

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Keeping Boys and Men: Marvelous Pageboys in Romantic Tragicomedy

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Modern critics have found the feminine pageboys of early Jacobean drama, those pretty, clever, ambiguously sexual darlings of fashionable gentlemen, compelling and puzzling figures. Catherine Belsey writes that ‘the drama helped... to construct an image we still recognize of “petty pretty pratlyng parling” little boys, capable of mischief, disarming precocity or deep sadness, and also of inviting adult indulgence’.¹ The appeal of these feminine boys is difficult to categorize according to either early- or late-modern accounts of identity and desire. Moreover, in many plays of the early 1600s, pageboys embody a degraded service that contrasts with a nostalgically evoked feudal ideal. The genre of romantic tragicomedy emerging in the years 1608-13 gave pageboys a new dramatic function: they became miraculous figures exemplifying virtuous service. Romance, as critics have noted, gives the tragicomedies of this period their emphasis on wonder and on miraculous plot twists; but satire also invests these plays with elements of cultural critique and self-reflexivity. Why do pageboys, in particular, embody this mix of genres, affects, and social tensions in this period? Recent scholarship on twentieth-century ‘cuteness’ as a ‘minor aesthetic category’, in the words of Sianne Ngai, opens a door to seeing how the diminutive, abject, and appealing aspects of pageboys operates in a context of early modern concerns over wealth and commodification.² While the aesthetic mode of cuteness registers discomfiting aspects of twentieth-century consumerism, the compelling, sexually ambiguous boys of tragicomedy offer a marvelous and reassuring resolution to concerns about wealth and

¹ Catherine Belsey, ‘Shakespeare’s Little Boys: Theatrical Apprenticeship and the Construction of Childhood’, in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. by Bryan Reynolds and William N. West (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 53-72 (p. 68).

² Sianne Ngai, ‘Our Aesthetic Categories’, *PMLA* 125 (2010), 948-58 (p. 951). I am indebted to Julia Reinhard Lupton’s lecture, “[Cut Him Up in Little Stars: Romeo and Juliet Among the Arts](#),” World Shakespeare Conference, Stratford-upon-Avon, August 1, 2016.

social decay in the early modern context. The motif of the marvelous linked to these pageboys in tragicomedy reflects the genre's infusion with romance, which allows for reassuring resolutions to these plays. This article theorizes tragicomic pageboys' function by connecting contemporary discourses of cuteness with early modern theories of the marvelous, while grounding these formal concerns in the historical context of early modern service.

Montaigne, the disillusioned title character of *The Honest Man's Fortune* (1613), laments the aristocracy's changing priorities by remarking that 'now in this age most men do begin, / To keep one boy, that [once] kept many men'.³ What cultural chords were struck by this contrast between keeping just one boy and keeping many men? Shakespeare's *King Lear* paints the contrast in broad strokes by marking Lear's descent from king to 'unaccommodated man' through the forced attrition of his adult male retinue until Lear's only follower is the fool he calls 'my good boy'.⁴ Though he is Lear's last remaining follower, the Fool requires succor rather than providing it. Lear's tenderness for this unthreatening, though gently mocking, 'boy' contrasts with his conflicted emotions about the adult service offered by Kent, whose support a tottering Lear needs even as he fears Kent's uncompromising frankness. Kent's rigorous honesty and heartfelt loyalty suggests the richness of virtuous service as a masculine ideal. In effect, 'honest' Montaigne of *The Honest Man's Fortune* accuses his peers of voluntarily choosing to follow in Lear's footsteps: rather than fostering a retinue of faithful Kents, they maintain charming, frivolous boys. Keeping a boy, I argue, was a sign in the drama of an abdication of the role of manorial lord for that of fashionable urban gallant, trading the mutual respect owed between gentlemen in exchange for the affectionate contempt due towards a mere boy. Such a lapsed patriarch is Falstaff, who turns away his adult followers in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (c. 1597-1601), saying, 'Falstaff will learn the humour of this age: / French thrift, you rogues – myself and skirted page!' (1.3.81-82). Like Shakespeare, Jonson satirically depicts the choice between the life of a virtuous *pater familias* and a decadent London gallant as a contrast between mastering many men and mastering one boy.⁵ The foolish courtier of *Every*

³ Cyrus Hoy (ed.) *The Honest Man's Fortune*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, general ed. by Fredson Bowers, 10 vols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.1.416-19. All further quotations are taken from this edition.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 3.2.77. All further references to Shakespeare will cite this edition.

⁵ On the perception of a lost feudal ideal in the contemporary drama, see James Emmanuel Berg, 'Gorboduc as a Tragic Discovery of "Feudalism"', *SEL* 40 (2000), 199-226; John W. Draper, 'Falstaff's Robin and Other Pages', *Studies in Philology* 36.3 (1939), 476-90; and Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare's History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985). On Falstaff's page and boyhood, see Katie

Man Out of His Humour (1599), Sogliardo, takes instruction from Carlo Buffone in the London manner of householding: rather than spending money to keep followers, he should encourage them to 'keep themselves' by stealing plate from houses he visits; furthermore, 'after you have kept 'em a fortnight or so and show'd 'em enough to the world, you may turn 'em away and keep no more but a boy. It's enough.'⁶ Carlo Buffone urges Sogliardo to abuse the cherished convention of hospitality, a traditional virtue of manorial householders, and emphasizes the purpose of service relations in the new, fallen practice of mastership: to display one's commitment to fashion.

These dramatic commentaries on the new order of service and mastery respond to real changes in the social structure of aristocratic households. The urbanization of the gentry that had begun under Henry VIII climaxed in James's reign, when noblemen spent more and more time in London pursuing their interests at court. Jacobean nobles reduced household retinues in order to minimize expense during long stays in smaller London houses. Contemporaries observed that the era of great housekeeping was drawing to a close, and popular literature predicted the demise of traditional values along with the extensive service and patronage systems of great households.⁷ The aristocracy began to divide its retainers between country and city. As Kate Mertes writes, after 1600 the noble household, 'Once a stubborn enclave of men devoted to the furtherance of their master's political authority', changed 'from [a] social institution to [a] purely domestic establishment'.⁸ Now that it was less important to the nobility's political strength,

Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys: A Cultural History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and Mark H. Lawhorn, 'Falstaff's Page as Early Modern Youth at Risk', in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Performance*, ed. by Edward J. Esche (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 149-60.

⁶ Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of his Humour*, ed. by Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 1.2.142-44.

⁷ The Jacobean ballad, 'The Old and the New Courtier', contrasts the 'Queen's old Courtier', who 'kept an old house at a bountiful rate' in the country, supporting many servants, neighbours, and the poor, with the 'King's new Courtier', who has sold his father's manors and haunts London society. 'R.B.', the author of *Some Rules and Orders for the Government of the House of an Earle* (c. 1605), remarks that 'noble men in these daies (for the most parte) like better to be served with pages and groomes, then in that estate which belongeth to their degrees'. 'The Old and the New Courtier', (*Le Prince d'Amour*, 1660) in Vivian de Sola Pinto and Allan Edwin Rodway (eds), *The Common Muse: An Anthology of Popular British Ballad Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), pp. 107-8; *Some Rules and Orders* (London: for Robert Triphook, 1822), 11. See also 'Time's Alteration', in *A Century of Ballads*, ed. by John Ashton (London: Elliot Stock, 1887), pp. 5-7.

⁸ Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250-1600* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 191. See also Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World from the Black Death to the Industrial Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Steven Ozment, *Ancestors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 463-504; and C.M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

aristocratic service often appeared merely ceremonial or menial.⁹ In the seventeenth-century drama, idealization of feudal households enabled an ethical critique of the narrowed social concerns of the London gallant, who had apparently shrugged off his patriarchal role as lord of the manor. But such critiques of mastery also imply that service itself has lost its claim to fostering virtue, suggesting that in 'this age', service was no longer what it had been: an honorable endeavour for men from the highest royal counsellors to the lowest kitchen helper.

Boys occupy a site of ethical ambiguity in early Stuart theater in part, no doubt, because boyishness represents a transitional state, one between innocence and knowledge of ambitions both sexual and social, and, therefore, between innocence and experience of desire, deceit and venality.¹⁰ The transitional state of youth was a prominent theme of court life in the early Stuart years: for the first time since Henry VIII's reign, there were royal children, and Henry and Elizabeth were both teenagers undergoing very public initiations into adulthood during the first decade of James I's reign. Prince Henry's death at eighteen and the wedding of two sixteen-year-olds, the Princess Elizabeth and Frederick, Elector Palatine, a few months later juxtaposed youth's promise and its vulnerability.¹¹ Robert Carr, who first arrived in England in 1603 as a page of about sixteen, played the role of the youthful favorite in the spectacle of Jacobean court life. By 1607, James had knighted Carr and made him a gentleman of the bedchamber, and observers were remarking caustically on James' dotting behavior towards his young

⁹ Service declined in prestige throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the process in England, see Christopher Brooks, 'Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800' in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800*, ed. by Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 52-83; and Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 12ff. For studies of service relations elsewhere in Europe, see Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: 1984), pp. 18-20; Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton: 1983), pp. 247-335; and Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ For background, see Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹¹ By the age of thirteen, Prince Henry was officially involved in the improvement of the navy and in the Virginia Company. Both ventures entailed great fanfare and confirmed his reputation as a fledgling warrior and future empire-builder; 1610 saw his ceremonious investiture as Prince of Wales. Meanwhile, Princess Elizabeth experienced the female version of such rites, as a suitable spouse was sought for her. On Prince Henry, see Roy Strong, *Henry, Prince of Wales, and England's Lost Renaissance* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), and J.W. Williamson, *The Myth of the Conqueror: Prince Henry Stuart* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

favorite.¹² The court careers of Robert Carr, Prince Henry, and Princess Elizabeth climaxed in the period 1610-13 as Carr accrued increasing royal favour and noble titles, Elizabeth came of age and married Frederick, Elector Palatine, and Henry was created Prince of Wales, became active in court politics, and then fell ill and died in November 1612, just before his sister's marriage. For a few years, the court's attention focused on these youthful figures making public and controversial transitions to adulthood, whose careers could climb so precipitously and end so abruptly. In the same period, William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609-11) and *The Tempest* (1611) stressed the themes of parents and children, age and youth.

After a decade of dominance by men's companies, the revival of the Children of Paul's and the Children of the Chapel in 1599-1600 made boys and boyishness the subject of dramatic scrutiny and comment; plays for the children's theatres exploited the satiric potential of pageboy roles and developed the thematic significance of boyishness.¹³ Mark Johnston and Will Fisher each argue that the spectacle of beardless boys playing men, as well as women, on the early modern stage dramatized cultural anxieties over the privileges of adult male masculinity; for Johnston, *Epicoene* seeks to mask 'the possibility that masculinity and its prerequisite privileges are... prosthetically constructed and inherently artificial'.¹⁴ While plays often mock the signs of childishness in their 'smooth', 'pretty', 'little' child actors, boys onstage also foreground anxieties

¹² David M. Bergeron, *Royal Family, Royal Lovers: King James of Scotland and England* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 87-109.

¹³ In considering pageboys as representatives of emergent sexuality, we should remember that some of the 'boys' of the children's companies were really young men, by our standards. Take the example of the Children of the Queen's Revels; the actor-list for *Epicoene, or, The Silent Woman* (1608) lists as a chief actor Nathan Field, who, having been baptized in October 1587, was already twenty-two years old; he probably joined the Children at the age of thirteen or fourteen. As Anthony Caputi and Reavley Gair argue, many of the 'children' probably remained with their companies for ten years or so, as Field did. What were originally companies aged fourteen and under became, through retention of aging actors and the impressment of new youths, companies representing a range of ages; thus the more experienced actors could fill more difficult roles. Actors like Nathan Field, appearing regularly at Paul's or Blackfriars' throughout their youth, staged for theatergoers a comic drama of maturation. See Roberta Florence Brinkley, *Nathan Field, the Actor-Playwright* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), p. 7; Anthony Francis Caputi, *John Marston, Satirist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 115; E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 2, *The Companies* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1923); Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company 1553-1608* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 129-32, 154-5; David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?' *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2005), 220-46; and Shen Lin, 'How Old Were the Children of Paul's?' *Theatre Notebook: A Journal of the History and Technique of the British Theatre*, 45.3 (1991), 121-31.

¹⁴ Will Fisher, 'The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 155-87; Mark Johnston, 'Prosthetic Absence in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholmew Fair*', *English Literary Renaissance* 37.3 (2007), 401-28.

about adult masculinity and what it means to leave boyhood behind and deserve the status of 'man'. Recent work by Lucy Munro, Katie Knowles, and others reveals how Shakespeare's plays thematized the hazy boundary between boyhood and manhood. Knowles sees Shakespeare using pageboys in *Love's Labour's Lost* and elsewhere as foils who expose the immaturity or absurdity of their adult masters.¹⁵ Munro's research investigates the impact of the Children of the Queen's Revels on the adult companies during the period in which tragicomedy developed, 1608-1613.¹⁶ The boys' companies, she argues, 'foreground the discontinuous relationship between age and adult male status through their very constitution' and in antiromantic, satirical plays, the swaggering boys playing men deconstructed masculinity, critiquing 'tragic heroism itself'.¹⁷ Munro argues that Shakespeare adopted this critique in the recurring concern in *Coriolanus* over whether its hero will 'prov[e] himself a man', as Volumnia has it (1.3.18).

The rise of tragicomedy in these years was a strikingly new development. In plays like Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (c. 1609-10) and John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont's *Philaster, or, Love Lies a-Bleeding* (c. 1608-10), the King's Men explored new possibilities for dramatic genre that paired the youthful love familiar in the romantic comedies so successful in Elizabeth's latter years with darker themes involving jealousy, sexuality, and death. John Fletcher sought to persuade his countrymen of the beauties of tragicomedy in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), a version of Giambattista Guarini's play, *Il Pastor Fido* (1589-90). Guarini provided a model and critical theory for tragicomedy as a genre that would flirt with death while avoiding a tragic conclusion; the same themes, mostly stripped of pastoral trappings, became a popular success in Fletcher and Beaumont's *Philaster*. Tragicomedy went on to dominate English drama until the closure of the theaters in 1642. The early romantic

¹⁵ Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys*. See also Richard Madelaine, 'Material Boys: Apprenticeship and the Boy Actors' Shakespearean Roles', in *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance*, ed. by Lloyd Davis (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 225-38

¹⁶ Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Gina Bloom, "'Thy Voice Squeaks': Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage", *Renaissance Drama*, 29 (1998), 39-71 and, on the impact of boy actors on adult companies in the 1590s, Andrea Crow, 'Mediating Boys: *Two Angry Women* and the Boy Actor's Shaping of 1590s Theatrical Culture', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65.2 (2014), 180-198.

¹⁷ Lucy Munro, 'Coriolanus and the Little Eyases: The Boyhood of Shakespeare's Hero', in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 80-95 (pp. 84, 87). See also Garth Kimbrell's somewhat contrasting argument that in tragicomedy, the King's Men strove to differentiate themselves from popular theatre by emphasizing courtly romance tropes in 'Taste, Theatrical Venues, and the Rise of English Tragicomedy', *SEL: Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 55.2 (2015), 285-307.

tragicomedies, which trade in disguise, mistaken identities, and the themes of nature and art, offered a particularly rich trove for exploring youthful love and relations between youths and their elders. In the plays I will focus on here, *Philaster* as well as Fletcher's collaboration with Philip Massinger and Nathan Field, *The Honest Man's Fortune* (1613), master-page relations move from the periphery to the centre, competing for attention with the heterosexual romance plot. Building upon Munro's identification of boyhood and masculinity as crucial themes in tragicomedy, I argue that in these plays, feminine-seeming pageboys are highly charged figures whose devotion to their masters both generates erotic tension and implicitly affirms that the service relations so important in early modern life were honorable rather than degrading.¹⁸

Bellario and Veramour, the pageboys in *Philaster* and *The Honest Man's Fortune*, have chiefly been recognized as successors of Shakespeare's crossdressed boy-heroines. Like Cesario and Ganymede, they are physically appealing, witty companions whose devotion to their masters strikes observers with awe – and suspicion. The exposure of the crossdressed page as a woman in love with her master was so conventional that *The Honest Man's Fortune* parodies it in a dénouement revealing Veramour to be a 'real' boy. Scholarship of the 1990s produced a number of accounts of how the cross-dressed heroines of the early modern English stage intervened in the ideology of sex- and gender-identity, a debate that focused on whether the eroticism of stage pageboys

¹⁸ Critics such as Frances Dolan, Mark Thornton Burnett and Frank Whigham have demonstrated the thematic significance of service throughout Tudor-Stuart drama. Whigham and Michael Neill go further than this, arguing that the drama reflects, in Neill's words, 'the tense coexistence of . . . fiercely conflicting attitudes' toward service ('Servant Obedience and Master Sins: Shakespeare and the Bonds of Service', chap. 1 in *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000], pp. 13-48; quoted from p. 46); Mark Thornton Burnett, *Masters and Servants in English Renaissance Drama and Culture: Authority and Obedience* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Frank Whigham, *Seizures of the Will in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also David Bevington, 'Juvenile Servants on the Medieval and Renaissance Stage', in *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V. A. Kolve*, ed. by R. F. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2001), pp. 581-7; Mario DiGangi, 'The Homoerotics of Mastery in Satiric Comedy', chap. 3 in *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 64-9; Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Tracing a Heterosexual Erotics of Service in *Twelfth Night* and the Autobiographical Writings of Thomas Whythorne and Anne Clifford', *Criticism* 40 (1998), 1-25; Cristina Malcolmson, "'What You Will': Social Mobility and Gender in *Twelfth Night*", in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Richard Strier, 'Faithful Servants: Shakespeare's Praise of Disobedience', in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. by Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 104-33.

revealed onstage as crossdressed heroines represented same-sex desire as an alternative to heterosexual desire, courtship, and marriage. Phyllis Rackin influentially argued that the exposure of boy-heroines' 'real' gender serves opposing purposes in romance and satire: to ridicule gender violations in satire, but in romantic comedies, to celebrate androgyny and inclusive eroticism.¹⁹ Similarly, Bruce Smith and Nicholas Radel each argue that in *The Honest Man's Fortune* and *Philaster*, the feminine pageboy represents a homoeroticism that the play repudiates by revealing that the beautiful boy's 'true' gender is female. In tragicomedy, the argument goes, all-embracing romance finds formal closure by satirically excluding sexual ambiguity.²⁰ Yet we need not read the removal of gender disguise as an erasure of the heterodox possibilities the feminine pageboy represents; as Radel points out, 'homoerotic desire is situated in a marginal, though defining and constitutive, relationship to heteroerotic desire'; and tragicomedy itself notoriously embraces ambiguity.²¹ The slipperiness of pageboys' sexuality and gender indicates the kind of 'category crisis' that Marjorie Garber links to transvestism when she writes that 'a transvestite figure, or a transvestite mode, will always function as a sign of overdetermination – a mechanism of displacement from one blurred boundary to another [that]... marks the trouble spot, indicating the likelihood of a crisis somewhere, elsewhere'.²² As Michael Shapiro notes, no single discourse on gender and sexuality accounts for the eighty-one plays in which a heroine donned male garb on the English stage from 1570-1642.²³ Jonathan Goldberg captures the ambiguities of pageboy eroticism when he argues that *As You Like It's* resolution 'produces the boy as a sex that is neither male nor female and thus a site for male/male, ... female/female, ... and male/female desires that are not collapsed one into the other'.²⁴ The loving boy

¹⁹ Phyllis Rackin, 'Androgyny, Mimesis and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage', *PMLA* 102 (1987), 29-41. See also Jean Howard, 'Crossdressing, the Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1988), 418-40.

²⁰ Bruce R. Smith, 'Making a Difference: Male-Male 'Desire' in Tragedy, Comedy and Tragicomedy', chap. 8 in *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Susan Zimmerman (New York: Routledge Press, 1992), 127-49. Nicholas Radel, 'Fletcherian Tragicomedy, Crossdressing, and the Constriction of Homoerotic Desire in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Drama* 26 (1995), 53-82; and 'Homoeroticism, Discursive Change, and Politics: Reading "Revolution" in Seventeenth-Century English Tragicomedy', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in English*, 9 (1997), 162-78.

²¹ Radel, 169. On ambiguity in tragicomedy, see Peter Berek, 'Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Absolutism in the Beaumont and Fletcher Plays', *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44.2 (2004), 359-77 (p. 371).

²² Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 16-17.

²³ Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 8.

²⁴ Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 142-3.

Bellario's transformation into the loving Euphrasia in *Philaster* does not eradicate the eroticism Bellario represented; as a conventional romantic device, the transformation calls for wonder, and I argue that it invites the audience to admire the marvelous nature of selfless familiar service at a critical moment for service relations.

Before the pageboys of romantic tragicomedy appeared, the English stage had already proffered an array of boy servant-types, including the comic bumbler (Lyly's Gunophilus, Shakespeare's Launce), the Machiavellian 'instrument' (Henry Chettle's Lorrique, Marlowe's Ithamore, Jonson's Mosca), the *servus callidus* or Plautine clever servant (Shakespeare's Speed, Jonson's Brainworm), and a more childish servant type, a boy beloved by his master.²⁵ This last type combines the *servus callidus*'s wit with several characteristics absent in other servants: he is appealing and distinctly childish: physically defenseless, sensitive, and often affectionate. The beloved boy usually companions an unmarried gallant, such as Ascanio of *The Maid's Metamorphosis* (Anon., 1599). Ascanio delights in his page Juculo, 'my sweet Boy', who, in the absence of Ascanio's female beloved, is '[o]f this worlds comfort, now my only joy' (2.1.21, 54).²⁶ In *Love's Labour's Lost* (1588-97) Armado fondly calls his page, Moth (or 'Mote'), 'my tender juvenal', a 'sweet ounce of man's flesh' who is 'pretty, because little', and 'apt, because quick' (1.2.8-23; 3.1.134). Moth mocks his foolish master, while Juculo returns Ascanio's affection heartily; but in both cases, masters cherish similar qualities in their boys: childishness, prettiness, and wit.

These attractive qualities provoke mixed affective reactions – emotions both positive and negative, as we will see in the analysis of cuteness below. Masters' affection for pageboys often provided a target for satire on aristocratic decadence. As the page serves his master's whimsical longings, he himself exemplifies a frivolously fashionable acquisition, signifying the aristocrat's abdication of his social responsibilities. In satirical plays, affected gallants were trailed by pageboys whose employment in carrying messages, singing songs, and looking handsome symbolized the vacuity of courtly social life. In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Woman Hater* (1607), the courtier Lazarello is comically dependent on his 'Boy' to procure the rare delicacies (in this case, a fish's head) upon which his hyper-refined taste is fixed. His attachment to his longings – and therefore to his boy – marks Lazarello out for satire, as it does Fastidious Briske in Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) and Simplicius Faber in

²⁵ See Richmond Barbour, "'When I Acted Young Antinous': Boy Actors and the Erotics of Jonsonian Theater", *PMLA* 110 (1995), 1006-21; Steve Brown, 'The Boyhood of Shakespeare's Heroines: Notes on Gender Ambiguity in the Sixteenth Century', *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 30.2 (1999), 243-63; and Shapiro, *Gender in Play*.

²⁶ R. Warwick Bond (ed.), *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, 3 vols, III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902).

Marston's *What You Will* (1601).²⁷ Lazarello's longing for the absurd delicacies brought by his page exemplifies pageboys' symbolic association with their masters' hedonism. Erotic relations between boys and masters are a convention of many contemporary satires of court life; as Alan Bray has argued, the charge of keeping a 'catamite' aimed at the perceived license of London and court society.²⁸ Marlowe's dramatization of Jupiter's passion for Ganymede represents the fully eroticized version of master-pageboy relations; elsewhere, beloved boys' relations with their masters are presented as more or less eroticized pleasures, ranging from Armando's enjoyment of his page's 'sweet' littleness and quickness to Clerimont's sexual banter with his 'ingle' in Jonson's *Epicoene* (1608-9). In the background of these relations, Jupiter and Ganymede provide a *locus classicus* for master-boy affection that playwrights could either exploit or allow to remain dormant.²⁹ Thus critics including Mary Bly and Valerie Billing have recognized pageboys as queer signs, registering multiple and often transgressive gender and sexual identities.³⁰

Acknowledging the queerness of stage pageboys helps to conceptually manage their shifting signification, but does not address the particular aesthetic and affective qualities so consistently linked to these figures: they are small, pretty, lovable, dependent, and, like Moth, full of bravado but prone to adorable botch-ups. In modern parlance, they are 'cute', and the work of Sianne Ngai on this twentieth-century 'minor aesthetic category'

²⁷ Marston and Jonson's gallants are less developed than Lazarello, but their doting on their pages is equally a sign of ridiculous frivolity. Marston's Simplicius saves Holofernes Pippo from a whipping and declares 'I am enamored on thee, boy, wilt thou serve me?' (2.2. 98-99). Enormously proud of his page's sweet face ('Pippo's my page. How like you him? Ha! has he not a good face, ha?' (2.2.114-5), Simplicius plies him with pudding pies. John Marston, *What You Will*, in A. H. Bullen, ed., *The Works of John Marston*, 3 vols, II (London: John C. Nimmo, 1888).

²⁸ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), pp. 33-7.

²⁹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), 1.1. See Leonard Barkan, *Transuming Passion: Ganymede and the Erotics of Humanism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Mario DiGangi, 'Queering the Shakespearean Family', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47.3 (1996), 269-90; Stephen Orgel, 'Call Me Ganymede', chap. 4 in *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 53-82; and Bruce R. Smith, 'Master and Minion', chap. 6 in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England*, pp. 190-223.

³⁰ Billing, 'Female Spectators and the Erotics of the Diminutive in *Epicoene* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', *Renaissance Drama* 42.1 (2014), 1-28; Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queens on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also David L. Orvis, 'Cross-dressing, Queerness, and the Early Modern Stage', in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 197-217. Thomas A. King makes a broader argument about theatricality and queerness in *The Gendering of Men, Volume 2, 1600-1750: Queer Articulations* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

highlights, through both its similarities and differences, how pageboys signified on the early modern stage. Ngai remarks that

the formal properties associated with cuteness — smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy — call forth specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency... In addition to being a minor aesthetic concept that is fundamentally about minoriness... it is crucial to cuteness that its diminutive object has some sort of imposed-upon aspect or mien — that is, that it bears the look of an object not only formed but all too easily de-formed under the pressure of the subject's feeling or attitude towards it... We can thus start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly or aggressive feelings, as well as the expected tender or maternal ones. For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle'.³¹

Ngai's analysis exposes the power dynamics implied by small, dependent, appealing objects: the vulnerability that the viewer perceives in them implies, by contrast, the observer's own self-mastery. In the context of consumerism, this vulnerability seeks to awaken the viewer's desire to own the cute object or literally 'consume' it, bringing with it the subtext of sadism, feeding, and savagery that the word 'consumption' implies. At the same time, the concept of cuteness refutes violence and sublimates power differentials; in reflecting on Chaucer's narrators, Aryanne L.O. Fradenburg observes that 'cuteness is inclusive, "generous"; it requires gestures that invite care and protection, hence the fantasy of intimacy without aggression'.³² The 'cuteness' nexus of commodification, smallness, and a desire for intimacy in the context of dependency is highly relevant to recent work by scholars of early modern childhood, who have recognized children, and especially the boys of the acting companies, as literal commodities. Debunking Lawrence Stone's description of parents as affectively indifferent to their children, Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh argue that, instead, 'children were a precious commodity', both loved and treated as possessions.³³ Claire M. Busse argues that boy actors were unpaid labor, perhaps impressed into service or abducted from their parents; inductions spoken by boy actors depict the boys as

³¹ Ngai, 'The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde', *Critical Inquiry* 31.4 (2005), 811-47 (p. 816).

³² Aryanne L.O. Fradenburg, 'Living Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 33.1 (2011), 41-64 (p. 59).

³³ Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, 'Introduction: Early Modern Children as Subjects: Gender Matters', in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. by Miller and Yavneh (New York: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

troublesome commodities who resist authors' attempts to control them.³⁴ This scholarship underlines the roles of stage pageboys as symbols of luxury and hedonism on the part of aristocratic men (like Lazarello in *The Woman Hater*), and helps to explain why the onstage affection between such boys and their masters brings with it issues of control and subordination. As Richmond Barbour notes of Ben Jonson's plays, 'dominant males... admire subservient males in intimate, invasive terms'; often in these plays, the affection between adult masters and boy servants bears a weight of potential violence, as early modern drama's many allusions to the whipping of servants attest.³⁵

And yet, in the romantic tragicomedies of 1608-1613 something new happens to pageboys. While cross-dressed heroines still appear, in *Philaster* and *The Honest Man's Fortune* the pageboy his/herself is a central figure, even though not he/she is not the play's heroine in disguise. Pageboys inhabit a new role inspired by romance, but different from the cross-dressed heroines of Shakespeare's and Lyly's romantic comedies. To theorize this role, I turn from the modern aesthetic category of cuteness to the early modern concepts of wonder and the marvelous. The experience of wonder, for Plato and Aristotle, provided a bridge from ordinary thought to philosophical inquiry; while wonder itself is in a sense the opposite of rationality, and is characterized by paralysis or stupefaction, it also inspires in the wonderer a salutary wish to know, which then leads to rational thought and finally, to knowledge. As T.G. Bishop and Peter G. Platt observe, Shakespeare's contemporaries followed Cicero in emphasizing the pleasurable aspects of wonder.³⁶ Stephen Greenblatt argues that Columbus's voyages of exploration inaugurated 'a century of intense wonder' on the part of Europeans encountering the New World in text and experience. As its title indicates, Greenblatt's book, *Marvelous Possessions*, argues that the marvelous triggers in observers the desire to own, control, or master; thus the observer of marvels is much like the

³⁴ Claire M. Busse, "'Pretty Fictions" and "Little Stories": Child Actors on the Early Modern Stage', in *Childhood and Children's Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800*, ed. by Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 75-101. See also Robert Barrie, 'Elizabethan Play-Boys in the Adult London Companies', *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 48 (2008), 237-57; Busse, 'Profitable Children: Children as Commodities in Early Modern England', in *Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England*, ed. by Kari Boyd McBride (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), pp. 209-43; and Shehzana Mamujee, "'To serve us in that behalf when our pleasure is to call for them": Performing Boys in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Studies* 28 (2014), 714-30.

³⁵ Barbour, 1012.

³⁶ T.G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peter Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

consumer/observer of cuteness.³⁷ However, in the genre of romantic tragicomedy, marvelous pageboys hold out a promise to evade commodification and the threats of corruption or violence linked to service relations in the plays. Wonder is, of course, an affect linked to the genre of romance beginning with medieval literature; Stephen C. Jaeger observes that ‘There is a strong element of wish fulfillment, of dreaming, of constructing an earthly paradise of love and honor’ in chivalric romance.³⁸ Similarly, Jacobean romantic tragicomedy first satirizes its subjects and then resolves its plot through startling coincidences that invite not rational inquiry, as wonder does for Plato and Aristotle, but the ‘wish fulfillment’ and ‘dreaming’ of Jaeger’s romances. Robert Y. Turner observes that ‘the heroic, as it appears in the tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, must be differentiated from the heroic as Sidney describes it in *An Apology for Poetry*: not as an example to admire and imitate, but an exception to be wondered at’.³⁹ I argue that pageboys of romantic tragicomedy evoke just this sort of wonder; they are hardly superhuman adventurers, but instead diminutive, rather helpless (yet loving) figures. Tragicomic pageboys are not idols like Jaeger’s romantic heroes, but idolators whose love for their masters is miraculous and superhuman, generating a romantic wonder like that which Jaeger and Turner attribute to ‘the heroic’ in romance.

Shakespeare’s pageboy-heroine in *Cymbeline*, an early experiment in romantic tragicomedy, adds a new quality of quasi-miraculous fidelity to the pageboy conventions we have seen thus far. Shakespeare reprised his earlier disguised-heroine successes in this play, but he abandoned Rosalind and Viola’s bawdy puns and forthright sexuality. Instead, Imogen is a faithful, unjustly suspected wife; like other tragicomic heroines (Hermione of *The Winter’s Tale*, Arethusa of *Philaster*, and Lamira and Lady Orleans of *The Honest Man’s Fortune*), she represents unwavering virtue. When cross-dressed as the faithful pageboy Fidele, she accesses a very different range of associations than those linked to Ganymede and Cesario: her youthfulness suggests childlike purity instead of wit and audacity. All of Shakespeare’s boy-women strike their male and female viewers as strangely compelling, but Fidele’s attractive power evokes a reverence and wonder missing in the playful affection prompted by *Twelfth Night*’s Cesario. The men of *Cymbeline* find traces of divinity in Fidele’s epicoene beauty. Belarius exclaims: ‘By Jupiter, an angel! or, if not, / An earthly paragon! Behold divineness / No elder than a boy!’ (3.8.15-17). Imogen’s brothers Guiderius and

³⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 13.

³⁸ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 174.

³⁹ Robert Y. Turner, ‘Heroic Passion in the Early Tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher’, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984), 109-30 (p. 127).

Arviragus are equally struck with Fidele's beauty and instantly feel a powerful attraction to him. Though they express it in terms of heterosexual love, Shakespeare marks this attraction as mysterious and holy rather than playful, like the crossdressing scenes in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. The audience knows that Guiderius and Arviragus are moved not only by Fidele's femininity but by the secret draw of kinship; thus their reaction to Fidele combines several forms of marvelous attraction: to boyish innocence, to hidden nobility, to secret femininity, and to their kinship with Imogen. The pageboy figure compounded of these attractions exerts a mystical pull not only on Arviragus, Guiderius and Bellarius, but on Lucius, who happens upon a grieving Fidele and immediately offers to prefer him to service 'and rather father thee than master thee' (4.3.395).⁴⁰

In the climactic scenes proving Imogen's miraculous fidelity, Shakespeare exploits the pathos of a forsaken but infinitely faithful servant-child to emphasize the martyrdom of Imogen the wife. Posthumus arbitrarily strikes Fidele down, a revision of *Twelfth Night*'s dramatic confrontation between a jealous, vengeful man and a wrongly suspected boy/woman. As a helpless page, the victim of men's casual brutality, Imogen most fully represents helpless, wronged virtue. She assumes an emblematic pose of faithfulness when Lucius discovers Fidele collapsed upon 'his' supposed master's dead body. Through mourning this 'master', Fidele expresses the grief Imogen feels for her apparently dead husband. Here, in contrast to *Twelfth Night*, the affective content of the servant's address to the master corresponds exactly to that of wife to husband:

There is no more such masters: I may wander
From east to occident, cry out for service,
Try many, all good: serve truly: never
Find such another master' (4.2.371-4).

As Fidele, Imogen has no need for Cesario's puns; the discourse of marriage and service match unproblematically. The mirroring of Imogen's faithfulness in the figure of a boy

⁴⁰ Part of the childish page's appeal is his/her helpless and friendless state, which invites adult males to take the role of protector. In *The Night Walker, or, The Little Thief*, Snap (a disguised woman) tries to gain a place in Lurcher's service by impersonating such a figure: she calls herself 'A poor distressed boy Sir, / Friendless and comfortless, that would intreat / Some charity and kindness from your worship . . .'. But Snap has misjudged Lurcher, who wants the opposite type; for Lurcher this blushing page is 'A pretty Boy, but of too mild a breeding, / Too tender and too bashful a behavior' to be his accomplice in crime (1.2.08-15). Cyrus Hoy, ed., *The Night Walker, or, The Little Thief*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. by Fredson Bowers, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

magnifies the wondrous virtue, ‘more goddess-like than wife-like’, that Shakespeare allots to her role (3.2.8).

Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster* shares *Cymbeline*’s use of a boyish representative of ‘holy and sincere’ love, but here the role of the feminine page takes up the plot’s centre as a locus of virtue and affect. *Philaster* was presumably written between 1608 and 1610, since it receives mention in John Davies of Hereford’s *Scourge of Folly* (1610). Though critics have argued over which play, *Philaster* or *Cymbeline*, imitates the other, it is only certain that, as Andrew Gurr judiciously notes, their relationship is ‘more than casual’.⁴¹ The play is listed twice, once as *Philaster* and once as *Love Lies a-Bleeding*, in the list of plays performed for the Christmastide and wedding festivities of Princess Elizabeth and Frederick, Elector Palatine in 1612. It is the first of Fletcher and Beaumont’s collaborations and bears the marks both of Fletcher’s earlier pastoral, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, and the influence of Shakespeare, whose *Hamlet* is a precursor for the title character’s political exclusion, indecisiveness, and penchant for antifeminist rage.⁴² Audiences approved the formula; the play received nine quarto printings in the seventeenth century and was adapted twice by Restoration dramatists.⁴³ As the play opens, Philaster, son of the former king of Sicily, loiters malignantly in the court of the king of Calabria and Sicily, who, having defeated Philaster’s father at war, seeks to secure his throne by marrying his daughter Arethusa to Pharamond, the prince of Spain. Arethusa makes known to Philaster that she prefers him, and he seals their secret engagement by sending his faithful page Bellario to serve her. When a spiteful lady-in-waiting accuses Arethusa of sexual dalliance with Bellario, Philaster succumbs to jealous despair and escapes to the woods, where both Arethusa and Bellario follow him, only to be attacked and wounded by him, each in turn. Only when the wounded Bellario takes the blame for stabbing Arethusa does Philaster’s rage subside and his trust in Arethusa return. In the dénouement, the townspeople rise up against the king in Philaster’s defense, the king accepts Philaster as heir, and Bellario is revealed to be a

⁴¹ Andrew Gurr, ‘Introduction’, *Philaster, or, Love Lies A-Bleeding*, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 19-84 (p. xlv). All *Philaster* citations will refer to this edition. For the debate over priority, see Janet Clare, *Shakespeare’s Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 234; Suzanne Gossett, ‘Introduction’, *Philaster, or, Love Lies A-Bleeding*, Arden Early Modern Drama (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), pp. 1-102; and Harold S. Wilson, ‘*Philaster* and *Cymbeline*’, in *English Institute Essays 1951*, ed. by Alan Seymour Downer (New York: AMS Press, 1952), pp. 146-66.

⁴² On *Philaster* and *Hamlet*, see Lee Bliss, ‘Three Plays in One: Shakespeare and *Philaster*’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985), 153-70; and Gurr, ‘Introduction’, *Philaster*, pp. xxix-xxxv.

⁴³ See Dora Jean Ashe, ‘Introduction’, in *Philaster*, ed. by Ashe (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), p. xii.

lady who fell in love with Philaster from afar and now promises to serve both Philaster and Arethusa with equal love.

As I mentioned above, critics like Lucy Munro see in tragicomedy an exploration of the fictions and fragilities of adult masculinity; similarly, critics have found in *Philaster's* themes of jealousy, misogyny, and violence toward love objects a view of adulthood as a fall from childish innocence, as Lee Bliss argues: 'the force and range of sexual desire marks off adulthood's ambiguous complexity'.⁴⁴ In the betrothal of Philaster and Arethusa, the play introduces the question of whether disturbingly adult passions lurk beneath an apparently innocent surface of youthful beauty. We have already witnessed the king praise his daughter's innocence; her 'few yeeres, and sex / Yet teach her nothing but her feares and blushes, / Desires without desire' (1.1.92-94). The audience quickly learns how falsely the king has portrayed Arethusa, who privately expresses what Philaster calls 'a lady's longing': 'I must enjoy these kingdoms', she declares, 'Both, or I die: by heaven I die, Philaster' (1.2.53-57). Arethusa's sexualized language belies her father's assurances to Pharamond and equally discomfits Philaster: 'But how this passion should proceed from you, / So violently, would amaze a man / That would be jealous' (1.2.94-6). A suspiciously amorous Arethusa replaces the virginal daughter of the king's speech; but immediately Philaster introduces a new figure of 'pretty helpless innocence' in his description of Bellario, 'the trustiest, loving'st, and the gentlest boy / That ever master kept' (1.2.138-9). Philaster describes at length his first encounter with Bellario, whom Philaster found weeping over a garland of flowers. This feminized youth, 'not yet seen in court', well suits Philaster's pastoral fantasies:

He told me that his Parents gentle died,
Leaving him to the mercy of the fields
Which gave him roots; and of the crystal springs,
Which did not stop their courses; and the sun,
Which still, he thanked him, yielded him his light.
Then took he up his garland, and did show
What every flower, as Country people hold,
Did signify: and how all, ordered thus,
Expressed his grief (1.2.125-33).

⁴⁴ Lee Bliss, 'Tragicomic Romance for the King's Men, 1609-1611: Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher', in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan: Change and Continuity in the English and European Dramatic Tradition*, ed. by A.R. Braunmuller, J.C. Bulman and Maynard Mack (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), pp. 148-64 (p. 154). See also R.A. Foakes, 'Tragicomedy and Comic Form', in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, pp. 74-88; and Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 82-9.

Here Beaumont and Fletcher revive a thematic paradox of the pastoral genre: Bellario's art is the 'art' of nature, that is, the lack of artifice.⁴⁵ Found sitting at a fountain twining garlands, this boy adopts a pose of pastoral innocence expressed in rustic, yet exquisite, artistry. In pastoral discourse artlessness creates the most beautiful art, and Philaster imagines Bellario's lack of experience (of court, especially) as a guarantee of his true purity, innocence, and devoted service. Readers of pastoral might already recognize the paradox in such artful innocence and expect to find Bellario's youthful purity called into question, as Arethusa's has been already. Though Philaster is a character tormented by suspicion of others' insincerity, his speech's almost parodic adherence to pastoral conventions also casts doubt on his own ability to experience authentic emotions. Ngai notes that 'cuteness, as a style that speaks desire for a simpler relation to commodities, is arguably a kind of pastoral'.⁴⁶ It fits Ngai's analysis of cuteness that Bellario's first appearance, described in obsessive detail by Philaster, reveals more about Philaster's longing for a pure, and purely loving, love object than about Bellario himself.

Philaster attributes Bellario's love to the youthfulness that produces a natural, and therefore pure, surge of affection, a 'childish overflowing love, / To them that clap thy cheeks and speak thee fair yet' (2.1.16-17). Bellario's youthfulness suggests to Philaster the purity of his love, but he immediately inspires other comparisons. As Jeffrey Masten has argued, '[Bellario] functions as a figure for the possibility of eroticism, a figure always on the verge of eroticization'.⁴⁷ Like Fidele, he provokes amazed reactions to his androgynous beauty; but when Pharamond avows that Bellario's 'form is Angell-like', the divine epicoene symbolizes universal sexual attractiveness and sensual decadence (2.4.20). Megra calls Bellario 'an Hylas, an Adonis', fit for the love of both man and woman — 'The Princess does provide him for you and for her self' (2.4.18-24). Still, Megra expresses a dislike of youths' inexperience in love: 'They can do little, and that small they do / They have not wit to hide' (2.4.26-7). These witty sexual allusions emphasize the ambiguity of Bellario's youth and foreground the interpretive difficulty he poses.⁴⁸ Bellario is repeatedly described as 'smooth', a word that captures his

⁴⁵ On pastoralism in *Philaster*, see Nicholas Radel, "'Then Thus I Turne My Language To You": The Transformation of Theatrical Language in *Philaster*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 3 (1986), 129-47.

⁴⁶ Ngai, 'Our Aesthetic Categories', p. 952.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Masten, 'Editing Boys: The Performance of Genders in Print', in *Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 113-34 (p. 118).

⁴⁸ The play repeatedly insists on Bellario's boyishness; he is a 'little' boy, says Philaster, 'that knows not yet desire', one whose cheeks are clapped, his head stroked, etc.; but both Megra and the king estimate

slipperiness: it suggests attractively soft, beardless skin and seductive physical beauty, but also the possibility of artfulness or duplicity.⁴⁹ The 'smooth' boy figures both innocence and cunning. Arethusa declares that Bellario cannot know grief, for 'Thy brows and cheeks are smooth as waters be / When no breath troubles them' (2.3.44-5). However, for Dion, Arethusa is 'that lascivious Lady / That lives in lust with a smooth boy' (3.1.10-11). Here Bellario's 'smoothness' – both his youth and his attractive person and manner – serves as evidence of his and Arethusa's secret crimes. Dion's reasoning proceeds directly from Bellario's appealing looks and manners to his sexual knowledge of the princess: 'That boy, that Princess' boy; that brave, chaste, virtuous lady's boy; and a fair boy, a well-spoken boy! All these considered, can make nothing else – but there I leave you, gentlemen' (2.4.189-92). In Philaster's opposing view, Bellario's 'smoothness', or apparent youthful innocence, is a cosmic affront if it conceals sexual knowledge; addressing the gods, Philaster asks: 'Do you mean / To entrap mortality that you allow / Treason so smooth a brow?' (3.1.155-7).

Philaster has turned to Bellario's love for reassurance when Arethusa's seems threatening, and his disappointment at Bellario's apparent faithlessness competes with his grief for Arethusa's betrayal: 'It more afflicts me now to know by whom / This deed is done than simply that 'tis done', he asserts (3.1.141-2). As a figure of faithful love, Bellario exceeds even Arethusa, although the title page of the 1620 quarto, which shows Arethusa lying wounded while Philaster flees pursued by the Country Gentleman, leaves out the equally central wounding of Bellario.⁵⁰ In the betrothal scene, Philaster's praise of Bellario takes the place of any love speeches he might have directed to Arethusa, and when we next see the affianced couple together, he already suspects her. Bellario and Arethusa are parallel figures, but Bellario has many more lines and more scenes with Philaster, and the full affective intensity of the play develops primarily in the scenes between man and boy. 'And all this passion for a boy?' we might ask, as

that he is 'about eighteen' (3.1.107, 2.4.158, 3.2.21). As with Nathan Field and other aging members of children's companies, Bellario's adolescence allows him to float between adult and child, and the plot of *Philaster* hinges upon the confusion generated by such 'boys'.

⁴⁹ *OED*, 2nd ed., s.v. 'smooth'. Bellario's youth and inexperience are implied by 'smooth boy' through 'Free from hairs or bristles', (2a). By 1450 the complex metaphorical sense of 'smooth' as 'speaking fair or smoothly; using specious or attractive language . . . usually with implication of insincerity or selfish designs' was available (7b). But 'smooth' could also be applied to fair looks, fair words, fair manners, and so forth – it was often used, the *OED* indicates, to denote a suspiciously polished and appealing surface (7a).

⁵⁰ Masten notes that this quarto could be known as the 'Boy Quarto' for its consistent use of 'Boy' in reference to Bellario ('Editing Boys', p. 119). On the differences between the 1620 and 1622 quartos, see also Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 114.

Philaster does (3.2.95). Critics have argued that the intensity of Philaster's feelings for his boy only return us to the heterosexual plot; that is, that all the passion generated around Bellario serves to dramatize the secret heterosexual desire underlying his love of his master.⁵¹ But both the body of the play and its conclusion emphasize Bellario/Euphrasia's love as an element of service; though the feminine pageboy turns out to be a woman, Euphrasia is a figure no less symbolic of devoted service (not marriage, which she abjures) than Bellario. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, as Michelle Dowd has noted, Viola and Maria deserve marriage by first proving their mettle as servants.⁵² While *Twelfth Night* thus idealizes hierarchical marriage, *Philaster* refuses Euphrasia the marriage attained by cross-dressed Viola in order to idealize service instead.

Service first appears in the play as a feature of court life dismissed with contempt. Approached by his supporters, Philaster rebuffs them: 'I am no minion. / You stand, methinks, like men that would be courtiers' (1.1.297-8). At court, shows of devotion or admiration are the currency by which ambitious courtiers gain preferment, and Philaster, a disinherited malcontent, can only interpret such practices as basely mercenary ploys. Nevertheless, Philaster revels in Bellario's devoted service. His innocence affirms Philaster's image of himself as a good master; as Bellario assures him, 'You did take me up when I was nothing, and only yet am something by being yours' (2.1.6-7). Here the language of preferment inhabits a purely affective register, for though these words could have indicated a 'minion's' ambition, in Bellario's mouth they suggest childlike dependence. When Bellario's 'love doth plead so prettily to stay' in his service, Philaster muses that such purely virtuous service is a symptom of youth, for later, 'when thy judgment comes to rule those passions' he will come to see service as a way to advance his status (2.1.40, 19). Bellario seems to offer a newly redemptive form of service, one which will purge a servant's obedience and a master's favor of demeaningly mercenary associations.

The faithful pageboy's new formal importance in romantic tragicomedy allows *Philaster* to explore the nature of mastery and the psychological demands of mastership. While *Twelfth Night*, *Cymbeline*, and *Philaster* each stage a violent confrontation between a faithful feminine page and a jealousy-maddened man, the 'Love' that 'Lies A-Bleeding' in *Philaster*'s subtitle may refer equally well to the faithful page Bellario or the faithful lover Arethusa, both of whom suffer wounds at the hands of the

⁵¹ See Radel, 'Fletcherian Tragicomedy' and 'Homoeroticism, Discursive Change, and Politics', and Smith, 'Making a Difference'.

⁵² Michelle M. Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 21-56.

suspicious and vengeful Philaster. In *Philaster*, the feminine page's emblematic fidelity casts suspicion upon the emphatically adult and masculine master/husband's fitness to rule himself and others; Philip Finkelpearl argues that Philaster's tirades satirize the tyranny of magistrates, and Gordon McMullan identifies King James as a target of *Philaster*'s critique of court culture.⁵³ The King's illegitimate rule is matched, as Philip Finkelpearl notes, by failures of other potential rulers; the play also presents Pharamond and Philaster as lacking in self-mastery.⁵⁴ The King, who has taken Sicily from Philaster's father by conquest, fills the dramatic type of the tyrant consumed with self-doubt and suspicions. In this play, self-mastery and domestic mastery (i.e., of women and boys) crucially test a man's claim to political sovereignty. Attempting to assert his status as future husband and king, Pharamond assures Arethusa that he will prevent Philaster's challenges by preferring him in court service: 'We must stop his mouth / With some office when we are married'. Arethusa's response, 'You were best make him your controller', implies that Pharamond is more suited to service than mastery (1.2.192-4). However, Philaster's more assertive masculine presence fails equally to fit him for rule; Munro classifies him as a 'Fletcherian foolish young prince'.⁵⁵ Philaster's readiness to suspect his wife-to-be and servant, his sudden shifts of passion, and his outbursts of violence are so extreme that they broach the line between tragedy and comedy; as Kathleen McLuskie has argued, Philaster's more ludicrous moments give the play a certain artificiality and produce a 'comic undercutting of the very fantasies which sustain the main action'.⁵⁶ Driven by jealousy, Philaster no longer cares about regaining the kingdom, and the present king's tyranny cannot be resolved while Philaster himself takes the role of domestic tyrant. Even Philaster recognizes that his uncontrollable aggression and emotional susceptibility disqualify him as a dispenser of justice; 'I am to blame to be so much in rage... I will be temperate / In speaking, and as just in hearing', he decides. In the next moment he spies his betrothed and page together, and immediately his self-mastery rather comically dissolves: 'O monstrous! Tempt me not, you gods! Good gods, / Tempt not a frail man!' (4.5.18-24).

⁵³ Philip J. Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 155-6; McMullan, *The Politics of Unease*, p. 114. In contrast, Richard Hillman finds resemblances between Philaster and both Prince Henry and Philip Sidney in *Intertextuality and Romance in Renaissance Drama: The Staging of Nostalgia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 159.

⁵⁴ Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics*, 155-6. Political readings of *Philaster* have focused largely on the play's positive depiction of challenges to royal authority, especially Dion's assertion that the king may only command things 'possible and honest' (4.4.30). See Peter Davison, 'The Serious Concerns of *Philaster*', *ELH* 30 (1963), 1-15.

⁵⁵ Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels*, p. 122.

⁵⁶ Kathleen McLuskie, "'A maidenhead, Amintor, at my Yeares!'" chap. 8 in *Renaissance Dramatists* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), pp. 193-223 (p. 212).

Philaster explores the theme of fit mastery through the title character's desire for escape from the problems of the household. Such desires surface primarily through romance conventions – pastoral fantasies and marvelous transformations. Romance promises escape either through alternate and more innocent worlds, or through transformations of identity that leave behind the insecurities of the ordinary and domestic. Philaster envisions a pastoral retreat from society to a rude household consisting of 'my fire, my cattle, and my bed' all 'shut together in one shed', served by a rock-like 'mountain girl' and accompanied only by beasts (4.3.5-13). Here Beaumont and Fletcher imitate the opening lines of Juvenal's sixth satire, the virulently antifeminist source of the rant Jonson gives Truewit in *Epicoene* 2.2. Philaster's highly conventional, and in this case obviously allusive, expressions of outrage against women are offered to the audience as examples of a well-known and slightly absurd genre, that of antifeminist raillery.⁵⁷ In his first expression of this fantasy he goes to 'Some far place, / Where never womankind durst set her foot' to 'dig a cave, and preach to birds and beasts / What woman is, and help to save them from you' (3.2.122-6). The image of Philaster preaching to beasts in the wilderness conjures up the saintly image of St. Francis of Assisi, but Philaster's fantasy is a parody of holy retreat; he will save the birds and beasts by reciting bromides about women:

How heaven is in your eyes, but in your hearts
 More hell than hell has; how your tongues, like scorpions,
 Both heal and poison; how your thoughts are woven
 With thousand changes in one subtle web,
 And worn so by you ...
 How all the good you have is but a shadow,
 ... how your vows are frosts (3.2.126-36)

This set speech, with its rhetorical parallels and antitheses, advertises itself as a conventional sermon, and Philaster confirms its conventionality by noting that 'These sad *texts* / Till my last hour I am bound to utter of you' (3.2.140-1, italics mine). Philaster's acknowledgement that his antifeminist rage rehashes well-known admonitory texts emphasizes the artificiality of such declarations and associates him with a genre characterized by rhetorical excess. His parallel desires to find in Bellario 'pretty helpless innocence' and to find in 'Some far place' 'a life / Free from vexation'

⁵⁷ On women and sexuality in the play, see Verna A. Foster, 'Sex Averted or Converted: Sexuality and Tragicomic Genre in the Plays of Fletcher', *SEL* 32 (1992), 311-22; and Marie H. Loughlin, 'Cross-Dressing and the Politics of Dismemberment in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Philaster*', *Renaissance and Reformation* 21 (1997), 23-44.

appear as self-deceiving all along (1.2.123, 3.2.121, 4.3.12-13). *Philaster* is interested in the power of the fantasy of innocence and in its constitutive contradictions, which cause the fantasy to repeatedly fail Philaster and plunge him into despair.

Ironically, Philaster's skeptical crisis can only be resolved when Bellario tells a lie about service. Having been wounded by his enraged master, Bellario claims responsibility for both his and Arethusa's wounds, inventing a fable of ambitious service to convince the nobles that the crime was his own. Bellario's speech echoes the parting scene in which he proved his selflessness by pleading with Philaster not to force him out of his service; but he now depicts himself as a mendacious servant:

It pleased her to receive
Me as her page, and when my fortunes ebb'd,
That men strid o'er them careless, she did shower
Her welcome graces on me, and did swell
My fortunes till they overflowed their banks,
Threat'ning the men that crossed 'em; when as swift
As storms arise at sea she turned her eyes
To burning suns upon me, and did dry
The streams she had bestowed, leaving me worse,
And more contemned than other little brooks,
Because I had been great. (4.6.71-81)

James M. Bromley argues that *Philaster* 'eroticizes service as masochism', and Bellario's voluntary abjection here mirrors that of Arethusa. As Christine Varnado argues, 'Beaumont and Fletcher make an erotics of being instrumentalized, or "used", the hinge of the play's dilated love triangle plot'.⁵⁸ Unlike Arethusa, who asserts herself elsewhere in the play, Bellario's self-abnegation is total, and his helplessness, like that of the cute objects described by Ngai, appeases Philaster's anxiety. Bellario's fiction of venal service assures Philaster that his page really is the emblem of fidelity that he seems. Now Philaster bursts out of hiding, uttering Bellario's praises in a series of comparisons: Bellario is more precious than 'the wealth of Tagus', 'the treasure of all kings in one', and so forth (4.6.91-2). Bellario's lack of concern for himself, underlining his difference from the conventional 'minion' he depicts in this speech, endows his master with a sense of fabulous plenitude. To master fully, to be served for his own sake

⁵⁸ James M. Bromley, *Sexuality and Intimacy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 86; Christine Varnado, 'Getting Used, and Liking It: Erotic Instrumentality in *Philaster*', *Renaissance Drama*, 44.1 (2016), 25-52 (p. 26).

rather than for his servant's advancement, bestows a godlike power on Philaster. Though he calls Bellario 'the wealth / Of poor Philaster', Bellario also promotes Philaster to giddy heights, for the page is 'a ransom / To have redeemed the great Augustus Caesar, / Had he been taken' (4.6.124-32).

Philaster's trio of flawed would-be patriarchs embody the play's critique of fantasies of mastery, and Bellario is both the instrument that exposes their insecurities and the 'ransom' that redeems Philaster and restores political and domestic order. Bellario himself retains his aura of wonder, nor becoming ridiculous like Philaster, nor revealing a secret vulnerability, as Arethusa does. Beaumont and Fletcher insist on Bellario's slipperiness in terms of sex, eroticism, and innocence in his affectionate scenes with Philaster, and though this ambiguity generates the play's conflicts it also allows him to resolve them. Philaster expresses the Bellario paradox:

The love of boys unto their lords is strange;
I have read wonders of it, yet this boy
For my sake (if a man may judge by looks
And speech) would outdo story (2.1.57-60).

On the one hand, a boy's passionate love for his master is ordinary; but despite this Philaster finds it 'strange', the stuff of romance. In *Philaster*, the private realm is imbued with an aura of mystery and redemptive power that presages the mystification of marriage and domestic heterosexuality that would develop in the eighteenth century. Here, though, the mystified domestic ties are homosocial bonds defined through the hierarchical institution of service.

The climactic revelation that Bellario is really Euphrasia compounds Bellario's marvelous nature by resolving the interpretive problem 'he' has posed. While Bellario's 'smoothness' promises innocent eroticism and the pleasures of mastery to those on whom he bestows his devotion, it also suggests the possibility of deception, as he admits: 'that which you were apt / To conster a simple innocence in me / Perhaps might have been craft, the cunning of a boy / Hardened in lies and theft' (2.1.08-11). This possibility, so intolerable to Philaster, cannot be excluded while Bellario maintains his attractively ambiguous status. Bellario's transformation into Euphrasia disambiguates not only his sexual status, but his maturity: he moves from 'boy' to 'woman', leaving behind the problem of youth's indeterminate sexuality. Thus Philaster's ecstatic cries of 'It is a woman! . . . It is a woman!' celebrate the erasure of the category of 'boy', which has aroused in everyone both pleasurable and disturbing reactions (5.5.137-39). While Bellario carried the aura of eroticism wherever he went, Euphrasia uses symbols of

religious devotion to describe her service; she has made a ‘vow, / By all the most religious things a maid / Could call together’ never to marry (5.5.185-87). The revelation that Bellario is Euphrasia, a woman who passionately loves Philaster, seems hardly to change the devoted triangle of man-woman-servant the play has already established; Euphrasia remains, as Lee Bliss has observed, a ‘figure of static pathos and sublimated desire’.⁵⁹ The difference now is the new confidence of the husband and master in the chastity of his wife and the pure love of his servant.⁶⁰ The revelation of Bellario’s ‘true’ gender, then, serves to enhance the romance theme of the marvelous: even more astounding than a pageboy who is secretly a woman is the pageboy-heroine who happily becomes the servant of her beloved and his wife.

This service theme, so easy to recognize in Jacobean city comedies, is often overlooked by scholars of romantic tragicomedy; but the connection between themes of service and the marvelous was in fact familiar to early modern thinkers. In his 1587 work on poetics, the Venetian philosopher Francesco Patrizi lists twelve techniques for generating wonder, which include ‘ignorance, fable, novelty, paradox, augmentation, departure from the usual, the verisimilar, the divine, *great utility*, the very exact, the unexpected, and the sudden’.⁶¹ The notion of ‘great utility’ as a motif of literary wonder connects the early modern romance genre to later works that amaze their readers with technological marvels, like Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* and the modern genre of science fiction. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park recognize ‘wonders of art’ as a category in early modern discourses of the marvelous, within which artificial servants are prominent: ‘The wonders of art, then, like the wonders of nature, embodied a form of symbolic power – over nature, over others, over oneself ... Automata functioned as ideal servants: beings useful for the discipline and surveillance of others, and over whom their owners could have in turn perfect control’.⁶² This fantasy of ‘perfect control’ bears a strong relation to Philaster’s paranoid desire to control Arethusa and Bellario, a desire that Euphrasia neutralizes through marvelous servitude.

⁵⁹ Lee Bliss, *Francis Beaumont* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), p. 85. Similarly, Catherine A. Henze dubs Bellario ‘an otherworldly masque figure’ in *Philaster’s* conclusion in ‘Unraveling Beaumont from Fletcher with Music, Misogyny, and Masque’, *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44.2 (2004), 379-404.

⁶⁰ On Euphrasia’s declaration that she will never marry, see Jo E. Miller, “‘And All This Passion for a Boy?’: Cross-Dressing and the Sexual Economy of Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster*”, in *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997), 129-50.

⁶¹ Francesco Patrizi, ‘La deca ammirabile’, in *Della poetica*, qtd. in Adam Max Cohen, *Wonder in Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 105 (italics mine). On Patrizi and English literary uses of the marvelous, see also Platt, *Reason Diminished*.

⁶² Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), p. 91.

As noted above, Bellario's desire to be serviceable has been interpreted by modern critics as an expression of early modern queer sexuality and/or a form of masochism; I argue that the play depicts perfect service as a queer marvel. As the pastoral garland-making scene with which Bellario is introduced affirms, Bellario and Euphrasia are wonders of both art and nature: both disguised and authentic, female and male, one who loves passionately at first sight, yet who renounces the 'natural' female fate of marriage and childbearing.

The tragicomic romances of 1608-1613, including *The Winter's Tale* and *The Faithful Shepherdess* as well as *Cymbeline*, *Philaster*, and *The Honest Man's Fortune*, feature a powerful man whose irrational suspicion of his wife or betrothed causes him to strike her down, and often to destroy his family, repulsed by the role of husband and household master. A sudden conviction arises in these tragicomic heroes that all social ties may be deformed, and the truth behind others' affect impossible to know.⁶³ The ordinary surface of domestic life hides a monstrous double of the family: a wife whose passions belong not to her husband but his guests and servants, children who are reproductions of his enemies, intimate friends and servants whose attentions to him have helped them to his wife's bed, and the householder himself – not the nurturer and protector of his dependents but their hapless victim. Doubting a woman's chastity produces in *Philaster*, *Leontes*, and *Posthumus* a general skeptical crisis: they doubt their sanity, the evidence of their perceptions and indeed, the possibility of belief itself. Like Amintor in *The Maid's Tragedy*, whose jealousy is warranted, they are driven 'to that dull calamity, / To that strange misbelief of all the world / And all things that are in it' (4.1.214-15).

The skeptical crisis in *The Honest Man's Fortune*, however, arises through homosocial household relations rather than heterosexual love and marriage.⁶⁴ This crisis belongs to Montaigne, 'an honest Lord' financially ruined by Lord Orleans, the jealous husband of his former lover. Montaigne suffers a catastrophic fall in fortune and social place through the vindictive agency of his onetime romantic rival, and in the opening scene he sadly releases his retinue, declining to allow them to support him. His pageboy Veramour refuses to leave him, while his faithful gentlemen-in-waiting, Longaville and

⁶³ On political authority and the suspicion of women's fidelity in tragicomedy, see Susanne Collier, 'Cutting to the Heart of the Matter: Stabbing the Woman in *Philaster* and *Cymbeline*', *Shakespearean Power and Punishment*, ed. by Gillian Murray Kendall (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), pp. 39-58.

⁶⁴ Details are scarce about the earliest performances of this play, but a manuscript text (MS Dyce 9) notes that it was performed in 1613. The cast list indicates the play originally belonged to the Lady Elizabeth's Men; it was revived in 1625 by the King's Men.

Dubois, seek preferment from Orleans and his brother-in-law Amiens in order to secretly work on Montaigne's behalf. Arrested for debt, Montaigne flees to the country, where he requests to serve the noblewoman Lamira, an independent householder who has also given refuge to Lady Orleans and Veramour. A clutch of venal gallants, Lapoope and Laverdure, make their appearance in order to court Lamira, mock the demoted Montaigne, and woo Veramour, whom they suspect is a crossdressed woman. When Amiens and Orleans arrive, Lamira soothes Orleans' jealous rage and invites the reconciled couple to a banquet at which she will choose her own husband. Here, the once-abject Montaigne rebukes the venal gallants and Lamira announces that she is promoting him to husband. Orleans' suspicions produce the typical jealous-lover plot: Lady Orleans acts the part of faithful martyr until a climactic scene of epiphany, regret and reunion. Nevertheless, the plot hinges upon Montaigne's transformation rather than that of Orleans, whose moral lessons are quickly dispensed with. Though Montaigne proves himself in the first scene to be an ideal master – scrupulously moral, self-critical, charitable, and cold to flattery – he undergoes a lengthy purgatory as an impoverished servant before deserving rehabilitation as a householder. What triggers the destruction of a household here is not Orleans' insecurity, but a pervasive social disorder of which Montaigne's loss of mastership is a symptom. Montaigne is thrown into a crisis of confidence in his class and himself – a sense of crisis that the audience is expected to share.

Montaigne's undeserved punishment and subsequent social rise would seem to prove the lesson of the play's title and John Fletcher's epilogue – that despite Fortune's whims, 'Man is his own Star, and that soule that can / Be honest is the only perfect man' (91-2). This little-read play's major legacy has been this epilogue, which Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted in both the epigraph and conclusion to 'Self-Reliance' (*Essays*, 1841). But the play scarcely asserts the power of the individual will; instead, Montaigne's suffering appears as an effect of the disintegration of noble households and their collective failure as centers of social networks, rewarders of traditional virtue, and stabilizing social forces. The play returns insistently to the troubling question of whether the 'honest Lord' Montaigne is culpable for his financial failure, the collapse of his household and the attendant losses suffered by his retainers. The disintegration of noble households is presented as part of a moral collapse on both sides of relations of service and mastery, and Montaigne's rehabilitation hinges upon rehabilitating the ideal of the noble household as a system of virtuous reciprocal service relations.

The play's depiction of Montaigne's fall presents an aristocracy at war with itself and undermining its traditional source of strength – bonds of kinship among peers and ties of 'bounty' or patronage towards their social inferiors. While *Philaster's* setting in

Calabria and Sicily allows Beaumont and Fletcher to criticize tyranny both domestic and political in a safely exotic setting, the France depicted in *The Honest Man's Fortune* provides only the thinnest of veils for its portrayal of a Jacobean English nobility in crisis. The first scene of *The Honest Man's Fortune* depicts a fractured noble kinship bond: Orleans meets his brother-in-law the Earl of Amiens, who treats him with less familiarity than their close relation warrants; he is cold to Orleans' vindictive suit against Montaigne. Kinship demands unity of interests, or, as Orleans complains, 'a love to what I prosper in / Without exceptions', but here respect for such social forms is at odds with justice. The law courts sanction Orleans' abuse of Montaigne, who has spent his way into debt 'for unprofitable Silkes / And Laces', making him impotent to help the poor – or, now that he is *in extremis*, himself. He sends away his faithful retainers and falls prey, with his last small sums, to a crowd of opportunists offering easy ways out of his legal and financial bind. *The Honest Man's Fortune* depicts a venal society in which creditors, lawyers, merchants, shopkeepers, and courtiers prey upon men of Montaigne's class and profit from their penchant for excessive displays of wealth, their self-destructive litigiousness, and their gullibility in venturing their capital in financial schemes. Preyed on by envious peers, by a ruthless and rising citizen elite, and by their own financial excesses and lack of savvy, the aristocracy as represented by Orleans, Montaigne, and Amiens appears to be self-destructing as the play begins.

The play's observers and commentators take the conventional attitude of Jacobean satire that the times themselves are depraved – the 'O tempora! O mores!' of Cicero. Montaigne bemoans his own failure to live up to an older aristocratic standard: 'O antiquity / Thy great examples of Nobility / Are out of imitation' (1.1.188-90). The disenchanted tone of the play implies that Montaigne's fate is not exceptional, and that noble households are declining either through financial ruin or moral laxity, as Montaigne claims:

... 'tis the comfort that
 Ill fortune has undone me into the fashion:
 For now in this age most men do begin,
 To keep but one boy, that kept many men (1.1.416-19).

This accusation suggests much more than a mere narrowing of noble means. The difference between keeping 'many men' and keeping 'one boy' is that between the great householder supporting a meritocracy of retainers, officers and servants and the pleasure-loving courtier – as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man Out of His Humour* – who requires in the way of service only amusement and the gratification of his vanity. Likewise, Longaville scoffs that Orleans' attendance consists in 'a page, a

cook, a pander, coach-man, and a foot man, in these dayes a great Lords traine' (3.2.96-98). Later in the play, Laverdure and La-poope will conclude that the noblewoman Lamira's household is 'a bawdy house, with Pinnacles and Turrets' in which Montaigne 'goes to rut gratis' since, after all, 'not so much as his boy is wanting' (3.3.179-89). Montaigne's loss of property means the loss of a virtuous community of attendants, who now are set adrift, while the nobleman and his lone page are both defenseless and morally suspicious.

The play follows Montaigne's cast-off retainers, who ponder their future as masterless men in a venal age: Longaville muses that the roles of masters and servants have become so confused that 'now tis grown into a doubt / Whether the Master or the servant gives / The countenance' (2.1.5-7). Mistresses, he adds, with a bawdy innuendo, 'keep more servants now (indeed) then men . . . the women are / Grown full to' (2.1.9). Their only recourse is to set up a 'male stews', or bawdy house, which would thrive with 'some half a dozen proper men' (2.1.15-17). Despite the jocular tone of such exchanges, the imagined transformation of the male society of Montaigne's retinue into a male brothel suggests that the dissolution of Montaigne's estate involves a loss of sexual order and a threat to the superior moral virtue traditionally associated with a tightly knit masculine society. The play idealizes Montaigne's lost household as a source of social regulation and a nursery of merit. Having been hired by the corrupt Orleans, who declares that 'thou art mine / For I do find thee made unto my purposes', Duboys laments the change:

I walke now with a full purse, grow high and wanton,
Prune and brisk my self in the bright shine
Of his good Lordships favors; and for what virtue?
For fashioning myself a murderer.
O noble Montaigne, to whom I owe my heart,
With all my best thoughts, though my tongue have promised
To exceed the malice of thy destiny,
Never in time of all my service knew I
Such a sin tempt thy bounty; those that did feed
Upon thy charge had merit or else need (2.4.4-13).

While Orleans fashions wantons and murderers, Montaigne had fashioned a homosocial order bound by affective ties, where service was a method of inculcating and rewarding virtue.

Though Montaigne's household has dissolved because of Orleans' legal chicanery, it represents in *The Honest Man's Fortune* the larger, more mysterious loss of a past ideal

world that, though recalled insistently as a rebuke to the fallen present, cannot really be imagined as recoverable. Montaigne compares himself to Hecuba fleeing a burning Troy, and the notion that an entire social order has collapsed – consumed in flames, perhaps, of its own making – attaches to the image of noble households in the play (3.1.190-91). In Montaigne's darkest hour, he delivers a soliloquy lamenting his fall that equivocates oddly on its causes. Entering 'in mean habit', Montaigne muses that his past beneficence has brought only debt and financial ruin: 'The liberty thy ever giving hand / Hath bought for others, manacled it self / In gives of parchment indissoluble' (4.1.5-7). The next lines shift to a different portrayal -- of a great man lacking in virtue:

The greatest hearted man supplied with means
 Nobility of birth and gentlest parts,
 I, though the right hand of his Sovereign,
 If virtue quit her seat in his high soul,
 Glitters but like a Palace set on fire,
 Whose glory whilst it shines, but ruins him,
 And his bright show each hour to ashes tending
 Shall at the last be rak't up like a sparkle,
 Unless men's lives and fortunes feed the flame (4.1.8-17).

Oddly, this description of corrupt mastery, one which suits Orleans better than Montaigne, is embedded in Montaigne's soliloquy. This elision of the distinction between honest Montaigne and the villain Orleans suggests that the 'Palace set on fire' characterizes the current state of the nobility, whose prominent role in society, as the play depicts it, has changed from a stabilizing to an entropic force.

As an image for a nobleman's social role, the 'Palace set on fire', fed with the 'lives and fortunes' of men, reverses the traditional image of the noble household as a cornucopia of bounty and hospitality, dispensed by its master to the benefit of a privileged domestic society and the world at large.⁶⁵ Instead, noble mastery represents an instrumental relation such as that suggested by Orleans' search for men 'made unto my purposes'. Though Orleans' depraved mastery contrasts with the ideal mastery of Montaigne, Amiens, and the noblewoman Lamira, the notion that service and mastery might themselves be mutually exploitative and demeaning surfaces repeatedly. When Longaville and Dubois seek employment in Amiens' and Orleans' service, the noblemen's differing reactions delineate a refined ideal of proper service. Dubois and Longaville pretend to accuse one another of corrupt service, of having 'some seven years

⁶⁵ See Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

fed on thy masters trencher, yet never bredst good blood towards him'; this is the specter of mendacious servant that another good servant, Bellario, also evoked in order to prove his true fidelity to his master (2.2.160-62). Orleans accepts Duboys' service eagerly when he sees Duboys ready to fight in his defense, but Amiens refuses Longaville as champion since he dares 'offer / To take my honour in his feeble arms' (2.2.193-94). Duboys and Longaville propose a high ideal of service, one which demands a servant's genuine gratitude and affection in return for the benefits he receives; Amiens' scruples, on the other hand, demonstrate that virtuous mastery consists in refusing service if it is offered dishonorably. As Amiens and Longaville distance themselves from the stigma of servility, their reciprocal scruples threaten, however, to constitute an indictment of service relations in general. Amiens observes that 'You never yet had a meals meat from my Table, / Nor as I remember from my Wardrobe / Any cast Suite' (2.3.24-25). Longaville reacts contemptuously:

Tis true,
I never durst yet have such a servile spirit,
To be the minion of a full swollen Lord;
But always did detest such slavery:
A meal's meat, or a cast suit?
I would first eat the stones, and from such rags
The dunghill does afford pick me a garment (2.3.27-33).

Seeing that Longaville disavows 'the imputation of a Sycophant', Amiens offers to accept his service after all, but under the name of 'friend':

Thou shalt go hand in hand with me, and share
As well in my ability as love;
Tis not my end
To gain men for my use, but a true friend' (2.3.6-9).

Amiens avoids using words associated with service, such as 'follow' or 'prefer', just as Longaville has claimed to eschew the ordinary benefits of service at all social levels – meals and clothing. The careful discrimination between venal and virtuous service has led to a rejection of the forms of service itself, casting doubt on the final distinction between 'minion' and 'servant', between 'full swollen Lord' and 'greatest hearted man'.

Such comments as Montaigne's that 'in this age most men do begin / To keep but one boy, that kept many men', allude to a general aristocratic failure but fail to distinguish between impotence and venality. The play itself remains uncertain whether the

aristocracy is victim or villain in the story of its decline. Repeatedly, in the moral suspicion attached to the landless Montaigne and his boy, the chaotic future foreseen by his masterless followers, and the insistent question of Montaigne's culpability in his fall, social and moral collapses are equated, with the result that Montaigne's role as the ideal master is insistently undercut. Montaigne is compared to female figures who are emblems of victimhood; he sees himself as Hecuba fleeing Troy, while his followers describe him as a Euridice they have rescued from hell (3.2.45). Montaigne's eagerness to trust the con men who assure him of huge profits at no risk (through schemes to sell offices and aid piracy) seems at odds with his reputation for moral rectitude and his magisterial role as domestic sovereign. The cartoonishly knavish Laverdure and La-poope cheat Montaigne 'as easily as a silly Country wench of her maidenhead' (2.4.19-20). Mallicorn, Laverdure and La-poope abuse him with impunity, and even Veramour and the serving woman Charlotte must urge Montaigne to face his suffering with greater fortitude. The problem of the plot turns out to be how to revalue both the notion of virtuous mastery itself and Montaigne's fitness for mastery.

Laurence Senelick calls the pageboy Veramour an 'ingenious manipulation of the faithful page/loving heroine/boy player/catamite nexus', but despite the surprise ending in which he turns out *not* to be a crossdressed heroine, Veramour is much like *Philaster's* Bellario.⁶⁶ Like Bellario, Veramour offers his master an ideal love that promises to recuperate his mastery of self and others. The play's audience might see the reduction of Montaigne's retinue to one pageboy as a sort of purging of service and the moral problems it poses; as in *Philaster*, the pageboy-master relation offers a special purity unavailable in adult relations. A figure of boundless devotion and dependence, Veramour desperately attempts to reinstate Montaigne as master and creator of virtuous homosocial ties. Veramour, a youthful version of *King Lear's* Kent, imagines himself protecting his master as they wander friendless through the elements. Like Bellario, Veramour offers Montaigne a pastoral vision; in this case the wandering master and boy, stripped of both community and shelter, will exemplify selfless service:

In the Winter I will spare
 Mine own clothes from myself to cover you;
 And in the Summer, carry some of yours
 To ease you: I'll do any thing I can (1.1.408-11).

Later, Veramour expands on this image:

⁶⁶ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Varieties of Theatrical Cross-Dressing* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 142-4.

I'll quit assured means, and expose my self
To cold and hunger still to be with you;
Fearless I'll travel through a wilderness,
And when you are weary, I will lay me down
That in my bosom you may rest your head,
Where whilst you sleep, I'll watch that no wild beast
Shall hurt or trouble you: and thus we'll breed
A story to make every hearer weep,
When they discourse our fortunes and our loves.

Montaigne. Oh what a scoff might men of Women make,
If they did know this boy? (4.1.54-64)

As in *Philaster*, the pastoral vision of man and boy as a loving, isolated pair explicitly opposes itself to heterosexual unions; master and servant will breed virtue by example. Sexual reproduction looks rather base: so far, the Duke of Orleans and his lady provide the play's only heterosexual union, one destroyed by the Duke's pathological sexual jealousy. Montaigne, meanwhile, tests Lady Orleans' virtue by inviting her to a hedonistic banquet to excite and quench appetites of all kinds (1.3.33-47). The romance of service takes the place of pastoral heterosexual romance, the usual subject of pathetic histories of 'our fortunes and our loves', and offers an alternative source of pleasure and affective intensity.

However, Veramour's idealized adoration of his master fails to settle the play's curious ambivalence about Montaigne's culpability in his fall; indeed, it seems to catalyze more self-doubt in Montaigne. He claims to be oppressed by Veramour's goodness and to find in it proof of his own debility: 'Is not thy Master strangely fallen, when thou / Servest for no wages, but for charity?' (4.1.38-39). The homosocial pastoral Veramour proposes remains a fantasy, one that strikes Montaigne as excessive and only seems to produce in him further helplessness.⁶⁷ 'Veramour' suggests 'vrai-amour' or 'true-love', and he proves himself true by voluntarily serving Montaigne even when he can no longer gain by it. The name, however, could also suggest the Latin 'ver' and 'amor' – 'spring-love' or 'youthful-love'.⁶⁸ The authors obviously appreciate a double pun: Captain La-Poep's name refers both to his formal and informal vocations, both the

⁶⁷ 'Oh, lad, thy love will kill me', Montaigne says, weeping (4.1.81).

⁶⁸ Thomas Thomas, *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1587), s. v. 'ver'.

‘poop’ sail and ‘to poop’ – ‘to deceive, cheat, cozen, befool’.⁶⁹ If Veramour’s true but youthful love represents an immature affection, perhaps the noblewoman Lamira’s name is also significant: in Italian, ‘la mira’ is the aim, goal or purpose. Indeed, it is through Lamira’s agency that Montaigne is restored to mastery of himself and headship of a noble household. We needn’t, however, see Lamira’s love as a contrast to Veramour’s; they are united through the marvelous nature of their love for Montaigne. Lamira’s name also represents her beauty and wondrous virtue; the Latin ‘mira’ translates as ‘marvelous’. Lamira’s name hints that her love for Montaigne will be as extraordinary as that of Veramour, thus offering a vision of the ideal household. The play introduces Lamira as the head of a virtuous household who offers hospitality to the victims of household disintegration – Lady Orleans, Veramour, and Montaigne. The action moves from the dissolving households in the city to the haven of Lamira’s country house. Wishing to avoid the opprobrium attached to decadent aristocrats who would ‘be a burthen, or feed like a drone / On the industrious labor of the Bee’, Montaigne becomes a servant in her family (3.1.184-6).⁷⁰ Lamira contrasts with this specter of the dissolute aristocrat, providing a model of domestic sovereignty: she governs her country house as a virtuous community that contrasts with the corruption of court and city life.

The play relies for closure on a reinstatement of the household as a source of social order rather than on an escape from sociability in the virtuous isolation of master and boy. The depiction of Lamira as governor echoes the praise of aristocratic country life in such poems as Amelia Lanyer’s ‘The Description of Cooke-ham’, published two years before, and Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst’ and ‘To Sir Robert Wroth’, which would first appear in print in his 1616 *Works*, but might well have been known to his circle in

⁶⁹ *OED* 2, s. v. ‘poop’. The citations range in date from 1575 to 1663.

⁷⁰ This danger forms part of the Jacobean satirical view of an aristocracy in decline, a perspective that could be taken quite seriously as a moral criticism, as Robert Sanderson does in his sermon of November 4, 1621. Sanderson identifies three classes of persons who refuse God’s assignment of a vocation within which to labor: monks, ‘sturdy’ beggars, and the leisured aristocracy. A landed gentleman may expunge the stain of idleness by laboring industriously as governor of his household and locale, Sanderson admits. ‘For some man whom God hath blessed with power and authority in his country, with fair livings and large revenues, with a numerous family of servants, retainers, and tenants, and the like, it may be a sufficient Calling, and enough to take up his whole time, even to keep hospitality, and to order and overlook his family, and to dispose of his lands and rents, and to make peace, and preserve love and neighbourhood among them that live near or under him’. Martin Seymour-Smith (ed.), *The English Sermon*, 3 vols, I (Cheadle: Carcanet Press, 1976), p. 216.

manuscript.⁷¹ Like Penshurst, Lamira's 'homely house built more for use than shew / Observes the Golden mean equally distant / From glittering pomp, and sordid avarice' (3.1.10-12). Lamira's house is a realm of ideal mastery like Lanyer's 'Cooke-ham', where nature itself serves its mistress gladly in a reciprocal relation producing both pleasure and virtue. Lamira's servants display their tutelage in virtue by raising service to a noble calling; one refuses a bribe, provoking Laverdure's shocked response that 'thou art unfit, to be in office either in Court or City' (3.3.9-10).

The excessive subjection of a just person presents an interpretive puzzle, one familiar to us from Boccaccio's and Chaucer's 'Patient Griselda' stories.⁷² Lamira, like Griselda's husband, represents an exacting God who tests his favored ones with sometimes-extreme trials, but finally rewards patient faith. There is something of the divine about Lamira's governance, and this idealized mastery allows the play to reinscribe service as a robust exemplar of social order and virtuous affective relations. What affords Lamira the mystical authority to resolve the play's skeptical view of noble mastery and servitude seems to be that she evades the dichotomy of master and servant. The authors represent Lamira's relation to her social position as one of unfettered choice; she contemplates the decision of whether to master or serve as a free agent, first refusing to

Change my golden liberty and consent
 To be a servant to [a man], as wives are
 To the Imperious humors of their Lords:
 Me thinks I'm well, I rise and go to bed
 When I think fit, eat what my appetite
 Desires without control, my servants study
 Is my contentment, and to make me merry
 Their furthest aim; Command and liberty now wait upon
 My Virgin state; what would I more? change all,
 And for a husband? (3.1.48-59)

⁷¹ Amelia Lanyer, 'Description of Cooke-ham', *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), in Germaine Greer, et al. (eds), *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1988).

⁷² *The Honest Man's Fortune* revises this plot; the playwrights probably found a direct model in a lost source also used by Thomas Heywood in *Gynaikeion* (1624). Field, Massinger, and Fletcher were probably also influenced by George Peele's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1595), in which Euminides, a knight down on his luck, is protected by a 'page' who, after many proofs of Euminides' honesty, reveals that he is the ghost of a man who benefited from the Euminides' charity. The page 'Jack' magically provides for his master as they wander alone and comfortless. The wandering romantic-pastoral pair of knight and boy and the page's marvelous virtue proven through hardship link the play to *The Honest Man's Fortune*. The original attribution of the source appears in Gerard Langbaine, *Momus Triumphans* (1688), 58.

However, Lamira *will* change her ‘golden liberty and consent’ for a husband, choosing Montaigne as her master, since ‘he that has so well serv’d me / With his obedience, being born to greatness, / Must use me nobly of necessity / When I shall serve him’ (5.4.186-9). By this logic, marriage becomes the ultimate affirmation of service. Like Veramour’s love, Lamira’s is marvelous because it proves itself voluntary; but only Lamira, as a noblewoman, possesses the freedom to choose the position of servant over that of mistress. The homosocial hierarchy gives men no choice but to participate; therefore, even Veramour cannot prove by free choice that the hierarchy ennobles rather than exploits. Lamira’s service cannot be venal; as a result, she can resolve the pressing epistemological difficulty of evaluating affective hierarchical relations and distinguishing baseness from the virtue. Magically, the notion of marriage as service has rehabilitated the homosocial ideal of household service.

As Chris Meads points out, the banquet scene in *The Honest Man’s Fortune* is a ritualized ceremony resembling a trial, in which Lamira offers justice and retribution.⁷³ What Lamira offers is not romantic love; her sudden announcement that she will marry Montaigne lacks any hint of the devotion and adoration Veramour has represented. The scene stages a glorious social promotion rather than an admission of secret love. In fact, the play ends with the ritualized exclusion of heterosexual passion in the person of Veramour, who has been courted by Laverdure. Laverdure assumes (not unreasonably, given the literary context) that the attractive young man so devoted to his master must be a woman in disguise, and Veramour plays along – ‘I am a poor disguis’d Lady / That like a Page have followed you full long / For love god-wot’ (5.4.230-2). The silliness of this conventional pose provokes scoffs from all sides, and the notion of Veramour as a lovesick maid is ceremoniously rejected, although Michael Shapiro argues that Laverdure may continue to desire Veramour as a boy, at least in the manuscript version of the play.⁷⁴ In contrast, Sandra Clark observes that while Bellario remains an ‘erotically stimulating androgyne at the boundary between maleness and femaleness’, Veramour’s parodic take on this motif serves to reinforce the notion of strictly distinct gender roles, while exposing their social construction.⁷⁵ In my view, Veramour’s rejection of the disguised-heroine plot mocks a heterosexual fantasy about selfless female love, affirming instead the importance and reality of a pageboy’s love and

⁷³ Chris Meads, *Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in English Renaissance Drama* (Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 164-6.

⁷⁴ Michael Shapiro, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 85-6.

⁷⁵ Sandra Clark, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 63, 155-6.

loyalty – a different kind of ideal. Having proven that his name refers to homosocial ties and not unrequited heterosexual love, Veramour receives offers of patronage from the observers, who clamor to take him into their trades and households – as a sailor with the Captain or apprentice with the citizen. Montaigne dismisses these suggestions and reinstates the language of service rejected earlier by Amiens: ‘For his preferment it is determin’d’ (5.4.265). Veramour, like Bellario, offers an easing of the crisis of mastery by promising innocence and non-marital love at once. *The Honest Man’s Fortune* rejects a conventional comedic finale by replacing multiple marriages with preferment all around.

The skepticism addressed to claims of domestic mastery in these plays takes several forms. In *Philaster*, mastery is a psychologically unstable position producing wild swings between overbearing narcissism and crises of self-confidence that are linked to the epistemological problem of discerning the truth behind others’ affect. In *The Honest Man’s Fortune*, the class of noble householders has forfeited its traditional social role, leaving both masters and servants lost in a chaotic landscape. Early modern mastery, a central social form invested with high moral purpose, promised certain crucial satisfactions – not only those of social dominance, but of intimacy, of mutual affection and of a virtuous community. The possibility, ever present in these plays, that service actually debases both master and servant presents a threat to the entire social order as well as to the identity of domestic and political sovereigns. Each play offers a resolution of sorts to the doubts that plague its masters, but these oases of innocent domesticity, escapist fantasies, or alternate idealizations of the household never entirely banish the suspicion attached to traditional ideals of service. Only the marvelous figure of the ambiguously gendered, innocently loving pageboy for a moment erases these doubts.