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The Allure and Joy of Female Criminals in Early Modern English City Comedy

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Abstract

The article examines the appeal of female criminal characters in early modern English city comedies. Stage representations of urban criminals on the early modern stage reflect a cultural taste for fictionalized and sensationalized stories of criminal behavior also prevalent in the popular rogue literature of the time. This trend suggests everyday city dwellers' collective desire to better understand and contain the growing and diversifying population of London in the early seventeenth century. Specifically, the article posits that the comedic tones and alluring nature of staged versions of female crooks mitigate the threat of criminality for readers and viewers. Focusing specifically on Ben Jonson's *Doll Common* from *The Alchemist* and offering readings of some examples of rogue literature, the article turns to a body of research on coney-catching literature and gender to make the claim that female criminals on the early modern stage are portrayed in an affectionate way that emphasizes their sexual and emotional appeal. Their popularity speaks to both the fear of a familiar sense of danger and the thrill of experiencing the exotic in the changing early modern urban landscape.

Keywords: *Ben Jonson, Coney-Catching Crime, Female Criminality, The Alchemist, The Roaring Girl*

1. Introduction

The female urban criminal was a figure of much interest in early modern England and its theater. She features prominently in popular literature and in drama from the period. In city comedies, in particular, female criminals generally are portrayed as endearing and mostly harmless. Underworld characters, particularly female ones, provide a uniquely complex, layered emotional experience in the theater because they are at once desirable and repulsive, familiar and exotic. In city comedies especially, wayward women are even joyous, often embodying the pleasure of spectatorship and sexual allure. This article looks at the portrayal and actuality of crime in early modern London

to establish a context for the and plays and pamphlets that portrayed them and audiences' relationships to them. Through a reading of Doll Common from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) and other characters in popular literature, such as Moll Cutpurse/Mary Frith, it argues that depictions of early modern women who commit crime, especially prostitutes, are appealing despite the social threats they represent. I argue that female criminal characters in city comedies subvert not only gender roles as many critics have asserted, but the everyday experience of early modern citizens of London. These figures provide a critical opportunity to examine early modern dramatic and gender performance as not only experiences that destabilize social norms, but as thrilling departures from the chaos of daily life in early modern London. They also help to illuminate the subversive experiences audience members and readers have as they imagine themselves in an othered subject position of the criminal, allowing spectators and readers to navigate freely between the bounded world of early modern England and the freer imaginary world of the theater. This article contributes to an already robust discussion of female criminality and its representations in the early modern period by focusing on Jonson's Doll, a less-studied character in the discussion of the intersections between early modern criminality and popular literature, specifically city comedy. By considering the historical actuality of crime, the notions of gender in circulation in early modern London, and research done on rogue literature and more prominent early modern female criminals, I attempt to uncover a pattern of gendered criminal representation and develop an understanding of what kinds of particular pleasure these characters provide at the theater.

Critical discussion of dramatic representations of early modern female criminality in comedies has been dominated by scholarship on Moll Cutpurse in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* (c. 1607-1610) and the historical figure Mary Frith who inspired the character. Much of this work has focused particularly on the character's gender, sexuality, and crossdressing, and rightly so.¹ These contributions have done much to bolster our understanding of gender on the early modern stage and in early modern England generally. Readings of Moll have often been paired with readings of coney-catching literature in an effort to not only establish how accurately she represents the real Mary Frith, but also explore the relationship between the actualities of the London underworld and the ways the stage represented it. The critical attention Moll has received, I think, speaks generally to the particular, popular appeal of female criminals' stories. It is my assertion that scholarship on Moll and the rogue literature of the period can shed light on not only how Doll Common and other characters like her function to attract or increase interest in city comedies, but also what this interest reveals about cultural attitudes toward subversive, and even threatening, femininity. The work that has been done on Moll and Mary is helpful in developing an understanding of what was pleasurable and alluring about representations of female criminality in the period.

Moll and Doll are different in important ways. In *The Alchemist*, Doll is part of a criminal gang of sorts, while Middleton and Dekker's heroine acts autonomously. In Middleton and Dekker's play, Moll crossdresses and in some ways acts as a man even though she moves through the world identifying as female. In contrast, Doll plays up her femininity and sexual appeal in order to lure customers. We witness Doll's criminality over the course of Jonson's play, but Moll's pickpocketing and fighting is mostly just mentioned in an endearing way rather than acted out during the course of the drama. In her study on the rehabilitation of Mary Frith and her self-actualization in relation to *The Roaring Girl* and other early modern publications that focus on her

¹ While this list is certainly not exhaustive or inclusive of all of the good scholarship done on Moll and her gender and sexuality, see especially, Rose 1984; Howard 1988; Garber 1991; Bromley 2015.

celebrity, Alicia Tomasian claims that ‘Middleton and Dekker have taken the woman Mary Frith as a source but painted her as benign and harmless, albeit scintillating in her difference’ (2008, 206).² The characterization of female criminality as ‘scintillating’ indicates the allure of the female criminal, especially Frith who clearly captured the collective imagination given the frequency with which she is mentioned in various sources of the time.³ In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll’s cant, or street language, is a particular site of pleasure for the gallants in the play. As evidenced by the inclusion of cant lexicons in the popular ‘rogue’ pamphlets of the day, deciphering street language also interested early modern readers and audience members. In his study on cant in Middleton and Dekker’s play, Miles Taylor posits a theory about, ‘the pleasure produced by learning a subculture’s argot’ (2005, 108). He says: ‘not only [do] the play and pamphlets figure an education in cant as pleasurable, but also ... they associate such pleasure with a recovery of parts of the self excluded in identity formation’ (*ibid.*). Based on Taylor’s observation, we can surmise that education about other languages and subcultures is pleasurable in part *because* it helps the mainstream learner to develop a better understanding of unexplored parts of selfhood, perhaps the parts are tempted by the mysterious joys and freedom of the criminal underworld.

Experiencing that joy through Moll Cutpurse and other fictional representations of the female criminal allows the unexplored part of the self to remain safely within the dominant culture, a concept Zachary Lesser calls ‘safe danger’ (2004, 144).⁴ Lesser holds that the gender play in *The Roaring Girl* allows characters like Sebastian to safely play with transgressive same-sex desire when his love interest Mary Fitzallard dresses as a page. The concept of ‘safe danger’ is also present in Middleton and Dekker’s play and in its bringing together of the criminal underworld and the merchant class. Moreover, city comedies also allow their audiences to experience ‘safe danger’. In effect, the theater and other fictional accounts allow an audience member to occupy two very different positions within the social strata. Jennifer Higgenbotham reads Moll as a liminal figure that occupies the space between several categories, a reading that both explains the character’s cultural threat and posits how that threat is mitigated. She claims the play ‘renders Moll unthreatening’ by portraying her as girlish rather than sexualized, but also presents, ‘paradoxes [that] effectively undo the fixity of gender binaries and blur the distinction between the criminal and the legal, the sexual and the chaste, the manly and the womanly’ (2013, 91-92). Mark Hutchings claims that Moll embodies a similar paradox. Although her behavior may subvert dominant gender and criminal paradigms, her ability to challenge these systems is limited. He argues that Moll, ‘manoeuvres through but for the most part remains outside the social world of the play, Middleton and Dekker capture the paradox of Frith’s “place” as both marginalised and celebrated’ (2007, 93). With characters like Moll, and I would argue other female criminals, the theater allows for an opportunity to play with convention before it must reestablish social order. As a genre, city comedy provides a lot of room for subversive play, perhaps because the setting and subject matter were so familiar to its audiences. Other forms of popular culture also provided urban dwellers with opportunities to test forms of social control.

² Moll has also been rehabilitated by other critics, including Jacobs 1991; Howard 1992; Baston 1997.

³ Mary Frith gets mentioned in several sources from the period, including *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* (1662), an anonymous alleged autobiography that is almost certainly a fictionalized biography; court records from 1611 (for playing a lute and singing on stage at the Fortune after a performance of Middleton and Dekker’s play) and 1612 (for dressing as a man in St. Paul’s); and a 1612 letter by John Chamberlain that describes her behavior at a service at St. Paul’s. See Ungerer 2000 for more detailed accounts of these documentations of Frith’s doings.

⁴ Lesser develops different applications for his concept of ‘safe danger’ throughout ch. 4 of his 2004 book.

2. *Urban and Female Criminality in London and Its Literature*

The stage shaped early modern Londoners' understanding of their city and their places within it, but it also reflected larger cultural trends already in circulation. The female criminal as she was represented on stage does both; her dual functions are apparent by her pervasive presence in both historical accounts and sensationalized, fictitious cultural artifacts. In 1592, Robert Greene published a pamphlet in his coney-catching series, works in which he claims to reveal secrets of the London underworld dominated by thieves, prostitutes, and other criminals. It contains a dialogue, *A Disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher*, that features thief and rogue Laurence arguing with Nan, a prostitute and thief in her own right. In it, they discuss whether male coney-catchers, a term ascribed to criminals who took advantage of law-abiding citizens for their personal profit, or female coney-catchers are more effective in the criminal arts.

With a dismissive, superior tone, Laurence greets Nan by commenting on her fine appearance and surmising that she has been able to afford to live richly because her coney-catching husband has been particularly successful lately. Nan scoffs, chiding him 'though they [women] be not so strong in the fists, they bee more ripe in their wittes, and tis by wit that I liue and will liue, in dispight of that peeuish scholler, that thought with his conny-catching bookes to haue crosbyt our trade' (Greene 1592, A4r). Here, she most likely refers to Greene, the 'peeuish scholler' and his previous publications as unsuccessful attempts to curb women's criminal behavior. Having none of Laurence's – or Greene's – insults, sharp-tongued Nan easily makes a more comprehensive and convincing argument that female criminals were indeed more effective:

you men are but fooles, your gettings is vncertaine, and yet you still fish for the gallowes ... we mad wenches haue our tennants (for so I call euerie simple letcher and amorous Fox) as wel out of Tearme as in Tearm to bring vs our rentes, alas, were not my wits and my wanton pranks more profitable then my husbands foysting, we might often go to bed supperlesse for want of surfetting. (A4v)

She goes on to challenge Laurence, saying:

and sith I haue leisure and you no great busines, as being now when Powles is shut vp, and all purchasies and Connies in their burrowes, let vs to the Tauerne and take a roome to our selues, and there for the price of our suppers, I will proue that women, I meane of our facultie, a trafficque, or as base knaues tearme vs strumpets, are more subtile, more dangerous, in the common-wealth, and more full of a uyles to get crownes, then the cunningest Foyst, Nip, Lift, Praggies, or whatsoever that liues at this day. (*ibid.*)

As the dialogue continues, Nan grows confident and bold enough to claim that women are in fact not just more successful and ambitious criminals, but more dangerous to the commonwealth. Clearly, with Nan's bold statements, Greene means to emphasize female criminal's hubris. However, when considered practically, Nan's claims make a lot of sense given the female criminal's place in the social strata of early modern London and her double threat as a thief (or even murderer) and prostitute.

Nan's argument assumes several differences between men and women coney-catchers. First, she asserts that women have superior wit, implying not only that they are smarter, but more adept at endearing others to them because of their humor and charm. Second, Nan points out that women have more financial opportunity. She argues that men's crimes necessarily cease when their potential victims hole up for the night in their homes while women can continue to serve 'tenannts' by seducing (and stealing from) them indoors because one of their trades

is sex. Thirdly, Nan implies that male criminals, like Laurence and her husband, are actually dependent on female criminals not only because the women have more earning potential, but also because they need them to bait and lure victims. These arguments call upon real anxieties about female criminals that in many ways stood in for cultural anxieties about women in general: 1) they spread disease; 2) they are deceptively innocent; 3) they threaten men's earning potential in a capitalistic economy; and 4) they can become wayward, threatening the family structure. Although Nan and other female criminals in pamphlets like Greene's certainly represent street criminals generally, the emphasis is mostly on their acts of prostitution. Her quick association with the bedroom – and the tenants that occupy them – suggests that she threatens both the public space of the street and the indoor domestic space of the household in a way her male counterpart does not. Despite these dangers, she is clearly the more compelling character, speaking with more humor, intelligence, and knowledge than Laurence. The threats she poses, which are simultaneously a result of and seeming contradiction to her gender, make her interesting. There is a certain allure about her not just as a sexualized subject who might offer services noncriminal women would not, but also as a source of particular curiosity about the criminal world in general.

Nan and Moll Cutpurse are just two examples of female criminality. Looking at other female criminals in fictitious early modern accounts, like Doll Common in *The Alchemist*, provides insight as to why these women were a particular subject of interest for early modern literary and theatrical audiences. Greene's *Disputation* is one of the better-known examples of a subgenre of popular literature that appeared in England in the 1590s that has been categorized as 'rogue literature.' The popularity of this subgenre reflects a taste – especially an urban taste – for sensationalized stories about street crime. Though he was prolific in the genre,⁵ Greene certainly was not the only writer capitalizing on public taste for stories about London's underground world of criminals. Thomas Harman was writing similar stuff as far back as 1566 with the publication of his *A Caueat or Warening for Common Cvsitors*. Greene's contemporary Thomas Dekker wrote several pamphlets that were similar to his work as well, including 1608's *The Belman of London*. The public desire for rogue literature translated to the theater in the early sixteenth century as well. This taste is evidenced by the number of city comedies that feature rogues and other criminal characters; *The Roaring Girl* is merely one. Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, Marston, Heywood, Chapman, and other playwrights all wrote works between 1589 and 1616 that are set in London, feature citizen characters, and provide satiric commentary on urban life, and have therefore, been classified as city comedies.⁶ Characters from these comedies like Doll Common resemble characters like Nan: Doll is also a prostitute who is clearly familiar with other crooks and the ways of the criminal world.

However, the presentation of the criminal or rogue figure is somewhat different in the drama than it is in the printed literature. The coney-catching pamphlets often emphasize the threats that criminals pose to safety and the mannered citizen lifestyle in order to offer tips about protecting oneself from them. Contrastingly, city comedy reveals London-based criminal

⁵ Greene's other coney-catching works include, *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage* (1591), *The Second Part of Cony-catching* (1591), *The Third and Last Part of Cony-catching* (1592), *The Black Book's Messenger* (1592), and *The Defence of Conny-catching* (1592).

⁶ 1598-1616 is the generally accepted time period when city comedies were produced. The time period is generally suggested in Brian Gibbons' influential *Jacobean City Comedy* (1980); see especially ch. 1, 'City Comedy as Genre'. Other influential works that helped to define the time period and characteristics of city comedy include Leggatt 1973 and Leinwand 1986.

characters to be ultimately unthreatening, funny, and even likable, a characterization due at least in part to the behind-the-scenes look into the planning and execution of their cons that the plays offer. Johnathan Haynes describes the figure's translation to the stage:

the rogue found himself quite welcome in the theater. There the audience could indulge, in safety from his vermin and pilfering, the curiosity and fascinated ambiguity always accompanying the figure of the rogue, and could indulge also the temptation to think through, via the status crime of vagabondage, the themes of social identity and political organization which had become unavoidable in England's post-feudal society, and which now preoccupied the drama. (1989, 21)

Haynes' point presupposes the rogue's popularity, but in contrast to his representation in literature, which can be 'ambiguous,' criminal characters on stage were more legible, though still removed enough to allow for a sense of safety. Interestingly, he reads the representation of 'crime and vagabondage' as an interpretive tool that allowed an audience to more easily understand their own identity in a shifting culture that better reflected its capitalistic future rather than its feudal past. This new culture ushered in new social problems, such as increased crime and patterns of urban coexistence, like mingling with unfamiliar kinds of people.

During the period when city comedy flourished, the drama is indeed 'preoccupied' with issues of identity and community politics as Haynes claims, with special attention of how urban realities shape both. In the Prologue to *The Alchemist*, Jonson emphasizes his urban setting and some of the social problems the city was facing in the form of particular criminals in these famous lines:

Our Scene is London, 'cause we would make known
No country's mirth is better than our own.
No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
Whose manners, now call'd humours, feed the stage. (1967, Prologue, ll. 5-9)

In a direct address to his Blackfriars audience, Jonson emphasizes just how close the actions they will see on stage are to their everyday lived experience, but he also claims that these actions could not really transpire anywhere but this crime-infested city. The city 'breeds' prostitutes, pimps, and fraudsters. As he has already mentioned in the acrostic Argument, where he calls them 'a cheater and his punk' and 'cozeners' (Argument, ll. 4 and 6), these are the very characters that will feature in the play the audience is about to see. Should they feel threatened? Jonson believes so as he calls upon plague imagery of disease, mentioning the elusiveness of the 'cure' (Prologue, l. 14) for the 'diseas'd' (l. 17) spirit later in the Prologue. However, he also warns that the social disease of crime could be within the very audience members who have come to watch, 'even doers may see, and yet not own' (l. 24). From the outset, Jonson conflates the criminal behavior of the undesirables with his bourgeois audience's own questionable behavior. Crime is closer than their rich suburban neighborhood may suggest.

Haynes (1989) makes a clear link between what was presented in playhouses with 'true' narratives that circulated widely outside of it. Yet, a question remains about how accurately coney-catching literature like Greene's and city comedies like *The Alchemist* portray the real criminal threats in the city and whether the accuracy of those portrayals even matters in deciphering the figure of the female criminal. There are sources, of course, that provide data about crime rates and court books that reveal some specifics about some crime narratives.

However, critics have long been cautious about drawing parallels between the early modern underworld as it was represented in literature and the actualities of crime in the period.⁷

Emphasis on crime as a social problem rather than a religious one was a bit of a new phenomenon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Malcolm Gaskill argues that early modern people thought about crime and criminal behavior differently than both modern cultures and their predecessors. As J.A. Sharpe had done before, he explains that, 'until the nineteenth century (when law-breaking was firmly connected to an urban underclass, fixed penalties and published statistics) contemporaries tended to think less in terms of crime, than individual sins carrying their own particular social meanings' (2000, 28). However, according to historian Paul Griffiths in his study of the stability of early modern London, by 1600 the perception of crime became tied to London's rapid, unwieldy growth, 'crimes ... were understood to be both cause and consequences of the city's sprawl and squalour ... Criminal and environmental horrors were twinned in explanatory theories' (2008, 199). He goes on to claim that coney-catching pamphlets, many of which include canting dictionaries, were one way early modern Londoners attempted to pin down the chaotic growth: 'Like maps or texts that tried to keep on top of changes by making them seem part of the urban fabric, this growing crime lexicon was an attempt to make better sense of London's metamorphoses' (192). Craig Dionne discusses how this 'environmental perception' of crime, as Griffiths terms it, and its connections to vagrancy shows up in literary representations. He claims that one project of rogue literature is to 'reshape the image of the hapless vagabond into the covert member of a vast criminal underground ... Much of this literature ... manufactured an imaginary subculture for London's growing metropolis, displacing dominant notions of social hierarchy and order onto the growing populations of homeless' (Dionne 2004, 33). Crime stories perpetuated in the popular literature and on stage increased fear of criminals as a collective, but they also organized criminal activity into a knowable entity with particular characteristics. The vagabond was no longer a loner, but part of a collective that, if exposed, could be identified and therefore potentially contained.

Under Elizabeth, vagrancy laws became stricter as 'masterless men' were seen not just as a public nuisance, but as a threat to public safety. The Vagabonds Act of 1597 revised an Act from 1572 to increase efforts to ferret out the unemployed and homeless and send them back to their place of origin. In an important study on crime in early modern England, J.A. Sharpe discusses the figure of the vagrant and how he was perceived

The vagrant emerged as *the* criminal stereotype in the late sixteenth century. His importance in the eyes of those bent on keeping English society orderly was demonstrated by a mass of legislation and a substantial body of popular literature, the former aimed at curbing his escapades, the second at horrifying the public with sensational accounts of them. (1999, 100)

However, the historical evidence available in court records tell a different story. Vagrants 'were almost always far less threatening than their counterparts in the popular literature of the period' (101). Vagrancy concerns run underneath *The Alchemist*, especially as they apply to two of the three members of the 'venture tripartite', the small and bumbling crime organization that concocts schemes that drive the plot of the play.

⁷ See especially Sullivan and Woodbridge 2000; Beier 2003.

3. *Liminality and Criminality in The Alchemist*

In Jonson's play, the gang of three need each other as well as a fixed location to be successful crooks and run their brothel and scam alchemy businesses. However, their geographical fixity prior to their scheme varies, a difference that becomes important in the play's portrayal of urban criminality. Subtle and Doll are cast as the 'real' criminals, the figures who best fit the stereotypes perpetuated by the popular literature, even before the play begins. The Argument describes them as 'A cheater and his punk, who, now brought low, / Leaving their narrow practice, were become / Coz'ners at large' (Jonson 1967, Argument, ll. 4-6). Having come upon hard times, Subtle, the 'cheater' and presumed pimp, and Doll, a prostitute, have been practicing their criminal trades 'at large,' or in no particular spot. To dig themselves out of this hole, they need somewhere they can operate their fraudulent businesses, somewhere to lure customers so that their dealings seem legitimate. This is where Jeremy/Face comes in; he can provide them a house since his master is away. We find out that Face found a hungry, dirty, and vagrant Subtle wandering aimlessly in Pie Corner; considering that Doll is described as '*his* punk,' it seems safe to assume that she was found in a similar predicament and location. In other words, Doll and Subtle were vagabonds, products of the growing city who occupied all of it and none of it at the same time. They represent the frightening notion that criminals moved about the city, potentially blending in with the population at large. Haynes points out that the play perpetuates ideas about this circulation and criminals' proliferation described in the play and in rogue literature, '*The Alchemist* suggests that this social volatility will circulate through the fashionable demi-monde of profligate gallants, ordinaries ... brothels, and Paul's Walk, ... where social identity was mobile, uncertain, and frequently fraudulent' (1989, 36). The fear of encountering and interacting with criminals was not entirely about becoming a victim, though that fear is also clear in some of the rogue literature. The threat is also posed by criminal's shifting identities and the ease with which they cross geographical, and therefore, social boundaries.

Conversely, Jeremy, who adopts the alias Face in order to covertly pose as Subtle's alchemical assistant, works in Lovewit's service. His house is in Blackfriars, a relatively wealthy liberty that had not been under sovereign authority until 1608, just two years before *The Alchemist* was first staged in the new Blackfriars Theater. Although it is difficult to recreate what Mary Bly calls, 'the mental cartography of early modern London' (2007, 61), it seems useful here to provide some insight into this particular neighborhood and its cultural resonances. When Jonson's play premiered in the private theatre that bore its neighborhood's name to a wealthy audience, Blackfriars was a liberty that lay outside of both the City's ancient walls and its general jurisdiction. The confluence of the liberty's freedom and aristocratic audience reflects a shift in the city's landscapes and their meanings at a particular moment. In his important work, Steven Mullaney describes the specific moment,

Popular drama owed its birth ... to an interim period in a larger historical transition, a period marked by the failure of the dominant culture to rearticulate itself in a fashion that would close off the gaps and seams opening on the margins of its domain. Such a historical interlude could not last, long, however, and it was beginning to draw to a close in the first decade of the Jacobean period. (1995, 136)

The spirit of the liberties that allowed for a subversive, edgy theatrical culture flourish amongst the rogues and questionable citizens who occupied them was waning by the time *The Alchemist* was first performed. At the time, Blackfriars brought together an emerging wealthy class and a roguish spirit. The play reflects this paradoxical coming together by staging the criminal lifestyle alongside and even within the dominant, legitimate aristocratic lifestyle.

Like the liberty itself Jeremy/Face occupies a liminal space between legitimate citizen who has a home and a masterless man in the absence of the owner of that home. In partnering with the vagabonds Subtle and Doll, Jeremy/Face brings difficult-to-contain street crime over the threshold inside a domestic, regulated, and law-abiding space. J.D. Mardock acknowledges this paradox as dangerous: '[Subtle and Doll] move ... from an unbounded spatial practice in the suburban liberties to a place within the walls both of the city and of a specific house ... the plot of *The Alchemist* ... is nevertheless dependent on the permeability of the household walls and on the interaction between private and public' (2008, 84). Jonson's repeated references to the plague raging through London at the time of the play, the reason Lovewit has fled his home for the country, work to emphasize the potential threat of inviting the outside in. The action of the play itself exclusively takes place in one of two locations: on the street directly in front of Lovewit's house or just inside his door. Adding a layer to this indoor/outdoor dichotomy, *The Alchemist* was performed in the same neighborhood where the house is located at the indoor Blackfriars Theater, which had just recently been granted permission to stage plays using adult playing companies, effectively bringing an era of outdoor early modern theater inside.⁸

The coming together of indoor and outdoor worlds and of the domestic servant and the vagabond mirror the intersection of two other seemingly disparate forces also at odds in early modern London: the citizen and the criminal. The picture painted by the coney-catching pamphlets makes it seem that great pains had to be taken in order to avoid crossing paths with wily and dangerous criminals. They also depicted the underworld as a collective or a gang. In *The Alchemist*, the formation of the 'venture tripartite', the name adopted by the three coney-catchers, speaks to the image of the individual criminal as part of a gang or subculture. Such neat organization allowed criminals to be seen as safely outside of mainstream society, occupying their own space that was separate from the space occupied by those viewing the play. Bryan Reynolds speaks to the desire to cast the early modern criminal underworld as fundamentally a culture of others:

Beginning in sixteenth-century England, a distinct criminal culture of rogues, vagabonds, gypsies, beggars, coney-catchers, cutpurses, and prostitutes emerged and flourished. This community was ... defined by and against the dominant preconceptions of English cultural normality ... In effect, this criminal culture constituted a subnation that illegitimately occupied material and conceptual space within the English nation. (2002, 1)

Early modern Londoners willed clean divisions between criminals and regular citizens into being partly through literature like Greene's and drama like Jonson's. Up until the mid-sixteenth century, English society had been organized into more recognizable groups, like guilds. In early modern London, however, those categories were becoming more nebulous. The drama and the popular literature of the period contribute to a cultural effort to maintain a social hierarchy amidst the crumbling economic distinctions between groups.

However, the lives of criminals and vagrants that are portrayed as strange or exceptional were probably closer to citizens' experiences than they cared to acknowledge. After all, Doll and Subtle may be mangy wanderers, but Jeremy/Face could easily be a servant in any one of the wealthy audience members' houses. Griffiths is again very useful, arguing:

⁸ Christopher Foley makes an interesting spatial argument about the play that considers Jonson's use of space with reference to the plague, the dimensions of the Blackfriars Theater, and the implied blocking of the action (2018, 505-523).

No matter how often others saw thieves as something apart ... overlaps between citizens and criminals were plain to see. This was troubling for people who drew dividing borders. Little was comfortably clear cut ... There were too many pimping craftsmen, light-fingered traders, or other citizen-criminals for that, and too many officers who broke the law. (2008, 171)

Rogue literature and other crime stories, such as those contained in city comedies, functioned not only as a way for normal citizens to experience the criminal world, but also a way to contain the threat they posed. As Griffiths succinctly puts it, 'Putting criminals between book-covers controlled their narratives' (139). Out in the streets, criminals did as they pleased. In printed and acted works, the dominant culture, not the criminal subculture, controlled how criminals were presented and what was revealed about them. This control also helped to bring a sense of knowing to an increasingly chaotic London and helped to 'split London's massive mess into tidy polarities like citizen/criminal or seedy/sound. Societies are imagined along boundaries like these that signify difference and unease' (140). The discomfort with new populations moving into the city created a sense of urgency and a need for categorization and boundaries. Witnessing how rogues and vagabonds behaved on stage may have eased these fears by presenting them recognizable and controlling the spaces they occupy.

Understanding how law-abiding citizens thought about and interacted with criminals aids in understanding the pleasure early modern readers and playgoers would have found in portrayals of criminal figures. Polite society used these representations to raise itself above the other and maintain its carefully constructed identities. Jonson's play participates in this project through its concern with geographical fixity, as Mardock points out: 'London uses Subtle's [and Doll's] dangerous marginality to define itself as civilized' (2008, 86). Regular Londoners could view themselves as superior to others by witnessing criminals' amoral and inferior behavior, even if those criminals were imagined. The desire to witness the innerworkings of a criminal gang like the venture tripartite stems partly from a desire to see its wayward, wandering members punished and contained so that a familiar, though increasingly difficult to recognize, London could be identified against it. Part of the pleasure of observing the underworld of crime is self-righteously acknowledging oneself as in some ways superior to the characters presented on stage. To them, the posh Blackfriars that the audience occupies is clearly not the same London taken over by Jonson's criminal schemers.

The allure and excitement of the transgressive lifestyle represented also comes into play. Reynolds' idea of transversality becomes useful in understanding this source of pleasure. He defines 'transversal territory' as, 'where someone goes conceptually and emotionally when they venture, through what I call "transversal movements," beyond the boundaries of their own subjective territory and experience alternative sensations, thoughts, and feelings' (2002, 18). The idea of 'transversal territory' provides one explanation for the attractiveness of the theatergoing experience: watching criminal characters allows playgoers to experience a subversive act without actually having to enact it themselves. Witnessing crimes, they fear allows audience members to vicariously commit the crimes themselves through the mimetic power of theater. In this way, the theater takes on a sort of Bakhtinian carnivalesque quality: the dominant culture gets to experience the freedom of the subordinate one.⁹ In the plays that represented London like *The Alchemist* and other city comedies, the comedic tone and their forgiving, jovial treatment of criminals – especially female criminals – makes this experience even more attractive because it forgives the audience as it also forgives the character. Reynolds asserts that, 'transversality

⁹ For Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, see Bakhtin 1984.

produces and expresses desire in the dynamic form of what Deleuze and Guattari term “becoming” ... a desiring process by which all things ... change into something different from what they are’ (20). Readers and audience members who consumed representations of street crime, then, could be seen as seeking this experience of ‘becoming’ by identifying with criminals from a safe distance. Jonson’s play and others like it, especially *The Roaring Girl*, provide an additional transversal opportunity via their female criminal characters.

Transversality might offer the opportunity for audience to experience a vicarious thrill of the London underground, but it ultimately does not contain the threat that world poses; that needs to be accomplished through punishment of transgressive and subversive criminality and a lifting up of the dominant culture. Therefore, reestablishing the status quo, which has long been recognized as a necessity in the comic genre, provides another kind of delight to audience members. The writers of city comedy deliver this kind of pleasure by showing their unruly characters fail, sometimes in spectacular fashion. In *The Alchemist*, the rogues themselves attempt to exert control over their space, suggesting that the machinations behind their scheme in some way mirrors what was happening in the early modern city it staged and was staged in. They create tight boundaries within a narrow playing space and legible scenarios. In many ways they are successful and can run several potentially lucrative cons simultaneously with careful orchestration. However, their plans unravel in the scenes leading up to Lovewit’s return. For example, at the end of Act 3, Mammon’s entrance threatens to undo the scheme that has Dapper handing over money to please the Queen of the Fairies, the disguised Doll. However, they quickly improvise to keep Dapper in the dark by installing him in, ‘Fortune’s privy lodgings’ (Jonson 1967, 3.5.78), moving him out of the playing space of Lovewit’s entrance room, which is about to become very crowded. Act 4 passes in a flurry of activity as customers pass in and out of the space, beginning with Mammon who is seduced by Doll posing as an exceptionally smart but poor baron’s daughter. She takes Mammon to the bedroom after he pays Face for the pleasure of her company. At this point, the business of the brothel begins to interfere with the business of the alchemy laboratory, potentially disrupting the whole scheme.

Doll Common’s profession and sexual allure, from which she extracts her power, is explicitly tied to her criminal acumen. Her trade is her criminal contribution. Lovewit’s house is transformed not just into a front for an alchemical scam business, but for an underground brothel business as well, tainting and effeminizing all transactions that occur in the play, not just the sexual ones. And ultimately, the profits from those transactions are stripped from the two outsiders, Subtle and Doll, who are forced to flee Lovewit’s house empty handed. In the end, the play makes Lovewit the pimp who profits off of degrading labor performed by others. However, as a prostitute – and even solely as a woman – Doll represents a particular criminal threat separate from her male counterparts.

As the chaos of the plot increases, the three fraudsters begin to lose control of the space. The outside world – Doll and Subtle’s ‘natural habitat’ as street criminals – increasingly leaks into Lovewit’s comfortable, controllable space that at first allowed their operation to thrive, and it takes the form of prostitution. There is a clear link here between Doll’s profession and the downfall of the schemes the venture tripartite try to manage. Successful, profitable prostitution relies on the control of bodies by both pimp (Subtle) and punk (Doll), but the play devolves into ‘the unanticipated entry of other bodies’ (Foley 2018, 515), and Doll soon loses what control she had over her own. Aside from Jonson’s identification of her as a ‘punk’ in the play’s Argument, the first indication that she may not have control of the valuable commodity of body occurs when she is accidentally seen by Dapper early in the play. However, her lack of agency is most noticeable once Lovewit returns and she agrees – even excitedly so – to go with Subtle,

her pimp, to count and spend their earnings. He extracts a kiss from her after promising to take her away from the house that provides her stability and lucrative means necessary to thrive in her business. They never get those earnings and are forced to flee emptyhanded. The kiss she and Subtle share is the first sexual contact she has that the audience witnesses in play, and it is at the mercy of her pimp. The fantasy of prostitution as a means to control and even contain female sexuality falls apart with that kiss; it is her man that calls the shots. One of the ways the play punishes Doll is by denying her the autonomy that prostitution may have afforded her.

Of course, Face, Subtle, and Doll fear being caught in the criminal act because they might be subjected to harsh penalty by law or, in Jeremy/Face's case, by their master. Face stands to lose his job, Subtle risks being put back out on the streets to face hunger and disease. They risk these penalties and transgress legal boundaries for their own financial gain, posing a threat not just to themselves, but to their victims' sense of safety and the stability of social norms that guide behavior and make people discernable to others. Doll, of course, poses these threats as well. However, as a woman, she has even more at stake: without her alliance with the other crooks or access to resources that would allow her to continue her prostitutional trade, she has no other means for survival. Also, because she is a female criminal, she threatens not just legal or moral codes, but gender codes as well. In fact, the breaking of gender norms is a main focus of rogue literature's depictions of crimes committed by women. In a study of women in crime narratives, Sandra Clark concludes, 'It was not difficult for a woman to transgress the boundaries [of traditional gender]; and such transgressions, if violating the norms for sexual behaviour or domestic roles, were particularly threatening. It is these ... that make up the substance of pamphlets, ballads, and plays on women's crime' (2003, 53). In the minds of the male authors that produced these accounts, female coney-catchers do more than break the law. They threaten deeply held ideas about the roles of men and women in early modern society, standards that were established with the very goal of limiting women's power.

Given the regularity with which depictions like the ones Clark describes appear in popular literature and on stage, the potential for women to subvert male authority by breaking the law was a real concern. Griffiths points out that the early modern period, 'was a time of telling shifts in ideas of gendering crime. Either more women were breaking the law or magistrates felt that this was so (or both). Women were now closely linked to crime spawned by urban growth' (2008, 204). Urban crowding and criminality grew simultaneously in what was a sort of symbiotic relationship, and Griffiths makes a claim that genders that relationship. The growth of female criminality perhaps is linked to women because the city itself, like women in humoral theory, was seen as porous or leaky, and saturated.¹⁰ Her boundaries were easily permeated like London's in its period of growth. However, female criminals most likely were not as ubiquitous as early modern writers would have us believe. Clark points out that popular literature and plays paint an inaccurate picture of early modern female criminality, 'Of these literary accounts, the number which featured women's crimes is disproportionately high in relation to all the statistical evidence about the balance between the criminal activity and the sexes' (2003, 35). Clark is careful to note, however, that these accounts much more often focus on the most grievous crimes such as murder and witchcraft, rather than the lower order property and sexual crimes performed by female criminals in city comedy. Reports of actual and representations of fictional prostitution may have been a different story.

¹⁰ Gail Kern Paster's work (1987 and 2004) on humoral theory and gender is invaluable to understanding how gender was read through humoral theory and the concept of women as leaky vessels.

4. *The Gendered Geography of Crime on and off the Early Modern Stage*

The legality of prostitution in early modern England fluctuated depending on geographical location, local jurisdiction, and royal edict. According to Wallace Shugg in a seminal paper on the topic, the closing of brothels in 1506 ‘had the effect of scattering the prostitutes about London’ (1977, 293). Other historians have pointed to the closing of Bankside brothels in 1546 that also seems to have driven the practice into the city and other suburbs.¹¹ Much like London’s vagrancy problem in the late sixteenth century, the problem of prostitution was uncontained and loosely regulated. Jonson’s prostitute in *The Alchemist* reflects the entirety of her profession in this way since she also spread herself across the city. As mentioned above, the play seems to assume that Doll was picked up with Subtle near Pie Corner, but it is also safe to assume that they both wandered the city having no fixed abode. In other words, she, like her trade, was difficult to regulate. As a result, at the time of city comedy’s popularity, prostitution was increasingly seen as noncriminal, a perception that could have affected audiences’ opinion of staged prostitutes like Doll. According to Griffiths, court records indicate a sharp decline in the prosecution of sex crimes after 1600, and especially after the 1620s. It was, ‘a swift fall. Not quite overnight but quick enough to make us think that something important affected perception and policies’ (2008, 201). Based on an analysis of the number of reported sexual crimes, Griffiths concludes that the period with the lowest rate of these crimes was between 1648-1652 showing that ‘prostitution prosecutions were rare occurrences’ by then (202). As Shugg asserts, ‘toleration of prostitution in certain officially designated areas seems to have worked better than attempts to suppress it entirely’ (1977, 305). The portrayal of Doll as witty, talented, and entertaining despite her profession could be indicative of this tolerance; the play’s depiction of Doll’s customers is less tolerant.

Crimes committed by women, including prostitution, and female criminals generally were viewed differently than those committed by men in the early modern period. Male criminals were often demonized and cast off as alien, while female criminals were seen as entertaining, even funny. One reason for this difference is that the majority of the victims of women’s crimes were men who sought to explain away female violence against them to avoid humiliation. Garthine Walker argues that many depictions of women’s crimes, with the exceptions of murder (particularly infanticide) and witchcraft, are presented comically, much like Greene’s portrayal of Nan, Middleton and Dekker’s of Moll Cutpurse, or Jonson’s of Doll. She claims that these depictions make up, ‘The genre of comic violence [that] provided alternative voices in which to articulate and deny the seriousness of feminine force’ (2003, 82). Though Doll is not a violent criminal per se: Walker’s point is important for interpreting her place and behavior in the world of the play, an inherently comedic environment given the genre and Jonson’s satirical project. Her crimes – having sex for money and committing fraud by pretending to be various women she is not – impacts her victims financially, but they also work to make them look foolish. In this way, her criminality contributes to the play’s comedic tone and produces pleasure.

While the play does not demonize them, it does render Doll’s customers, like Mammon, ridiculous. By exposing the foolishness of the coney, she helps the audience to feel superior to them just as they feel superior to the criminals for other reasons. At the same time, the wit and charm with which she executes her crimes paradoxically subverts this sense of dominance, forcing the audience to see themselves in the London citizens she dupes. Pamela Allen Brown

¹¹ Karen Newman (2007) makes this claim. Paul Griffiths (1993) is an important study that traces patterns of prostitution and its prosecution.

sees rogue literature as critical and subversive, and I believe her assessment could be applied to the depiction of coney in city comedy as well. She claims that ‘The pamphlets produce a print skimmington against the coneyes ... [and pay] backhanded compliment to ... women’s skepticism and common sense’ (2003, 17). The cozened coneyes in *The Alchemist* are subjected to this kind of humiliation while Doll is admired for her common sense, or criminal acumen. For example, Dapper is humiliated by her (and her compatriots) in his blind belief of her performance as the Queen of Fairies. Mammon, however, is made a fool through her sexual allure as he endures her fabricated mad fits in an effort to complete their sexual exchange. The embarrassment of being conned by a prostitute gets drawn as a particularly potent kind of humiliation.

A popular ballad roughly from the period reflects this particular embarrassment. Although it postdates *The Alchemist* by 35 or more years, ‘The Great Boobee’ is relevant to Doll and the play, given its specific geographic reference to Smithfield, an area close to Pie Corner where Face claims to have rescued Subtle and Doll, and its depiction of a coney-catching prostitute. A young man who has recently come to London recounts his encounters with various sights and people. In particular, he encounters a ‘whore’:

As I through *Smithfield* lately walkt
 a gallant Lass I met
 Familiarly with me she talkt
 which I cannot forget
 She proffered me a pint of wine
 me thought she was wondrous free,
 To the Tavern then I went with her
like a great Boobee.

She told me we were near of kin,
 and calld for wine good store,
 Before the reckoning was brought in
 my Cousins provd a Whore
 My purse she pickt, and went a way
 my Cousin cozened me
 The Vinter kickt me out of door
like a great Boobee. (c. 1646-1653)

Like *The Alchemist* and other city comedies, the ballad shows prostitution to be a part of the larger trend of urban crime; the Great Boobee also has his pocket picked in the ballad. But it is more a lesson in potential humiliation: the man in the ballad is a country gentleman come to London to ‘see the fashions,’ but everything he does there makes him seem an ass to the Londoners he encounters; among other things, he gets mocked for being friendly and chastised for his bad manners. The Smithfield Lass is less a criminal threat and more a reputational one. The threat here again is gendered: being duped by a prostitute, no matter how witty and pleasant she is, means the victim is somehow weaker than the female criminal that does the duping. Being cozened, especially with sex, I would claim, comes to mean being emasculated. Applied back to the play, this kind of humiliation reflects what Ian McAdams and Julie Sanders call Jonson’s, ‘conscious contempt for such weakening of “masculine” dominion’ (2013, 134). Quite simply, prostitutes who take advantage of their clients threaten male domination in the realm of sex.

Doll’s brand of prostitution in *The Alchemist* is not the same as the prostitute’s in this ballad or Nan’s in Greene’s *Disputation* because they play brings her bawdy trade indoors and

the customers are brought to her rather than solicited on the street. Yet the depictions resonate because of the similar tactics each woman uses and the social risk they represent. All of the women dupe their victims with a performance rather than offering their services upfront, which makes them dangerously difficult to identify among the throng of other women in the city. Part of the allure of such stories is that the reader or viewer finds pleasure in others' misfortune by viewing them as other; they take solace in *not* being a fool like Mammon or a boob like the ballad's main character. However, Jonson, Greene, and the balladeer take pains to subvert this sense of relief through familiarity. References to specific settings make the stories that take place in them more impactful because they ask the audience to imagine a real potential scenario that puts them in those places. Because the threat of humiliation seen in the ballad and onstage exists in real places (Smithfield and Blackfriars), readers and viewers are reminded of its relevance to their own urban existence because they know these areas. Therefore, their project also becomes cautioning men against becoming the Great Boobee or Mammon who are so easily cozened by prostitutes.

Another effect of urban geographical references in popular and dramatic literature is to create a shared and knowing wink with early modern Londoners in the audience. The specificity of place comes together with a joint (though exclusive) knowledge of the city. As Adam Zucker argues when discussing *The Alchemist*, 'Jonson underscores the ways in which multiplicity and particularity collaborate to produce the spectacular social and economic exchanges of London life' (2010, 103). I argue that they also collaborate to advocate for a fear-driven approach to caution and therefore control criminal and noncriminal exchanges. As they make plans for their escape to avoid potential punishment from the now returned Lovewit and steal the profit from the venture tripartite's scheme, Subtle tells Doll that, to be safe, they will be leaving the area altogether. Subtle's promise to take her first to Ratcliff¹² and then to Brentford where they will count their fortunes acts as an example of the interplay between the particularity and multiplicity Zucker mentions. Subtle references the specific site of the Three Pigeons (Jonson 1967, 5.4.89), a tavern that was located in the marketplace of Brentford, implying that the pair will continue scheming unsuspecting Londoners for economic gain. Subtle chooses a specific (or particular) place that provides them easy access to a bevy (or multiplicity) of potential coneyes amongst the drunkards and shoppers in a crowded tavern or marketplace.¹³ Basically, he plans to set them up in a place where they can continue to capitalize on his roguery and her body. This plan serves as the play's final reminder that because figures like Doll and Subtle are mobile and able to gain access to a London crowd, they continue to be threatening. Considering the play's several knowing references to London's landscape, the playgoers' collective experience and knowledge of familiar places create a certain vulnerability by hinting that they may very well be the next victims should they find themselves in Brentford, just as they would have been if Subtle and Doll remained in Pie Corner.

Yet, despite these threats of urban criminality that Doll and her compatriots bring to the surface, the play fails to entirely demonize them. In a way, it even exonerates her. While Doll Common no doubt participates in the gang's criminal dealings, she also is humanized by acting

¹²Daryll Grantley points to this reference to Ratcliff, an area of docks near Stepney, as an example of characters in Jacobean drama using the river to escape the city, prosecution, or social rules governing marriage. Based on this observation, in a longer study of the play a compelling argument might be made about Subtle and Doll seeking to become respectable (2008, 109).

¹³In their respective editions of the play, both Mares (Jonson 1967) and Wilkes (1982) mention the Three Pigeons Tavern's proximity to Brentford marketplace.

as a peacekeeper and demonstrating other positive characteristics. Right at the beginning of the play, Doll comes across as the voice of reason. In the opening, Subtle and Face saunter onto stage mid-argument, a sign of the fragility of their partnership. Pleading with Subtle and Face to discontinue their row, she appeals them as ‘Sovereign’ and ‘General,’ not only showing herself to be deferential to their leadership positions in the crime plot, but also elevating the level of conversation significantly from the vulgarity of Subtle’s first line, ‘I fart at thee’ (Jonson 1967, 1.1.1). Doll also demonstrates a practical savviness, warning them that their raucous behavior is unwise with lines like, ‘Will you have / the neighbors hear you? Will you betray all?’ (1.1.7-8). She also attempts to calm them down and bring them together, ‘Will you undo yourselves, with civil war?’ (1.1.82). These attempts come to a head when her warnings fall on the quarrelling men’s deaf ears. She first appeals to their egos and then to their sense of solidarity before getting cut off, ‘O me! / We are ruin’d Lost! have you no more regard / To your reputations? Where’s your judgment? ‘slight, / have yet some care of me, of your republic—’ (1.1.107-110). Here, she identifies and acknowledges the importance of teamwork in executing their scheme. Failing to shut them down, she adapts and takes up the manners of her criminal community. After forcibly taking Face’s sword and breaking some of Subtle’s alchemical ‘glass,’ she forcefully insists, ‘Sdeath, you abominable pair of stinkards, / Leave off your barking, and grow one again, / Or, by the light that shines, I’ll cut your throats’ (1.1.117-119). After a long tirade that follows this threat, Face and Subtle agree to stop fighting and work together. So, immediately, right as the play opens, Doll successfully endears herself, presenting herself first as mannered, empathetic, and team-oriented, and then as knowledgeable and threatening.

In this moment, Doll becomes at once criminal mastermind and peacekeeper. It is difficult not to admire the ambition, intelligence, and commitment she demonstrates up front, especially given Jonson’s propensity to satirize his audience as much as his criminal characters. Doll inhabits both the sensationalized criminal underground depicted in rogue literature, which is appealing for its exoticism, and the polite world inhabited by the play’s audience, pleasing in its familiarity. It is most potently through her that Jonson plays with the line that distinguishes and separates these realities. Her allure forces the audience not only to consider their own identities against the criminal underworld, othering and therefore distancing it, but also beside the criminal world, creating the threat of criminal danger that might just be lurking behind the façade of a Queen of Fairies or an attractive poor baron’s daughter. Foley suggests that the play, ‘arguably works to foster an embodied sense of sympathetic identification between the rogues and the play’s audience’ (2018, 515). On the other hand, in writing about the experience of another Jonsonian city comedy, *Epicoene*, Erin Julian and Helen Ostovich speak to, ‘the malicious pleasure of observing the downfall of another, the pleasure of being the audience to a ludicrous situation, and not the victim. Perhaps it is the laughter of the lucky escape – like Face’s smirk at the end of *The Alchemist*’ (2013, 2). The ending of Jonson’s *Alchemist* is famously unsatisfying. Doll and Subtle flee broke but mostly unpunished, Jeremy/Face keeps his stable job even after coming clean, and, perhaps worst of all, Lovewit his master becomes a willing benefactor of the con. Although they are forced to cease their criminal operation, they are left mostly unscathed and unpunished. The ballad of ‘The Great Boobee’, Greene’s fictional accounts of the prostitute Nan in *A Disputation*, and the pickpocket Moll Cutpurse similarly lack a satisfying punishment for their criminal protagonists.

Doll is no angel in Jonson’s play, but she is somewhat redeemed because she is interesting, charming, and skillful. Like Doll, other fictionalized criminal women are not excused for their behavior. However, their charisma, wit, and cleverness help readers to empathize and recognize that the victims of these schemes are themselves implicated in sin. The play, more specifically

Doll, brings together the familiar and the new by reflecting authentic experiences back to the viewer's, creating a pleasure in knowing and allowing audience members to experience things they otherwise would not in their noncriminal, everyday lives. In their depictions of female criminality, early modern rogue literature that circulated in the street and city comedies that proliferated the stage create pleasure in novelty. Simultaneously, the familiar urban settings in which these women's crimes are committed emphasize the real threat they may pose. Doll Common in *The Alchemist* and her counterparts in other literature of the period demonstrate the gendered nature and subversive power of early modern female criminality.

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