

we have seen, but with many of Jonson's favourite writers, most of all the satirists Horace, Persius, Juvenal and Martial, who write about things like haemorrhoids and oral sex. The 'resolute refusal to grant any but narrowly carnal aims' rules out the possibility of romance or tragedy.¹²⁵ Comedy in Jonson, as it becomes 'more and more insistently low-mimetic', more pessimistic about humanity and yet less rigorously censorious, 'begins to close the gap between the spectators and the action they witness'.¹²⁶ The London setting becomes claustrophobic. *The Alchemist's* seemingly amoral denouement appears to violate the implicit contract of the play's start, in which Jonson invites his audience to share in his comic feast. Maus's essay is especially thoughtful in its way of locating Jonson and *The Alchemist* in the context of post-modern theory.

Other recent studies that locate Jonson fitly in our post-modern world include Julie Sanders, arguing that *The Alchemist's* Blackfriars venue inscribes in the play the ideological values of the marginal world outside of the city walls of London that made such a significant contribution to the 'symbolic economy' of Jonson's urban world as a whole and to a 'republic of wholesale merchants';¹²⁷ Stanton Linden, with his attention to Jonson's 'keen awareness of the political and religious associations of contemporary hermetic thought' and its links to 'occult interests in radical protestantism';¹²⁸ and Richmond Barbour, taking the view that Jonson's alleged conservatism, misogyny, homophobia and revulsion against the erotic are in fact deeply ambivalent, 'by turns authoritative and subversive', and driven by his own 'fear of engulfment' by women's sexuality and a consequent 'male irrelevance'.¹²⁹ For critical studies of *The Alchemist* in the twenty-first century, see Chapter 3 in this present collection.

CHAPTER TWO

The Alchemist on the Stage: Performance, Collaboration and Deviation

ELIZABETH SCHAFER AND EMMA COX

A performance history of *The Alchemist* has to confront the fact that theatre is an intrinsically collaborative activity and that Ben Jonson sometimes found the messy, unstable process of creating performance very difficult. Famously, by the end of his career, Jonson's relationship with his co-creator of masques, Inigo Jones, was in tatters; but even in the pioneering act of publishing his plays as serious *Works* in 1616, Jonson seemed to resist the collaborative dynamic by omitting plays he had co-written with other playwrights. Any performance collaboration can deviate from what the playwright originally intended – and Jonson's intentions are sometimes spelt out very clearly – but creative theatrical 'deviations' can offer important insights into the potential dramaturgy of a play. Our performance history explores such 'deviations', or interpretations, by directors, actors, and set and costume designers, in the full knowledge that some of these would have infuriated Jonson.

Indeed, a brilliant, farce-based comedy such as *The Alchemist* cannot be fully understood unless the three-dimensional, inter-subjective, unpredictable nature of theatre is taken into account.¹ On the page, laden with footnotes, *The Alchemist* is daunting; on the stage, served up with expert comic timing, it can become a dazzling showcase for theatrical virtuosity. Richard Cave points to the astonishing theatrical brio required in act 3:

[Face] speaks in Lungs' voice through the keyhole to Sir Epicure waiting without; in his own workaday tones *sotto voce*

giving instructions to Doll and Subtle; as the Captain advising the blindfolded Dapper how to conduct himself . . . and in squeaking falsetto as one of the elves searching the clerk for evidence of worldly pelf.²

Here voice, accent, pacing and energy are critical, and actors and directors will be able to offer more insight than editors or readers.

Despite *The Alchemist's* intrinsic theatricality, relatively few Jonson scholars have engaged with the play in performance. Robert G. Noyes's 1935 account of *Ben Jonson on the English Stage 1660–1776* was pioneering for its time and offers a methodical survey approach.³ Noyes maps the play's popularity during the Restoration; he mentions how topical productions seemed after the 1720 South Sea Bubble; he charts the play's association with star actors such as Colley Cibber, David Garrick, Charles Macklin, Charlotte Charke, Kitty Clive and Hannah Pritchard. He details the cuts made by Garrick and reports on the stage life of *The Tobacconist*, Francis Gentleman's 1770 adaptation. But Noyes is worried by deviations from Jonson: *The Tobacconist* is a 'monstrous', rather than a culturally specific, and culturally revealing, response to Jonson's play.⁴ Fifty years later Ejner J. Jensen's *Ben Jonson's Comedies on the Modern Stage* records regret that 'only a negligible amount' of criticism on Jonson takes account of Jonson's 'achievement as a dramatist who wrote for the stage' and 'as a consequence [Jonson's] dramaturgical skills remain relatively unexplored'.⁵ Jensen focuses on the period 1899–1972, finishing with the quatercentenary of Jonson's birth, and highlights the recurring theatrical problem, especially during the nineteenth century, of Jonson's frankness about bodily functions, functions which kept *The Alchemist* off the stage. Jensen then maps a healthy stage life for the play during the twentieth century after William Poel revived it in 1899.

More recently, Lois Potter has argued for the importance of theatre-centred readings of Jonson in an essay discussing the RSC's Jonson revivals on the Swan stage.⁶ Potter also notes that

Restoration theatrical memory claimed that the original players in Jonson's plays were 'taught', or directed, by Jonson 'Line by Line, each Title, Accent, Word'.⁷ Indeed, Jonson's aspiration that subsequent generations of performers should also be 'taught' to perform 'correctly' inflects his published texts of *The Alchemist*; both the 1612 quarto and the 1616 folio are important first sources for a performance history because of Jonson's determination to record his staging intentions.

According to the folio's title page, the King's Men performed *The Alchemist*. Given that 'The Persons of the Play' states 'The Scene: London', information repeated in the Prologue, 'Our scene is London' (line 5), and that the play's action is located in Blackfriars, we may reasonably assume that *The Alchemist* would have been performed at the company's newly acquired Blackfriars playhouse, as well as at the Globe. Any performance of *The Alchemist* at the Blackfriars playhouse would render the play an early modern example of site-specific theatre: the play is set in, and resonates with, the environment in which it was performed. Ironically, because the playhouses were closed during much of 1610, due to the very plague that had sent Lovewit scurrying to the country, *The Alchemist* was probably first performed far away from Blackfriars in Oxford in September 1610.⁸

The folio includes a list of players but not their parts: Richard Burbage, John Lowin, Henry Condell, Alexander Cook, Robert Armin, John Heminges, William Ostler, John Underwood, Nicholas Tooley, William Eglestone. From what is known about these actors, we can speculate about which roles they performed but, despite the number of assertions currently circulating on the internet that Burbage played Subtle, traditional scholarship usually identifies Burbage's role as Face.⁹ The folio does not name the boy players and it is less easy to speculate about who played Doll. Both the folio and quarto texts make few elaborate staging demands but the Prologue, ambitiously, expects the play to run at 'two short hours' (line 1). In addition, Cave has argued that Jonson's use, in both the quarto and the folio, of layout for printing intimates pacing.¹⁰ For example, the quarto opens 1.1 with

tightly compressed lines, crammed together in a way that visually suggests a hurly-burly atmosphere and 'a real sense of people trying to shout each other down'.¹¹ Jonson uses long dashes almost as stage directions, to mark where speeches are interrupted; some dashes are longer and more pronounced in the folio, which suggests he was not satisfied with the evocation of timing achieved by the quarto's layout. There are also more marginal notes on action in the folio compared with the quarto; at Doll's line in the first scene, 'You'll bring your head within a cocks-combe, will you?', the folio (F 609; *CWBj* 1.1.115) comments, '*Shee catcheth out Face his sword: and breaks Subtles glasse*', whereas the quarto does not spell out this business. In modern texts, these annotations are displayed as conventional stage directions, but Cave argues that when the folio layout is not reproduced, the effect is to deny 'access to Jonson's evocation of the play in performance'.¹²

Some of Jonson's directions are pragmatic. For example, the quarto (Q E3v) has '*Dol is seen*' (*CWBj* 2.3.210), pinning down what is implied in the text. Authorial intentions are very clear in the folio when Jonson states '*To Surly*' and '*He whispers Mammon*' (F 629; *CWBj* 2.3.288, 290.1) although an actor may choose not to 'whisper' for the full five lines that are addressed to Mammon, and might, if the performance space were appropriate, take Mammon aside and speak in tones well above a whisper, thus ensuring all the audience hear the lines. In 3.5, however, the folio marginal annotations become more expansive; it may not help much to know that Subtle is '*disguised like a Priest of Fairy*' (F 646; *CWBj* 3.5.0), because a modern designer still has to reimagine what this costume might look like, but '*He speaks through the keyhole, the other knocking*' (F 647; *CWBj* 3.5.58), like Jonson's careful deployment of 'within' and 'without' elsewhere, creates a sense of stage geography. In another critical scene, 4.5 (Q K2r), Jonson uses two columns and smaller font size to indicate Doll speaking at the same time as Face and Mammon; the folio adds '*They speake together*' (F 659; *CWBj* 4.5.24.1). Some folio annotations, such as '*He kisses her*' (F 652; *CWBj* 4.2.37), register different social conventions from today when it is not customary to kiss someone on

the mouth at first meeting; '*He falls to picking of* [Surly's pockets]' (F 661; *CWBj* 4.6.25.1) could be deduced but is not completely necessary; '*Subtle hath whisped with him this while*' (F 664; *CWBj* 4.7.72.1) is theatrically clumsy, as a stage direction should signal action in present or future tense, not past. Overall, the increase in annotation in the folio compared with the quarto suggests Jonson was attempting the impossible task of *controlling* and *authorizing* the play's theatrical afterlives.

This chapter focuses on a small selection from those afterlives, a group of productions which illuminate very specific dramaturgical and artistic challenges: characterization, tone, metatheatre, Londonness, larrikinism. The productions are David Garrick's adaptation, *The Alchymist*, which was published in 1777; Jean Gascon's 1969 *Alchemist* at Stratford, Ontario; a production by Gregory Hersov in 1987 for the Manchester Royal Exchange; Sam Mendes's 1991 *Alchemist* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon; Neil Armfield's 1996 production for Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney; and John Bell's 2009 *Alchemist*, which toured several Australian states.¹³ While by necessity we exclude many provocative, insightful and theatrically intelligent productions, these six works, which range widely in terms of theatrical and geo-cultural context, provide a varied and instructive sample of collaborations with, and deviations from, Jonson.

When David Garrick made Abel Drugger the star of the play, he introduced one of the most radical creative divergences from Jonson's *Alchemist*, in terms of characterization, in the play's performance history. But Garrick's foregrounding of Drugger continued a process that had begun much earlier: *The Imperick*, the droll printed in Francis Kirkman's 1662 publication *The Wits*, is largely given over to exhibiting Drugger (1.3, 2.6) and, to a lesser extent, Ananias (2.5).¹⁴ While Garrick first acted Drugger on 21 March 1743, over subsequent decades he frequently changed and adapted the role; the published text of *The Alchymist* indicates some overall trends of Garrick's adaptation. Cutting is often deep, and bawdy jokes are marked as unplayable. Garrick gives Drugger extra, amazed interjections in response to Face's or Subtle's

alchemical spiels, as well as lines which repeat what another character has just said, making him sound dopey. *The Alchemist* does not record, however, the moment which Garrick describes in his 'Essay on Acting' as part of a mock comic discussion of his own playing of Macbeth and Drugger:¹⁵

When *Abel Drugger* has broke the *Urinal*, he is *mentally absorb'd* with the different Ideas of the *invaluable Price* of the *Urinal*, and the Punishment that may be inflicted in Consequence of a Curiosity, no way appertaining or belonging to the Business he came about. Now, if this, as it certainly *is*, the Situation of his Mind, How are the different Members of the Body to be agitated? Why Thus, – His *Eyes* must be revers'd from the Object he is most intimidated with, and by dropping his *Lip* at the some [sic] Time to the Object, it throws a trembling *Languor* upon every *Muscle*, and by declining the right Part of the Head *towards* the *Urinal*, it casts the most *comic Terror* and *Shame* over all the *upper Part* of the Body, that can be imagin'd; and to make the *lower Part* equally ridiculous, his *Toes* must be *inverted* from the *Heel*, and by *holding* his *Breath*, he will unavoidably give himself a *Tremor* in the *Knees*, and if his *Fingers*, at the same Time, seem *convuls'd*, it finishes the compleatest low Picture of *Grotesque Terror* that can be imagin'd by a *Dutch Painter*.

Garrick's description is worth quoting at length because it is such an incisive deviation from Jonson, which seized on Drugger and expertly repackaged him to appeal to contemporary taste. While the comic deployment of urinals, or specimen bottles, is something that has recurred through much of *The Alchemist's* performance history, the broken urinal supposedly originated with 'old Cibber': Thomas Wilkes claims that in one performance, Theophilus Cibber, as Drugger, inadvertently broke a glass vial; his reaction, in character, to this accident so pleased the audience that they demanded he repeat the comic business in subsequent performances.¹⁶ The terror performed by Garrick's Drugger helped

create comic sympathy but it also helped to build a subsequent joke when Drugger shapes up to take part in the assault on Surly in 4.7; as Surly departs in confusion, Garrick's Drugger asks proudly, 'Did not I behave well?' and 'He won't be here | In a hurry, I believe', convinced his pugnacity has driven Surly away. While it is ironic that two of Garrick's most memorable comic moments as Drugger were *inspired* by Jonson rather than *written* by him, this creative collaboration between Jonson and Garrick generated physically comic theatre which helped keep *The Alchemist* on stage for a large part of the eighteenth century.

A recurring theme in critical responses to Garrick's Drugger is wonderment at Garrick's ability to transform himself; one night he plays King Lear, the next he plays Drugger.¹⁷ Although the roles of both Face and Subtle would have given Garrick even more chance to demonstrate his ability to switch rapidly from one persona to another, he found in Drugger a comedy grounded in pathos as well as silliness, something which other notable Druggers have identified in the role. In 1932, Ivor Brown described Cedric Hardwicke's performance:

Drugger became in his hands a superb simpleton, whose bland expectant smile continually atoned for the absence of a big speaking part. The make-up, with a clown's tuft of hair and upturned snout, was a masterpiece of plastic creation, and this great actor's boundless skill was evident in the complete success with which he made an almost speechless role dominate a stage which was otherwise a flood of roaring eloquence.¹⁸

In 1947, Alec Guinness's Drugger inspired even higher praise. Kenneth Tynan claimed Guinness's performance confirmed him as 'the best living English character-actor':

Mr. Guinness manages to get to the heart of all good, hopeful young men who can enjoy without envy the society of wits. I was overjoyed to watch his wistful, happy eyes moving, in

dumb wonder, from Face to Subtle: a solid little fellow, you felt, and how eager to help! At last he puts in a tolerable contribution to the conversation. O Altitude! His face creases ruddily into modest delight, and he stamps his thin feet in glee. . . . Druggier is commissioned by Face to bring him a Spanish costume as disguise. He trots away, and returns shyly, clad in its showy cloak and hat. Waiting for Face to answer the door, he begins to execute timid dance-steps under the porch. He treads a rapt, self-absorbed measure with himself, consumed with joy. Then Face appears: and, not regretfully or pathetically, but smartly and prosaically, he sheds his costume and hands it over. It is most touchingly done.¹⁹

While 'most touchingly done' does not sound Jonsonian, there was a significant theatrical pay-off in Guinness's interpretation.

Characterization is almost inevitably a major area where modern theatre will deviate from Jonson, simply because so many modern actors are trained in Stanislavski-inspired approaches, which seek nuance where Jonson deployed cartoon. And most boy players would have had trouble competing with Jane Casson's cleavage, which featured in production photographs and reviews of Jean Gascon's 1969 *Alchemist* at Stratford, Ontario. Casson's Doll was praised for her ability to switch 'from nun to whore to fairy to thief with expert timing';²⁰ she was 'first-rate, a lovely bawd made up of rouge, beauty marks, protuberant bosom and an utter capacity for the consummate swindle';²¹ and she 'can, and she does, imitate Marilyn Monroe'²² – something it is safe to say Jonson never envisaged.

Gascon's *Alchemist*, which toured widely in the United States and Canada, polarized reviewers and provides a particularly useful case study for examining the challenge of tone, of how robustly the comedy of *The Alchemist* should be played. The production's farce/comic balance generated much discussion: one review praised the 'sight gags, the bold bawdy gestures and the wildly inventive Rube Goldberg-like contraptions';²³ meanwhile, another complained of

'the limited but standard Stratford sight gags of breast-pulling and crotch grabbing'.²⁴ The pacing was hilarious, 'reminiscent of French bedroom farce';²⁵ or it came close to 'a traffic disaster'.²⁶ The production's visual comedy was increased by the use of an alchemical machine that would 'spew forth steam whenever the clients need impressing'.²⁷ It was 'a sort of gothic boiler on wheels, armor plated, adorned by a set of matching crocodiles that look like tin armadillos. Atop it is a jungle of beakers, retorts, flasks and tubing and it is invaluable in helping the alchemist fleece the fleeceable'.²⁸ Gascon placed alchemy centre stage, both thematically and physically, although the machine risked upstaging the performers – and Jonson's words.

Despite the production's commitment to *The Alchemist's* London location – the soundscape was dominated by cockney vowels²⁹ – some reviewers found a Molièresque flavour. This had the potential for political loading in 1969 Canada, when franco-phone and anglophone relations were deteriorating as the FLQ campaign escalated in violence. And although in terms of 1969 Québécois politics, Gascon, a French Canadian, was far from hard-line, he had a history of sustained commitment to the francophones' classic playwright;³⁰ indeed, in the previous year at Stratford, in a theatre largely dedicated to English high culture, he had directed a very successful *Tartuffe*, which was being revived in 1969. Despite intersections between *Tartuffe* and *The Alchemist* – two neoclassical comedies, full of biting satire, written fifty years apart – for one reviewer, 'a Molière-oriented intelligence is not the most felicitous to turn loose on the extravagance of Jonson';³¹ another commented that Powys Thomas's Subtle 'kept reminding me of *Tartuffe*, a hard surface with something close to wizardry beneath it'.³² Meanwhile, Martin Gottfried, who began his career as a classical music critic, took Gascon to task for directing 'as if it [*The Alchemist*] were a comic-ballet of Molière's' and 'sandwiching a slow second act between the first and third acts, as if the play were a concerto', something redolent of Molière 'whose plays are very much stage concertos'.³³

One reason this production was susceptible to being seen as Molièresque was because William Hutt, who had played Tartuffe, and was about to reprise the role, was Mammon. But Hutt's performance, like most aspects of the production, divided the critics. In the 'naked between my succubae' speech (2.2.41–95), one reviewer found subtlety of characterization:

He speaks with faint relish of the pleasures of table and bed, but one knows at once that for all his long life he has been a victim of acid indigestion and sexual timidity. We see him now as an old man, turning to the practitioners of the grey art in the sad hope of tasting at last the pleasures that have always been denied him.³⁴

And yet Hutt's Mammon was also described as 'eyes goggling, lips salivating' and eventually quivering 'away in lusty exhaustion',³⁵ 'a figure of ecstatic pornography. He struts and roars like an over-sexed lion, preens himself, roars, rants and almost literally brings down the house.'³⁶ Broad comedy was also to be found in Thomas's playing of Subtle: 'looking like a strange cinematic amalgam of Svengali and Ghengis Khan', Thomas 'plays the fake alchemist with enormous gusto, rolling the meaningless periods of scientific gobbledey gook off his tongue with the zeal of a Welsh preacher'.³⁷ He was 'a thrift shop Merlin', 'fondling his astrological charts, peering into his glass globe, knocking a knuckle on a handy skull'.³⁸ These descriptions all suggest a physicality in performance that was comically robust.

Overall, Gascon's *Alchemist* was far more positively reviewed at Stratford than on tour; the production developed and changed during its extended run, but on the open main stage at Stratford, it worked better than in the tour venues, most of which were proscenium arch theatres.³⁹ A rather different approach to the challenge of touring was adopted in Gregory Hersov's 1987 *Alchemist*, for the Manchester Royal Exchange;⁴⁰ this production took its stage space with it. This *Alchemist* was always performed in the round, in a space very evocative of the unlocalized Jacobean playhouse

stage, on a portable stage replicating the Royal Exchange's dimensions.⁴¹

Like most productions, Hersov's had to work with the play's insistent identification of its location as London. A production staged in Manchester, which toured the north of England, has to have a different relationship with the play's Londonness compared with, for example, an *Alchemist* at the National Theatre in London, which (as the programme for Nicholas Hytner's 2006 production claimed) is close to the original Blackfriars playhouse. Even the name 'Blackfriars' reads differently in Manchester, where it evokes a tower-block-dominated area in Salford. Locale at the end of the production also functioned differently. After the cast dismantled the entire set in seconds for the move to outside Lovewit's house, a very large crowd of neighbours entered. Local amateur dramatic societies provided these neighbours when the production was on tour; these amateurs were led and managed by the two professional company members playing Neighbours 1 and 2, who spoke all the Neighbours' lines. The local actors murmured, hummed at, and reacted to events onstage, creating an enthusiastic and distinctively localized 'rabble' (5.3.74). Few professional companies today can hope to assemble 'Forty o'the neighbours' (4.7.112), but this production deployed far more than is usual.

While the Royal Exchange theatre-in-the-round configuration placed specific constraints on staging – no flats – the production's set, 'Lit by Michael Calf in the mellow tones of a Rembrandt night scene' was 'dominated by furnace, bellows and retort, and overhung by a flickeringly-candled chandelier from which dangle cabbalistic signs'.⁴² The characters constantly circled around the object of desire, the powerhouse of alchemy, and Face, Subtle and Doll regularly pumped the central stove with bellows, producing clouds of smoke. Offstage, behind the audience, an area 'was used as an echo chamber for tormented voices and exploding, smoking cauldrons',⁴³ an effect which helped catch the audience in the embrace of the action; they too were part of the circle of alchemy and had been conned into giving money to watch Face, Subtle and Doll perform.

The opening scene of this production was understated, with Jonathan Hackett's Face, Michael Feast's Subtle and Alyson Spiro's Doll keeping their distance from one another, lobbing abuse across the space. This blocking diluted the intensity of the action, but it played to every angle of the theatre and took in every section of the audience. In the magic circle of the stage space, Hackett's Face became a superb shape-shifter or 'the ideal rep character actor',⁴⁴ someone who could play any required role in any production. There was broad physical comedy as he performed a Quasimodo version of Lungs, fighting ludicrously with his behumped costume; he then became an icily puritanical Jeremy at the end of the play. Meanwhile, Feast's Subtle overacted with gusto for all the gulls, 'a wonderful diabolical figure swirling a great cloak, holding a druid's staff aloft, glaring transfixed into a bubbling glass flask'⁴⁵ and 'swooping on victims like Kenny Everett playing Dracula',⁴⁶ although his 'final rage after being cheated contains something of Malvolio's compressed bitterness'.⁴⁷ Feast rendered the alchemical jargon a glorious, ridiculous hocus-pocus. The alchemical catechism was hilarious, palpable nonsense delivered with a gleeful sense of improvisation, or even theatre sports in play. One minute Subtle was enthusiastically stripping off to join the Anabaptists in mortifying their flesh; then he was pulling on his reversible coat and completely transforming his appearance; the next he was ad-libbing (or appearing to) as the gate into the playing space got stuck.

Like Gascon, who used 'lugubrious melodramatic incidental organ music',⁴⁸ Hersov deployed music – Carl Orff's 'Fortuna' from *Carmina Burana* – to help 'fuel the atmosphere of mediaeval necromancy and astrological craft'.⁴⁹ Costume was Jacobean, but Hersov stressed how relevant the play was to 1987: 'After years of "Thatcherism", England seems to me to be dedicated to lust, greed, avarice and the fulfilment of fantasies. . . . The parallels of A.I.D.S., get-rich-quick, advertising, Big Bang seems to make "The Alchemist" particularly relevant to 1987'.⁵⁰ Hersov adds, 'At the end, Face's final speech to the audience comes from the past right into the present'; certainly, Caryl Churchill's play

Serious Money, which opened in London in March of that year, satirized many of the same targets identified by Hersov. The left wing *Tribune* felt the cast played 'with the accuracy and fervour of stockbrokers making their first million' and that the play's action offered

the perfect metaphor for the post-Big Bang yuppie wealth trail. That VDUs and computers are used now instead of alembics and crucibles doesn't alter the essential identity. Props apart, the name of the game is to take someone else's money and call the process wealth creation.⁵¹

A memorable sound effect, the chink of money being dropped into a moneybox every time a gull handed over any cash, generated a powerful sense of the booty that was accumulating.

Hersov slimmed the text strategically, cut deeply into the Kastril plot-line, and updated vocabulary ('bitch' for 'brach', 1.1.111). The actors managed to have fun with words that could have no meaning for modern audiences; for example, 'chiaus' in 1.2.26, 30 and 35 became 'chouse', an affected choice of vocabulary, probably a malapropism, trotted out by Dapper to the great amusement of Face who then played around with the word.⁵² Overall, Hersov's production exhibited finesse in its use of space, locale and metatheatre, and broad, knockabout comedy in its energized, exuberant performances.

An indication of how difficult it can be to please reviewers over the question of comic balance in relation to *The Alchemist* appears in the critical responses to Sam Mendes's 1991 RSC *Alchemist*.⁵³ Generally, there was high praise for this *Alchemist*: it was a 'vigorous and brilliantly acted production';⁵⁴ 'Zestful, shrewd and often extremely funny';⁵⁵ 'gloriously entertaining'.⁵⁶ One reviewer, however, complained that the 'extra rapacious edge – the darker side of Jonson' was 'absent' and 'the black comedy' had 'gone missing'.⁵⁷ For another, there was 'little sense here of Jonson's lashing of vice or the bitterness of his vision. Indeed you find yourself suspending all judgment on the unholy trinity of Face, Subtle, and Doll

Common because they are such stylish, inventive villains.⁵⁸ A reviewer of the 1992 revival commented, 'This is an exceptionally good-natured production' with the satire 'gently administered'.⁵⁹ And yet, David Bradley's Subtle offered 'clever, involuntary hints of the character's destitute background',⁶⁰ and his 'defeat' was 'enraged'.⁶¹ Certainly, the *Times Educational Supplement*, with more time to reflect than reviewers in the daily papers, found that the production's 'ever-inventive humour lightly conceals a swingeing indictment of that most meretricious of decades, the 1980s'.⁶² Mendes himself stressed that Face, Subtle and Doll 'need money, they are also starving. Acting becomes their livelihood'; he argued the play was 'not about criminality; it's about gullibility; about the need to believe' and that 'the crushing of [the gulls'] dreams is a terrible thing'.⁶³ He also found the scenes between Mammon and Doll 'sad and very desolate'.⁶⁴

The performers were working with a space, the largely unadorned Swan Theatre, which was one step up from bare boards: 'five doors and a table and a light bulb'.⁶⁵ So the challenge to Jonathan Hyde as Face, David Bradley as Subtle and Joanne Pearce as Doll was how to use actorly craft to create what the gulls – and the audience – wanted to see. One major point of reference for Mendes was the theatricality of street traders:

You go down the Walworth Road now . . . and you go down the market, and it's the same guys. They've got endless tricks. They're endlessly inventive. We spent some time talking to market traders. Because it's that sort of street nous that they use. You're looking all the time to try to find a way of demonstrating the artistry, with nothing, out of nothing.⁶⁶

For several reviewers, this *Alchemist* evoked David Mamet's 'salesmen-in-extremis' plays such as *Glengarry Glen Ross*.⁶⁷ When con-merchants are roguishly entertaining, it becomes easier to overlook their illegality. But because Mendes 'inserted a whole host of visual gags that seem to owe more to vaudeville than classical theatre',⁶⁸ he could also be read as underlining the levels

of theatricality in play, something which could offer a comically Brechtian distancing and commentary, as well as securing laughs.

A particularly clear example of Mendes's creative collaboration with Jonson appeared in the production's representation of Doll (Figure 2.1). Although she initially appears to be an excellent role for an actress, Doll has fewer chances to display virtuoso acting skills than her partners in crime, and her great comic moment as the Queen of Fairy comes at a point when the sometimes exhausted audience can see that the play is galloping into the last furlong. Pearce's Doll was an unusually strong presence – 'both funny and sexy' and 'moving with great assurance from feisty slut to high-class whore'.⁶⁹ As the Queen of Fairy Pearce recognizably imitated Queen Elizabeth II, speaking in a cut-glass accent which contrasted strongly with Doll's usual broad cockney. Because she was balancing on Face's shoulders – Face was largely covered by Doll's gigantic flouncy skirts – this Queen of Fairy was able to caress Dapper 'with all four hands'.⁷⁰ Elsewhere Pearce's Doll was

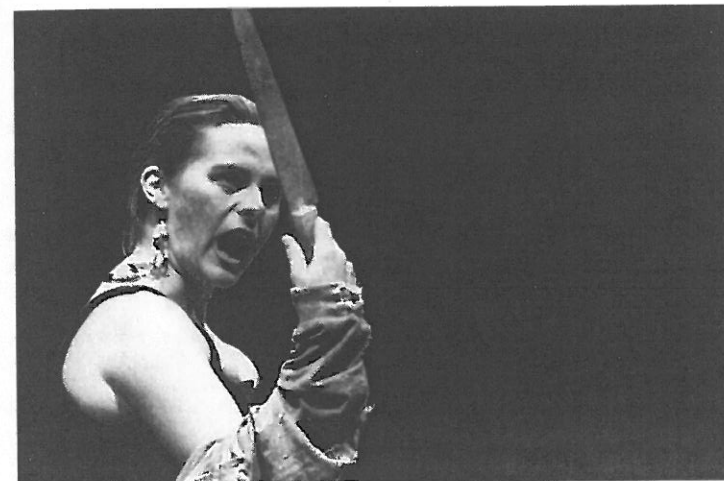


Figure 2.1 Joanne Pearce as Doll Common in *The Alchemist*, RSC, 1991. Directed by Sam Mendes. Photograph: Michael Le Poer Trench. Reproduced with permission.

a 'sassy smokey-voiced Bonnie to Bradley's Clyde',⁷¹ and aroused Mammon 'to ecstasy by rhythmically stroking his dangling money bag' in 4.1.⁷² Nevertheless, Mendes felt Pearce was frustrated in the role: Doll 'doesn't have any gags' and 'she's not funny: she doesn't have the comic motor of the play'.⁷³ What this production gave to Pearce was more room to manoeuvre than Jonson did. Pearce's Doll was frequently to be seen roaming the long stage gallery, hidden by the shadows, during scenes when she was supposed to be offstage, such as 1.2 and 2.1. Spying and eavesdropping as she prowled around the gallery, this Doll was a particularly strong and sometimes threatening presence; this staging decision also made good plot sense as Doll was seen to be keeping up with the latest plot developments and was clearly ready to shift into whatever role might be required next.

Alongside Pearce, Bradley's Subtle, brought 'a wonderful ferrety fervour and a prodigious gift for esoteric mumbo-jumbo to his various impersonations of the alchemist'.⁷⁴ Hyde as Face went 'through a series of lightning disguises, accents and manners',⁷⁵ when he 'has to revert to his "real" self as Jeremy the butler at the end, this last role seems, in its creepy mock-meekness, no more authentic than, say, his uproarious impersonation of "Lungs"'. Finally, Hyde's Face 'tries to bribe the audience to acquit him, hinting at our complicity in what has gone on. Here he throws what looks like a heavy handful of sovereigns into the stalls. Only instead of landing with the crash of coins, they float and flutter in the air, sparkling, weightless confetti'.⁷⁶ This theatrical gag – a variation on a pantomime favourite whereby a bucket of 'water' is thrown at the audience and the 'water' turns out to be bits of shiny paper – offered one final chance for the audience to see themselves as gulled among the gulls.

Mendes's *Alchemist* was costumed in a mixture of Jacobean and modern modes; Dapper wore a doublet and hose made out of pin-stripe material; Surly wore plus fours. In addition, Lovewit's house contained a flushing loo and electric lights. While the first director to put *The Alchemist* into modern dress, Tyrone Guthrie, was castigated in 1962 for his contemporarized Old Vic production,

since then many directors have followed Guthrie's lead.⁷⁷ In 2000, Barry Edelstein, who was directing *The Alchemist* in New York, argued for viewing *The Alchemist* 'through a double lens of 1610 and 2000, with one foot in early modern London and the other in post-modern New York'.⁷⁸ This notion of a 'double lens' sits very comfortably with Mendes's production.

Similarly, Neil Armfield's *Alchemist*, produced by Company B, Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney in 1996,⁷⁹ had to negotiate a 'double lens', grounded in the fact that audiences would in all likelihood approach the play with an awareness of it (and themselves) being simultaneously in-London and not-in-London. This compounded the dualities produced by historical distance, crystallized in designer Stephen Curtis's mixing of the mock-Jacobean and the contemporary: a section of neo-Tudor panelling looming over modern interior squalor. But Sydney is a very long way from London, and it is perhaps the case that Armfield's production was not as culturally and imaginatively freighted by the London-centrism that affects theatre in Britain, particularly performances of English canonical texts. For British productions that originate outside London, going to the capital remains an important measure of success. The task that faced Hersov in Manchester might, as far as extricating his *Alchemist* from the overwhelming dominance of London is concerned, have been more acute than that faced by Armfield, a major player in an Australian professional theatre scene that by the mid-1990s had set aside the burdens of cultural cringe. In terms of centre-periphery relations, Sydney – Australia's London, the big, restless, multifarious, greedy city – was inextricably present in Armfield's *Alchemist*.

This geo-cultural resonance exists despite Armfield's characteristic resistance to any self-consciously 'localized' idea of place, whether Sydney, London, or otherwise. Armfield emphasizes the role of the theatre space in doing the bulk of the imaginative work, commenting in an interview for the national broadsheet, 'The skill is achieving your own and particular world for that play and not trying to say this is happening in London of 1610 or we've updated it to [Sydney's] Kings Cross'.⁸⁰ Several critics were more interested

in international resonances than local ones, including Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (a comparison also invoked, as we have noted, by critics of Mendes's production); Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*,⁸¹ the British theatrical inheritance of Garrick and Guinness as Abel Drugger;⁸² the emergent impacts (and uncontrollable trajectories) of the internet and genetic science;⁸³ and contemporary New Age 'self-help gurus [and] get rich quick schemes'.⁸⁴ Others were interested in the local, with one reviewer maintaining that despite Armfield's general approach, the production had a sense of contemporary Sydney: 'Neil Armfield has said he always sets productions of the classics "on the stage", but his version of this savage satire of life in the back streets of Jacobean London seems awfully familiar when we walk out of the theatre into the back streets of Howardean Sydney.'⁸⁵

Although *The Alchemist* is not often staged in Australia, it is tempting to suggest that the play finds a natural home in a nation that stereotypically values certain qualities that are hallmarks of this comedy: an irreverence that runs roughshod over certain social formalities, delight in mocking excessive seriousness or pretension, boisterous physicality and inventiveness with language. These are traits of the Australian larrikin, a figure so iconic that it has become a cultural cliché. The term 'larrikin' has undergone a shift from its derogatory meaning in settler culture as a tough hooligan to its current affectionate connotation; Melissa Bellanta emphasizes the importance of Australian vaudeville theatre from the 1890s to the early twentieth century in popularizing the larrikin identity, citing the bawdy double-act 'Stiffy and Mo' (Nat Phillips and Roy Rene).⁸⁶ If, as Penny Gay argues, the larrikin 'insist[s] on the integrity and right to speak of . . . subaltern individuals',⁸⁷ *The Alchemist*'s protagonists seem to fit the bill – it would not be a stretch to imagine Subtle, Face and even Doll as the kind of people who, some 150 years after Jonson wrote the play, might have found themselves on a convict ship bound for Australia.

Armfield's dynamic Subtle and Face, Geoffrey Rush and Hugo Weaving, can to a large extent be mapped onto vaudeville antecedents. The actors offered an inventive, subversive theatrical

larrikinism, unencumbered by cultural-nationalistic sentimentalism. Many of the Lecoq-trained Rush's comic and tragicomic stage performances owe at least as much, in terms of embodiment and characterization, to European stage clowning traditions and the Australian vaudeville theatre to which Bellanta refers than to post-Stanislavski techniques.⁸⁸ Weaving's commanding, at times imperious physicality as Face complemented Rush's fluidity as the wily Subtle. The duo generated a great deal of comedy out of verbal ripostes and slapstick interactions.

Characterization and vaudeville-larrikin comedy in this actor-focused production (played in Belvoir's 340-seat theatre, configured as a corner thrust stage enclosed by two of the building's external walls) are best understood in terms of deviations, and even *deviousness*, in costume, language (including accent) and non-verbal work. Kym Barrett's costumes gave particular insight into characterization and were a grungy celebration of shape-shifting (as well as time- and place-shifting) and actorly artifice. Rush's mercurial Subtle first appeared as a dirty, ratty figure in threadbare long johns, his face faintly whitened (as were the other actors'), eyes outlined in black and his teeth dark with rot between the gaps. He reappeared in the first scene with Abel Drugger (Arky Michael, hunched and peering dimly through thick spectacles) in a long black gown, skullcap and Jacobean-style white neck ruff. Rush also shifted gear physically in this scene, reining in Subtle's roving limb and hand movements and adopting a solemn, hushed demeanour (Figure 2.2). His subsequent costume changes eliminated any sense of the character occupying an identifiable time or place: Subtle appeared as a barefoot guru in sarong and turban, his body daubed in white, and later robed himself in swirl-patterned satin dressing gown and waved a peacock feather about in an outrageous performance of New Age conjuring. A charismatic Face, Weaving wore a British naval officer's jacket and tight black trousers; as Jeremy, he was dressed suavely in a black suit and sunglasses, his hair tied up and briefcase in hand. Only as Lungs did he shed this businesslike veneer, appearing in overalls and apron, with a gas mask pushed up on top



Figure 2.2 Geoffrey Rush and Hugo Weaving as Subtle and Face in *The Alchemist*, Belvoir, 1996. Directed by Neil Armfield. Photograph: Heidrun Löhr. Reproduced with permission.

of his head. As Doll, Gillian Jones's costumes drew on theatrical signifiers of a prostitute that were closer to contemporary urban than Jacobean – a short red skirt over white stockings and platform heels; a pink minidress; and as Queen of Fairy, a white skirt with silvery trim topped with a black bodice – most of these items worn past their best.

The production omitted the Prologue, moving straight from the acrostic Argument into the explosive opening.⁸⁹ Subtle's crude first line, and the audience's response to it, can be something of a barometer of how the vulgarity and farce are likely to play. Rush's vocal work helped things along. While not using the comically broad local inflections that marked out some of the production's dim-witted characters, he lingered a beat on open-mouthed long 'aa' vowels (an identifiably Australasian sound), bookending the joke with a rhyming repetition: 'Thy worst. I fart at thee' (1.1.1), became, 'Aah, thy worst. I fart at

thee', followed by another minor addition to Jonson's text that produced the same sound: 'Lick figs | Out at my *arse*' (the last word overlapping with Face's forceful 'Rogue').

Armfield retained most of the exchange between Subtle and Face in 1.2, allowing for high-energy interplay between Rush and Weaving. The words most savoured or emphasized by the lead actors were in many cases modifications to Jonson's text: 'my arse'; 'You pathetic whelp, you coward'; 'cramped and constipated, with your ugly great nose'; 'boot boy' (Subtle's insult to the knee-high-boot-clad Face); 'dog vomit'; 'stink-marks'. Other words, in particular Jonson's repeated 'mongrel', translated very easily into a familiar Australian vernacular – this word was, in fact, made more prominent by the alteration of Face's line, 'You might talk softer, rascal' (1.1.59) to 'Keep your voice down, mongrel', and 'Hang thee, collier' (90) to 'Yes, I hang thee, mongrel.' The modification of Doll's 'Rascals' (166) to 'Puritans' accorded with one of Armfield's 'what I love about' Jonson statements, which were printed in the programme: 'I love the way the play hates puritanism and all those who impede the pleasure of play and of people laughing at themselves.' Some of the production's more obvious textual 'violations' included Face's 'loose lips sink ships'; Pliant's idiotic 'is it French?'; Surly-as-Spaniard's 'que sera, sera' and 'hasta la vista, baby'; and Face's panicked 'Fuck!' upon Lovewit's return. The enthusiastic laughter that these lines attracted hinted at a collective delight in humour that, in contrast to many of Jonson's jokes and references, demanded of the audience no cultural translation whatsoever.

The production crucially deviated from Jonson in 1.1 when Jones's Doll threw a full chamber pot over Subtle – an act that drew a wave of repulsed laughter from the audience – followed by the barked out addition, 'clean it up'. As Armfield explains, this coup was a last-minute innovation:

It was only on the morning of opening night that we decided Doll . . . would tip the chamber pot all over Subtle. . . . We'd had Subtle throwing it over Face . . . within the first four or

five lines of the opening scene and it never really worked, because it was actually defusing the fight too early. We spent a couple of hours that morning and changed it.⁹⁰

As well as avoiding a too-soon quelling of the fight, Doll's action here prevented her from being swept aside in the maelstrom of Subtle's and Face's bravado. But while she was no timid collaborator, Jones's Doll did appear in an anxious state, her lines prior to the first knock at the door, a modification of Jonson, spoken with desperate urgency: 'we're in it up to our necks, we could drop for this'. The stakes, at least as far as she was concerned, were life or death, encapsulated in a textual change from 'I'll not be made a prey unto the marshal' (1.1.120) to 'I'll not be made a prey unto the hangman'. Jones moved in a twitchy, agitated manner, with an addict's air of being caged. Sitting close to Mammon (Max Cullen, a preposterous dandy in suit and cravat) in 4.1, she awkwardly rearranged her long cape, the mechanics of seduction not coming naturally. As Queen of Fairy, her con-artistry was accompanied by some nervous toe-tapping and nail-biting. With this unease, Jones offered compelling textures of characterization that tempered the production's raucousness, even if reviewers tended to be preoccupied by the extraordinary duo of Rush and Weaving, about whom they were universally effusive: Rush gave a '*tour de force*',⁹¹ 'magnificent'⁹² performance 'to be treasured'⁹³ and Weaving was 'suave and calculating',⁹⁴ and 'dashing'⁹⁵ 'in one of his superior stage performances'.⁹⁶

Strategic use of regional and international accents delineated differences in class and intelligence, producing immediately recognizable (for local audiences, with their specific geo-cultural competencies) – and outrageously funny – associations. While the production's audacious mixing of voices suggests, in part, a cultural abandonment of lingering anxieties about the 'proper voice' in which to perform Renaissance plays, it also highlights the particular function of accent in comic work. Drawing on his phonetic analyses of selected Australian productions of Shakespeare, Rob Pensalfini observes that Standard British English accents

frequently remain the default in non-comedic roles.⁹⁷ Pensalfini understandably laments this apparently imperial theatrical hangover, but in this context it is worth expanding upon the implication that, in Renaissance comedies at least, accent variation may become a potent tool. Accent (and more broadly, sociolect) bypasses the meanings contained in words and sentences, connecting with audiences at a very deep level. As such, accent is one of the most acute weapons in a comedian's arsenal, something Australia's most successful stage and screen comedians (including Barry Humphries, Jane Turner, Gina Riley and Chris Lilley) understand very well.

Arky Michael's Druggier had a very broad Australian accent, with characteristic long, flat vowels, marking him out as a stolid simpleton, while Daniel Wyllie's Kastril and Rebecca Massey's Pliant spoke, much to the audience's delight, in thick New Zealand accents to indicate a similar deficit of sophistication and nous. Cullen's Mammon adopted an approximation of Received Pronunciation, inflected with a lisp. Tribulation and Ananias, played by Frank Whitten and Keith Robinson as buttoned-up men, spoke with approximate Standard British English accents, while Ralph Cotterill's Lovewit had an English West Country lilt. This combination of voices reflects a specific set of geo-cultural perspectives, which not only attributes certain ideas of class and intelligence to a broad Australian accent, but also registers the voices of other nationalities, New Zealand and British, as having clear significations which are ripe for mockery. Not all of the production's accent varieties were as blatant: in each other's company, Rush's Subtle, Weaving's Face and Jones's Doll used General Australian accents, but their inflections shifted slightly in scenes of con-artistry, when their characters were 'acting'. As the alchemist, Subtle's tone shifted towards Standard British English, as did Doll's accent in her play-acting scenes. As the alchemist's assistant, Face used a broader Australian accent, signifying low status.

While accent or sociolect can expedite certain effects of characterization, from Armfield's directorial perspective *The Alchemist*

required a lot of work in terms of what had to exceed the text. Shortly after the production's opening, he commented:

The Alchemist was exhausting for me. It was a particularly hard one to do, much harder I have to say than *Hamlet*, because of the constant demand for comic invention. Each scene of *Hamlet* has an organic, imaginative glow to it that actors just have to hook on to and the scene then plays itself. With *The Alchemist* you all have to work so much harder than that.⁹⁸

The comparison seems to suggest that while *Hamlet* – so often held up as a theatrical Everest – offers a ready framework for performance, Jonson's text is demanding to the extent that it must be met with a robust and comprehensive physical language on stage. These demands were answered with extratextual fun in Armfield's production. A spirit of inventive, intersubjective play was achieved most decisively in farce-based visual gags and the appearance of improvisation, helped by the fact that the intimate Belvoir corner space lends itself to a potent complicity between actors and audience.⁹⁹

Much of this complicity derived from the audience being 'in' on the duping of the gulls, but on other occasions, it meant watching as an individual audience member became an object of fun. In the first scene with Abel Drugger, Subtle ostentatiously mimed a séance and then sprayed the room with air freshener after Drugger's departure, grimacing at the audience as if in sympathetic disgust at Drugger's halitosis that had offended them as much as him. In 2.6, Subtle encoded Drugger's name in chalk on the wall by drawing a bell, a crude outline of a person with a 'D' on the chest, and a defecating dog accompanied by a canine growl; Drugger's good-natured stupefaction, standing on one spot, arms clamped to his sides, contrasted directly with Subtle's and Face's dynamic use of the stage, and his delayed comprehension of the chalk scribbles drew applause from the audience in the production recording analysed. A cup of tea shared with the uptight Ananias

and Tribulation became a pretext for audience participation when Rush (cheekily intoning, 'c' mon, it'll be fun') pulled a person on stage to join the tea party, then upon releasing him a few moments later, threw a biscuit at him with the prepared, and explicitly Australian, ad-lib, 'You can have an Iced VoVo. Did you know that Jonson invented the word Iced VoVo?'¹⁰⁰ Of course, the element of unpredictability that comes with participatory techniques demands actorly quick-wittedness, as hinted in a review of a pre-view performance that refers to 'a couple of hilarious attempts at getting a stubborn audience member to participate'.¹⁰¹

As the play progressed, interactions between Subtle and Face increasingly took on the chaotic quality of a vaudeville-larrikin double-act: a brilliant farce interlude saw Subtle knocked out cold when a trapdoor in the downward-tilting ceiling broke open, releasing a jumble of pots and pans. Face resuscitated him using an iron brandished like a defibrillator, holding it to Subtle's chest repeatedly and calling out, 'clear'. As the pair swept the pots and pans into a trapdoor in the stage floor, dancing about as they worked, Rush's prepared ad-lib, 'we do anything in this bit', was followed with theatrical bows from the pair. In addition to these visual gags, an ongoing aural joke consisted of a series of different tunes for the doorbell, including Hal David and Burt Bacharach's 'Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head', and Scott Joplin's ragtime classic 'The Entertainer', which was memorably revived as the theme music of the 1973 film about a pair of con-artists, *The Sting*. A clever prelude to the 5.1 transition to outside was the exploitation of Belvoir's unique stage geography: a door exiting on to the street. Face threw Doll out of this door, with Subtle hot on her heels, as passing cars and streetlights came into view, producing a wonderful metatheatrical breach of the play's imaginative borders, as well as its interiority. At the play's denouement, Weaving's Face appeared alone, eating an apple and sitting nonchalantly in a chair; his final line, which put him in the position of a Master of Ceremonies, was a casual, 'well, you are the audience', at which point he threw his apple core at one of the doors, bringing out the rest of the cast for a jubilant curtain call.

If, in Armfield's production, Sydney obscured London as far as imaginative, cultural and theatrical inheritances are concerned, the intervening 13 years and an accelerated globalization helped to frame John Bell's 2009 *Alchemist* in terms of a kind of multilocal imagination. In part, its geo-cultural unfixedness is a consequence of performance conditions: a co-production by the Sydney-based Bell Shakespeare Company and the Brisbane-based Queensland Theatre Company, it premiered in Brisbane, before touring to Sydney, Canberra and Perth.¹⁰² But the work also seemed to tap into certain transnational discourses, much of which it did not actively seek. In a promotional video, Bell connects the themes of greed and gullibility in *The Alchemist* to contemporary economic woes, but prefaces the observation by noting, 'we shouldn't always be looking for, "is it a play about us"',¹⁰³ and the company's online promotional material did not engage the link. Nevertheless, just as Hersov's production was read through the lens of Thatcherite cut-and-thrust capitalism, a contemporary meme informed critical interpretation of Bell's work, with almost all reviewers commenting on the global financial crisis, or on modes of scamming in a globalized world. A Canberra reviewer inferred the resonance of the economic crisis as a creative intention, describing the production as 'a work that director John Bell aims squarely at the present economic debacle'.¹⁰⁴ A Sydney reviewer commented, 'Wall Street shows us not much has changed in 400 years',¹⁰⁵ while another praised the production for helping 'to pull theatre-lovers from the dark depths of the global financial crisis'.¹⁰⁶ Some critics drew more general contemporary connections: a reviewer of the Brisbane season wrote that *The Alchemist* might 'be a play whose time has come. Anyone who has ever been e-mailed by a Nigerian millionaire dying to share his loot will know that suckers are born every day'.¹⁰⁷ One critic offered an extended contemporary analogy, reproducing a scammer's e-mail that had recently 'plopped into the inbox'.¹⁰⁸

Notwithstanding this interest in modern allusions, a play so intensely concerned with the chameleonic as *The Alchemist* resists too-easy insertion into an economic or political thematic

basket. Bell was concerned to avoid 'anything too naturalistic', and told designer Bruce McKinven, 'Let's have a totally open space: there is no set . . . a bit like a theatre rehearsal room'.¹⁰⁹ The venues to which the production toured are all configured as end-on proscenium spaces, with capacities ranging from 398 at the single level Sydney Opera House Playhouse, to 618 at Canberra's three-level Playhouse, to 850 at the two-level Queensland Performing Arts Centre Playhouse in Brisbane and 1,200 at Perth's Edwardian Baroque His Majesty's Theatre. McKinven's design used several metatheatrical devices: two costume racks flanked the stage on each side, providing exits and entranceways – as well as a frame – for the actors. Behind one of these racks, a stage scaffold was visible, and the assistant stage manager, Jennifer Buckland, sat in view of the audience. An old stained couch decorated in ripped and faded floral was the centrepiece of much of the action, and opposing it was a make-up mirror and chair. Proximate spaces were littered with recognizable detritus of modern consumption: a box of cornflakes, a tea towel, a cardboard soft-drink cup and straw, a dish-rack, dishes, cups, pink washing up gloves, a teapot and pan, a milk carton, a tin of baked beans with a utensil left in it, a spray can, old suitcases. Perhaps the most effective metatheatrical design element was the enormous mirror across the back wall of the stage, which intensified the theatrical duality, revealing actors and props from behind and making the audience privy to certain mechanics and to 'hidden' things – an unadorned back of a table or chair, or the unfastened back of Subtle's ill-fitting disguise – that were not ostensibly part of the 'picture' of alchemy. When Patrick Dickson's Subtle formed Druggier's name 'in some mystic character' (2.6.15) on the mirror, the effect was to reflect his acting self to himself, just as his face became visible (the face of the trickster, mid-trick) to the audience in reflection. An additional level of theatrical self-referentiality consisted of the glimpses that some audience members – depending on where they were seated – could catch of themselves in the mirror, laughing, reacting, submitting to the illusion.

Costume in this production was also fundamentally metatheatrical, the cast wearing items selected from the Bell Shakespeare Company and Queensland Theatre Company wardrobe stocks. The actors had some input in selecting what they would wear, in a 'controlled negotiation'¹¹⁰ with McKinven and Gayle MacGregor, the then Head of Wardrobe at the Queensland Theatre Company, which acknowledged the function of costume in a performer's characterization process – and democratized that process. McKinven describes how the work of creating costumes for the production differed from the professional norm:

[F]or this production, where we are using the artifice of theatre to expose the deceit of the play, we decided to throw open the collaborative process somewhat . . . The costumes become more like found-object sculptures, each one taking you on an individual journey. I think you need to be far more trusting of your process to know that this will work . . . I also really enjoy that some pieces of clothing hidden in stock for so long, are getting another run onstage.¹¹¹

The resulting costumes ranged wildly in terms of period, style, colour, fabric, and even gender- and age-appropriateness, and reinforced the point that characterization was here derived from a series of exteriors being trotted out and presented to the gullible of the play, and of the theatre.

Dickson's Subtle wore a range of dressing gowns over grubby pyjamas, a woollen hat, a gold star pendant and beaded necklaces (giving him an ageing hippie appearance that he accentuated by occasionally pressing his hands together in a *namaste* gesture); as the alchemist, he wore a girl's gingham dress over his regular clothing. As Doll, Georgina Symes clattered with jewellery and switched from denim miniskirt, cowboy boots over fishnet stockings, a leopard-print shirt and a long black wig (evoking, as several reviewers noted, the late British soul singer Amy Winehouse), into a slinky red evening gown for her assignation with Mammon (during which she undressed to white and pink lingerie) to a gaudy

dress as Queen of Fairy, made up of mismatched fabrics and red feathers. Andrew Tighe's Face was comparable in appearance to Weaving's, his eighteenth-century British naval officer's uniform alternating with a blue boiler suit, workman's apron and protective eye mask as Lungs. But this Face did not exhibit the reckless confidence that Weaving brought to the role, Tighe's Face being imbued, as one reviewer put it, with 'precision and steadiness', a concentration that left him 'exhausted, at the play's end'.¹¹²

David Whitney's Mammon was a kind of grotesque whiteface clown, clad in a very obvious fat suit over the top of a red and gold embroidered frock coat, a colourful waistcoat, white trousers and knee-high boots, glittering rings on each finger, and a pair of devilish horns protruding from his head. Lucas Stibbard's Druggier wore an apron and knitted vest, a flat cap over his greasy red hair. As Kastril, Scott Witt's outfit consisted of a mink coat, a floral shirt, gold necklaces, trousers with feather tassels, a cowboy belt, oversized sneakers with extralong shoelaces and a too-large baseball cap. His sister Pliant, played by Liz Skitch, wore a similarly discordant concoction: a slinky silver dress over pink stockings, long white gloves with rings on top, a colourful feather fascinator over tight blond curls, all set off by the stuffed toy elephant that she carried around with her. Peter Kowitz's Tribulation wore a long black frock coat, a wide brimmed straw hat and had a thick grey beard, giving him an Amish appearance. When disguised as the Spanish Don, Sandro Colarelli's Surly strutted about in a flamboyant satin matador's costume, a contrast to Surly's top hat, maroon tails and riding boots. Such a motley collection of signifiers gave the production a cosmopolitan sense of being located in many places at once, or nowhere but the theatre itself (also a hallmark of Armfield's theatrical approach).

The prepared ad-libs and farce interludes that were so effective in Armfield's production were not as prominent a feature of Bell's *Alchemist*; nonetheless, Bell's direction drew appreciative laughter from extratextual elements – characters' outrageous appearances and mannerisms and visual gags. Doll's assignation with Mammon in 4.1 was a slapstick burlesque centrepiece, culminating in

Mammon stumbling, half-dressed, his preposterous fat suit protruding, after Doll, and then struggling, his love-heart motif boxer shorts fallen to his ankles, to resuscitate Subtle-as-doctor by hammering on his chest. Pliant's ridiculously high-pitched, idiotic laugh was a hit with the audience, and her exit, in fits of giggles as she was carried out by Surly dressed as the Spaniard, elicited an uproarious response. The cashed-up Lovewit (Russell Kiefel, who played Surly in Armfield's production), all-gauche, golf-club swinging, gum-chewing bravado, was an immediately recognizable contemporary 'type'.

As a means of characterization, accent again played an important comic function. Witt's posturing Kastril, continually rehearsing his fighting moves, bouncing on the spot like a terrier, used a broad Australian accent, delivered (absurdly for the Angry Boy) at a high pitch; along with Witt's small stature, these elements of characterization gave Kastril's feistiness an inherent comic irony. Like Arky Michael in Armfield's production, Stibbard's Drugger spoke in a very broad Australian accent, his tone rising at the end of each sentence, a local speech pattern that, when caricatured, conveys a sense of perpetual uncertainty. The actor's dopey demeanour, his arms hanging by his sides, head thrust forward, was also remarkably evocative of Arky Michael's in the same role. Whitney's effete Mammon spoke, as had Cullen's, with plummy RP vowels. Kowitz's Amish appearance as Tribulation was accompanied by his approximation of a southern US accent (and sometimes the singsong tones of a Southern preacher). These idiolects carried direct class and cultural implications.

The production omitted a large chunk of the elaborate exchange of insults between Subtle and Face in 1.1 and consequently Doll spoke a greater proportion of text. Symes played to this opportunity to come more to the fore: easily manhandling Subtle in 1.1.149, by the end of the scene she positioned herself between Subtle and Face on the couch and spoke calmly, an arm around each in a domineering position. Their flattery at 174-9 ('Royal Doll', 'thou shalt sit in triumph', etc.) reinforced her stature – in Armfield's production these lines were cut. While Jones's Doll

spoke feverishly of being made 'prey unto a hangman', Symes's was concerned merely with being made 'prey unto the sheriff'. A tall, striking performer, she was, like a kind of female version of Weaving's Face, empowered by her glamour. If a contemporary theatrical manifestation is to be found of the 'larrikin girl' that Bellanta has sought to recuperate in an essay on this most masculine of Australian identities,¹¹³ Symes's Doll may just have been it.

Jonson's fighting address 'To the Reader', which prefaces the 1612 quarto, employs a telling phrase that goes to the heart of our performance history of *The Alchemist*. Jonson attacks the 'Multitude' for, among other things, commending 'Writers, as they doe Fencers, or Wrestlers; who if they come in robustuously, and put in for it with a great deale of violence, are receiv'd for the braver fellowes.' Many productions of *The Alchemist* over the centuries have been criticized precisely for coming in too 'robustuously' even though just how 'robustuously' *The Alchemist* should be played will always be up for debate; it is certainly impossible to access Jonson's own standards of theatrical energy, pacing and tone, all which are impossible to pin down in writing, and which within any one production will vary from performance to performance, depending on audience response. But while the productions we have discussed illuminate a range of dramaturgical possibilities, it is the issue of tone and comic balance – precisely of whether a production comes in too 'robustuously' – which emerges as critical. Was Garrick too robustious in hijacking *The Alchemist* and making Drugger the star? What about the physical and visual comedy of Gascon's *Alchemist*? Rush's claim that Jonson invented the Iced VoVo? Was this too robustious or was it inspired riffing, which helped get the Australian audience onside? When was Symes's larrikin Doll collaborating with Jonson and when was she deviating from him? On the other hand, was the lack of darkness in Mendes's production not robustious enough?

The liveness of theatre means that the areas focused on here – characterization, Londonness, (meta)theatricality and comic tone – will be revisited and reworked in every *Alchemist*. The

play's original site-specificity – at least when it was performed at the Blackfriars playhouse – has to undergo fundamental reorientations in productions such as the ones we have discussed. For modern practitioners and audiences, the imaginative work of (re-)presenting, comprehending and deriving enjoyment from *The Alchemist* will always be inflected with an awareness of certain transhistorical and sometimes transnational dualities: London and not London; London now and London then; boy player and actress. And the theatricality that exists between Jonson's lines – pacing, costume, soundscape, accent – will always create space for robustness.

Much work remains to be done in terms of performance-centred Jonson studies, and *The Alchemist*, in particular, would benefit from more in-depth, as well as critically rigorous, performance histories. Ideally, the insights offered by performance histories of early modern plays should always be fully integrated into any exploration of their potential dramaturgies. The productions examined here suggest that Jonson's play succeeds best nowadays when directors, actors and designers collaborate with him, and rework *The Alchemist*, rather than respecting every dash in the Folio text. But which elements of such reworkings are 'collaborations with', and which are 'deviations from'? And how, indeed, do the two elements work together? However, these questions may be reconciled, while Jonson continues to attract international theatre practitioners, wholly prepared simultaneously to work within and test the boundaries of his meticulous authorial designs, *The Alchemist* will continue to conjure up explosive, unpredictable alchemy in the theatre.

CHAPTER THREE

The State of the Art

MATTHEW STEGGLE

'Like all mega-writers', observes Charles Nicholl, 'Jonson supports a small industry of research'.¹ Certainly *The Alchemist*, which for its intellectual density, complexity and importance deserves to be called a mega-play, has by itself been the subject of a great deal of scholarly work since the year 2000. Across that body of work there are many recurring themes and concerns, although the chapters and articles in question are not always fully in dialogue with one another. In this survey of the state of the art, I bundle recent work into a series of loose categories which suggest, in the process, various opportunities for new explorations of the play.

The categories are as follows: editions, *The Alchemist* in Jonson's career, space and place, time, historical contexts: The Blackfriars in 1610, historical contexts: gender and masculinity, histories of science, histories of economics, performance, other approaches, my conclusion.

Editions

The one major new edition of the play in the new millennium is that of Peter Holland and William Sherman for *The Cambridge Works of Ben Jonson*, the long-awaited project which promises finally to supersede Herford and Simpson and to change the whole field of Jonson studies. In the case of *The Alchemist*, Holland and Sherman's edition includes a modern-spelling text freshly edited from first principles, and a fresh collation of copies of both the 1612 quarto and the 1616 folio. The resulting text bases itself

106. Ian Donaldson, 'Language, Noise and Nonsense: *The Alchemist*', in Earl Miner (ed.), *Seventeenth-Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 69–82.
107. Richard Dutton, 'Volpone and *The Alchemist*: A Comparison in Satiric Techniques', *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 18 (1974), 60.
108. Douglas Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 191, 194.
109. Aliko Lafkidou Dick, *Paedeia through Laughter: Jonson's Aristophanic Appeal to Human Intelligence*, *Studies in English Literature* 76 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 63.
110. Robertson Davies, 'Ben Jonson and Alchemy', *Stratford Papers 1968–9*, ed. B. A. W. Jackson (Hamilton, ON: McMaster University Press, 1972), 42.
111. Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
112. Anne Barton, 'The Alchemist', in *Ben Jonson: Dramatist* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 136–7.
113. *Ibid.*, 142.
114. Wayne Rebhorn, 'Jonson's "Jovy Boy": Lovewit and the Dupes in *The Alchemist*', *Journal of English and German Philology* 79.3 (1980), 355–6.
115. Gordon Sweeney, *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 125. All subsequent references are to pages 125–32.
116. R. L. Smallwood, "'Here, in the Friars": Immediacy and Theatricality in *The Alchemist*', *Review of English Studies* 32.126 (1981), 142–60.
117. William Armstrong, 'Ben Jonson and Jacobean Stagecraft', in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (eds), *Jacobean Theatre*, *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies* 9 (London: Arnold, 1966), 56.
118. Smallwood, "'Here, in the Friars"', 148.
119. Cheryl Lynn Ross, 'The Plague of *The Alchemist*', *Renaissance Quarterly* 41.3 (1988), 439–58. See also F. P. Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927).
120. Andrew Gurr, 'Prologue: Who Is Lovewit? What Is He?', in Richard Cave, Elizabeth Schafer and Brian Woolland (eds), *Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Practice, and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 17.
121. W. David Kay, *Ben Jonson: A Literary Life* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 108–13.
122. Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 59–64.
123. *Ibid.*, 83.

124. William Sights, 'The New Face of Secrecy in *The Alchemist*', in *Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 106.
125. Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, 84–7.
126. *Ibid.*, 147.
127. Julie Sanders, 'Republicanism and Theatre', in *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics* (Houndmills: Macmillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 68–9.
128. Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 128.
129. Richmond Barbour, "'When I Acted Young Antinous": Boy Actors and the Erotics of Jonsonian Theater', *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 110.5 (1995), 1006 and 1015.

2: *The Alchemist* on the Stage: Performance, Collaboration and Deviation

1. *The Alchemist*, with its vibrant performance history, particularly suffers from the decision by the Cambridge general editors to banish performance history from their magisterial new print edition of 2012. While the online version of the Jonson edition will include a stage history of *The Alchemist* by Lucy Munro, the implication that performance history can be dispensed with in the print edition is political and anti-theatrical in its prejudice.
2. Richard Cave, *Ben Jonson* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), 84.
3. Robert Gale Noyes, *Ben Jonson on the English Stage 1660–1776* (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1935). For a discussion of survey approaches to the performance history of *The Alchemist* see Elizabeth Schafer, 'Troublesome Histories: Performance and Early Modern Drama', in Ton Hoenslaars (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
4. Noyes, *Ben Jonson on the English Stage*, 153.
5. Ejner J. Jensen, *Ben Jonson's Comedies on the Modern Stage* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 113, 114.
6. Lois Potter, 'The Swan Song of the Stage Historian', in Martin Butler (ed.), *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 193–209.
7. 'Prologue to the Reviv'd Alchemist', in C. H. Wilkinson, *Proceedings and Papers of the Oxford Bibliographical Society*, vol. 1, 281–2; qtd in C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson (eds), *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), 9.228.
8. Geoffrey Tillotson, *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 July 1933.
9. See T.W. Baldwin, *The Organisation and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927), 437.

10. Richard Cave, 'Script and Performance', in Cave, Schafer and Woolland, *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, 23–32.
11. *Ibid.*, 26.
12. *Ibid.*, 24, 26.
13. Particular thanks are due to Francesca Marini at the Stratford, Ontario archive; John Goodfellow and archivist Stella Lowe at the Royal Exchange; Helen Hargest at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; Jane May and Gabrielle Bonney at Belvoir St Theatre; and Matt Bartlett at Bell Shakespeare Company.
14. Francis Kirkman, *The Wits; or, Sport upon Sport* (London, 1662).
15. David Garrick, 'An Essay on Acting: In Which Will Be Consider'd The Mimical Behaviour of a Certain Fashionable Faulty Actor, and the Laudableness of Such Unmannerly, as Well as Inhumane Proceedings' (London, 1744), 7–8, reproduced in full in Michael Caines (ed.), *Lives of Shakespearian Actors 1*, vol. 1, 'David Garrick' (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 23–50, 30–1.
16. Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London: J. Coote, 1759), 257–8.
17. See Noyes, *Ben Jonson on the English Stage*, 127.
18. Ivor Brown, *The Guardian*, 3 August 1932.
19. Kenneth Tynan, *He That Plays the King; A View of the Theatre* (London: Longmans, 1950), 92–4.
20. Michael Allen, *Michigan Daily*, 26 March 1969.
21. Lawrence DeVine, *Detroit Free Press*, 27 March 1969.
22. Frank Morris, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 June 1969.
23. Lewis Funke, *New York Times*, 12 June 1969.
24. Jim Vanderlip, *Ontarion*, 10 October 1969.
25. Stewart Brown, *Spectator*, 11 June 1969.
26. Herbert Whittaker, *Globe and Mail*, 11 June 1969.
27. Audrey M. Ashley, *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 April 1969.
28. Jay Carr, *Detroit News*, 26 March 1969.
29. Roger Dettmer, *Chicago's American*, 5 March 1969.
30. That Gascon reshaped the text is indicated by the creative team credits including 'textual revisions' by Gascon. In this he was aided by Jack Ludwig (David Nicolette, *The Grand Rapids Press*, 11 June 1969; Nathan Cohen, *Toronto Daily Star*, 11 June 1969).
31. Ralph Hicklin, *Toronto Telegram*, 5 March 1969.
32. Kevin Kelly, *Boston Globe*, 12 June 1969.
33. Martin Gottfried, *Women's Wear Daily*, 13 June 1969.
34. Christopher Dafoe, *Vancouver Sun*, 8 July 1969.
35. Kevin Kelly, *Boston Globe*, 12 June 1969.
36. Morris, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 June 1969.
37. Hicklin, *Toronto Telegram*, 5 March 1969.

38. Carr, *Detroit News*, 26 March 1969.
39. See, for example, the discussion by Robert Pollak in the *Hyde Park Herald*, Chicago, 19 March 1969. See also the discussion of theatre space in David Nicolette, *The Grand Rapids Press*, 11 June 1969 and William Leonard, the *Chicago Tribune*, 6 March 1969.
40. Performance analysis of Hersov's production is based on memories of the matinee performance on 23 May, on tour at the Bedford Arts Centre.
41. For the replicating of the Royal Exchange stage see *The Guardian*, 20 March 1987.
42. Martin Hoyle, *Financial Times*, 23 February 1987.
43. Joan Seddon, *Manchester Evening News*, 20 February 1987.
44. Timothy Ramsden, *Times Educational Supplement*, 6 March 1987.
45. Simon Warner, *Evening Courier*, 23 February 1987.
46. Kenny Everett (1944–95) was a British comedian famous for manic and mad-cap character comedy.
47. Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, 21 February 1987.
48. See, for example, Brown, *The Spectator*, 11 June 1969.
49. Ron Lawson, *Bolton Evening News*, 20 February 1987.
50. Programme supplement, tour.
51. Anton Wahlberg, *Tribune*, 13 March 1987.
52. See the prompt copy in the archive of the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre.
53. Performance analysis of Mendes's production is based on memories of a performance at the Swan in 1991 and a viewing of the archival video of a 1992 performance at the Barbican.
54. Michael Coveney, *Observer*, 1 September 1991.
55. Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 29 August 1991.
56. Kenneth Hurren, *Mail on Sunday*, 1 September 1991.
57. Kirsty Milne, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 September 1991.
58. Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 29 August 1991.
59. Malcolm Rutherford, *Financial Times*, 21 April 1992.
60. Taylor, *Independent*, 29 August 1991.
61. John Peter, *Sunday Times*, 1 September 1991.
62. Rex Gibson, *Times Educational Supplement*, 13 September 1991.
63. 'Interlude I; Sam Mendes talks to Brian Woolland', in Cave, Schafer and Woolland, *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, 79–85, 81.
64. *Ibid.*, 83.
65. *Ibid.*, 80.
66. *Ibid.*, 81.
67. Sheridan Morley, *Herald Tribune*, 29 April 1992; Sarah Hemming, *The Independent*, 17 April 1992; and Keith Stanfield, *City Limits*, 23 April 1992 also invoked Mamet.

68. Spencer, *Telegraph*, 29 August 1991.
69. Ibid.
70. Taylor, *Independent*, 29 August 1991.
71. Michael Quinn, *What's On*, 4 September 1991.
72. Hemming, *Independent*, 17 April 1992.
73. 'Interlude I; Sam Mendes talks to Brian Woolland', 83.
74. Spencer, *Telegraph*, 29 August 1991.
75. Nicholas de Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 16 April 1992.
76. Taylor, *Independent*, 29 August 1991.
77. See Jensen, *Ben Jonson's Comedies on the Modern Stage*, 94–7. Guthrie first updated *The Alchemist* for the Vic-Wells in 1944.
78. Barry Edelstein, *New York Times*, 13 February 2000.
79. Performance analysis of Armfield's production is based on an archival video recording filmed on 24 September 1996, as well as memories of a live performance.
80. Joyce Morgan, *Australian*, 23 August 1996.
81. References to *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Reservoir Dogs* appeared in Belvoir's media releases and in reviews.
82. James Waites, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1996.
83. Morgan, *Australian*, 23 August 1996.
84. Paul Fraser, *Mosman Daily*, 5 September 1996.
85. John McCallum, *Australian*, 29 August 1996.
86. Melissa Bellanta, *Life Matters*, ABC Radio National, June 2011, http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2011/06/lms_20110609_0943.mp3. Bellanta's book, *Larrikins: A History*, will be published by University of Queensland Press in 2012.
87. Penny Gay, 'Recent Australian *Shrews*: The "Larrikin Element"', in Jonathan Bate, Jill L. Levenson and Dieter Mehl (eds), *Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Los Angeles, 1996* (Cranbury, NJ, London and Mississauga, Ontario: Associated University Press, 1998), 170.
88. Rush emphasizes the deep formative influence of pantomime and vaudeville acts in the travelling tent shows that enthralled him as a child in Queensland in the 1950s, when this performance tradition was on the cusp of being eclipsed as popular entertainment by television. Geoffrey Rush, interviewed by Emma Cox, Melbourne, 23 July 2011.
89. Rush points out that the acrostic Argument, spoken by Lovewit with Face, Subtle and Doll in a freeze, was added after opening night. He explains: 'That helped enormously; it gave the audience a chance to look at the room, look at who we were and theatrically it . . . opened the play out instantly; somebody came up and spoke to the audience – whereas the fight is so inward.' Schafer, 'Jonson Down Under: An Australian *Alchemist*', in Cave, Schafer and Woolland, *Ben Jonson and Theatre*, 195.

90. Steve McLeod, *Sydney Star Observer*, 12 September 1996.
91. Waites, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1996.
92. McCallum, *Australian*, 29 August 1996.
93. Pamela Payne, *Sun-Herald*, 1 September 1996.
94. Waites, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1996.
95. Susan Mooney, *Wentworth Courier*, 4 September 1996.
96. Paul LePetit, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 September 1996.
97. See Rob Pensalfini, 'Not in Our Own Voices: Accent and Identity in Contemporary Australian Shakespeare Performance', *Australasian Drama Studies* 54 (2009), 142–58.
98. McLeod, *Sydney Star Observer*, 12 September 1996.
99. Geoffrey Milne notes (in an observation made prior to Belvoir St Theatre's renovation in 2005–6), 'the space is too small and technologically ill-equipped (as a matter of deliberate house style) to be anything but an actors' space: the close proximity and cramped confines force almost all of our attention onto the actor and the text'. 'Geoffrey Rush: Manic Genius or Team Player?', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14.3 (2004), 26.
100. An Iced VoVo is a sweet biscuit made by the Australian-based (and formerly owned) company Arnott's.
101. Fraser, *Mosman Daily*, 5 September 1996. Armfield maintains that the pre-view audiences were receptive, that they 'just took the play full-in-the-face', in contrast to the media- and industry-peopled audience on opening night, in front of whom, he observes, 'the actors certainly felt they were being assessed'. McLeod, *Sydney Star Observer*, 12 September 1996.
102. Performance analysis of Bell's production is based on an archival DVD recording filmed on 24 March 2009 at the Sydney Opera House Playhouse.
103. 'John Bell Talks about *The Alchemist* (2009)', www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdINQO17MrA.
104. Aaron Ridgway, *Canberra Times*, 2 May 2009.
105. Nicholas Pickard, *Sun-Herald*, 29 March 2009.
106. *Daily Telegraph*, 25 March 2009.
107. Sue Gough, *Courier Mail*, 27 February 2009.
108. Diana Simmonds, *Stage Noise*, 21 March 2009.
109. 'John Bell Talks about *The Alchemist* (2009)'.
110. Katie Stewart, 'Performance Notes for Educators', *The Alchemist*, Queensland Government (Education Queensland) and Queensland Theatre Company, 2009, 14.
111. Stewart, 'Performance Notes for Educators', 14–15.
112. Ridgway, *Canberra Times*, 2 May 2009.
113. Melissa Bellanta, 'The Larrikin Girl', *Journal of Australian Studies* 34.4 (2010), 499–512. While Jonson's Doll is not presented as enjoying the female friendships that would support the case for her as a 'larrikin girl' in Bellanta's terms, Doll's relative autonomy as far as Symes's

characterization was concerned distinguished her from the position of subservience (and vulnerability) to male power that would relegate her merely as a larrikin's 'moll'.

3: The State of the Art

1. Charles Nicholl, 'Ben Jonson: A Life by Ian Donaldson – Review', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2011.
2. Peter Holland and William Sherman (eds), *The Alchemist* in Bevington, Butler and Ian (gen. eds), *CWB7*, vol. 3.
3. Cited from the LION transcription, <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>
4. Felix E. Schelling (ed.), *The Alchemist*, cited from the Project Gutenberg e-text at www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4081
5. Matthew Steggle, "'Knowledge Will Be Multiplied": Digital Literary Studies and Early Modern Literature', in Raymond G. Siemens and Susan Schreibman (eds), *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 90.
6. Jonson, *The Alchemist*, ed. Clark Holloway, <http://hollowaypages.com/jonson1692alchemist.htm>
7. Jonson, *The Works of Ben Jonson, Volume 3*, ed. Peter Whalley (1756), <http://books.google.co.uk/ebooks?id=VjgJAAAAQAAJ>
8. Jonson, *The Works of Ben Jonson, Volume 4*, ed. William Gifford (1816), <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=UT4UAAAAYAAJ>
9. In *Bell's British Theatre*, Volume 17 (1780), www.archive.org/details/bellsbritishthe19bellgoog
10. David Bevington, 'The Major Comedies', in Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81.
11. *Ibid.*, 84.
12. Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 248.
13. *Ibid.*, 254.
14. Derek B. Alwes, 'Service as Mastery in *The Alchemist*', *Ben Jonson Journal* 17.1 (2010), 38–59.
15. Russell West, *Spatial Representations and the Jacobean Stage: From Shakespeare to Webster* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 43.
16. *Ibid.*, 57.
17. Andrew Hiscock, *The Uses of This World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cary and Jonson* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 16.
18. Shona McIntosh, 'Space, Place and Transformation in *Eastward Ho!* and *The Alchemist*', in Joan Fitzpatrick and John Martin (eds), *The Idea of the*

- City: Early-Modern, Modern and Post-Modern Locations and Communities* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 66.
19. James Mardock, *Our Scene Is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (London: Routledge, 2008).
 20. James Loxley, *The Complete Critical Guide to Ben Jonson* (London: Routledge, 2002), 84.
 21. Sean McEvoy, *Ben Jonson, Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
 22. *Ibid.*, 101.
 23. *Ibid.*, 102.
 24. Ian Donaldson, 'Clockwork Comedy: Time and *The Alchemist*', in *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 102.
 25. Anthony J. Ouellette, 'The Alchemist and the Emerging Adult Private Playhouse', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 45 (2005), 375–99.
 26. Melissa D. Aaron, "'Beware at What Hands Thou Receiv'st Thy Commodity": *The Alchemist* and the King's Men Fleece the Customers, 1610', in Paul Menzer (ed.), *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 75.
 27. *Ibid.*, 72.
 28. David Lucking, 'Carrying Tempest in His Hand and Voice: The Figure of the Magician in Jonson and Shakespeare', *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 85.4 (2004), 297–310.
 29. Arlene Oseman, 'Going Round in Circles with Jonson and Shakespeare', *Shakespeare in Southern Africa: Journal of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa* 15 (2003), 71.
 30. Melissa Smith, 'The Playhouse as Plaguehouse in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy', *Journal of the Washington Academy of Science* 89.1/2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 77–86.
 31. Patrick Phillips, "'You Need Not Fear the House": The Absence of Plague in *The Alchemist*', *Ben Jonson Journal* 13 (2006), 43–62.
 32. Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgzoy and Susan Wiseman, 'Introduction', in Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgzoy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics, and the Jonsonian Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 1–27, esp. 15.
 33. Ian McAdam, 'The Repudiation of the Marvelous: Jonson's *The Alchemist* and the Limits of Satire', *Quidditas* 21 (2000), 74.
 34. *Ibid.*, 67.
 35. *Ibid.*, 74–5.
 36. Lynn S. Meskill, 'Jonson and the Alchemical Economy of Desire: Creation, Defacement and Castration in *The Alchemist*', *Cahiers élisabéthains* 62 (2002), 62.