

To Glimpse the Commonwealth on Earth: The Problem of Contract and Possession in Jonson's *The Devil Is An Ass* (1616)

Yasue Yokota (横田 保恵)

The Devil Is An Ass, a city comedy written by Ben Jonson and performed in 1616, is often referred as a “dotage” and sometimes as a failure. At the same time we could say that the analysis of the whole structure of this comedy has not been begun until recently, while a number of topical satires contained in this play have long been analyzed. What, then, is the reason of this situation? A straightforward answer to this question might be that too many plots are woven into this comedy and thus it seems to have neither concentration of plots nor an obvious climax. According to Robert E. Knoll, “[t]he multiple action of the play has proceeded in orderly fashion from introduction to complication, but in the last scene of the second act the plotting begins to break down”, and finally “[o]ur interests are divided” (Knoll 168). This criticism might well seem natural, if we remember how wide its topical satires range—from about the socio-political problems like fen draining and monopoly, to about the diabolical problems like the trial of notorious Frances Howard and some cases of demonic possession.

On the other hand, according to Peter Happé, “[t]he use of sources indicates that Jonson is highly selective in what he takes, and that he has remarkable powers of transforming the acquired material to his own purposes” (Happé 4). Moreover, Anne Barton points out the importance of trust in this play by counting the number of the word “trust” and its two variants, “trusting” and “trusted” used in this play and comparing it with the result of two other plays, i.e. *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Winter's Tale*, and concludes as follows:

‘[t]rust’ is an issue in all areas of *The Devil Is An Ass*, a word constantly on the lips of characters as diverse as Satan, Pug, Fitzdottrel, Plutarchus and Guilt-head, Mercraft, Ingine, Ambler, Wittipol, Frances and Manly. Jonson seems to have been determined to activate the whole spectrum of its possible meanings, from the narrowly legalistic to the emotional and abstract. (Barton 229)

We should not stop the analysis here like Barton, if we remember the fact that patriarchal relationship between husband and wife is totally turned upside-down in the finale of this play. By the emphasis on such “trust”, what kind of human relationship and social order are brought into question in this play, and what is shaped by it?

Similar approach to this play is chosen by Barbara Irene Kerps, and firstly she points out that Jonson uses several keywords in plays on words and then focuses her argument on the problem of “contract”. By concentrating the argument to the problems caused by the usage of the words in this play, Kerps tries to deal with it as a whole, and points out its structure as follows:

[b]y collapsing the meaning of the key words, Jonson in fact comically unites a number of figures whose activities are apparently disparate, and one of my purposes here is to show how Jonson uses the terms of contract and property law as a dramatic nexus in the very different worlds he shackles together in *The Devil Is an Ass* [sic.].

To deal with the most obvious levels of intersection, two sets of contrarities dominate the play: the opposition between hell and earth on the one hand, and the contrast between the theater and the “real” world on the other. In Jonson’s complex plotting, all four of these normally discrete areas interact: indeed, much of his satiric point is to reveal their unsuspected permeability, and the ways they reflect on each other as a result. (Kerps 86–87)

Kerps analyses many kinds of contracts in this play, and especially concentrates her argument on the problem of Fitzdottrel’s testament which finally rescues Mistress Fitzdottrel in Act 5. Thus Kerps tries to deal with the play as a whole by focusing on one special feature contained by this play itself, though she leaves the problem of diabolic possession also in Act 5, which is tightly connected to the problem of that testament.

Furthermore, Frances Fitzdottrel, female protagonist of *The Devil Is An Ass*, is shaped to have her own agency. She is neither a masculine woman like Lady Tailbush, who binds herself so tightly to the patriarchal hierarchy that she displays her masculinity too much, nor a feeble woman, like Celia in *Volpone*, who scarcely seems to have any agency. We might say, following Anne Barton, that this play “has a heroine” (Barton 234). Thus it is often treated as an exception to Jonson’s misogyny. For example, Helen Ostovich elaborates on the reading of Frances Fitzdottrel’s agency using the close relationship between Jonson and the Sidney women, especially Mary Wroth, as a shadow-text of this play.

Taking these various viewpoints into consideration, from what standpoint could we grasp the structure of this play as a continuity? What might be an effective way to unweave the complicatedly interwoven plots of this play? In this paper, I would like to deal with the questions about the key note and the structure of this play mentioned above. Firstly, I would like to concentrate my argument to a rather small and odd incident in the finale of this play—the fake “possession” performed by Fitzdottrel and his accusation of his wife—and then, by showing that “incident” is actually not an incident but an integral part of this play, I would like to demonstrate that all the plots of this play are made to reveal every aspect of the theme of “contract”. This theme of “contract” is a category which includes, of course, not only economical and legal contracts, pointed out by Barbara Irene Kerps, but also emotional and even diabolical contracts. The theme of “trust” is one aspect of it. Thus using an analytical method like micro history, I would like to throw light on the idea of a new commonwealth, not that of Hell in the opening scene but that on earth, which we could glimpse at the end of this play.

Does the Accusation Backfire?

In the final scene of *The Devil Is An Ass*, Fitzdottrel suddenly begins to fit and groan out

accusation against his wife, Frances Fitzdottrel. He calls her a whore, and the Justice Sir Paul Eitherside is surprised and calls it a demonic “possession”. He displays a variety of symptoms in this scene, but in fact, the audience of this play is told that Merecraft and Everill, his assistant, have given Fitzdottrel instructions beforehand to perform the “possession” successfully:

MERECRAFT. Why, if he were the Devil, we sha’ not need him,
If you’ll be ruled.

MERECRAFT *gives the instructions to him and the rest.*

Go throw yourself on a bed, sir,
And feign you ill. We’ll not be seen wi’ you,
Till after that you have a fit, and all
Confirmed within. [*To EVERILL.*] Keep you with the two ladies
And persuade them. I’ll to Justice Eitherside,
And possess him with all, Trains shall seek out Engine,
And they two fill the town with’t; every cable
Is to be veered. We must employ out all
Our emissaries now. Sir, I will send you
Bladders and bellows. Sir, Be confident,
’Tis no hard thing t’outdo the Devil in:
A boy o’ thirteen year old made him an ass
But t’other day.

(5.5.38–51)

Moreover, they continue to do so during the “possession” without being noticed by the other spectators on stage like Lady Tailbush and Sir Paul:

EVERILL. You do not tumble enough.

MERECRAFT. Wallow! Gnash!

TAILBUSH. O, how he is vexed!

PAUL. ’Tis too manifest.

EVERILL. Give him more soap to foam with. Now lie still.

And give him soap to act with.

MERECRAFT. And act a little.

(5.8.67–70)

Thus we could say that this subplot of demonic “possession” is indeed carefully constructed to disclose the theatricality of such “possession” before the audiences of this play itself. At the same time, it is obvious that Fitzdottrel performs this fake “possession” with the aim of recovering his property that is now under control not of himself but of his wife, and Merecraft helps him because he has not relinquished his plan to bilk money of Fitzdottrel. What, then, do they actually do in the “possession” scene? His demonic “possession” begins as follows:

FITZDOTTREL. Gi’ me some *garlic, garlic, garlic, garlic* [*sic.*].

MERECRAFT. Hark the poor gentleman, how he is tormented!

FITZDOTTREL. *My wife is a whore, I'll kiss her no more:*

Masyt not thou be a cuckold, as well as I?

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha & c [sic.].

THE JUSTICE *interprets all.*

PAUL. That is the Devil speaks and laughs in him.

MERECRAFT. Do you think so, sir?

PAUL. I discharge my conscience. (5.8.24–30)

Fitzdottrel thus begins to perform the “possession” by bringing an accusation against his wife and calling her a whore. Then his performance continues as follows:

FITZDOTTREL. *A cuckold is,*

Where e'er he put his head with a wanion

If his horns be forth, the Devil's companion!

Look, look, look, else [sic.].

MERECRAFT. How he foams!

EVERILL. And swells!

TAILBUSH. O, me! What's that there rises in his belly!

EITHERSIDE. A strange thing! Hold it down.

TRAINS, PITFALL.

We cannot, madam.

PAUL. 'Tis too apparent this! (5.8.32–38)

After Wittipol, Manly, and his wife enter, he calls Wittipol's name and then continues as follows when his wife worries about him and comes near the bed where he is lying:

FITZDOTTREL. *O, O,*

She comes with a needle, and thrusts it in,

She pulls out that, and she puts in a pin,

And now, and now, I do not know how, nor where,

But she pricks me here, and she pricks me there: O, O — [sic.](5.8.48–52)

Wittipol and Manly do not believe in what is said and done by Fitzdottrel, while the Justice Sir Paul Eitherside is totally deluded. Therefore, Sir Paul declares as follows:

PAUL. Gentlemen, I'll discharge

My conscience. 'Tis a clear conspiracy!

A dark, and devilish practice! I detest it. (5.8.55–57)

How, we could ask here, can Sir Paul connect this fit and confused accusation against Frances Fitzdottrel with “a dark and devilish practice”? What does Fitzdottrel actually mean, according to Sir Paul's “interpretation”? First of all, Fitzdottrel says that his wife is a whore, and by pointing out Wittipol, he accuses those two as adulterous. Then he says that his wife torments

him by pricking him with a needle. Therefore we could say that Frances Fitzdottrel is described as an adulterous woman who not only robs her husband of all his property but also makes him fit, groan, foam and feel pain in his body—and thus we could conclude that Sir Paul “interpretes” and values what Fitzdottrel says as an accusation against his wife not only as an adulterous woman but also as a witch. Thus the deed of “adulterous” Frances Fitzdottrel can be a “dark and devilish practice”.

For early modern English people, the diabolic possession is a phenomenon mainly caused by witches. This is peculiar to the notion of witchcraft in England. James Sharpe points out as follows:

demonic possession was attributed to witchcraft rather than to the direct action of Satan, and was frequently followed by the prosecution of supposed witches who sent unclean spirits into the bodies of the possessed. It remained, of course, perfectly possible for somebody to be possessed by demons sent directly by Satan rather than by his human agents. But in what might be termed the classic English possession cases witches were normally accused and sometimes executed. (Sharpe 145)

It was said that a witch was able to use some devilish creatures (and sometimes the devil himself), which were said to be kept secretly and fed with some drops of the witch’s blood in reward for such evil deeds like anguishing the witch’s neighbors and destruction of their property. It was also said that their “ability” to send such creatures derived from the “fact” that they had made contract with the devil. The “victim” of the witch was seized by a fit, fell into trances, foamed, sometimes vomited out small things like pins and spoke in strange voice (sometimes they also spoke in foreign languages). During the fits, the possessed person often accused someone as the witch who caused that situation, and the accused person was interrogated and sometimes executed. Men as well as women were accused in such cases, and in one case in 1597, so many women were accused by an apprentice whose name was William Somers that there arose a witch panic (Sharpe 148). Puritan preachers as well as Catholic priests were eager to commit to such cases as exorcists. The ceremonies of exorcism were performed before huge audiences, and we could regard such ceremonies as a kind of religious propaganda, and theatricality of this ritual played pedagogic role in the performance.

At the same time, we could also point out that the accusation of a witch could be raised in every situation where there was a conflict. According to Malcolm Gaskill, the factors which led to the accusation of witches were, “first, competition for power and resources; secondly, deviance, criminality, and the resolution of disputes; and, finally, the mentality shaped by belief within a universe governed by supernatural forces” (Gaskil 54). Naturally, those who had power like magistracies and ministers as well as common people could become the targets of the accusation. In other words, every person in a community could be charged as a witch. At the same time, “[t]he accused were rarely persecuted by whole communities, nor they invariably outsiders whose social difference was marked by obvious characteristics of appearance and behaviour—unlike, say, Jews or gypsies” (Gaskil 66). To accuse and persecute a witch was to disclose an enemy among “us”. Therefore, we could regard witchcraft accusations as clues that

enable us to grasp every layer of confrontations within communities.

We should not miss the function of the household as the basic social unit in witchcraft accusations. "Because most of the tensions behind accusations were economic in origin, we need to look to the basic unit of production: the household. Accusations could be reinforced by family history, since it was widely held that witchcraft was passed on as a skill or through heredity" (Gaskil 57). Family members could be divided into some groups during a witchcraft trial, as they could belong to different factions. In ordinary witchcraft cases, the persecution of a witch was done in a regressive way, viz. after some people had run into bad luck. Those who suffered impeached the supposed witches and the persecuted were firstly brought to trial at the assizes court before the JPs. Testimony of the third person was integral to the trial procedure, and we should not forget the fact that sometimes children were called to testify against their own parents as "witches". We can read such cases, for example, in the trial records collected by C. L'Estrange Ewen in his book *Witchcraft and Demonianism: A Concise Account Derived from Sworn Depositions and Confessions Obtained in the Courts of England and Wales* (1933). They attested that their fathers, or mothers had kept some strange creatures like small animals in boxes or something like that, and the "creatures" were regarded as imps. Thus it is not strange that Fitzdottrel accuses his own wife as a witch.

Moreover, we could add that not only Frances Fitzdottrel, but also Wittipol is accused in this scene. When they enter the stage with Manly in the last Scene, Fitzdottrel calls Wittipol's name three times. On hearing him groan, Merecraft says, "O strange impudence! / That these should come to face their sin!" (5.8.40-41), and shortly after that he and Everill again call Sir Paul's attention to the "fact" that Fitzdottrel groaned Wittipol's name at his approach though he "never saw 'em" (5.8.44). Thus we might conclude that it is not Manly but Wittipol that is accused with Frances Fitzdottrel in this context, though Manly includes himself among the accused. Frances Fitzdottrel is accused as a witch, and Wittipol is also accused as her accomplice. Thus we could point out here that all the plots concerning "contracts" between human beings in this play—economic contracts between Merecraft and the others (mainly Fitzdottrel), the contract over a cloak between Fitzdottrel and Wittipol, the contract over Fitzdottrel's property between him and Manly, the marital contract between Fitzdottrel and his wife, along with the problem of adultery—are intertwined in one plot about the witchcraft accusation against Mistress Fitzdottrel. Thus, by analyzing this scene of diabolic "possession", we might be able to grasp what works as the continuo of this play as a whole.

In this "possession" scene the Justice Sir Paul Eitherside reveals his opinion that it is "a clear conspiracy" and a "dark, devilish practice", and thus we could say that the performance of fake fit itself works not only as an accusation but also as a testimony. There is no one who gives testimony as the third person here, every person interprets the meaning of this phenomenon, and thus great authority is attached to what Fitzdottrel says. Rather strangely, Sir Paul begins to examine this phenomenon as follows after he delivered his judgment:

PAUL.

Show

The taking of tobacco, with which the Devil
Is so delighted.

FITZDOTTREL. Hum!

PAUL. And calls for hum.

You takers of strong waters and tobacco,

Mark this.

FITZDOTTREL. *Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow, &c [sic].*

PAUL. That's starch! The Devil's idol of that colour.

He ratifies it with clapping of his hands.

The proofs are pregnant. (5.8.70-77)

It is obvious that it is not Sir Paul but Fitzdottrel that has the initiative in this examination, though the former tries to maintain objectivity in this examination. He tries to collect evidence of witchcraft from what Fitzdottrel says as well as from his behavior, but we could easily point out that he can distinguish what can work as "evidence" from what cannot in this situation, because he knows beforehand how to read such phenomenon, and moreover, Fitzdottrel, Merecraft, and Everill share the same frame of reference about witchcraft with him. We could say that the audience of this play itself could easily see what would happen next, because Jonson uses as the source of this scene an actual "possession" of a thirteen-year old boy that occurred in 1616 in Leicester and was brought to light by the King as a fakery (Marcus 91) along with the cases in relation to a famous Puritan exorcist-preacher John Darrel. To add to this, there were so many pamphlets and printed materials on such cases. Thus the representations of the reality in the real world shape the dramatic "reality" in this play world. What seems to be a clue to interpret this phenomenon for Sir Paul is a fake clue prepared by the other three. He tries to interpret, or read this phenomenon, but instead, it is he that is easily read by the other three. He is totally cheated into believing himself to be objective:

MANLY. Are you frantic, sir,

Or what grave dotage moves you to take part

With so much villainy? We are not afraid

Either of law or trial; let us be

Examined what our ends were, what the means,

To work by; and possibility of those means.

Do not conclude against us ere you hear us.

PAUL. I will not hear you, yet I will conclude

Out of the circumstances.

MANLY. Will you so, sir?

PAUL. Yes, they are palpable.

MANLY. Not as your folly.

PAUL. I will discharge my conscience, and do all

To the meridian of justice. (5.8.91-102)

Thus the Judge himself disallows the defense of the accused and declares that he does all "to the meridian of justice". Here we could hear the resonance of what King James wrote in his

Demonology in an inverted way:

PHILOMATHES. But what is their [the witches] power against the magistrate?

EPISTEMON. Less or greater according as he deals with them. For if he be slothful towards them, God is very able to make them instruments to waken and punish his sloth. But if he be the contrary, he, according to the just law of God and allowable law of all nations, will be diligent in examining and punishing of them. God will not permit their master to trouble or hinder so good a work.

PHILOMATHES. But fra they be once in hands and firmance, have they any further power in their craft?

EPISTEMON. That is according to the form of their detention. If they be but apprehended and detained by any private person upon other private respects, their power no doubt either in escaping or in doing hurt is no less nor ever it was before. But if, on the other part, their apprehending and detention be by the lawful magistrate upon the just respects of their guiltiness in that craft, their power is then no greater than before ever they meddled with their master. For where God begins justly to strike by his lawful lieutenants it is not in the devil's power to defraud or bereave him of the office or effect of his powerful and revenging sceptre.

(Normand and Roberts 398-9)

Therefore we could say that the accusation of witches is in every way an integral part, or the supplement, of the world of this play. Sir Paul needs Mistres Fitzdottrel to be adjudicated a witch in order to become the most renowned judge, Fitzdottrel needs his wife to be a witch in order to recover his property from her, and Merecraft and Everill want Sir Paul to pronounce her a witch to beguile Fitzdottrel of his property. For them, she has to be "proved" as a witch.

However, suddenly the keeper of Newgate enters into the stage and the situation changes. He brings them a piece of news that a person who has the self same body of a cutpurse hanged in that morning appears again to be executed. He also tells that the devil appeared then, the Newgate prison is rent down, and after that, only the dead body of that person is left. They can identify that "person" as Devil, the new servant who steals the clothes of Ambler and is sent to Newgate, and suddenly Fitzdottrel begins to confess that his "possession" is a fake one and Merecraft and Everill help him in doing so. However, even after this confession, he still keeps on accusing his wife:

MANLY. Sir, are not you ashamed

Now of your solemn, serious vanity?

PAUL. I will make honourable amends to truth.

FITZDOTTREL. And so will I. But these are cozeners, still;

And ha' my land, as plotters with my wife:

Who, though she be not a witch, is worse — a whore. (5.8.145-150)

In this way, we could assume that the fear of cuckoldry still seizes Fitzdottrel and his fear of losing fair wife is connected with his fear of losing his land—in a sense, if he loses his wife as well as his land, he loses every element of his household. His wife would become the head of their household instead of him, and the world and order turn upside-down for him. For him, this subversion could be caused by the adultery of his wife and Wittipol, and he refers her as a whore, worse than a witch.

As we have seen above, the “possession” in the last Scene of this play illustrates the theatrical mechanism of the witchcraft accusation aimed at Frances Fitzdottrel, which in turn backfires. Fitzdottrel, instead of his wife, is the person to be impeached and convicted like John Darrel, who was revealed to be a fraud instead of a real exorcist. However, Manly, who plays the role of the judge instead of Sir Paul in this scene, speaks as follows:

His land is his: and never, by my friend,
Or by myself, meant to another use
But for her succours, who hath equal right.
If any other had worse counsels in't—
I know I speak to those can apprehend me—
Let 'em repent 'em, and be not detected.
It is not manly to take joy, or pride
In human errors. We do all ill things:
They do 'em worst that love 'em, and dwell there,
Till the plague comes. The few that have the seeds
Of goodness left will sooner make their way
To a true life by shame, than punishment.

(5.8.163–174)

Should we regard this as the sentence to a criminal? Far from it, this passage is full of forgiveness and sympathy for erroneous people. Thus we might say that the accusation aimed at Frances Fitzdottrel backfires, but because of this backfire, Fitzdottrel can be borne again as the husband of Frances Fitzdottrel, who is always sincere to him. However, here we could ask a question: why does he stop feigning “possession” when he hears the news about Pug the devil from the officers of Newgate? This is an important question, if we remember the fact that this news and the confession of fraud directly cause that “backfire”. This “possession” is often treated as the failed role back of the fakers, but we should regard this scene as an essential preliminary to that conclusion as well. This scene is not an odd incident, and the break down of the accusation by the news from Newgate should be treated as an important component of this play. Or rather we might ask the question in this way: what is the effect of this rather strange and sudden confession in the structure of the play as a whole? In order to answer this question, we should firstly discuss two kinds of “possession” in this play—explicit one and implicit one—as well as the problem of contract in the next two sections as the foundation of the discussion about the problem of Fitzdottrel’s confession.

Two Kinds of "Possession" without Exorcist

In the opening scene of this play, Satan gives Pug the devil a body of an executed cutpurse saying as follows:

But Pug, since you do burn with such desire
To do the commonwealth of Hell some service
I am content, assuming of a body
You go to earth, and visit men a day.
But you must take a body ready-made, Pug,
I can create you none nor shall you form
Yourself an airy one, but become subject
To all impression of the flesh you take
So far as human frailty. So this morning
There is a handsome cutpurse hanged at Tyburn,
Whose spirit departed, you may enter his body: (1.1.131-141)

Satan cannot create a human body for Pug, because only God is able to create everything. Therefore, he chooses one dead body and, as it were, allows Pug to wear it. However, as the body is not clothes, of course, and so Pug "become subject / [t]o all impression of the flesh" which he puts on. Pug is able to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste, and feels various desires now that he has human body as well as evil spirit. We could call it a demonic possession, or more precisely, the real demonic possession: the spirit of a devil in a human body. Thus the dead body without Pug's spirit is left after he is sent back to Hell, and the reappearance of the dead body of the cutpurse in Newgate obviously witnesses the presence of the devil in contemporary London.

What is the difference, then, between this real possession and the fake "possession" of Fitzdottrel? Firstly, Fitzdottrel's performance, which is regarded as the legal evidence by Sir Paul, directly leads to the accusation of his wife, and the bedside of Fitzdottrel is actually an instant court of justice, while the real demonic possession apparently has no such direct legal connotation. However, what Sir Paul regards as the "evidence of witchcraft" in the fake "possession" case actually cannot serve as such. Fitzdottrel falls into a fit of convulsions and foams, in fact using soap, and groans according to circumstances in foreign languages in order to seem to be a victim. He attracts the eyes of the others, but more precisely, the focus of their attention is not his body itself but the behavior of his body. The spectators of this "possession" speak about such phenomena like the change of his voice, the foam he belches, and the movement of his belly. Thus we might say that his behavior functions as a signifier of witchcraft without the signification, and what really matters in this case is the discourse woven by his strange utterances and the interpretation by the audiences. This theatricality with Fitzdottrel's body and behavior as its center, along with the situation in which Mistress Fitzdottrel is put in—she is made to wear gorgeous attire and locked into a small room, thus made to be the beautiful living object which only Fitzdottrel enjoys—as well as his frantic zeal in wearing fancy cloaks and sitting on stage in the theater, reveal that Fitzdottrel is obsessed by the desire to control other

peoples' eyes.

On the other hand, the real demonic possession, caused only by the words and the power of Satan, is too subtle to be noticed by the others, and therefore it neither has the performance—like nature, or theatricality, nor serves as an evidence of witchcraft in this play world. In other words, not the human body itself possessed by the devil but the behavior of the “possessed” person is the object to be examined as the evidence of witchcraft in this play world. The human body by itself does not attract the other persons' attention here with the exception of the keepers of Newgate. However, the beating as well as the danger of execution Pug the devil gets attracts the audiences' eyes and makes them realize that he is no longer a spiritual existence and has human body, and thus bluntly emphasizes the presence of one frail male body on stage.

Secondly, while Fitzdottrel copies what other fakers do in the preceding fake “possession” cases, Pug the devil has no such precedents. Thus, it is much easier for Fitzdottrel to deceive others, as he has much information about diabolic matters as a lover of the devils, and he knows exactly what his audience want to see in such a situation.

What is the similarity, on the contrary, between these two possessions? Firstly, both possessions are motivated by certain kinds of socio-economical profits. As to Fitzdottrel, the “possession” is an effort to regain his “lost” property. And for Pug the devil, the reason for coming to London in human guise is to do service the commonwealth of Hell, and Satan promises as follows:

But as you make your soon at night's relation,
And we shall find it merits from the state,
You shall have both trust from us and employment. (1.1.148-150)

Pug the devil is a candidate for the employee of Hell, and as he wants to be promoted, he is eager to go to London and do great evil. These points might have some relationship with the fact that the possession and exorcism was used as a religious propaganda not only by the zealous Puritans but also by the Catholics, and easily connected with the politics within the Anglican Church in post-Reformation England. Sometimes the fake “possession” was directed and produced by the clergyman who took part in it as the exorcist for the purpose of converting more people to his side. According to Darren Oldridge, Protestant clergies in England used public exorcisms as a weapon to attack popery (Oldridge 131).

The most interesting similarity between these two possessions in this play is that no exorcist appears in both cases. In early modern England, both Catholic and Protestant priests played the role of exorcists. The former used such things like holy water and the cross in fighting with the devil, while the latter relied mainly on praying and fasting, and lengthy conversation between the devil and the priest often occurred during such ceremony (Sharpe 146). In another cases, the possessed person accused someone as a witch, or witches, and, by scratching that accused, the possessed person was “healed”. In these cases, there was no necessity for the exorcist ritual. In neither case in this play, the exorcists appear on stage. Moreover, neither Pug the devil nor Fitzdottrel is “healed” in these cases. As to the case of Pug the devil, it is apparent that no one plays the part of exorcist for him, and Satan himself just discharges Pug from his contract and

brings him back to Hell. The keepers of Newgate realize his real identity, and that their testimony that Pug is a devil is not an interpretation of what happens in Newgate but a simple statement of the fact and its consequence is made apparent in the following passage:

SHACKLES. O me!

1 KEEPER. What's this?

2 KEEPER. A piece of Justice Hall

Is broken down.

3 KEEPER. Foh! What a steam of brimstone

Is here!

4 KEEPER. The prisoner's dead, came in but now!

SHACKLES. Ha? Where?

4 KEEPER. Look here.

1 KEEPER. 'Slid, I should know his countenance!

It is Gill Cutpusre, was hanged out this morning!

SHACKLES. 'Tis he!

2 KEEPER. The Devil, sure, has a hand in this! (5.7.1-6)

Here the keepers pay attention to the body itself, especially its countenance, and that enables them to realize the presence of the devil. What they are saying should be accepted at face value as simple facts, and the dead body of Gill Cutpurse appearing again in Newgate is the real evidence of the diabolic possession. On the other hand, the "evidences" plentifully provided by Fitzdottrel in his "possession" are hardly useful as the real ones, because their real function in the discourse is to lure Sir Paul away from making his own judgment and control his interpretation. That seemingly copious discourse woven by Fitzdottrel and the audience allows in reality only one kind of interpretation to Sir Paul and refuses the possibility of plural interpretation. It is obvious that this discourse is anything but the statement of the "fact" and it has the tendency to refuse plural interpretation in common with such statement of facts, though their functions are totally opposite.

Thus we have analyzed the similarities as well as the differences between the fake "possession" by Fitzdottrel and the real possession of a dead human body by Pug the devil in this section. The former is a fraud but easily attracts the attention of the others, and is performed in accordance with the precedents as well as the taste of the audience, while the latter is too subtle to be noticed and has no precedent in this play world. To take the initiative in the fabrication of the discourse of accusing someone as a witch (in this case that is Frances Fitzdottrel) is essential for the former, while the latter is caused only by the words and power of Satan. However, as they share one tendency to refuse deeper, or plural reading, we might regard them as the both sides of one coin. Fitzdottrel is the master of Pug the devil in this play world, and thus we could assume that those two possessions are intertwined tightly in this play. In the next section, we would discuss another problem about the relationship, especially the contract between them.

The Problem of Diabolic Contract

As we have seen above, Pug the devil is shown as a contrast to Fitzdottrel. At the same time, these two personages are tightly connected each other as a master and his servant. To begin with, we would like to analyze the following passage concerning their first encounter:

[PUG.] Sir, your good pardon that I thus presume

Upon your privacy. I am born a gentleman,
A younger brother; but in some disgrace
Now with my friends; and want some little means
To keep me upright, while things be reconciled.
Please you, to let my service be of use to you, sir.

FITZDOTTREL. Service? 'Fore hell, my heart was at my mouth,
Till I had viewed his shoes well, for those roses
Were big enough to hide a cloven foot.

He looks and surveys his feet, over and over.

No, friend, my number's full. I have one servant,
Who is my all, indeed; and from the broom
Unto the brush: for just so far, I trust him.
He is my wardrobe man, my cater, cook,
Butler, and steward; looks unto my horse;
And helps to watch my wife. He' has all the places
That I can think on, from the garret downward
E'en to the manger, and the curry-comb.

PUG. Sir, I shall put your worship to no charge
More than my meat, and that but very little;
I'll serve you for your love.

(1.3.1-20)

As Pug the devil is told by Satan beforehand to serve Fitzdottrel only, he proposes to serve him without wage. However, Fitzdottrel declines to hire him twice, saying that he has hired another man already as his servant. Moreover, he does not believe what Pug the devil says when he introduces himself as a devil, because he has no cloven foot (1.3.28-29). Thus he mistakes the word "devil" as Pug's surname, and says as follows:

I'll entertain him for the name sake. Ha?
And turn away my tother man? And save
Four pound a year by that! There's luck, and thrift too!
The very Devil may come hereafter as well.
Friend, I receive you: but withal I acquaint you
Aforehand, if you' offend me I must beat you.
It is a kind of exercise I use,
And cannot be without. (1.3.36-43)

Here the contract between Fitzdottrel and Pug the devil is made, but this contract is rather strange. It is strange even as a contract about master-servant relationship: the servant does not receive the wage and sometimes the master will beat him as “a kind of exercise”. Thus the servant can receive nothing but his food and violent beating from his master, and it is already made obvious even here that Pug the devil cannot rob his master of his soul as the reward for his service, though this is a direct contract between Fitzdottrel and a devil. What is the reason of this comical breakdown of Pug’s plot?

The difference between their attitudes towards the language is the main reason of this. Barbara Irene Kerps points out that “[w]ords as a means of communication are under peculiar stress” in this play, and “key words such as ‘credit’, ‘use’, ‘trust’, ‘possession’, ‘title’, ‘deed’ all mean different things as they move around in the play’s different contexts” (Kerps 91). In other words, many important words in this play are treated not as the combination of signifier and signification, but rather the tools of Wittgensteinian word play. The word “devil” cannot be the exception, and finally Mistress Tailbush proposes to call him “De-vile” instead of “Devil”, because it is “a prettier name” (4.4.189), and we could point out that the sound of a word is more important for her and her companions than its meaning.

The situation is same for the other personages of this play, and such word play is abundant in this play. For example, Merecraft is a faker who tricks others out of money only by showing them some seemingly profitable “projects”, and the same thing can be said about Everill and Trains, who work as his assistants. Many other personages, like Fitzdottrel, Lady Tailbush, Guilthead and his son Pultarchus, are deceived by his tactfully handled discourse. Moreover, another kind of play on words could be found in this play. Wittipol is a gallant who tactfully speaks, and the “conversation” between himself and Mistress Fitzdottrel in Act 1 Scene 6 — Mistress Fitzdottrel stood mute as her husband tells her to do so beforehand during the fifteen-minutes “conversation” with Wittipol, who barter the right to speak to her and a gorgeous cloak with Fitzdottrel, and thus he starts to speak for her and tells Mistress Fitzdottrel what he wants her to do—is a good example of his mastery. Mistress Fitzdottrel also does this word play, but we should not forget that not only the language but also the silence is her tool in this word play. She shows her ability to use language in that way when she bids Pug the devil to tell Wittipol to “put off his hopes” (2.2.48). She gives instructions to Wittipol about the place of their secret meeting by declining his hope seemingly. At the same time, her silence in that conversation scene functions as a very effective tool, because by letting both Fitzdottrel and Wittipol freely “read” her silence, she succeeds in keeping her own emotion secret and utters it in nobody’s hearing in Act 2 Scene 2. Thus, while she takes part in the word play actively, she uses her silence as a screen to protect herself from it within this play world.

On the contrary, Pug’s attitude towards language is rather different from that of the others’. For example, he cannot grasp the hidden meaning of what Mistress Fitzdottrel says in Act 2 Scene 2, and tells it to Wittipol, though Fitzdottrel orders him to keep an eye on her beforehand. When he is put through a catechism by Lady Tailbush, Mistress Eitherside, Wittipol in the guise of the Spanish Lady and Fitzdottrel in Act 4 Scene 4, Pug cannot make quick and witty answer, and is looked down upon as a “dull fellow / [o]f no capacity” by the women (4.4.224–5).

Moreover, he cannot understand the presence of hidden emotions within Mistress Fitzdottrel and judges her from her appearance—her attire is too gorgeous for a chaste wife, though in reality it is Fitzdottrel that makes her wear such clothes—and tries to seduce her into adultery with him in Act 2 Scene 2. He pays no attention to the individual context in which her attire works as an individual sign, but behaves in accordance with the common notion about women's clothes. However, contrary to the common notion, to wear gorgeous attire is a way to show her chastity to her husband. In this sense Pug is an heir of traditional devils in English popular culture, who try to seduce people into contracting with them and doing evil deeds but are often deceived by them instead. According to Darren Oldridge, in such cases, the power of the devil is blocked by some simple tricks as well as by "the belief that he could only harm those who led outwardly wicked lives" (Oldridge 64). We should also pay attention to what John D. Cox says:

Pug's ineptitude in inciting human beings to vice is a keen satire on the depth of urban depravity, but it is not original in Jonson, as he implicitly acknowledges in alluding to Dekker's *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is in It*. . . . Dekker borrowed this device, in turn, from a lost comedy of 1601, by Day and Haughton, called *Friar Rush and the Proud Woman of Antwerp*, which is the first English example of the Friar Rush motif, that is, of a devil in human guise whose machinations barely compete with those of human beings. In short, Jonson's explicit satire of popular tradition coexists with his debt to it in *Devil Is an Ass* [sic.], and nothing in the play challenges the real existence of devils or their association with human evil. (Cox 157-8)

The devils belong to the opposite side of God, who is the source of logos, and thus God's logos, unchangeable sacred words, indirectly defines the limitation of the activities of the devils. In this sense, it could be natural for the devils not to doubt the language and accept the words spoken by others at face value. As the situation surrounding Pug the devil and Fitzdottrel is woven by the language and signs like the clothes, both of which are used by human beings as signifier without concrete signification, thus it is Pug the devil who sucks on the hind tit.

When he is finally put into prison and sentenced to death in Act 5 Scene 6, Pug the devil cannot believe anything and his loyalty to Satan begins to crumble. While he is criticizing Satan, Satan himself appears on stage and scolds him as follows:

What one proffer hast thou made,
Wicked enough, this day, that might be called
Worthy thine own, much less the name that sent thee?
First, thou didst help theyself into a beating
Promptly, and with't endangered'st too thy tongue;
A devil, and could not keep a body entire
One day! That, for our credit. And to vindicate it,
Hinder'dst, for aught thou know'st, a deed of darkness:
Which was an act of that egregious folly,
As no one's to'ard the Devil could ha' thought on.

This for your acting! But for suffering! Why,
Thou hast been cheated on with a false beard,
And a turned cloak. Faith, would your predecessor,
The cutpurse, think you, ha'been so? Out upon thee!
The hurt thou' hast done, to let men know their strength,
And that they're able to outdo a devil
Put in a body, will for ever be
A scar upon our name!

(5.7.43-60)

It is already obvious for the audience of this play that it is the contract with Fitzdottrel as a servant that causes all these problems. However, we might wonder here, does that contract have any meaning for Satan, as it is not a diabolic contract but a master-servant contract? It seems so, because Satan speaks about the employment in Hell that Pug aspires to get when he appears in the Newgate prison (5.7.63-67). As it is a contract made between a devil and a man, so it should be treated as such. What is the most important thing for a devil to do, when he makes a contract with a man? Not to serve him, but to rob him of his soul is the devil's task. However, Pug easily forgets this principle and can gain nothing for Hell. Satan makes a contract with Pug to employ him in Hell if he is able to rob Fitzdottrel of his soul in one day, thus he sticks to the principle of that contract and refuses to give him employment. At the same time, we might have the clue here for the question mentioned before: what makes Fitzdottrel confess his fakery all of a sudden? Therefore we would deal with that problem in the next section.

The Problem of Male Witch:the Accusation Backfires

In the previous sections, we have dealt with the problem of two kinds of possession shown in this play along with that of the contract made between Fitzdottrel and Pug the devil. Pug possesses the dead body of a cutpurse, appears before Fitzdottrel in answer to his resounding invocation, and makes contract with him as a servant. Then, now we could ask a question: who gives the chance for the devil to possess the dead body of a cutpurse? —The answer: Fitzdottrel. Then, is he a magician or a sorcerer? It might seem so, however, there are some points that let us doubt that simple conclusion.

First of all, the form of their contract is rather strange: it is a contract made orally. In usual cases, the devils and magicians conclude their pact by signing on a parchment with the magicians' blood. Moreover, what does Fitzdottrel do, when Pug appears before him? He is just reciting his desire aloud, and the use of neither instruments nor spell is mentioned in the script. He is just speaking.

Secondly, magicians usually invoke the devils to gain supernatural magic powers for a span or to find some hidden treasure, etc. In other words, they invoke them to go beyond the bounds of natural human ability, thus his desire to become friends with the devil is also strange. To add to this, he even says that he would allow him to share his wife. Why does he desire to construct a male bonding with the devil?

Thirdly, why does Pug appear before him in human guise? It is not unusual for a devil or

evil spirit to appear in the shape of some animals, or even with the airy body. We could find a good example in the Introduction of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, an anonymous play performed in 1608 and referred to in the Prologue of *The Devil Is An Ass*. In that scene, a spirit named Coerb enters into the study of a magician whose name is Fabell, the protagonist of this play, and demands the soul of him, as the term of their contract comes near to end. Fabell offers a spelled chair to him and thus successfully makes him disable from standing up from it. The following passage is the scene after this:

COERB. Come, Fabell, hast thou done?

FABELL.

Yes, yes, come hither.

COERB. Fabell, I cannot.

FABELL. Cannnot?

What ails your hollowness?

COERB.

Good Fabell, help me. (Introduction. 59-62)

In this passage, Coerb the spirit is easily bound to the magic chair, though he has an airy, "hollow" body. There are some plays in which the devils appear in human guise, like Dekker's *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil Is In It* (1612), another play referred to in the Prologue of *The Devil Is An Ass*, or Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1588-89). In these plays the devils appear in the guise of friars, so we could assume that there are some satirical nuance in the choice of that guise. Then, why does Pug appear on stage as a young and handsome man? If we remember that Fitzdottrel himself cannot believe the diabolical identity of Pug, we should assume that he anticipates meeting the devil in ordinary guise with cloven feet, and if so, he would share his wife with him. What might happen, then, if Pug succeeded in making him believe what he says? These deviant aspects of Pug's introduction into this play world could make us wonder about the intention of the playwright. Does he betoken the break down of Pug the devil's scheme of becoming an employee of Hell by robbing Fitzdottrel of his soul from the beginning?

We could easily point out that it is natural for a playwright to give some twists to so ordinary a motif like that of the devil, however, this scene varies so much that it has the effect to make the audience wonder whether Fitzdottrel is a magician or not. In other words, this scene is constructed to arouse the doubt within the audience about Fitzdottrel's ability as a magician. Fitzdottrel meets the devil suddenly, makes contract with him unknowingly, promises to give him some place to live and some food as the reward for his service—this plot strongly reminds us of some other people who contract with the devil: the witches. As we have already argued, the witches were also said to make contract with the devil, and it is not the magicians but the witches that were accused of causing possession. Thus, we could regard Fitzdottrel as a male witch, rather than a magician.

As Lara Apps and Andrew Gow argue, though there were many male witches brought to trial, there is an implicit notion that equates witches with women. In early modern England, of course, there were several male witches though small in number, and Apps and Gow choose one such example, about John Samond of Essex, tried in 1560 and point out as follows:

His indictment demonstrate that . . . men could be accused of witchcraft independently of their female relatives and were not always accused of practicing magic that was different from that of women. Indeed, the striking thing about John Samond, besides his frequent appearances before the assizes, is that there is no clear distinction between him and the female witches indicted in Essex. (Apps and Gow 49)

Moreover, by propounding the problem of the male witches, we could not only criticize the implicit equation of female with witches, a notion caused by the binary opposition between male and female, following Apps and Gow, but also analyze the process that the former notion strengthens and empowers the latter opposition.

At the same time, we should not miss the fact that the word “witch” is used in this play as the indication of female witches only. This word is used in the opening scene in *Hell* as well as in the ending scene of this play, and in every case, it indicates a woman. Here we could assume that the binary opposition between male and female, along with the equation of female with the witches, is presupposed by Jonson, and as the words like “conjurer” are used to indicate male magician in this play, that assumption becomes all the more stronger. However, we could ask again here, the two questions above mentioned: why does Jonson construct this play to arouse the question about the definition of Fitzdottrel, and why does he give Pug that human guise which is rather unusual from contemporary standard? In other words, why does Jonson construct this play in such a way that it allows Fitzdottrel to deviate from the binary opposition between male and female to some extent as well as Pug from the standard appearance that straightly indicates him as a devil?

Here we should not forget that direct intervention of some supernatural power into the human community, like the appearance of Satan in *Newgate*, is rather rare in the play world of Jonsonian comedy. We could find such examples in his Roman plays. In *Catiline*, the ghost of Sylla appears in the opening scene, and in *Sejanus*, the head of Sejanus’ statue suddenly breaks as an omen. Why, then, does he choose to avoid the standpoint that is without the society in writing comedy? Like the influence of macro cosmos upon micro cosmos, the supernatural power, good or bad, transcends the limit of human society and controls it. Thus, we could assume that, by removing the influence of such power and concentrating on the affairs within the micro cosmos, Jonson emphasizes the power of the authority in human society and its ability to judge and control human affairs, and in this play, this dynamism is made much more impressive, as the final judgement shown by a human being, Manly, is full of forgiveness. By contrast, the vision of God that can be glimpsed through one thin cleft in the script, i. e. that forgiveness, or mercy, is all the more glorious.

We could find another trace of this tendency in this play, for this play indicates the dissolution of every possession by the possessed person’s confession to other people (as we have argued, not to the exorcist) about the mechanism of the possession. Before brought to *Newgate*, Pug the devil confesses his real identity and purpose as follows:

I am the very Devil, and had leave
To take this body I am in to serve you:

Which was a cutpurse's, and hanged this morning.
 And it is likewise true I stole this suit
 To clothe me with. But, sir, let me not go
 To prison for it. I have hitherto
 Lost time, done nothing; shown, indeed, no part
 O' my devil's nature. Now I will so help
 Your malice 'gainst these parties: so advance
 The business that you have in hand of witchcraft,
 And your possession, as myself were in you;
 Teach you such tricks, to make your belly swell,
 And your eyes turn, to foam, to stare, to gnash
 Your teeth together, and to beat yourself,
 Laugh, loud, and feign six voices —

(5.5.14–28)

Here he adjures Fitzdottrel to help him, and offers help in the “possession” to him in return. He reveals what he has in mind, and asks forgiveness for his crime—this is totally similar to what Fitzdottrel does when he hears the news from Newgate about the presence of the devil, with the exception of one important point. His confession is as follows:

Nay then, 'tis time to leave off counterfeiting.
 Sir, I am not bewitched, nor have a devil:
 No more than you. I do defy him, I,
 And did abuse you. These two gentlemen
 Put me upon it. (I have faith against him).
 They taught me all my tricks. I will tell truth
 And shame the fiend. See here, are my bellows,
 And my false belly, and my mouse, and all
 That should ha' come forth!

(5.8.137–145)

Fitzdottrel here confesses two things: firstly, he confesses that he does the fakery with the aid of Merecraft and Everill and explains the mechanism of that fakery, and secondly, that he has true faith in God and defies the devil, though he unknowingly made contract with one. Now we could conclude that he finally realizes that he is delivered safely from the snares of the devil and thus confesses his crime. It is obvious that God's Providence delivers him from the diabolic power, and the accusation against his wife totally backfires here, but he confesses not before God but before human being—namely, Manly and is forgiven by him.

Thus we could point out that, by figuring Pug as a devil with not airy but human body and Fitzdottrel as a man who deviates from the definition of a magician or a witch at the same time, Jonson contrasts these two confessions done by these two possessed person, and makes the repercussion of the latter's confession all the more great. Moreover, by making these two possessed person confess not before the priests but before the other, ordinary person, Jonson

upholds the secular power not only judges but also forgives the people who “do all ill things” (5.8.170), and all the plots about contract, including that of the diabolic contract between Fitzdottrel and Pug, are dissolved by this confession and forgiveness shown in the very end of this play.

Conclusion: To Glimpse of the Commonwealth on Earth

As we have already seen, Fitzdottrel is a man who deviates from simple definition of a magician or a witch, and thus his existence in this play could undermine to some extent the binary opposition between male and female, along with the gender-biased notion of the witch. At the same time, we should not forget that he said he wanted to construct a male bonding with the devil by sharing his wife with him, and moreover, he does not cease to call his wife a “whore” even after his confession of crime, and is reproved by Manly. These facts obviously show us that he is so obsessed with the fear of cuckoldry, and it seems that the cause of this obsession is his inability to imagine any other kind of male-female relationship than the two simple ones: marriage and adultery. Thus, on realizing that he was coaxed by Wittipol, disguised as the Spanish Lady, into assigning his whole property to Manly, he laments and is jeered by Wittipol as follows:

FITZDOTTREL. Am I the thing I feared?

WITTIPOL.

A cuckold? No, sir,

But you were late in possibility.

I'll tell you so much.

MANLY. But your wife's too virtuous!

WITTIPOL. We'll see her, sir, at home, and leave you here

To be made Duke o' Shoreditch with a project.

FITZDOTTREL. Thieves, ravishers! (4.7.61-66)

Moreover, after Wittipol goes out of the stage, Fitzdottrel cries out for agony:

O!

What will the ghost of my wise grandfather,

My learned father, with my worshipful mother

Think of me now, that left me in this world

In state to be their heir? That am become

A cuckold, and an ass, and my wife's ward;

Likely to lose my land, ha' my throat cut,

All, by my practice!

(4.7.73-80)

Here we could assume that for Fitzdottrel, the fear of cuckoldry is tightly connected with the fear of losing the patriarchal command handed down to him from ancestors. In other words, the break down of marriage bond directly means the break down of his household for him. At the

same time, the situation is same for Mistress Fitzdottrel. She is forced to be chaste and obey her husband, while she knows he is totally controlled by Merecraft to waste all his property. Thus she is in a double bind. Helen Ostovich explains this situation as follows:

the chief question regarding wives seems to be whether women have the right to rearrange their lives, as Jonson suggests in *The Devil is an Ass* [sic.], or must submit to male authority. In the Fitzdottrel marriage, like many others of the period, property and sexuality coalesces as the chief factor contributing to the wife's discomfort. (Ostovich 159)

However, we should ask here, what does the word "chastity" mean for him? When Mistress Fitzdottrel tries to refuse the "conversation" with Wittipol, Fitzdottrel commands her to obey him:

MISTRESS FITZDOTTREL. Why, what do you mean, sir? Ha' you your reason?

FITZDOTTREL. Wife,

I do not know that I have lent it forth
To any one; at least, without a pawn, wife:
Or that I've eat or drunk the thing of late
That should corrupt it. Wherefore, gentle wife,
Obey, it is thy virtue: hold no acts
Of disputation.

MISTRESS FITZDOTTREL. Are you not enough
The talk of feasts and meetings, but you'll still
Make argument for fresh?

FITZDOTTREL. Why, careful wedlock,
If I have a longing to have one tale more
Go of me what is that to thee, dear heart?
Why shouldst thou envy my delight? Or cross it?
By being solicitous when it not concerns thee?

MISTRESS FITZDOTTREL. Yes, I have share in this. The scorn will fall
As bitterly on me, where both are laughed at. (1.6.2-16)

It is apparent that he cannot understand what she says at all. He demands her to be obedient, and that means he has no idea of her individuality. She is a woman, and his wife. She has her own identity and agency, and moreover, she realizes that the reputation is a gender-biased thing: "[t]he scorn will fall / [a]s bitterly on me, where both are laughed at" (1.6.16). All these things are out of sight for Fitzdottrel, and he regards his feeling as the only criterion of judgment. Therefore, there is no coherence in what he does and what he says. He says that he fears cuckoldry, but in this case he behaves as a pimp, and this is out of the hope to get a fine cloak for "nothing"—thus equates such feelings like shame, dismay and sorrow, which she might have felt when she is told to converse with Wittipol all of a sudden by her husband, with "nothing".

Moreover, we should not forget that he wants to construct a male bonding with the devil by sharing his wife with him. Thus we could say that he uses his patriarchal command arbitrarily, and regards his wife as the elongation of his ego.

At the same time, Jonson makes Mistress Fitzdottrel express explicitly what she really needs for her survival in this situation, using her own words:

I am a woman
That cannot speak more wretchedness of myself
Than you can read; matched to a mass of folly,
That every day makes haste to his own ruin;
The wealthy portion that I brought him, spent;
And, through my friends' neglect, no jointure made me.
My fortunes standing in this precipice,
'Tis counsel that I want, and honest aids:
And in this name I need you for a friend!
Never in any other; for his ill
Must not make me, sir, worse.

(4.6.18-28)

She chooses neither obedience to her husband nor adulterous relationship with Wittipol, but what she really needs is the counsel and aids based on friendship, which she has been unable to promote as she was confined within reach of Fitzdottrel's eyes. He puts her in a small chamber like a cage, and always has an eye on her. Moreover, their household does not seem to function as one knot of the web of society, because Fitzdottrel's attitude towards others is rather too extreme: he does not care for what other people think about him and her, and always tries aggressively to impress himself and dominate others by wearing gorgeous cloaks. He seems to have no male friends, because he is very jealous of his beautiful wife. However, she manages to go beyond his reach, embraces the rare chance given by him arbitrarily and makes the best of it to construct relationship between people she chooses using her own agency. In doing so, she reveals her sincerity before Wittipol whom she wants to make friends with, and Wittipol accepts her request with the aid of Manly. Wittipol answers to her as follows:

Virtue shall never ask my succours twice;
Most friend, most man, your counsels are commands:
Lady, I can love goodness in you more
Than I did beauty; and do here entitle
Your virtue to the power, upon a life
You shall engage in any fruitful service,
Even to forfeit.

(4.6.35-41)

Here what has been kept beneath the appearance is brought to the light, and they promise to establish a real friendship each other, and Manly, who had doubt about the intention of Wittipol in disguise of the Spanish Lady, now rejoices and supports them, and it is these three who in fact

forgive Fitzdottrel in the finale. In other words, here they make a new kind of contract, which leads them to the establishment of a new relationship between men and women based on sincerity and care for each other. This contract differs from any other contracts in this play world, from the contract between Fitzdottrel and Merecraft to the contract with Satan and Pug the devil. The ordinary contracts between human beings in this play world are based on word play, while the contracts made by Pug the devil with Satan or Fitzdottrel are based on the interpretation of the words at face value, and we could regard these two kinds of contract as both sides of one coin, in that they stick only to language.

In the finale, Manly speaks for the other two, and reveals their resolution to succor Mistress Fitzdottrel. In this way, the gate of the household of Fitzdottrel, where he behaved as a despot and which was used as the cage for his wife, is opened towards the friends, and instead, will begin to function as one knot of the network of the society. Therefore we could say that Fitzdottrel is finally recovered from the false relationship that he regarded as the society into a new community based not on the word play but on sincerity, and if some kind of relationship between Fitzdottrel and the other two men, Wittipol and Manly, is established, surely it will be not the male bonding but friendship between individuals. We cannot catch the whole sight of that community, as it is under construction at the end of this play, however, we could assume that it will also be based on that kind of friendship. The household as one social system is not removed from this play world, and as there is no trace of Fitzdottrel's repentance about his attitude towards his wife, we could not be sure to affirm that the gender problem is resolved here. However, as the glimpse of a new community now emerging in London based on the contract of friendship can be seen in this finale, we could regard this ending not as the ending but as the opening of a new phase of repetition in Deleuzian sense.

As we have already seen, all the plots concerning various kinds of contract are intertwined into one plot about a fake "possession" and the accusation of witchcraft against Mistress Fitzdottrel, and finally dissolved by Fitzdottrel's confession. From the forgiveness towards this confession, a new kind of contract, i.e. the contract of friendship based not on word play but on sincerity, emerges and it is upheld beyond the other kinds of contract sticking only to the language. Moreover, the contract between Fitzdottrel and Pug the devil shows that the language is firstly used in this play world as the signifier without signification, and the word play based on this variance between the literal meaning of a word and its real meaning, changeable in accordance with the context it is used, are to be continued and lets the fakers cheat others out of their whole property. Suddenly a simple fact about the presence of the devil in contemporary London is shown to the personages, and that makes one of the fakers confess their crime. Seen from this angle by focusing the function of demonic possession and its dissolution in the final scene, this play could be said to have a coherence of all of its multiple plots, and the progress of its protagonists in this play world dominated only by language and word play is clearly shown before our eyes. By showing forgiveness towards the erroneous male protagonist, Fabien Fitzdottrel, by his wife and her friends in the final scene, Jonson lets the audience glimpse the sight of new community based on a new contract. We could call it the commonwealth on earth, and should distinct it from that of Hell or its opposite number on earth based on only language. As the commonwealth on earth is now emerging, we could catch only the glimpse of it, however,

Jonson might hope it will appear on earth someday.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Anon., *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. Ed. Nicola Bennet. New York: Theatre Art Books / Routledge, 2000.
- Dekker, Thomas. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Cambridge: CUP, 1958.
- Jonson, Ben. *The Devil Is An Ass*. Ed. Peter Happe. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994.
- Marlowe, Christopher, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*. Eds. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford: OUP, 1995.

Secondary Sources

- Apps, Lara and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003.
- Barton, Anne. *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*. Cambridge: CUP, 1984.
- Cave, Richard Allen. *Ben Jonson*. London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1991.
- Clark, Stuart, ed. *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*. London: Macmillan Press LTD, 2001.
- Cox, John D., *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642*. Cambridge: CUP, 2000.
- Cressy, David. *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissent*. Oxford: OUP, 2000.
- Dutton, Richard. "Jonson's Satiric Styles." *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*. Ed. Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart. Cambridge: CUP, 2000. 58–71.
- Ewen, C. L'Strange, *Witchcraft and Demonianism: a Concise Account Derived from Sworn Depositions and Confessions Obtained in the Courts of England and Wales*. London: Heath Cranton Limited, 1933.
- Gaskill, Malcolm. *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: CUP, 2000.
- Goodare, Julian, ed. *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
- Kerps, Barbara Irene. "Contract and Property Law in *The Devil Is an Ass*." *The Ben Jonson Journal*. 8 (2001): 85–122.
- Knoll, Robert E. *Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Lindley, David. *The trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Marcus Lea S., *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and Defeat of Old Holiday Pastimes*. Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Normand, Lawrence and Gareth Roberts, ed. *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*. Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2000.
- Oldridge, Darren. *The Devil in Early Modern England*. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000.
- Ostovich, Helen. "Hell for Lovers: Shades of Adultery in *The Devil is an Ass*." *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian Canon*. Ed. Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgoy and Susan Wiseman. London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998. 155–182.
- Sanders, Julie. *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics*. New York: Palgrave, 1998.
- Sharpe, James. *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Summers, Claude J., and Ted-Larry Pebworth, ed. *Ben Jonson Revised*. New York: Twayne

Publishers, 1999.

Womack, Peter. *Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986.