



Language, Power and Identity
in the Drama of Ben Jonson

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the relationships between language, power and identity in the drama of Ben Jonson. The approach is primarily through linguistic analyses of the plays, but frequent reference is made to other texts which illuminate the social, and cultural conditions out of which the drama emerges.

The first three chapters deal, respectively, with Jonson's Humour plays, Poetaster, and both tragedies. Four subsequent chapters deal individually with Volpone, Epicoene, The Alchemist, and Bartholomew Fair. Two final chapters deal with Jonson's late plays.

The thesis analyses the way in which characters reflect on each others' uses of language and make artificial use of language themselves in order to acquire power over others, raise their social status, and confirm, deny or alter their identities. This involves the analysis of the numerous discourses which are contained in the plays (e.g. those characterized by origins in the Classics, in English Morality plays, or in contemporary sources such as the literature of duelling, or the idiom of the Court).

The playwright's self-conscious use of language games, plays-within-plays, disguises, and deceptions is studied with close attention to the self-reflexive effects of these dramatic techniques.

Jonson's plays, by using mixed modes of drama, set off dramatic conventions against one another in ways which often undermine the artifice. The moral views in the plays, in

consequence, fail to find any single basis and are also set in conflict with one another. Thus, it is argued, the plays, contrary to certain orthodox views, do not offer simple moral positions for the audience, but demand of the spectators a re-examination of their own frames of moral reference.

It is suggested that the view of the world implicit in the earlier plays is one where language seems to offer the possibility of access to an ultimate truth, whereas in the later plays, language increasingly constructs its own truths.

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Introduction

Yes, fait, dey shall all both be ladies and write Madame. I vill do't myself for dem. Do, is the vord, and D is the middle letter of Madam, DD put 'em together and make deeds, without which, all words are alike, la.

(Bartholomew Fair IV.v.82-5) (1)

The Elizabethan and Jacobean delight in word-play, puns, conundrums and puzzles is well-known. Ben Jonson's drama probably displays the supreme mastery and the most thorough exploration of such delight in the period from the end of the sixteenth century to the third decade of the seventeenth century.

The passage quoted is an example of Jonson's brilliant word-play, from Bartholomew Fair. It typifies the linguistic inventiveness and sense of experiment which characterises nearly all of Jonson's drama. The speaker, Captain Whit (an Irish bawd), literally takes the laws of linguistic construction into his own hands here in order to transform the two women in his charge into 'fowl i' the Fair' (IV.v.12) (i.e. prostitutes). He exercises his powers of artifice in order to redefine, for his own purposes, their identities (2).

The thesis explores this kind of self-conscious display of the manipulation of language as it occurs throughout Jonson's dramatic works in shaping different characters, in the construction of the plays themselves, and in directing the theatrical experience of the spectators or readers (3). I shall be examining the ways in which identity is constructed for individual characters (and for whole plays)

from specific fields of language-use. The field of language-use, or 'discourse' as I shall call it (4), is rarely the subject of such anarchic re-assembly as occurs in the hands of Captain Whit. More often, as I will seek to show, the particularity of the discourse (whether it be that of duelling, of the court, of cosmetics, or of larger domains such as the Classics, Alchemy, or English Morality plays) is adopted by a single character or imposed on one by another character as a complete means of constructing reality. Characters are repeatedly shown criticising one another on their uses of particular vocabulary, or parts of speech, or on their invocations of external dramatic forms. Syllables, metaphors, titles, names, and characters from other texts, are all in dispute in Jonson's plays, and through their self-reflexive qualities they question the make-up of the plays themselves. The acquisition and manipulation of identity through language seems to me to be the controversial and problematic basis of power in the plays. The 'un-in-one-breath-utterable skill' of affectation on the one hand (5), and the 'more removed mysteries' of esoteric or allusive significance on the other (6), represent two extremes between which my concern for language in Jonson's drama will move.

Most critical studies of Ben Jonson's dramatic language, although they have revealed some of the cleverness, have tended to focus on an essential didacticism and a fundamental morality in the plays (7). J.A. Barish has, however, been repeatedly drawn to conclude that

Jonson's drama and use of language are more radical than its author (8). I shall be pursuing Barish's notion of a use of language that subverts itself (9), in order to draw out the full range and significance of the self-conscious and self-reflexive forms of discourse that punctuate all of Jonson's plays.

The effect of these activities of discourse, I shall argue, is to loosen the certain morality of the plays' surface sentiments, and to draw attention, repeatedly, to the shifting play of meaning within each speech or action. I shall not attempt to present Jonson's drama as a number of finished statements (10). Instead I will argue that the drama serves an interrogative function. I shall approach the plays as a series of questions that demand answers of their audiences by embodying conflicting moral attitudes, political views and dramatic practices (11).

My aim will be to stand back from the moral expectations engendered by statements in Discoveries, to which certain orthodox critical views attend with perhaps too great an emphasis (12). I will try to look into the theatrical world of the texts, and to analyse the plays as 'performance-texts' that participate as much in the individual moral system of the author, as in the intellectual, social and political turmoil of England (especially London) in the period.

In this respect it is important to make two points clear. Firstly, in referring to Jonson's plays as 'performance-texts', I will deliberately draw attention to

the dual status of the dramas, both as texts for private readers, and scripts for theatrical performance. Jonson's careful attention to the publication of his Workes in the 1616 Folio is well-known. This, coupled with his frequent addresses To The Reader (as well as The Reader Extraordinary, in whom much faith was also placed) are more than sufficient justifications to analyse the plays in the context of both the reading and theatrical experiences. Many details of language and scholarship are crucial to the analysis of the play but would be lost in the staging, while, equally, rhythms of action, ironies of disguise, juxtaposition of scene, are all effects which can only be fully appreciated in performance.

Secondly, throughout the discussion, I make reference only to an implied audience of readers and spectators contemporary with Jonson and not to a modern audience. The audience, as far as one can assume, would be more or less familiar with the range of literature (fiction and non-fiction) into which Jonson's drama inserted itself. Jonson's audiences were, however, as far as can be determined now, a very mixed crowd of people who ranged from the illiterate 'groundlings', through the merchants and traders of the emergent middle-classes, to courtiers, gentry, and members of the governing elite (13). Jonson's drama would clearly have appealed to different elements of the crowd in different ways; the farcical qualities of some scenes having a more general impact than the intellectual, and often esoteric material which, no doubt, would only have

been understood by a minority of cognoscenti. To this extent, then, Jonson's drama may be seen to have divided its audiences, setting off against one another the humorous and other responses of different sections of the crowd. Whether this was the reason for the theatrical failure of some of the plays, like Poetaster, cannot now be known. It certainly does not seem to account for as clear-cut a division as the one suggested by Harbage (14). This is particularly so when one considers that the plays were probably often performed for both popular and select audiences (15), with equal, if differentiated, success. It will be necessary, therefore, to bear in mind, throughout the thesis, the double sense in which the audience both knows, and does not know, the extent of literary reference in the plays.

While, through the detail of individual speeches, I will seek to display crucial functions of the different discourses, I will also, inevitably, pursue the dramatic modes that govern those discourses and the origins of the discourses. Jonson's plays have been studied by numerous venerable critics in terms of their sources and the literature from which they are derived (16). No other English playwright, certainly of the period, draws such repeated attention to the borrowings in his plays. Criticism, until recently, has necessarily and invaluabley concentrated on particular aspects of Jonson's borrowings and their origins. It has been a crucial task to uncover the mass of material upon which the plays draw and to begin

to see how they use their sources. I shall deal with the borrowings in the drama, and analyse, play by play, the ways in which obviously distinct dramatic modes are brought into conflict with one another in order to focus particular issues; or how, less overtly, divergent dramatic conventions are interspersed in the main dramaturgy to dynamic and contrasting effect.

This is the intertextuality of Jonson's oeuvre (17); from the direct importing of classical writers as characters, and translations of their texts, into Poetaster, through the re-working of passages by Tacitus, Cicero, Sallust and others in the tragedies, to the use of Aesop's Fables in Volpone and the varied presence of Morality play elements, and other elements of the native tradition, in the later plays. Although all texts occupy specific positions in the play of intertextuality (18), there are few bodies of work which draw attention to selected aspects of their intertextuality in the way that Jonson's does.

In relation to these traces and re-workings of other texts in his drama, the double attitude (of simultaneous knowledge and ignorance) I describe in the audience will also be applied to the author. While Jonson overtly provides references for many of the classical sources which he invokes or to which he alludes, there are also a considerable number of unacknowledged allusions in the plays which will form a necessary part of my discussion. In Epicoene, for example, the allusions to Chaucer's Miller's Tale and the Medieval Ship of Fools, are more or less

unconscious functions of the text, and yet they are crucial to a full understanding of the play. The question of whether the author was aware of such instances of intertextuality, and whether or not he intended them is, of course, lost with the man. For my discussion, it is the interplay of various texts, voiced in different discourses within the one text, that will be of concern regardless of authorial presence.

The thesis will carry out, to some extent, a displacement of the theoretical and practical presence of the author from the texts in order to examine them on their own terms. Although the self-dramatization of Jonson as 'poet-hero' in a number of different characters has been much discussed (19), I will pursue the dynamics of the whole dramaturgy rather than isolate statements of individual characters or invest them with particular authorial authority. The author may well be seen to return to the text as another character on paper, whether it be Crites, Horace, or 'the poet Ben Jonson', in a function similar to that described by Roland Barthes in the famous essay 'From Work to Text' (20). This study will be an analysis of the language-uses that construct identities in and for the drama on stage, and not for the author at his desk.

I will not therefore try to plot a simple graph of an unfolding Jonsonian metaphysics or even a maturing poetics in this study, but I shall seek to expose the number of different ideas about language, identity and power which seem to be explored in the plays, from a variety of angles

and with an equal array of moral, social, and political ramifications. This is not to suggest that I will be depicting a wholly inconsistent, or fragmented version of Jonsonian dramaturgy, but rather that I shall discuss the practice of his drama as it occurred, and endeavour to respond to the elliptical twists, turns, and shifts of emphasis that characterise Jonson's dramatic practice between plays as well as within them (21).

I take a chronological approach to the plays (with the exceptions of the two versions of Every Man In and the tragedies) (22), because this is the recorded order in which the plays emerged, but also because many of the plays seem to demand to be understood in the context of the shifting social and cultural climate in which they were produced. The writing of Volpone seems to have coincided with the publication of a number of non-dramatic texts that deal with education and its moral functions (23), The Staple of News confronts the new growth of newsletter publications in England in the 1620's (24), while The Alchemist is well-known for the startling topicality and contemporaneity of its setting (25).

The thesis therefore, although primarily a study of the functions of language in Jonson's drama, will inevitably involve discussion of the social and political issues of the period. L.C. Knights' pioneering work in this field, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (26), still forms the basis for such analyses. Knights argues that:

the dramatic treatment of economic problems showed them as moral and individual problems - which in the last analysis they are. (27)

I will be pursuing this notion, and perhaps conclude by reversing it. It will become clear, in the thesis, that the 'moral and individual problems' of characters in the plays directly relate to political or institutional uses of language which construct particular ways of perceiving the world, and these perceptions frequently come into conflict with the needs and desires of individuals (28).

In the early plays, dependence on affected uses of language will be seen to be the subject of manipulation by more knowing and informed wits. In Poetaster and the tragedies the function of language as an instrument of direct political power will be examined through the re-workings of the historical events and the classical narratives of Rome. In Volpone, the familiar contemporary theological texts, the conventions of declamation and the Fables of Aesop will be shown to be ambiguous educational materials. As soon as the moral texts of the grammar schools are brought into Jonson's world of dramatic discourse, they display their ability to be subject-matter for the teachings of the Devil as well as the Church. While in Epicoene, The Alchemist, and Bartholomew Fair, the social uses of magic, madness and superstition, among others, are explored in the light of their linguistic constructions. The discourse of alchemy will be analysed as a central example of the ultimate ambiguity in any language, as it oscillates between utter nonsense and extreme sense. It

will be suggested that the view of the world implicit in the earlier plays is one where language seems to offer the possibility of access to some ultimate truth upon which moral and political action may be based, whereas in the later plays, language, through its rhetorical formulations, increasingly constructs truth, and a dependent reality, in its own likeness.

In Discoveries Jonson formulates the famous maxim: 'Language most shewes a man: speak that I may see thee' (29). His plays constantly explore the implications of this idea, and the recurrent difficulty that it provokes. There is probably no other playwright who makes such exciting and witty use of jargon, cant, nonsense, and also more stylized forms of language like letters, advertisements, proverbs, ballads, or songs. In Jonson's plays speech probably does show more about a character and a scene than other theatrical devices such as costumes or props, but the nature of the character, the social position, sometimes even the gender are equally often disguised by the kind of language used, and the meaning of the scene may also remain ambiguous or deferred. Jonson also writes:

I have considered, our whole life is like a
Play: wherein every man forgetfull of himselfe,
is in travaile with expression of another. (30)

This often-quoted statement, also from Discoveries, seems to stand almost in contradiction to the maxim quoted above. If the language that every man speaks is merely the 'expression of another' it can only show that identity which is not his own, or the form of power which he is trying to

assume. In a different sense, one might also see this as reference to the constant quotation, the use of other writers' conventions and discourses, which characterise Jonson's work. Certainly this is not carried out by an author 'forgetfull of himselfe', but the dramaturgy often places itself, in a highly scholarly manner, 'in travaile with expression of another'; whether it be the expressions of Juvenal, of Horace, or even of Sir Thomas Overbury. It is the interplay between these differing perceptions that will be the concern of the thesis. Jonson often developed new ideas by returning to earlier ground and then elaborating, or amplifying his earlier notions; his motto Tamquam Explorator also serves well as a motto for the present writer.

Introduction : Notes and References

1. All references to and quotations from Jonson's works (unless otherwise stated) are based on the definitive Clarendon Ben Jonson, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1925-51), edited by C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (cited in the text as H & S). In quoting from the plays, however, I have used the modernised spelling in the revised version The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, edited by G.A. Wilkes, based on the edition edited by Herford and Simpson (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981).

2. It is a significant irony here that Whit's 'deeds' are in fact acts of linguistic deconstruction and reconstruction. The identities of the women are put in flux precisely by the activation of the play of linguistic 'differance' 'without which all words are alike'. Whit's game seems to have much in common with the concept of 'differance' as constructed by Jacques Derrida. The concept of 'differance' is explained best by Christopher Norris; he describes how the term 'differance',

sets up a disturbance at the level of the signifier (created by the anomalous spelling) which graphically resists such reduction [to any single, self-identical meaning]. Its sense remains suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer', both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. Language depends on 'difference' since, as Saussure showed once and for all, it consists in the structure of distinctive oppositions which make up its basic economy. Where Derrida breaks new ground, and where the science of grammatology takes its cue, is in the extent to which 'differ' shades into 'defer'. This involves the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification. Differance not only designates this theme but offers in its own unstable meaning a graphic example of the process at work.

(Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, New Accents Series, General Editor: Terence Hawkes (London and New York, Methuen, 1982) p.32)

The identities of the women in Whit's game strike me as subject to precisely the kind of 'play of signification' described by Derrida. Their new identities are both marked out by the difference from their old ones which Whit invokes, but also deferred through the instability which stems from his deeds (will they be women, ladies, or Madames?). The instability of identity is also an instability of moral status from which they may or may not recover. The idea of meaning persistently deferred is one to which I shall return. Although I shall not directly allude

to the theories of Derrida, my own readings of the critical writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault (and of their English interpreters, particularly Catherine Belsey, Christopher Norris, and Alan Sheridan) have influenced and, I hope, clarified my approach to the works of Ben Jonson. I do not, however, appropriate 'wholesale' the (sometimes conflicting) methodologies of these theorists and my approach remains personal and individual.

3. The drama of Jonson presents itself to both spectators and readers. Clearly a different kind of attention is involved in the two experiences; the visual presence and stage-business experienced communally in the theatre must be distinguished from the highly literary, silent and individual experience of private reading. Jonson's drama appeals to both experiences and the thesis involves discussion of both (see p.7).

4. A 'discourse' should be understood as a distinct field of language-use which may be characterised by particular types of syntax, construction and vocabulary, but also by a distinct set of moral and social values. Texts are constructed out of a multiplicity of discourses and, likewise, a character is produced out of one, or more discourses which speak that character. Through discourse analysis it is possible, therefore, to discern different attitudes confronting one another in a text and so to uncover how contradictory readings of a play may occur. Such a difference of attitudes is not necessarily one visibly present in the themes or debates on the surface of the text.

Cf. Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice, New Accents Series, (London, Methuen, 1980).

5. This is sought by Matthew of Bobadill in Every Man In His Humour (the version revised for the Folio of 1616) I. iii. 199. See Chapter two for an explanation of my references to this play.

6. The revelation of these is promised in the prologue to Jonson's masque Hymenaei (1606) H & S, VII, p.209. Richard Dutton's recent book, Ben Jonson: To The First Folio (Cambridge University Press, 1983), has appeared too late for me to refer to it in any detail, but some of his conclusions seem to support my arguments here.

7. Helen Watts Baum insists 'it is impossible to over-emphasise Jonson's seriousness with regard to the didactic theory'.

The Satiric and Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1947) p.27.

Robert Knoll emphasises 'Jonson's insistent didacticism'.

Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1964) p.5.

Alexander Leggatt still finds it 'comforting to reflect that on the whole Jonson was against sin and in favour of virtue'.

Ben Jonson: His Vision And His Art, (London and New York, Methuen, 1981) p.xv.

8. J.A. Barish, Ben Jonson and The Language of Prose Comedy, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1960) pp.72-3,233.

9. Barish, op. cit., pp.61, 69.

10. Leggatt sees the importance of not reducing Jonson's drama to closed moral statements, but as a whole, his analysis seems to be a retreat from radical ideas about Jonson into a more familiar perspective of the man's work as basically moral, didactic and realistic (p.xv).

11. Joel B. Altman explicates a similar notion in the wider context of Elizabethan drama as a whole. 'Renaissance plays...did not merely raise questions, in the general sense, but literally were questions - or rather fictional realizations of questions'.

The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry And The Development of Elizabethan Drama, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978) pp.2-3, 64-106, 181-195.

12. A surprisingly high number of critical studies of Jonson's plays depend upon his pronouncements in Discoveries in order to describe his moral intentions. Baum regards her task as to present Jonson 'seeking to harmonize his theory and his medium' (p.v).

See also: Edward Partridge, The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1958) pp.53, 55, 64, 236.

G.B. Jackson, Vision and Judgement in Ben Jonson's Drama, (London & Newhaven, Yale University Press, 1968), p.8.

Alan Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy, (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1971) pp.2-7.

There have, however, been no full-length studies of Discoveries in its own right. Jonsonian scholarship seems to prefer merely to make use of that text as a convenient collection of axioms to be extracted for their useful application to the plays. Discoveries, of course, does constitute more than just a number of different classical views of society, literature and the theatre. Jonson carefully acknowledges all the sources in his marginalia,

but much of the material is original. As a result, perhaps Discoveries does not represent a consistent approach in its attitudes to mimesis, artifice, and morality; it is rather a contradictory and problematic set of statements worthy of critical analysis in their own right. The view of Jonson's which is perhaps most useful, in respect to the application of his theories to his drama, is 'rules are ever of lesse force, and valem, than experiments' (H&S, XIII, p.617). The dissociation of Jonson's theory and practice has begun to be recognised recently; see, for example:-

P. Carlson, "Judging Spectators", English Literary History, 44, (1977) 443-457.

13. Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1941) pp.53-91) see also:- Terence Hawkes, Shakespeare's Talking Animals: Language and Drama in Society, (London, Edward Arnold, 1973) pp.221-9, 232-3.

14. Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and The Rival Traditions, (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1952) pp.58-89.

15. Bartholomew Fair, for example, was performed by The Lady Elizabeth's Servants at The Hope on October 31st 1614 and then at Court the following night.

16. There have been many studies of Jonson's use of classical sources, and the influence of the classics on his work:-

Charles Wheeler, Classical Mythology in the Plays, Masques, and Poems of Ben Jonson (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1938).

Coburn Gum, The Aristophanic Comedies of Ben Jonson: A Comparative Study of Jonson and Aristophane, (The Hague - Paris, Mouton, 1969).

Aliki Lafkidou Dick, Paedeia Through Laughter: Jonson's Aristophanic Appeal to Human Intelligence, (The Hague, Mouton, 1974).

George Parfitt, Ben Jonson: Public Poet and Private Man, (London, J.M. Dent, 1976) pp. 104-123.

Douglas Duncan, Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition, (London and Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979).

17. The 'sources' of Jonson's plays are, of course, much discussed, but these only constitute one part, mainly the authorially acknowledged part, of the plays' intertextuality. Intertextual connections occur where several texts are seen to partake of a similar syntax or vocabulary, a similar field of reference, or a similar formation of characters or events. Intertextual relations

may be either conscious or unconscious, they may occur between texts whether their authors know each other or not. The criteria for the establishment of these relations are dependent less upon the arbitrary descent of information about which books were available to an author, or which taverns he frequented, and more on the structural formulations that may be seen to connect the texts because they are produced in similar cultural or social conditions. Intertextuality, therefore, also represents the reader's experience of other texts as a source of intelligibility for that under consideration.

See Belsey, op.cit., pp. 26, 134, and also Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, (London, Fontana/Collins, 1977) pp.146,160.

18. By the 'intertextual' position of Jonson's plays, I mean, therefore, the position that relates Jonson's texts to the whole field of texts into which his are placed and through which they are intelligible, see also Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) pp. 139-140.

19. Cf. G.B. Jackson, op.cit., pp. 51-52 also Parfitt, op.cit., pp.36-64. Parfitt concentrates on 'the way in which Jonson projects the poet figure as essentially an impersonal guide and commentator' (p.38) and Jackson confronts the more literal view of Jonson as poet-ruler in his own drama; 'Jonson did consider himself a man of the same species as that of which Asper, Crites, and Horace were outstanding examples' (p.51).

20. Barthes, op.cit., pp.155-164.

21. Leggatt, in contrast, attempts to synthesise an overview of Jonson's 'ideas' by not dealing in detail with any one individual text, (Leggatt, op. cit., p.xi) but the result seems to be a rather blurred analysis.

22. See chapters 1 and 3.

23. See chapter 4.

24. See chapter 8.

25. See chapter 6.

26. (London, Chatto & Windus, 1937).

27. Knights, op. cit., p.176.

28. A provocative reappraisal of Knights' views on Jonson has recently been suggested by D.E. Wayne:-
'Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson: An Alternative View', Renaissance Drama, NS. XIII, (1982) 103-129.

29. H & S, VIII, p.625, 2031-2.

30. H & S, VIII, p.597, 1093-5.

Chapter I: 'Conspiring motions of desire': The Every Man Plays and Cynthia's Revels.

Every Man In His Humour (1598), Every Man Out Of His Humour (1599), and Cynthia's Revels (1600) do not seem to form an obvious group. The first two were great theatrical successes; the third was Jonson's first major failure. Nor do many critics discuss these three plays in relation to each other, surprisingly perhaps, since the plays follow one another so closely in the writing.

The three plays, it seems to me, are bound together successfully in their use of games, rituals, plays and texts-within-the-text. In this common use of dramatic devices they may be seen to form an integrated coherent group which sets out, in great detail and variety, important areas of Jonson's textual explorations where conflicts between language, power and identity continually arise.

Every Man In is the main focus of my discussion in this chapter since the problems of the whole group are best seen in this first play, but I shall refer fully to the two later pieces as well. One reason why the plays have rarely been looked at together is their marked formal dissimilarity. In commenting on the links between the first and second Every Man play, Herford writes:-

Every Man Out Of His Humour is neither a counterpart nor a contrast, neither a companion piece nor a sequel, to Every Man In His Humour. It is a second handling of the same theme, with a more direct satiric purpose and a more uncompromising and defiant originality of method. (1)

This view of the way in which the two plays are linked is

useful, if not very specific. It should be added that the 'defiant originality' in the later play refers to the drastic change that takes place in the formal presentation. The incorporation of the classically inspired Grex, that is to say, the commentaries of Mitis and Cordatus, induces an increased self-consciousness of action which exaggerates what has already been suggested in Every Man In, although the later heights of Bartholomew Fair are not yet reached. One reason why the drama does not become completely self-conscious is, as Cope observes, because Mitis is ignorant of his dual role as simple auditor and as a part of the Grex. Mitis' double function, nevertheless, represents one of a number of innovative experiments which are at work in Every Man Out, as Cope observes:-

This doubleness causes the structure of the play to overflow the closed stage and envelop the theatre, and forces him (Mitis) to surrender his formal part to a permanent sense of contingency. This is a small example of Jonson's experiment: at every level he works to set forth his artifice only to dissolve it. We get another hint of this process in Cordatus' requests that the audience (and Mitis) participate in the play-making by imagining their own scene changes. (2)

Cope gives a good sense of the play's quality of experiment. The most important point, however, is the idea that the artifice is set forth only to be dissolved. The problem that I shall be exploring emerges from the 'sense of contingency' that arises from these pieces of playfulness, for what they produce is a persistent moral ambiguity.

Cynthia's Revels differs again, but only in its introduction of an allegorical and mythical element to the dramaturgy. The "Fountain of Self-Love" provides an

unresolved allegorical core around which the various events may occur, but Cynthia's descent, at the end of the play, remains at a distance from the real satire of the piece. The Grex of Every Man Out and the choric wits of Every Man In are, in Cynthia's Revels, subsumed under the functions of Mercury and Cupid (3). Despite these innovative formal devices, the underlying exposure of vice and folly, in the form of courtly affectation, in Cynthia's Revels, remains within the domain established by the humour plays. The title, Cynthia's Revels, seeks to raise the play above the level of social satire which the subtitle, the "Fountain of Self-Love", expresses, but in the end it is the revellers rather than Cynthia who are the main objects of attention.

In the Induction to Every Man Out, Asper explains that the term 'humour' is a metaphor which is applied to the 'general disposition' of men and women (ll.103-104). The metaphor is, however, a little confused. 'Humour' represents two different things. Firstly, a 'humour' is an innate quality of a character that can become exaggerated, for example, Kately's paranoia or Sordido's miserliness. Secondly, 'humour' can represent those modes of behaviour that characters affect, in order to boost themselves in the eyes of others and, indeed, in their own eyes. This is seen, for example, in Matthew's attempts to learn the art of duelling and in Asotus' efforts to become a courtier. Both kinds of 'humour' are satirised in these plays. Every Man In deals, perhaps, more with innate humours, the latter two plays more with assumed humours, but both kinds of humour

occur throughout this group of plays (4).

One of the difficulties encountered in discussing these texts, therefore, is that the metaphor of the 'humours' evolves and becomes, by necessity, loosened from the basic analogy to the balance of the 'choler, melancholy, phlegm and blood' (Every Man Out, Induction, 1.99) in the body. In the variability of its application, the trope begins, in fact, to haemorrhage; its meanings flow out of it in a way that leads the audience to look to something other than the 'humours' as a central core for the plays.

Since Asper may best be understood as the voice of the text at the beginning of Every Man Out, where the humour theory is most clearly elaborated, his awareness of the rhetorical formulation of the 'humour' as 'metaphor' leads directly to a need to understand that of which the 'humour' is metaphoric, and it is with this need that I am concerned here. The search for the rhetorical, as opposed to the semantic, origins of 'humour' is a linguistic exploration in which the plays themselves are already involved. Their relationship, I shall argue, is centred on an exploration of knowledge in relation to rhetoric, through the representation of characters in dramas, and the narrative of dramatic texts as a whole. This extends beyond the relative simplicity of perception provided by the humour theory (5). The explorations of this group of plays are centred on a conflict between the rhetorical and poetic use of language and the moral and social functions of language.

The audience is presented with a range of characters

which lie between two extremes, that of the professors and that of the admirers after mysteries. On the one hand, there are figures like Matthew, the city gull of Every Man In, who believes another character, Bobadill, to 'have absolute knowlege i'the mystery' of duelling (F.I.iii.195). Matthew hankers after this 'un-in-one-breath-utterable skill' (1.199) as much as Bobadill persistently demonstrates his lack of real knowledge. He uses the duelling jargon with great liberality; at one point he talks about how he outwitted and out-fought a crowd of opponents who beset him 'after/my long travel, for knowledge in that mystery' (F.IV.v. 18-19). Then he relates how he set about raising a private army from the best nineteen of them:-

...I would teach these nineteen the special rules, as your punto, your reverso, your stoccata, your imbroccata, your passada, your montanto, till they could all play very near or altogether as well as myself.

(F.IV.v.71-74)

The emphasis here is on the 'mystery' of the art and on its 'play'-like qualities. Despite all his bravado and his exchange of insults with Downright, Bobadill is soundly beaten when it comes to the fight (in F.IV.v.118).

Matthew, Stephen, Sogliardo and Asotus are the main examples of gulls seeking the secret knowledge of the various currently fashionable 'mysteries'. The plays oppose to these gulls, characters like Bobadill, Sordido, and Amorphus, who profess that coveted knowledge to varying degrees of expertise. Amorphus, in Cynthia's Revels, is the most elaborately presented. He boasts of:-

... knowing myself an essence so sublimated and refined by travel; of so studied and well exercised a gesture; so alone in fashion; able to tender the face of any statesman living; and to speak the mere extraction of language; one that hath now made the sixth return upon venture; and was your first that ever enriched his country with the true laws of the duello;

(I.iii.28-33)

The use here of alchemical terms suggests the way that mysteries are to be developed later, in the play which uses mystery in the most compelling way of all, The Alchemist.

Ultimately these 'artists' are always exposed by the wits and commentator-figures. Cupid, for example, describes Madam Moria:-

She is like one of your ignorant poetasters of the time, who when they have got acquainted with a strange word, never rest till they have wrung it in, though it loosen the whole fabric of their sense.

(II.iv.13-16)

Again a later play, The Poetastor, is anticipated in Cupid's speech, and this is one of many early indications of areas that are to be developed in later plays.

The problem of these plays lies in the manner in which these conflicting types of character work on one another. The conflict centres on the use of language, while the question of morality and power is persistently made present, but is far from being consistently explored. Although Cupid comments accurately on the affectation of the court, he is banished, at the end of Cynthia's Revels, because of his offence to Cynthia. Cupid may seem to offend morally, in his disguise as 'Anteros, or Love's Enemy', but his is an offence defined by allegory and mythology, not by the moral questions raised in the action. Conversely, although

Brainworm has acted cunningly and deceptively (thus immorally) throughout Every Man In, he is ultimately exonerated. While the nature of the conflict over language-use is clear in these plays, (canting, jargon, and affectation being equally condemned) the manner in which a true or sound use of language relates to a sound morality and a true identity is far from clear.

It is perhaps for this reason that 'humours' are still seen, by critics, as the central factor in the plays. Bryant, in one of the first modern essays to discuss critically the revisions of Every Man In, writes of Jonson's changes:-

He cut away the superfluous moralizing about poetry and reshaped his play to make it a humour play all over, speaking with a single voice and saying only what it was capable of saying as a whole play and nothing more. (6).

As I have already suggested and will explore further, discussion of poetry and morality in this group of plays, far from being 'superfluous moralizing', is the central underlying issue. Poetry is central to the rhetorical knowledge and to the truth sought after here. 'A humour play all over, and speaking with a single voice' also seems, to me, to be a statement which begs some important critical questions. All three plays may be described as 'humour' plays. As Crites puts it at the end of Cynthia's Revels, 'Humour is now the test we try things in' (V.iv.568). Discussion of the 'humours' is only one of a number of ways in which the dramas 'test' the complex problems of knowledge. These problems include that of the relationship

between knowledge of self and knowledge of others, where uncertainty of identity and the possibility of deceit may always be present.

Lever, in his introduction to Every Man In, begins to extend the focus beyond the 'humour' in the drama. He observes of the play that the 'key word is not "humour" but "gentleman" ' (7). Yet, Lever has failed to note the way in which these two 'key words' are related. Thomas Cash defines a 'humour' as follows:-

Marry, I'll tell thee, Cob: it is a gentlemanlike monster, bred in the special gallantry of our time by affectation, and fed by folly.

(F.III.ii.164-166)

If a 'humour' is a paradoxical 'gentleman-like monster' then, clearly, the two are part of the same problem of identity. Interestingly, in the Quarto, the humour is 'bred' by 'self-love and / affectation' (Q.III.i.147-8) (I shall refer to the Folio version on the whole but frequent comparison with the Quarto is important and useful) (8). In this figure of speech the earlier version of Every Man In anticipates the "Fountain of Self-Love" that is central to the allegory of Cynthia's Revels. Thus the plays are bound closer together by the questions surrounding notions of 'self-love' rather than by the metaphor of the 'humours'. 'Self-love and affectation' are the qualities persistently condemned in these plays and a 'humour' is only part of the presentation of a much larger pattern of behaviour and speech that has the power to construct identity.

In the well-motivated action of Every Man In, in the

anarchic assembly of episodes of Every Man Out, or in the mythically framed elaborations of Cynthia's Court, it is, as Kitley in one of his outbursts puts it, 'the conspiring motions of desire' (F.II.i.196), that revolve at the forefront of these early plays. 'Desire' is frequently expressed in the sexual pressures that characters place upon one another, and even more frequently in the pressure towards social 'improvement' that leads to affectation. 'Motions' may best be understood as the theatrical performances, the gullings, the challenges, that are set up inside the body of each play, very often in a 'conspiring' form to out-wit or to deflate. It is these 'motions', or inner plays, which frequently reflect back on the whole plays in problematic ways that reach beyond the theory of humours, they embody the texts' various 'tests' of integrity and deceit, and of true or false identity.

Every Man In has the most prominent and important plot of the three plays and is, therefore, probably the most accessible (9). In the rivalry between father and son, and the wily machinations of the servant, Brainworm, the bones of a Plautan plot are still visible, but Jonson's first 'humour' text is more than a simple repetition of New Comedy (10). The main-spring of the action, in characteristic Jonsonian style, is a text-within-the-text, Wellbred's letter to Knowell Junior inviting him to taste the delights of city women and city gulls. The Familiar Epistle, as the gallants call it, is exemplary in that it provides a textual construction of character, a domain of knowledge against

which the dramatic world is read by the characters who read the letter and by the audience.

It is, to be more precise, the interception of the letter, by old Knowell, which is the real source of the action and the interception establishes a paradigm for the dramatic practice as a whole in this group of plays. Old Knowell breaks into a correspondence that is otherwise closed to him and finds that it relates to him. In the same way the drama breaks into a world of discourse, which is closed to the audience, and yet relates to them. Asper enacts a similar movement in the Induction to Every Man Out. He enters, ranting against the evils of the day, and then, suddenly, notices the presence of the audience:-

I not observed this thronged round till now.
Gracious and kind spectators, you are welcome;

(Induction, 11.51-52)

On one level Asper's behaviour, and the interception of Wellbred's letter, reinforce the verisimilitude of the drama. Here, it seems to be suggested to the audience, is part of a real world at which you are privileged to laugh and to watch. On another level, however, attention is drawn to the fact that the play, like the letter or the Induction, is only one form of communication sent (or spoken) by one individual to another. They are, therefore, styled and phrased to be significant in a particular manner, they cannot merely reflect a 'slice of life'. Indeed old Knowell makes himself feel less guilty, by stressing that he will read the letter: 'Be it but for the style's sake and the

phrase' (F.I.i.148). The irony is, of course, that once he reads it, he finds himself abused and forgets all about the rhetorical style in his concern for the content.

Wellbred's Familiar Epistle to his country-dwelling friend, the Young Knowell, is the impetus for the action of nearly the whole of Every Man In, and for the various 'conspiring motions of desire' that culminate in orchestrated madness outside Cob's house (in F.IV.viii), while Young Knowell wins access to Bridget. It is a witty and utterly contemporary call to the city which characterises the actual movements of many of the young gentry in the late sixteenth century (11).

The commonly noted contrast between country and city is played upon here in Knowell Senior's resolve to follow his son 'dry foot' across the marshes (F.II.ii.8). Jackson notes that the phrase 'dry foot' is a hunting term, it means to hunt 'without any tracks as guidance - by the scent alone... a play on the notoriously marshy Moorfields impossible to cross "dryfoot" ' (12). The plot, here, provokes a kind of topological symbolism where the settled order of the country, with which the play begins, stands in contrast to the multiple confusions that occur in the city.

It is across this polarity that the exploration of knowledge also occurs in both Every Man plays. Knowell cannot follow his son, Edward, without becoming embroiled in the vice of the city, that is without getting 'bogged down' in it. Also, in terms of the hunt, it may perhaps be seen that to hunt 'without any guidance' suggests a lack of

sufficient knowledge (moral or otherwise) in Old Knowell with which to find the path he seeks. The marshes, where Brainworm beguiles both master and son, emerge as a kind of middle ground where Brainworm's physical and moral 'translation' occurs. He leaves behind the identity of the wily servant and acquires a more theatrical, cunning disguise that is suggestive of the old Morality Vice. He exclaims:-

Oh, that my belly were hoop'd now, for I am ready to burst with laughing! Never was bottle or bagpipe fuller. 'Slid, was there ever seen a fox in years to betray himself thus? Now I shall be possess'd of all his counsels, and by that conduit, my young master.

(F.II.iii.131-135)

Brainworm's description of himself as a fox is immediately suggestive of Volpone and his associations with the Anti-Christ (13), but also, in Brainworm's keenness to 'be possess'd of all' (i.e. both his young and old masters), there is another suggestion of demonic possession such as is later seen in Epicoene (14).

The marsh is an uncertain and mystifying space where the stability and sedate morality, romantically invoked in the country, are opposed to, and come into conflict with the attitudes of the city. Leech writes about this kind of topological split:-

A special effect involving two localities is found where the opening scene or act is in one place and the rest of the play is in another. It is as if we are led by a bridge to the locality in which the drama proper will be acted out, a world of fantasy or of special danger. (15)

This is perhaps more true of Shakespearean comedies than of

Jonson's, but Leech does draw attention to the first act of Bartholomew Fair, where the characters are preparing to enter the world of the Fair. In Every Man In, however, the movement seems to be reversed. In following the journey to London, the action actually moves closer to the world of its audience, not further from it. By starting in the country, and then moving to the city, the dramaturgy is able to defamiliarise the metropolis so as to intensify it at the moment of its re-presentation. Act one of Every Man In (in the Folio) takes place entirely in the country, act two scene one takes place in the city, and the rest of act two is set in the marshes. First the audience sees a contrast, between city and country, then they are presented with the middle-ground. In the marshes, the play is definitely on Leech's 'bridge' (or perhaps more literally under it), and Brainworm's ability to deceive both his masters signals the beginning of the transition to 'a world of fantasy or of special danger'.

The country and the city are also contrasted in Young Knowell's attempt to match the fun to be derived from the city gull, Matthew, by that to be derived from the presence of his own cousin, Stephen:-

It will do well for a suburb-humour: we may hap have a
match with the city, and play him for forty pound.
(F.I.iii.114-116)

The 'suburb', it should be noted, would have been the outlying rural area beyond the walls of the city. Young Knowell anticipates using Stephen to 'play' with against Wellbred's gulls. He also seems to see Stephen as having

one identity in a catalogue of humours. 'He' becomes 'It' and 'It will do well for a suburb-humour' suggests the discourse of taxonomy, belonging to a collector, not to a cousin. The wits treat the gulls as 'humours', to be played off against each other, in the same way that the gulls affect 'humours' to improve their standing in society. The metaphor here has become quite slack in its general application to 'deeds and language such as men do use' (F.Prologue,1.21). In effect, the characters come to be seen more in terms of written and dramatic texts than in terms of real people. Young Knowell advises Stephen:-

Let the idea of what you are be portray'd i' your face,
that men may read i' your physonomy: 'Here, within this
place, is to be seen the true, rare and accomplish'd
monster, or miracle of nature' - which is all one.

(F.I.ii.105-109)

Knowell can hardly disguise his disdain for his monstrous, or rather miraculous, cousin and the suggestion seems to be that, in such a person (afflicted by the need to affect 'humours') their 'humour', and their real identity, may be read like a book or 'deciphered' like a code, as Saviolina puts it, in reference to Sogliardo in Every Man Out (V.ii.81). Saviolina, too, is attempting to prove the sophistication of her courtly manners over rural vulgarity. She is challenged by the gentlemen at court to 'decipher' the real nature of a clown, Sogliardo, who is presented to her. It is a test of her special knowledge and she claims, in her examinations, to have 'gathered infallible signs of the gentleman in him, that's certain' (V.ii.84-5). Inevitably she is proved wrong and is humiliated when

Macilente enters and casually points out Sogliardo's rough hands. The clown immediately explains: 'Tut, that was with holding the plough' (1.102) and the Lady marches off in fury. This game of knowledge is made neatly ironic because it is not simply a matter of revealing Saviolina's affectations. The game itself revolves around an ability (or the lack of it) to demonstrate power over a special mystery of Knowledge. It occurs in the context of a joke, but its outcome is crucial. Although the game or sport is part of the courtly atmosphere, it is the clown from the country, Sogliardo, who triumphs together, of course, with the ubiquitous Macilente.

Reality and artifice are continually brought into conflict in a way that challenges the characters' grip on events, but this effect is also carried over, occasionally, into the domain of the audience, for example, in the introduction of Orange and Clove. Mitis asks Cordatus to explain who they are:-

Marry, a couple sir, that are mere strangers to the whole scope of our play; only come to walk a turn or two, i' this scene of Paul's, by chance.

(III.i.15-17)

The casual introduction of these characters perhaps increases the realism of the crowded scene in the bustling aisle of St Paul's. Every Man Out was first performed in the Globe theatre within sight of the great cathedral (16). On a formal level, however, the introduction of Orange and Clove draws attention to the flexible, expansive qualities of the artifice. For, far from being 'mere strangers to the

whole scope our play', Orange and Clove enact its innate qualities. They are firstly, drawn into the action and then refused access to it. 'Let us turn to our former discourse, for they mark us not' (III.iv.34-35), says Clove when their absurd affected dialogue has entertained the audience, but fails to be taken up by any other characters. Clove and Orange, and their introduction by Cordatus, highlight a kind of self-consciousness in the dramaturgy, an almost capricious delight in the openness with which the text can be controlled. As with Asper's first entry, and with the paradigm of the intercepted letter, the audience here is required to move between two opposites, between a sense of referential realism and a sense of intense artificiality of action.

Letters, Bills, or other such moments of textual self-reference, in the drama, are important to all three plays. They form the basis for much of the deflation of character, and the inflation of textual authority, which renders knowledge, in these dramatic worlds, an uncertain commodity. Wellbred's letter, Shift's bills, or Amorphus' duelling and court challenges, are all eventually subject to a dismantling that reveals the element of rhetoric and illusion involved. Fastidius, the hapless husband to Saviolina, says of her:-

She does observe as pure a phrase and use as choice figures in her ordinary conferences as any be i' the Arcadia.

(II.iii.201-202)

Carlo Buffone deflates this, however, with the repost:-

Or rather in Greenes works, whence she may
steal with more security.

(II.iii.203-204)

Written texts, even as here only invoked, represent a known standard up against which reality is measured, but the authority of any one text is always subject to the possibility of subversion by another, as demonstrated by Buffone. Implicitly, the dramatic forms which display such subversions are challenged too, but in the earlier plays this does not become a major area of exploration, although it is part of the problematic nature of the plays' presentations (17).

Before producing the 1616 Folio edition of his Workes, Jonson altered the setting of Every Man In from Florence, in the Quarto, to London in the Folio. One of the major changes which accompanied this was to the names of the characters. The father and son pair, the Lorenzos, became the Young and Old Knowells. The change of name draws attention to the questions which arise throughout the early plays, the question of the nature of true knowledge within the dramatic worlds of satire and irony, the question of the nature of that which can in fact be known well, and equally important, of those who can know it.

In Every Man Out (II.ii.), Puntarvolo enacts the bizarre, ironic ritual of wooing his own Lady, each day denying his own identity in the charade, as if he were a stranger to the house. Carlo explains:-

... it's a project, a designment of his own, a thing studied and rehearsed as ordinarily at his coming from hawking, or hunting, as a jig after a play.

The dramatic self-consciousness of this incident is typical. The Knight deliberately denies knowledge of himself (his own identity) in order to secure a series of compliments about himself from the servant and the more profound confirmation of his wife's integrity. The absurd vanity, and its logic, is another exercise of the way in which the plays expose the uncertainty of knowledge and integrity, both for the audience, and for the characters. Puntarvolo denies his own presence and therefore undermines his own powers, in effect, he proves the willingness of his Lady, not to be true to him, but to cuckold him.

The names of Jonson's 'humorous' characters are also an important part of the 'humour' system. The dramaturgy turns out to be doing more with the names than merely labelling various 'humours'. Kitley describes how he came to name Thomas Cash, his servant:-

I took him of a child, up at my door,
And christen'd him, gave him mine own name, Thomas;
Since bred him at the Hospital; where proving
A toward imp, I call'd him home and taught him
So much, as I have made him my cashier,
and giv'n him who had none, a surname, Cash;

(F.II.i.14-19)

Kitley's naming of Cash is an act of objectification which reduces Thomas to the level of the money that he handles for his master. In bearing his master's first name, Thomas, he indicates to whom the money belongs. Obviously, it is a comic idea that a person's name should be derived in this way, but the presentation of the act of naming in the drama, links it to the functions of control and manipulation that

occur elsewhere. The identity of the character is literally controlled by the person who applies the name to him, yet when the author does this, pre-textually, the situation is very different from when a character does it within the play. The implication is that those with powers of controlling discourse, and particularly with the power to name, have a concomitant control over people. Kately fails to order the large number of troublesome 'strangers', which the plot deposits in his house, but his servant, Cash, never strays outside his jurisdiction.

Cob, the water bearer of Every Man In, is perhaps better understood in these terms. His name, and the family-line inscribed in it, are the source of constant explanation and anxiety on his part. He explains himself first:-

Mine ance'try came from a king's belly, no worse man; and yet no man neither - by your worship's leave, I did lie in that - but Herring, the king of fish - from his belly I proceed - one o'the monarchs o' the world, I assure you. The first red herring that was broil'd in Adam and Eve's kitchen do I fetch my pedigree from, by the harrot's books. His cob was my great, great, mighty-great grandfather.

(F.I.iii.9-16)

This is, first of all, a satire on the fake pedigrees and lineages which were of so much importance to the social climbers of the time (18). The discourse that Cob adopts here is a bizarre, and somewhat disturbing, combination of the biblical and the folkloric. The name 'Cob', in this context, refers to the head of a herring, but the surreal images of 'Adam and Eve's kitchen' and 'The king of fish' construct a peculiar, intangible domain in which Cob's

identity resides, somewhere almost at one remove from the world of the drama. In Cob, the herring, presented as the water carrier, the audience might see him carrying his own element around with him.

On several occasions, Cob points to his name in a way that highlights the ambiguity of its meaning. While, as has just been seen, the name can mean the head of a herring, the word 'Cob' has an unusually large number of senses. OED suggests, amongst others, a male swan, a stout, short-legged riding horse, a large hazel nut, a roundish lump of coal, a small roundish loaf. A cob was also the name given to various species of sea-gull in the late sixteenth century, a very apt sense of the word in relation to this character. Several of these other meanings are suggested in Cob's speeches. At one point he explains indignantly:-

... I am none o' your cart-horse, though I carry and draw water.

(F.III.ii.152-153)

Later on, in his declamation against fast-days, he says:-

A fasting day no sooner comes, but my lineage goes to rack; poor cobs, they smoke for it, they are made martyrs o' the grid-iron, they melt in passion; and maids, too, know this, and yet would have me turn Hannibal, and eat my own fish and flood.

(F.III.ii.191-196)

In this speech, the meaning of 'cob' seems to be a herring, but it could also be a lump of coal that smokes on the grid-iron. There is no single, immutable, sense that predominates in this discourse of punning changes. Cob seems locked into a mode of language-use where his name is continually shifting in meaning, as are the other names and words he uses, 'Hannibal' for 'cannibal' is an obvious example.

Unlike Cash, he is not subject to someone else's definition, but he is unable to define his identity in his title. His confused, and confusing, discourse indicates that he has power over neither his name nor his lineage, nor his identity, and this lack of control is enacted in the confusions, and 'madness' that ensue, surrounding his lack of belief in the integrity of Tib, his wife (in F.IV.viii.65-77).

Jonson frequently gives his characters names or titles that, to some extent, describe their qualities at the outset, but it is rarely a singular or narrow description. The 'humour' suggested in the name, in Downright or in Fastidius for example, is never an adequate category that wholly contains the character. It is, much more often, a position from which the character is seen to move, or through which he passes. This kind of complexity is different from that of many Shakespearean characters. Jonson's characters are, very often, characters of discursive complexity, but of relative 'flatness' in personality. Their complexity is one derived from their rhetorical and discursive constructions. The particular fields of language that particular characters use give them their unmistakable characteristics.

In contrast to the subservience of Cash and Cob, the wily servant, Brainworm, is seen to be independent precisely through his ability to 'translate' himself into a variety of identities. On his way to the city, he disguises himself as a wounded soldier, and delights in the exercise of his

powers of artifice:-

'Slid I cannot chose but laugh to see myself translated thus, from a poor creature to a creator.

(F.II.ii.1-2)

The half-pun on 'creator' and 'creature' emphasises the closeness, in Brainworm, of these two apparently distant conditions. This is the first, overtly self-conscious, declaration of delight in Brainworm's abilities to metamorphose himself and its linguistic aspect is very much in the foreground. The prime sense of 'translated' here may be 'transformed', it is recalled that Bottom was 'translated' into an ass in Midsummer-Night's Dream (III.i.125), and the linguistic sense seems to be present in both speeches. Brainworm changes his field of language-use as well as his clothing, he re-names himself Fitzsword (F.II.iii.119). This new name means 'son of the sword', but also strikingly 'son of the word'. When Brainworm finally discovers himself to the Young Knowell, after fooling him several times with the disguise, the gallant exclaims:-

An artificer? An architect! Except a man had studied begging all his lifetime, and been a weaver of language from his infancy, for the clothing of it, I never saw his rival!

(F.III.ii.231-233)

Brainworm's use of language, Knowell implies, is a more effective disguise, a more complete change of clothing, than could be seen in his real clothes. Young Knowell goes on to exploit Brainworm's talent by arranging the diversion at Cob's house to distract Kately, Downright, and his father, so that he can gain access to Bridget, his lover, in the final 'conspiring motion of desire'. In order to carry this

out, Brainworm disguises himself for the second time as the Justice's clerk. The disguise is procured by intoxicating the real clerk, Formal, and stripping him of his robes. Later Brainworm describes to Clement how he went about 'making him drunk first with story, and then with wine' (F.V.i.164-165). Brainworm's powers of narrative are equated here with the intoxicating effects of alcohol. Brainworm finally confesses that 'this has been the day of my metamorphosis!' (F.V.i.146).

In all of these changes of language and identity, Brainworm is related to the classical sea-god Proteus. This link is reinforced when one considers the considerable moral ambiguity in Brainworm's behaviour. The ambiguity of his position, which I shall be demonstrating further on, casts Brainworm as both poet and Machiavel, and this is further highlighted in the similarities between Brainworm and Renaissance versions of Proteus. Giametti observes:-

Parallel to the tradition of Proteus as vates and poet is a tradition of Proteus as magus and sinister manipulator of words. The two traditions support one another, providing reciprocal tension and balance, for each depends on the other for the reservoir of ambiguity that gives Proteus, and language, the potency to adapt and to signify. The mutual dependence, or interpenetration, of the demonic and the divine elements in Proteus tells us something about the Renaissance and its view of language. Even more is said about the Renaissance itself when we notice that the demonic Proteus, the potential for chaos, falsity, and death predominates. (19)

The qualities that Giametti describes are strikingly applicable to Brainworm. Indeed, this is an important statement which relates much of Jonson's use of language to his use of 'magus' figures. In Cynthia's Revels, the

Protean villain is invoked by Mercury when he describes Amorphus:-

A traveller, one so made out of the mixture and shreds of forms that himself is truly deformed... all his behaviours are printed, his face is another volume of essays; and his beard an Aristarchus.

(II.iii.77-81)

Aristarchus of Samothrace was librarian at Alexandria, he edited the Greek classics, and is regarded as the originator of scientific scholarship. Here, again, the combination of identity and language are almost indistinguishably intertwined. Later, in describing various fawning members of the Court, Crites picks out:-

... some subtle Proteus, one
Can change, and vary with all forms he sees;
Be any thing but honest; serves the time;
Hovers betwixt two factions and explores
The drift of both;

(III.iv.42-46)

Jonson's texts clearly work with a profound awareness of the Protean formulation among Renaissance conventions. Volpone also, it will be recalled, promises Celia:-

I would have left my practice, for thy love,
In varying figures, I would have contended
With the blue Proteus, or the horned flood.

(III.vii.151-153)

Subtle and Face can also be seen to partake of this 'shifting', changing, convention, although Proteus is not invoked again in name. It is, however, a convention that Jonson's texts make their own. Protean figures occur in abundance in the plays, from Brainworm to Captaine Shift, from Amorphus, through Volpone, Subtle, and Face, to Wittipol, and Lord Frampul. The potential for chaos and falsity predominates, but rarely is the potential for death

excited, in the presentation of these figures. Only in the late plays does any sense of the potential for something constructive emerge, for example, from unmasking the Protean Lord Frampul and the resultant re-uniting of his Protean family (20). Ultimately, it is the contradiction, which Giametti calls the 'potency to adapt and to signify', that continually throws into question the assumptions of the audience. Brainworm's success, and his exoneration by Justice Clement, may be seen less as an indication of a tolerant moral attitude at the end of the play, but more as a sign that what is really at stake, in dramatic terms, and perhaps in legal terms too, is a constant struggle for control and power of domination over discourse which all too easily slips away and adapts to new circumstances. It is a struggle that Brainworm and his descendants win hands down.

In the world of the humours, the conflict emerges between those 'witty' characters for whom discourse is a system of signifying, to be manipulated, played with, and shifted, and those to whom the 'mysteries' and 'skills' of various different discourses (hawking, hunting, duelling, or courting) represent a form of authority through which they themselves can be elevated. It is revealing to see that, when Young Knowell and Wellbred discuss the Familiar Epistle, they speak of it in terms of 'style and phrase', Young Knowell enthuses:-

Yes, I'll be sworn, I was ne'er guilty of reading the like; match it in all Pliny or Symmachus' Epistles, and I'll have my judgement burn'd in the ear for a rogue: make much of thy vein, for its is inimitable.

(F.III.i.30-33)

The praise, of course, is ridiculously exaggerated, but the references to Pliny and Symmachus represent a different, more scholarly attitude to written discourse than is seen in Old Knowell's reading which is concerned totally with content. The wits' attitude can comprehend the complexity of being 'guilty', in terms of a moral law, while still being praiseworthy in terms of aesthetics and rhetoric. It is, after all the day's metamorphoses, precisely this attitude that enables Brainworm to go free at the end of the play. Old Knowell, on the other hand, is presented as more inclined to see the letter of the text as determined, and determining, even when it is condemning him as an 'old shirt'.

In Every Man Out Sordido is presented as totally bound up in the predictions of his 'prognostications'. The future, as predicted in these texts, completely determines his behaviour:-

I thank my blessed angel; never, never
Laid I penny better out than this,
To purchase this dear book: not dear for price,
And yet of me as dearly prized as life,
Since in it is contained the very life,
Blood, strength, and sinews of my happiness.
Blessed be the hour wherein I bought this book,
His studies happy that composed the book,
And the man fortunate that sold the book.
Sleep with this charm, and be as true to me,
As I am joyed and confident in thee.

(I.iii.49-59)

In this almost liturgical speech the 'book' is granted a sanctity of place and truth that is only equivocated by the possible vagaries of misprints, 'the other was false printed sure' (I.iii.38-9), he says when two predictions disagree.

When his servant brings him a letter, signed by the Justices, ordering him to bring his grain to the market and to stop hoarding it, Sordido immediately rejects it:-

... the prints of them stick in my flesh,
Deeper than i' their letters: They have sent me
Pills wrapped in paper here, that, should I take 'em,
Would poison all the sweetness of my book,
And turn my honey into hemlock juice.
But I am wiser then to serve their precepts,
Or follow their prescriptions.

(I.iii.86-92)

The letter from the Justices acquires a physical capability, it is literally the force of the Law of which Sordido is afraid but, at the same time, he is proud to outwit the Justices by means of his private superior book. A further distinction emerges, in this episode, between the publicly located letter from the Justices, and the private, mysterious prognostications, whose origins remain unknown. Where the authority behind the text has no known origin, or only a distant origin like the Italian sources of duelling discourses, then it acquires dominance over the locatable, and thus deflatable texts, such as personal letters. The lure of secret, mysterious knowledge, known only to the initiated, is developed again in the courtly practices of Cynthia's Revels (as I have already shown in Amorphus' speeches) and then magnificently extended in The Alchemist.

When Sordido's prognostications finally prove contradictory and inaccurate, his only remedy is suicide:-

Tut, these starmonger knaves, who would trust 'em? One says dark and rainy, when 'tis as clear as crystal; another says tempestuous blasts and storms, and 'twas as calm as a milk-bowl... You learned men, and have not a legion of devils, a vostre service! a vostre service? by heaven, I think I shall die a better

scholar than they!

(III.vii.12-20)

For one whose entire identity is dictated by the texts of the 'starmonger knaves', clearly, death is the only dramatic remedy when the texts that sustain his existence prove faulty. Sordido, however, is rescued from suicide and a miraculous change of humour is affected, but the change is such that the miser Sordido does, in effect, die and a new, dramatically unformulated, 'good' character appears. This change from miserly usury to benevolence, occurs just after Sordido is rescued from his own gallows. A group of rustics, having found him swinging, cut him down. Then they realise who he is and start to curse him, and each other, for rescuing such a villain from death. Sordido, in turn, is horrified at what he hears:-

What curses breathe these men! How have my deeds
Made my looks differ from another man's,
That they should thus detest and loathe my life!
Out on my wretched humour, it is that
Makes me thus monstrous in true human eyes.
Pardon me, gentle friends, I'll make fair mends
For my foul errors past, and twenty-fold
Restore to all men what with wrong I robbed them:
My barns and garner's shall stand open still
To all the poor that come, and my best grain
Be made alms-bread, to feed half-famished mouths.

(III.viii.32-42)

This is such an absurd case of a character being put 'out of his humour' that the audience must see it, at least in part, as a self-mocking piece of satire at the expense of the play's own practice, as well as a satire of other earlier repentant sinners. It also points directly to an awareness of considerable inadequacy in the humours system.

The conclusions of the plays seem to imply that if a character's humour can be fully demonstrated or exorcised, then the audience may rest relatively satisfied, even if there are other difficulties still unresolved. After the affected courtiers, in Cynthia's Revels, have drunk too deep from the "Fountain of Self-Love", Crites administers justice and instructs them all, amongst other things on their way home, to go 'to the well of knowledge, Helicon (V.xi.153), where they will be purged. Helicon is the birthplace of the Muses and, in this reference, the text again allusively constructs the link between poetry and knowledge. The punishments in Cynthia's Revels are dealt out without any discussion because their authority is derived directly from the descent of Cynthia into the Court. The brief appearance of Cynthia in the play hardly warrants its title except that one must understand that, however brief the presence of the queen, the entire mythology of the Queen as Cynthia, Astrea and Claridiana is invoked in her descent. Yates has explored the Imperial theme in the sixteenth century very fully. Jonson's drama, in Cynthia's Revels, relies heavily on the common comprehension of this mythology, and a shared preconception of the queen amongst the play's spectators, to give the final judgements and punishments a coherence and authority that they do not, in themselves, possess (21).

Similarly, by the end of Every Man In, Brainworm has displayed a distinct resemblance to the early English Morality Vice; one recalls the changes of name, and appearance of Haphazard in Apilus and Virginia (1561/6) as an

archetype of the Vice figure:-

By the Gods, I know not how best to devize,
My name or my property, well to disguise;
A marchaunte, a may poole, a man or a machrell,
A crab or a crevise, a crane or a cockerell
Most of all these my nature doth inioy,
Sometime I advance them, sometime I destroy.

(Apius and Virginia, Scene ii.189-194) (22)

Brainworm is also defined by another set of conventions; those of the wily servant of Roman Comedy who triumphs over his master. Brainworm stands constructed out of both of these conventional archetypes and, as such, is saved being the object of any simply defined judgement in the end. Justice Clement saves him from a moralistic judgement, preferring to recall Brainworm's classical origins:-

Well, give me thy hand. Pro superi! ingenium magnum
quis nosset Homerum, Ilias aeternum si latuisset opus?

(Q.V.iii.197-198)

[Before greatness!] who would know Homer's name
were his immortal Iliad lost to fame? (23)

In this, the Quarto's version of the judgement, Clement quite clearly invokes Brainworm's classical roots. The substance of the quotation (from Ovid's Ars Amatoria III.413-414, the first four words are Jonson's) equates Brainworm's schemes and disguises with the action of the Iliad. It comes from a passage that laments the loss of status of poets (a favourite theme of Jonson's), and in an earlier line refers to Menander: 'him whose cunning slaves outwit his sires' (Cuive pater vafri luditur arte Getae) (24). In this way, very indirectly, the Quarto joins together the triumph of servants over their masters with the

success and fame of poets. It also tentatively equates Jonson with Homer in their circumstances as poets. Such a learned allusion might be lost on most of the theatre audience, yet it exposes the problem of Brainworm's moral position. He is 'creator' and poet, but also ambitious Machievel and Demon. It is a problem that the revised text passes over by deleting the reference. There is perhaps a recognition in this that the implications of the quotation are a little far-fetched. In the Folio, Justice Clement makes a plain request of Brainworm:-

Pledge me - Thou hast done or assisted to nothing,
in my judgment, but deserves to be pardon'd for the wit
o'the offense.

(F.V.i.173-175)

Justice is seen to be done in the 'judgement' of Clement, but for the audience, and later for Jonson it would seem, questions remain unsolved: how can Brainworm be a deceiver and a moral poet? This is the substance of the argument that revolves around the character of Ovid in Poetaster and I shall discuss Jonson's treatment of it there in the next chapter.

Brainworm is allowed to go free because, ultimately, he has served the 'humorous' purpose of the drama very well. In Every Man Out the problem is solved by making the agent-provocateur Macilente, the possessor of an 'envious' humour, out of which, he too, can neatly be put. In Cynthia's Revels, the descent of Cynthia as dea ex machina, followed by the administration of justice, by Arete and Crites, which is authorized by the mythology of the Queen also, rather too

neatly, wraps up the problems raised in the action. As Dutton comments:-

In the early plays... the moment of dissolution, where someone with the role, if perhaps not the manner, of a Justice Clement finally ostracized the follies, left a vacuum in which the satirist seemed, all too patly, to have cured the ills of the world. (25)

The conclusion of Every Man In, in the Folio, seems prepared to evade the subject of the contradiction between creation and deceit, but it is a problem still raised by the complexity of the action. Finally, it does emerge to be articulated in the very last lines of the play, when Clement says:-

Here is my mistress - Brainworm! To whom all my addresses of courtship shall have their reference. Whose adventure this day, when our grandchildren shall hear to be made a fable, I doubt not but it shall find both spectators and applause.

(F.V.i.279-284)

In this statment the full conflict that is suggested in the Quarto comes to the surface. At the very point, when the moral problems of the text would seem to be ready to be turned, questioningly, onto the audience and to make contact again with reality outside the dramatic world, Brainworm's actions are 'to be made a fable' (26). Instead of having application and access to the world, his actions are turned, very neatly, back into material for a text. The applause of the spectators will seal up or objectify the action into a 'fable' rather than open it to examination. The contrast to this comes much later, in The Alchemist, where Face's actions are quite specifically turned 'on you, that are my country' (V.v.163), but for the early plays the difficulty

remains of fully relating the meanings of the play to the world, resolution is only to be found in further experiment.

Notes and References

1. C.H. Herford, 'Introduction to Every Man Out Of His Humour', reprinted in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, Edited by J.A. Barish, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1963) p.82.
2. J.I. Cope, The Theatre and The Dream: From Metaphor to Form in Renaissance Drama, (Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) pp.226-227.
3. See E.M. Thron, 'Jonson's Cynthia's Revels: Multiplicity and Unity', Studies in English Literature, 11, (1971) 235-247.
4. An oversimplified view of the 'humours' system is often taken by critics, even recently, for example, see:- Wayne, op.cit., p105.
5. The theory of the 'humour' has been extensively discussed, the best exegesis remains in H&S, IX, pp.391-394. Asper's speech in the Induction of Every Man Out (11.87-114) is also a good basic explanation.
6. J.A. Bryant Junior, 'Jonson's Revisions of Every Man In His Humour', Studies in Philology, LIX, (1962) 641-650, p.650.
7. A Parallel-Text Edition of the 1601 Quarto and the 1616 Folio of Every Man In His Humour, Edited by J.W. Lever, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, (London, Edward Arnold, 1972) p.xvi.
8. Lever's parallel-text edition of Every Man In is invaluable and it is to this edition that I refer throughout the chapter. R.Dutton has observed that the changes made to the play are a definite stylistic improvement, but he concludes that it is ultimately an extremely limited revision:-
R. Dutton, 'The Significance of Jonson's Revisions of Every Man In His Humour', Modern Language Review, 69, (1974) 241-249.
9. The modern preference for the strong plot is perhaps one reason why neither Every Man Out nor Cynthia's Revels has been published (let alone performed) in a critical edition since Herford and Simpson did their work in 1927.
10. For further comparison of the play with Roman Comedy see:-
Dessen, op.cit., pp.44-45.

11. See - L. Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965) pp.385-402.
12. Every Man In His Humour, Edited by G.B. Jackson, (Newhaven and London, Yale University Press, 1969), p.83.
13. For further analysis of the link between the fox and the devil see my Chapter on Volpone.
14. See my chapter on Epicoene.
15. C. Leech, 'The Function of Locality in the Plays of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries', in The Elizabethan Theatre, Edited by D. Galloway, (London, Macmillan, 1969) 103-116, p.108.
16. There is some debate as to where exactly the Globe theatre was located, but it undoubtedly stood on the Southwark side of the river facing the city, see:-
E.K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923) II, pp. 427-433.
17. In Buffone's satirical reference to Greene's works, as opposed to the 'noble Sydney's' Arcadia, the play anticipates the rivalry and back-biting of the Poetomachia as it occurs in the context of Poetaster. See my chapter on Poetaster, p.1.
18. Stone, op. cit., pp.37-40.
19. A.B. Giametti, 'Proteus Unbound: Some Version of the Sea-God in the Renaissance', in The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History, Edited by P. Demetz, T. Greene, and L. Nelson Junior, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1968) 437-476, p.455. See also:-
M.Grivelet, 'A Portrait of the Artist as Proteus', Proceedings of the British Academy, 61,(1975) pp.153-170. Traces Shakespeare's use of Proteus as opposed to Romantic interpretations, but fails to do more than mention Jonson in very conventional terms as condemning 'whatever seems to flow with the flux of things' (p.167).
20. See my chapter on The New Inn.
21. F. Yates, Astrea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century, (London and Boston, Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1975).
22. Tudor Interludes, Edited by Peter Happe, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972) p.282.

23. Ovid's Ars Amatoria: The Art of Love, Translated by B.P. Moore, (London and Glasgow, Blackie & Sons Ltd., 1935) p.141, 11.413-414.

24. Ars Amatoria, pp.134-135, 1.332.

25. Dutton, op.cit. p.248.

26. Dutton makes a similar point, but in a rather general and abstract way (Dutton, op. cit., p.248).

Chapter II : The Poetaster, Or His Arraignment: Problems in Representation

The Poetaster, Or His Arraignment (1601) might fairly be described as one of Jonson's problem plays. It has frequently been cast as an unwieldy, poorly crafted affair and this impression has been justified on the basis of Jonson's own observation, through the Prologue by Envy, that the play only took 'fifteen weeks' to prepare (1). The speed with which the play was brought to the stage is generally attributed to the "Stage Quarrel": the heightened rivalry between Jonson and Marston and Dekker, that has been the focus of much attention. Even before its first performance the play seems to have been bound up in rivalries between these playwrights. Indeed the play is frequently read as a pre-emptive weapon against Dekker's subsequent attack on Jonson, in Satiro-Mastix (1602), the preparation of which Jonson is thought to have known about when writing Poetaster. The critical reading of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is almost obsessively involved in attempts to identify the characters in Poetaster with the contemporary authors supposedly being satirised, for example, seeing Crispinus as Marston and Demetrius as Dekker, on the basis of stylistic reminiscences (2). In their commentary Herford and Simpson devote some space to annotating the connections between the two plays and the points in Jonson's play that are picked up, echoed, or lampooned in the later piece (3). The foregrounding of the "Stage Quarrel" has in this way obscured interest in the

text of Poetaster in its own right and in its relations with the rest of the Jonsonian canon. Few modern critics have discussed it, and sadly, there has been no further edition of the play since Herford and Simpson's in 1920.

There have, of course, been a few recent attempts to analyse Poetaster further, and these have centred mainly on Ovid's crime and banishment, seeking to make this a central and unifying factor in the play (4). The difficulty with this approach, as Campbell recognises, is that it leaves 'the fifth act dangling' (5). Difficulty in reading the play, as a whole, seems to stem primarily from the way in which it does not move forward with a very strong narrative line. Campbell observes:-

The unity established for the play lies less in a closely-knit, simply-moving action than in a succession of intellectual attitudes. (6)

Talbert also finds that the best way to deal with Poetaster is to try to dispense with the conventional notion of plot and narrative:-

The material he (Jonson) has turned into a drama is not a story, not a plot in the conventional sense of the word, but a series of related ideas that go to make up an ars poetica. (7)

Yet having reached this interesting point, where 'what happens' is seen as less important than 'how it happens', and 'ideas' are given precedence over 'language', critics still seem to have been troubled by the play. The banishment of Ovid occurs too early in the action to be dominant, and the purgation of Crispinus seems too trivial to provide the audience with a satisfying sense of unity in the conclusion. Knoll summarises:-

The difficulty comes, at heart, because the play contains no single dramatic conflict, embodying the two principal ideas of the play. Our attentions are scattered among a wealth of incident We are embarrassed by a wealth of incident. (8)

The search for unified thematic interpretations seems to be a vain one and has resulted in a lack of interest in Poetaster and a predominant view of the play as of marginal importance. This may well be a critical judgement of craftsmanship that the play deserves; it is not, by Jonson's own standards, a very well-wrought play. Yet, it is precisely in the apparent awkwardness of construction and in the dependence within the play on various other, mainly Classical, texts that the modern critic is provided with an opportunity to observe some important aspects of Jonson's emergent dramatic exploration in a more obvious, though still not a crude, context.

In this chapter I shall examine closely the fragmentary nature of the play and try to show that 'wealth of incident' possesses patterns that are significant in a non-narrative manner. I shall explore the play's 'semi historical' mode, its use of sections of Classical texts 'imperfectly assimilated', as Herford and Simpson put it, and the manner in which the action progresses by a series of parallels and contrasts such as, for example, the clash of identity between Tucca and Virgil, or the comparison between Chloe's and Albius' banquet for the courtiers in II.ii., and the banquet held at court by Ovid and Julia, in IV.v.

Herford and Simpson, in their introduction to Poetaster, make the following observation:-

There was a rigidity in Jonson's mind which impeded the perfect mastery and harmonious fusion of its complex elements and vast resources; so that things came from him in masses, with abrupt discords at the points of junction, and a strange variegation of tones. (9)

I shall be exploring these 'abrupt discords' and the 'strange variegations of tones' in Poetaster because these qualities seem to me to typify the underside of Jonsonian dramaturgy not just in this play, but in the later works. Clashes of dramatic mode and the confrontation of different sets of discourse seem to me to lie at the root of Jonsonian comedy. In her introduction to Every Man In His Humour, G.B. Jackson writes:-

Jonson is not writing about common agreement on the outside world at all. He is writing about diverse and unmergeable inner worlds, about the impossibility of common agreement, about the psychological artificiality of a commonly defined outer world, even when it is a moral necessity. (10)

This seems to me to be a very important summary of what is at work in much of Jonson's drama. It is perhaps an over-psychological, and therefore a slightly anachronistic, view of Jonsonian drama, and I would challenge the notion that 'inner worlds' are ever presented on Jonson's stage at all. Jackson's central idea, nevertheless, of the 'diverse and unmergeable', is strongly expressed in the language of the drama and nowhere more so than in Poetaster.

The problem in Poetaster, it seems to me, is essentially a problem of representation and it begins with the location of the play in Rome. The drama draws attention to the setting through its first induction, spoken by Envy, and her speech also provides the key to a potential

solution:-

Mark, how I will begin: The scene is, ha! -
Rome? Rome? and Rome? Crack eye-strings, and your balls
Drop into earth; let me be ever blind.

(Envy's Prologue, 11.27-29)

Envy provides a double perspective, she is at once the voice of the text commenting on its own beginnings, and also speaks from the position of the audience approaching the drama, sceptically perhaps, for the first time. She continues:-

I am prevented; all my hopes are crossed,
Checked, and abated; fie, a freezing sweat
Flows forth at all my pores, my entrails burn:
What should I do? Rome? Rome? O my vexed soul,
How might I force this to the present state?

(II.30-34)

Rather than censure the play, the audience is immediately set a task, through this speech, to try to suit the historical setting of the play 'to the present state', but without altering it through a 'forced' interpretation such as Envy might apply. The setting is, on one level, designed to prevent any contemporary comparisons being drawn, or Envious comments made, of any kind. On another level, however, the presentation of Augustan Rome to Elizabethan England, as Herford and Simpson have already suggested, provides a useful analogy between the position of Horace amid his Roman detractors and Jonson's own position in the context of the stage quarrel (11).

Yet the deep and more prolonged interest in this setting for Jonson and other playwrights, Shakespeare most obviously, suggests more profound reasons for, and

significance to, this choice. In most simple terms Augustan Rome provides a moral 'Golden Age' model for everything that Jonson requires of his England. In this sense the symbolic prologue by Envy, which is a strangely archaic device reminiscent of morality plays, indicates one kind of allegorical level on which the drama could be approached. Velz has observed in relation to Shakespeare's use of Classical material:-

Virgil's mythic vision of Rome as driven (or called) by Fate toward the Pax Augusta was 'true' in his generation in just the same way the equally vulnerable Tudor myth was in Shakespeare's generation - that is, it was more true in its piety of invention than literalists are likely to understand. (12)

This 'piety of invention' is at work in Poetaster. The Prologue, appearing after Envy dressed symbolically in armour, declares the writer of the play is 'one that knows the strength of his own Muse' (1.24), but the suggestion is that this 'strength' will be tested during the play, both by detractors in the audience, and in the play. The symbolism of Envy and the armed Prologue, and also the heroic elements which I shall be analysing in Horace's discourse, are set up on a stylized level which suggest a highly literary function for the play. This is in marked contrast to the heightened, naturalistic induction to Cynthia's Revels. There, the arguing boy-actors squabble over who is to speak the prologue in a way which engenders expectations of a much more naturalistic drama than Cynthia's Revels in fact turns out to be. In Poetaster the opposite is true; a stylized, symbolic, double prologue is followed by what appears to be a naturalistic drama.

Yet, in Poetaster, Jonson does not depict Augustan Rome with the same kind of narrative consistency as does Shakespeare, for example, in Julius Caesar (1599). In Poetaster the depiction of the poetic heroes of Rome is alternated with the presentation of other characters, such as Albius and Tucca, whose behaviour and language has little in common with the known discourse and history of Augustan Rome, and a great deal in common with the discourses of Elizabethan social aspirants depicted in other Jonsonian texts. The comparison between Bobadil, in Every Man In His Humour, and Tucca is obviously a fruitful one. Both are ex-soldiers, both enjoy a blustering, uncontrolled kind of language, and both invoke the popular drama of the earlier English stage in a way that I shall explore further on. Similarly, Albius and Chloe here, and Captain and Mistress Otter in Epicoene, share the same kind of domestic comic relationship where the husband is harrassed and the wife absurdly over-critical in a manner that comes very close to the citizen comedy of Middleton and Massinger. Cytheris also speaks with the vocabulary of the affected English courtier strongly in mind. She offers some advice to Chloe on how to address people in courtly company:-

Carry not too much underthought betwixt yourself and them; nor your city mannerly word 'forsooth' use it not too often in any case... nor never say 'your Lordship' nor 'your Honour'; but, 'you', and 'you my Lord', and 'my Lady': the other they count too simple, and minceative. And though they desire to kiss heaven with their titles, yet they will count them fools that give them too humbly.

(IV.i.28-34)

This is a careful, satirical exegesis of correct phraseology in the courtly milieu, and it is reminiscent of the sycophantic affectations of the Elizabethan middle-classes which Jonson and the other authors of city-comedies frequently satirise. At the same time, when she refers to the courtiers' 'desire to kiss heaven with their titles', Cytheris anticipates the ambitious nature of Ovid's 'heavenly' banquet, held at court, later in the same act.

Given the 'piety of invention', that Velz finds in the use of the Roman setting, the problem of representation still lies in the difficulty for the audience in identifying what kind of non-literal, symbolical Rome is being depicted and with it what kind of Ovid, Horace, and Virgil. On what level of representation do these heroes of Rome speak to the Elizabethan audience?

The opening scene of Poetaster seems to operate on at least two levels which further develop this question. Lines 39-80 consist of Jonson's version of Marlowe's translation of elegy XV in Ovid's first book of Amores. Ovid is presented as having just finished writing the elegy whilst playing truant from his study of the law. He recites it:-

Envy, why twit'st thou me, my time's spent ill?
And call'st my verse fruits of an idle quill?
Or that (unlike the line from whence I sprung)
War's dusty honours I pursue not, young?
Or that I study not the tedious laws;
And prostitute my voice in every cause?

(I.i.39-44)

The effect of this speech is to place the 'real' poet, Ovid, before the audience in the rapture of composition and, as such, it has great immediacy as an opening scene. Clearly,

as Luscus alarmedly announces to Ovid the imminent arrival of his father, the character of Ovid, the young poet, and his position in the plot, are elaborately and carefully constructed around the very subject of the elegy. Ovid's assertion, in the verse, of the role of 'heavenly Poesie' over and above the study of laws, is turned into a precise articulation of his position in the action. All of the subsequent arguments, between Ovid Senior and Ovid Junior over the duties of the student and his priorities with regard to the law and to poetry, are an enactment of the points contained in the elegy.

The speech also gains added weight because it engages directly with Envy's prologue. They both function in a similar symbolic mode of discourse and it is specifically to Envy that the elegy is addressed giving echo to her words. Both seem to operate on the level of abstract archetypal debate, as opposed to the more prosaic argument between father and son, although, of course on yet another level, Ovid's elegy also casts Envy as his father.

It seems, as a result, that from the outset the action in the play is to be subsumed in the expression of a larger consciousness which is at work on more of an allegorical level. The nature of this consciousness seems, however, to have a more concrete basis in the construction of the text than is suggested by Talbert's notion of a kind of transcendent Ars Poetica within the drama. Such a reading seems a little distant from the actual dramatic activity that constitutes the play. I suggest, rather, that what

occurs is a series of dramatic interpretations and re-workings of classical fragments which are then linked together in a way which questions the audience on how truth and identity can satisfactorily be represented and on how power can be derived from that truth.

It may be recalled that it is Ovid, in Metamorphoses, who depicts Envy as nourishing her wickedness on snakes' flesh, while, in Jonson's prologue (1.5), Envy observes of the play "here will be subject for my snakes and me" (13). Multiple connections seem to be made between text, character, and the source-material which must set the audience thinking about what it means to represent 'real people', especially real writers, on the stage. Horace also refers to Envy (in III.v.119-123) in a way that adumbrates her archetypal presence in the play.

The unrepeated appearance of Ovid Senior in the first act, together with the presentation of Ovid as a truant student of Law (also a role that is not carried through into the rest of the play), must be understood as dramatic enactments of the Ovid elegy, as well as an attempt to initiate the plot. Indeed, it can only be an attempt, because the function of this first scene seems to be more of an introduction to the mode in which the dramaturgy is working than an actual setting into motion of characters' motives or of a 'story-line'. The absence of these conventional features of a first scene must have been something of a challenge to the contemporary audience who were well used to allusions to public figures, and events,

being scattered through the recounting of a fairly straightforward story that was introduced in a straightforward way. This is the case with Satiro-Mastix where a highly conventional tragi-comedy is simply given some extra scenes in which Horace and Tucca resume their argument and abuse. With Poetaster's unconventional beginning, the audience might well ask itself, what is this play actually about? Is Ovid the poetaster? Or, if not, who is the subject of the play? And, in this, the drama is slow and unwilling to reveal itself, perhaps because it is drama itself which becomes the underlying subject of the play.

With the presentation of Horace the same problem occurs. The textual movement, in and out of the classical discourse, produces a corresponding oscillation in the way that the classical characters are represented. In describing something of this effect, Pierce makes a useful division:-

At the centre of Horace's moral art is the persona "Horace", created most vividly in his Satires and Epistles. (14)

It appears to be this 'persona' who participates in Poetaster. The author of the preface to Dekker's Satiro-Mastix, perhaps not surprisingly however, sees it differently, finding that the audience is presented here with a "Horace the Second" (15). This is an allusion to the idea that Jonson's character, Horace, is intended to be a self-portrait. Jones too, in discussing the addition of the Apologetical Dialogue (added to the 1616 Folio edition), finds Horace uneasily defined:-

Instead of attacking fools, Horace is continually trying to avoid the fools who besiege him. In fact, we only know him as a satirist by reputation, not by anything he does in the play - at least until the final scene when he reluctantly agrees to act as plaintiff against his maligners and gives a purgative pill to Crispinus. (16)

The text of Poetaster seems to invite an examination of manifold levels of representation through which the single character of 'Horace' is continually rising and falling. One might begin to catalogue the multiple identities that are bound up in the one character: Horace the Roman whose existence is implied by the presence of a free rendering of the first Satire of Horace's second book (III.v.) and a more fragmentary version of the ninth Satire of his first book (III.i.); or Horace, the Augustan Poet, constructed by Jonson's Elizabethan discourse; or Horace as analogue to Jonson representing his own self-ideal; or Horace's persona as constructed by the discourse of the Satires. Each of these versions, or sub-versions, of Horace is differently constructed and has a different significance. The differentiated, separate, versions of Horace are recognised in the preface to Satiro-Mastix, when the author deems it important to thank "Thou true Venusian Horace", with an implicit reproach to the false Jonsonian Horace (17). Finally, in the last scene of the play, Horace takes on yet another identity in the role of Doctor Sopholis, from Lucian's Lexiphanes, when he administers the purgative tablet to Crispinus. The overt intertextuality of Poetaster is highly effective, but its plurality is far greater and more confusing than an audience can easily be aware of, or

is able to assimilate coherently in the theatre.

In III.i, Horace's ninth Satire is absorbed into the play. Crispinus leaves the banquet at the house of Chloe and Albius in search of a 'poet's gown, and ... a garland'. He is discovered, as act III opens, spying on Horace who is composing some verses as he walks along the Via Sacra. Crispinus pounces on him and then initiates the pestering dialogue that creates the interest of the original Satire.

The Satire is adapted in a number of small details which do not seem to affect it in a significant way. They seem merely to place the dialogue in the dramatic context of the play, but they also impart to the Satire a new value for its Elizabethan audience. The most obvious alteration is in the act of dramatisation itself, in which the ironic narrative voice of Horace is lost, the dramatic dialogue simply necessitates an exchange between the two characters: Crispinus and Horace. This absence reduces the ironic distance between event and narrative comment which the original achieves, although Jonson's Horace is given numerous asides that do to some extent replace this function. So, for example, when (at III.ii.) Fuscus Aristius leaves Horace, still helplessly in Crispinus' clutches, Horace exclaims in an aside:-

...Never was man
So left under the axe -

(III.ii.26-27)

This is a very direct, and a scholarly translation of Horace's original, narrative comment:-

fugit improbu ac me
sub cultro linquit.

(I.ix.73-74)

The rascal runs away and
leaves me under the knife. (18)

Jonson's translation turns the narrative into direct expression, with Aristius' exit being the staged enactment of the first half of the sentence. This seems to have the effect of giving Horace's words a more portentous weight than before. With the change of tense, and the alteration of the first half of the phrase so that the speaker is the sole subject, the outcry becomes more absolute and, through the slight syntactic change, the satiric poet's words are now presented enshrined in a kind of proverbial discourse; the colloquial idiom becomes a historic utterance ripe for repetition and re-working. It seems, then, that there are some deep-seated shifts of emphasis and evaluation that occur here in what is apparently a straightforward, merely formal, transposition.

In relation to this it is revealing to note that none of the classical allusions made by Jonson's Horace in this scene are actually in the original Satire. Jonson's Horace exclaims in outrage when Aristius asks him what his problem is:-

'Death, I am seized on here
By a land-remora, I cannot stir;

(III.ii.3-4)

A 'land-remora' was the sucking fish believed by ancients to have the power of staying the course of any ship to which it attached itself. It is then a very effective, apt and

comical description of Crispinus. Indeed, the OED cites Poetaster as the first occurrence of the word being used in a figurative and allusive expression, but Horace's Horace makes no such allusion, it is entirely a Jonsonian addition. Similarly, in other places in the passage, Jonson's Horace refers to Crispinus as 'this Python' (III.i.249), 'this Hydra of discourse' (III.i.252), and cries out that the poetaster 'cleaves to me like Alcides' shirt,/ Tearing my flesh and sinews' (III.ii.6-7). All of these allusions characterise Jonson's Horace as a speaker of an unmistakably classical discourse despite the fact that the Horace of antiquity makes no such allusions. Through these various references, furthermore, Jonson's Horace represents himself in his struggle with Crispinus as the heroic Hercules battling against lethal enemies in his twelve labours. It will be recalled that Hercules is also called Alcides and the second of his labours was the killing of the Hydra of Lerna. It is in this, almost hyperbolic, use of the classical material that a strategy perhaps reveals itself. For the audience sees and hears, in these very close transpositions of the original texts, an attempt to perpetuate and consolidate the classical material both in terms of its overt morality and its mythologies. The Horatian colloquialism becomes reinforced by the added allusion which heavily signals, to all sectors of the audience, the origins of the passage and emphasises its classicism as an innate virtue in itself. In its eagerness to convey the integrity and usefulness, as well as the

wealth of the Golden Age discourse, the Elizabethan text ends by exaggerating it. The result is almost an ossified version that is weighed down by the new status of the discourse as model which is now ascribed to it.

This presentation of historical material to a contemporary audience is clearly a matter of considerable complexity and part of that complexity lies in the area of representation. When Horace's discourse is used here it also stands as the utterance of a model morality, but whether or not this is something that remains at a constant level throughout the play is less clear. One of the principal reasons for this lack of clarity is that Poetaster makes its audience move with it between scenes which have a distinct symbolic character, such as the scene between Ovid and his father, and scenes which are far more mimetic in character, such as the preparations of Chloe and Cytheris for the banquet at court. Much of the action, of course, takes place on a level that is somewhere wavering between the two. At crucial moments, however, the modes of representation become polarised in a way that is not normally seen in Jacobean or Elizabethan drama (19).

The banquet that is held first, by Chloe and Albius (in II.ii.), is not in itself of any particular symbolic importance. The drama seems here to be involved merely in revealing the aspirations of the middle class hosts and the affectations of their courtly guests. This is achieved mainly through the over-elaborate patterns of speech that they use. Crispinus, for example, makes a

characteristically involved request of Chloe:-

Entreat the ladies to entreat me to sing then,
I beseech you.

(II.ii.120)

This convoluted, ritualised, discourse typifies the poetaster's use of language in its clumsiness and its repetition. Chloe obliges his request, and Julia in turn asks her if he sings well, to which Chloe, baffled, absurdly replies:-

I think so, madam: for he entreated me to
entreat you to entreat him to sing.

(II.ii.123-124)

Whilst unconsciously showing up Crispinus's attempts to draw attention to himself, and therefore exposing his false modesty, Chloe's reply also indicates the naivety of her own grasp of the situation. Both are neatly revealed here in a very naturalistic way. This is the kind of sharply observed verbal satire that is familiar enough to the audience which already knows Jonson's earlier Humour plays. One finds the beginnings of a split between this kind of social-realism and more mythological allegory in Cynthia's Revels. The use of myth and allegory seems to be a dramatic mode with which Jonson experimented at this time, but which was never fully pursued.

The seemingly un-extraordinary banquet gains added significance and poignancy, however, when Gallus brings the announcement of the banquet to be held by Ovid and Julia at the court. Gallus explains to Chloe:-

Your late kind entertainment is now to be requited with

a heavenly banquet.

(IV.ii.2-3)

In Gallus' reference to Chloe's 'kind entertainment' there is perhaps a hint of the early Elizabethan sense of 'kind' meaning 'natural' or even 'pastoral'. Immediately the comparison is available to be drawn between the ordinary 'natural' social gathering and the daring, fictional, theme of the banquet to be held at court. Occupying acts II and IV, as they do, these two events balance one another as central situations in the overall structure of the play. The plan for the banquet at court produces a sudden acceleration and intensification of the play's action after the lengthy buffoonery of Tucca in act III.

When Chloe and Cytheris are informed that the second banquet is to take place, and that it will be a divine banquet, they respond with enthusiasm:-

Chlo: A pretty fiction in truth.

Cyth: A fiction indeed, Chloe, and fit for the fit of a poet.

(IV.ii.20-21)

Cytheris' ostentatious word-play, in this response, grandly draws attention to the 'fiction' in a way that suggests parallels with the larger artifice, that is the play itself, and the banquet. King points out that this is a satirical quibble on Chloe's 'vulgar' use of 'in truth', but there seems to be more to their two responses in the way that the difference between them is foregrounded (20). They perhaps might also be seen to represent two different Elizabethan attitudes to the kind of poetic fictions that will

constitute the banquet. The exchange is reminiscent of one between Audrey and Touchstone in As You Like It (1600?):-

Aud.: I do not know what 'poetical' is. Is it honest in deed and word? Is it a true thing?

Touch.: No, truly, for the truest poetry is the most feigning.

(III.iii.18-22)

Chloe's response, 'A pretty fiction in truth', suggests a naively paradoxical attitude which accepts without complications a move between 'reality' and 'fiction', and therefore looks no further than to the aesthetic, prettiness of poetry (and its enactment) for its satisfaction. Her use of the vulgar idiom serves to emphasise her social inadequacy, but it also reveals her lack of awareness of the potential power in such fiction-making. The disguise in the shape of the gods has, for Chloe, only the significance of a delightful game. It has the aesthetic, without the political, attraction of the court masque.

Cytheris' response is more sophisticated. She emphasises 'A fiction indeed, Chloe', Here 'indeed' stands as a reprimand against Chloe's 'in truth', as the correct courtly phrase, but it also suggests a stronger faith in the power of fictions to produce actual effects in the 'real' world. 'In deed' might come to mean, here 'in practice'. The pun on 'fit' also contains a glancing reference to a further ambiguity in the noun that indicates Cytheris' knowing attitude. She uses the word 'fit' superficially to mean 'a part or section of a poem, or song' (OED), but there is also perhaps an open awareness of the secondary meaning:

'A paroxysm of lunacy' (OED). Cytheris' pun may thus contain an informed, ironic anticipation of the nature and awful consequences of the banquet, which will be seen to threaten the very basis, in 'reality', of Augustan dominion.

In this brief verbal exchange a paradigm can be seen for the way comparisons are drawn in Poetaster between social aspiration and poetic ambition. Chloe's aspirations to the social world of the court also contain her attitude to the nature of poetry. Her social ambition, however, also coincides with the intellectual aspirations of Crispinus to a poetic friendship with Horace. Both are lower down the scale of hierarchies than are the activities of Ovid, Julia and Cytheris, each of whom betrays a different more pragmatic attitude to fiction, and to society. Similarly, in terms of the plot, Albius' and Chloe's banquet is clearly held for the purposes of boosting the hosts' social-standing; its form is highly naturalistic and the drama makes use of it to pursue the familiar line of social satire. The banquet at court becomes, in its construction, a far more symbolic and suggestive affair. It is directly concerned with the potential of poetry to transform, radically, the world-view of those who perceive it. The presentation of the banquet seems to be particularly Elizabethan, therefore, in its exploration of the ways in which fictive events may acquire a power of their own making.

Poetaster actually deviates from the classical sources in presenting the banquet at court, since the Emperor himself is described as having taken part in such an event.

Suetonius describes a banquet of this kind in The Deified Augustus:-

Cum primum istorum conduxit mensa choragum,
Sexque deos vidit Mallia sexque deas,
Impia dum Phoebi Caesar mendacia ludit,
Dum nova divorum cenat adulteria:
Omnia se a terris tunc numina declinarunt,
Fugit et auratos Iuppiter ipse thrones.

As soon as that table of rascals had secured a choragus... Mallia saw six gods and six goddesses, while Caesar impiously plays the false role of Apollo and feasts amid novel debaucheries of the gods; then all the deities turned their faces from the earth, and Jupiter himself fled from his Golden throne. (21)

The orgiastic, Saturnalian, nature of this banquet and the moral disapproval with which it is narrated is, clearly, similar to that held in Poetaster. The distinction between the description in Suetonius and the revelry of Jonson's play is marked in the substitution of Ovid for Augustus. Ovid, however, takes the place not of Apollo but of Jupiter, which perhaps intensifies the controversy around the roles being adopted, but what is most striking is the way that the Emperor is removed from the scene completely. In order that the moral model of Augustan Rome can be shown to work properly for its Elizabethan audience, it must undergo an alteration which represents an important re-evaluation. Before the text presents the purgation of Crispinus, it first produces the purification of the Emperor.

The model morality has already been clearly outlined by Horace in his explanation to Crispinus. It is expressed, not in terms of Caesar's, but of Maecenas' house. Horace turns on Crispinus for suggesting that, if only the poetaster were allowed into the circle, then together they would become

Maecenas' favourites above Virgil, Varius, and the others:-

.. sir, your silkness,
Clearly mistakes Maecenas and his house;
To think, there breathes a spirit beneath his roof,
Subject unto those poor affections
Of undermining envy, and detraction,
Moods only proper to base grovelling minds:
That place is not in Rome, I dare affirm,
More pure or free from such low common evils.
There's no man grieved that this is thought more rich,
Or this more learned; each man hath his place,
And, to his merit, his reward of grace:
Which with a mutual love they all embrace.

(III.i.220-231)

This passage is another careful translation from Horace's original satire, but the references to 'envy, and detraction' are added, producing another association with the induction by Envy. The adumbration of Envy throughout the play may be seen, like the "Fountain of Self-Love" in Cynthia's Revels, as a slightly forced underdeveloped attempt to provide an allegorical theme that functions at numerous points throughout the drama to give it more depth and more impact. The reference to Rome is a similar addition which re-emphasises the setting. The tone is more belligerent in Jonson and the final passage emphasises, more than does Horace, that 'each man hath his place'; social status and social stasis is brought to the foreground. Ovid's banquet of the gods is, therefore, considerably anticipated by the conflict of attitude between Horace, as representative of the authority of Augustus, and the younger poets.

Although Ovid replaces Augustus in the banquet, Kermode explains that Ovid has no conventional Classical connection with such banquets:-

The association of Ovid with the Banquet theme has no source in the poet himself, and must have arisen from Chapman or from the more emancipated reading of Ars Amatoria and Amorea. The writers of Elizabethan epyllia had gained a certain new freedom in erotic expression; Ovid seems to have become a sort of counter-Plato: and the formal opposition between the two could be expressed very economically in the contrast between the banquet of Sense and the Banquet of Heavenly Love derived from the Symposium. (23)

The identity of Ovid, like that of Horace and of Augustus, becomes in those texts that Kermode is discussing, and in Poetaster, the subject of re-evaluation. He comes to represent a force for anarchic liberation, in the Roman world, an advocate of poetic improvisation and free love (24). This impulse obviously contrasts starkly with the rigid Maecaenan rules of respect and stasis. For it is not simply a freedom of expression and a freedom from convention, but an individual autonomy, a social, political mobility and power that is sought in the symbolism of the banquet and the forms it takes. Tibullus summarises neatly when he explains to Cytheris, and to Chloe, the object of the banquet:-

... to show that poets (in spite of the world) are able to deify themselves.

(IV.ii.30-31)

This is the deliberately 'flawed' statement of an ideal for poetry which is to be attacked by Augustus later.

There seems to be a considerable element of ambivalence in the presentation of the banquet at court. It is an ambivalence that is extended by the behaviour and fates of Ovid and Julia, which undoubtedly call for some sympathy from the audience, despite unfavourable aesthetic

comparisons with Romeo and Juliet. How is the banquet to be judged and how is the audience to interpret Augustus' violent reaction to it? The banquet at first declares itself to be a form of the Platonic Banquet of Heavenly Love. At the beginning of the explanation to Chloe and Cytheris, Gallus in fact calls it a 'heavenly banquet' (IV.ii.3), but in the event it is obviously much closer to the material gratification involved in the Banquet of Sense. In the proclamation that initiates the feast proper Gallus, with Crispinus ceremonially repeating each phrase, explains:-

... it is no part of wisdom,
In these days, to come into bonds;
It shall be lawful for every lover
To break loving oaths,
To change their lovers, and make love to others,
As the heat of everyone's blood,
And the spirit of our nectar, shall inspire.
And Jupiter, save Jupiter!

(IV.v.30-38)

Finally, in the song by Hermogenes and Crispinus, the term 'feast of sense' (l.174) is specifically used, thus making the opposition complete (25).

There is no doubt that, in their final speeches before the Imperial party breaks in, Ovid and Julia become dangerously treasonous in their proposed messages to Caesar:-

Ovid:Mercury, our herald; go from ourself, the great god Jupiter, to the great emperor, Augustus Caesar: and command him, from us (of whose bounty he hath received his surname, Augustus) that for a thank-offering to our beneficence, he presently sacrifice as a dish to this banquet his beautiful and wanton daughter Julia. She's a cursed quean, tell him; and plays the scold behind his back: therefore, let her be sacrificed. Command

him this, Mercury, in our high name of Jupiter
Altitonans.

Jul: Stay, feather-footed Mercury, and tell Augustus, from
us, the great Juno Saturnia; if he think it hard to do
as Jupiter hath commanded him and sacrifice his
daughter, that he had better to do so ten times than
suffer her to love the well-nosed poet, Ovid: whom he
shall do well to whip, or cause to be whipped, about
the Capitol, for soothing her, in her follies.

(IV.v.181-195)

These speeches swivel between a mocking humour and a risky
seriousness. Yet, throughout the banquet, the tone is that
of a failure. The 'gods' all rapidly become drowsy after a
few glasses of 'ambrosia' and have to be reawakened by
Hermogenes; he finally consents to sing on this occasion
after refusing to in the first banquet. There is a sense in
which the fiction prescribed for them, in the proclamation
of the scheme for the banquet, rapidly becomes tiresome. We
do see the characters engaging in a kind of double-
transformation, out of the social order of the court-world,
through their disguises and aspirations to divinity and
then back, through the waiving of 'godly' limitations to an
amoral, more fantastical order. The entry into a new
symbolic order also provides the characters with a freedom
to form themselves and to inter-relate as they desire. Yet,
ultimately, the drama is unable to allow them, as in
Suetonius' model, 'to turn their faces away from the earth'.
So one notes how Chloe remains within her middle-class
attitudes and refuses Tuca's advances (at ll.52-57) and
similarly Julia is outraged at Ovid's advances in which he
seems to function half-way between the real and the fantasy.

The problem, for the audience, is how to judge these events, how to comprehend what they represent. Talbert is in no doubt:-

Above all, the nature of the informer Lupus and the reaction of Horace to the banquet italicize these explicit indications that Jonson meant the scene to be construed as harmless and witty revelry (26).

This seems to be rather indirect evidence and, in a sense, evades the central interest of the banquet which seems to be its mixture of appeals, riskiness and danger. At one moment the celebrants seem like amiable, young, innocent drunkards, the next there is more than a hint of meaningful and deliberate treason in the dialogue. Lupus, in IV.iv, clearly is a comic character, with his absurd paranoia and over-reaction to news of the banquet, but that the audience should be told that he already knows of the banquet before it is presented on the stage, and that he considers it to be a 'conspiracy' (1.12) and 'rebellion, now' (1.16), not only intensifies the dramatic interest in the event, but must also raise the question of the status or meaning of the banquet in the minds of the audience. G.B. Jackson argues for the opposite view from Talbert's:-

Within the Roman framework of the play the religion which Ovid and his friends are ridiculing is the true religion, and their sacrilege consequently stands for blasphemy in general. (27)

Certainly, in a society where to become an Emperor was to become a god, for others to aim at that rank must imply some kind of treason.

The comment proves valid as far as it goes but, in the light of the adjustments made to the classical discourse in

the play, it seems a little inadequate. Jackson makes little of the ambivalence of the banquet because she does not question the parallel between Rome and England, and how it is mediated by translation and by history.

It seems to me that the audience is deliberately troubled by the presentation of the banquet and in a play where the problem of representation is central, this is to be expected, because the banquet is a highly symbolic occasion where the metaphoric significance of almost everything which is said and done is considerable. The real danger of the banquet for Poetaster, I think, lies not in its immorality nor in its blasphemy, but in the status of the celebrations as 'phantasie'.

In turning to Caesar's reaction to the banquet, one finds that his discourse seems less concerned with the theological error, than with the unreal nature of the events in which the emperor has intervened:-

Have we our senses? Do we hear? And see?
Or, are these imaginary objects
Drawn by our fantasy? Why speak you not,
'Let us do sacrifice'? Are they the Gods?
Reverence, amaze, and fury fight in me.

(IV.vi. 2-6)

This is an extraordinary speech in the sense that it is very difficult to pin it down to a single response. Caesar's discourse enacts a confusion of emotions. This is not simply incredulity, nor is it wholeheartedly sarcastic. The emperor is floundering at the very boundaries of reality and fiction, his own coherence of identity seems to waver, and with it the whole dramatic illusion of the play is

caught up and threatened. On top of everything else that the banquet invokes, one might also add that the Elizabethan Augustus is suddenly confronted here by a banquet over which, in the classical text of Suetonius, he himself would have presided. Horace and Maecenas still stand very firmly inside the drama, and their response seems to mediate and to seek to conserve the stability and coherence of the position. Caesar threatens to kill Julia:-

There is a panther, whose unnatural eyes
Will strike thee dead: turn then, and die on her
With her own death.

(He offers to kill his daughter)

Mae. Hora: What means imperial Caesar?

(IV.vi. 11-14)

Their incredulous question indicates the firmness with which they stand symbolically, as 'moderation' and 'virtue', but theirs is also the precise question that the banquet asks of the whole of the play-world. It seems to be the very fictionality of the 'pageant' which is the threat. Its intention may be blasphemous, but it is the very fact of its occurrence which threatens Augustus and suggests that the Imperial world may have an equally fictional aspect to it that might not be natural, but which might be simply another constructed, artificial form of power. It is this revelation that necessitates the banishment of Ovid and the arrest of the other guests. The stability of the court, and in a broader sense that of the play as a whole, is reduced by this internal re-ordering of roles and values which seems to set on edge the very basis for the establishment of the society and the drama. Caesar draws attention to this

specifically when he says:-

If you think gods but feigned, and virtue painted,
Know we sustain an actual residence;
And, with the title of an Emperor,
Retain his spirit, and imperial power.

(IV.vi.47-50)

Caesar's emphasis on 'an actual residence' seems to be asserting the absolutism of a single order of 'the real' and of 'virtue' which must be dominant over the kind of anarchic freedom that the banquet constitutes. Further on Caesar, again, condemns the revellers because they:-

...live in worship of that idol, vice,
As if there were no virtue, but in shade
Of strong imagination, merely enforced?
This shows their knowledge is mere ignorance;
Their far-fetched dignity of soul a fancy;

(IV.vi.66-70)

The 'shade/ Of strong imagination', might be associated with Envy's earlier preference for 'pitchy darkness' (Prologue, 2.2.), as opposed to the 'real' light of a knowable 'virtue'. The opposition between 'knowledge' and 'mere ignorance' raises ontological questions far more complex than the relative simplicity of faith espoused by Augustus here. It might seem initially desirable to say that the contemporary audience would have had a firm understanding of what constituted 'virtue' outside the text, in religious, moral and political terms, and that, as a result, they would find no difficulty in an acceptance of Caesar's words as 'truth'. Yet, the question raised here, by implication, is how precisely can 'truth' be known at all. This is, after all, a question far more characteristic of the late

Elizabethan, early Jacobean period, than it is of Augustan Rome. It will be recalled that, in Every Man In, the same problem arises in the context of the humours. In that play a 'humour' becomes less and less satisfactory as a means of knowing another person. The play persistently focuses on the difficulty involved in knowing people for what they are. In Poetaster the problem is expanded and becomes, not simply an internal question, asked by one character of another, but a dramaturgical problem which brings into question the whole basis of differentiated modes of dramatic representation and discourse and how, or whether, one mode can achieve power over another within the overall dramatic framework.

One character who repeatedly performs this interrogative function is Captain Tucca. He is almost the personification of anarchic mixed-mode drama, roving the various groupings of the text, invoking various fragments of earlier dramatic forms, and it is in his discourse that this anarchy is most frequently enacted. King observes:-

His expressions do not come from any particular social group. His pedantries reflect the Elizabethan interest in language.... Slang is the most obvious growth from an area of vital anarchy in the commonwealth of language: that anarchy is Tucca's field of speech.
(28)

Tucca's function is not only anarchic in language, but also in its effect on other characters and on the audience. King has shown how the captain does not derive his language from 'any particular social group' and, similarly, it can be seen that he moves freely between the various social circles of the play, causing disruption and chaos wherever he is.

In I.ii. Ovid Senior's reprehension of his son is

unable to become a constant centre of the scene because Tucca intervenes. He diverts attention from the immediate argument to protest at Luscus' familiarity with the Ovids:-

How now, goodman slave? What, rowl powl?
All rivals, rascal? Why my master of worship, dost
hear? Are these thy best projects? Is this thy
designs and thy discipline, to suffer knaves to be
competitors with commanders and gent'men? Are we
parallels, rascal? Are we parallels?

(I.ii.21-25)

From the beginning, Tucca shows himself to be an interrogator of all classes. Here he seems to challenge the very pattern of Ovid Senior's social posture, his 'designs.../discipline' come under attack from outside. The deployment of this speech marks Tucca's position immediately, or rather, Tucca's lack of a single position. Not only is this speech a diversion, taking the audience's attention away from the attack on Ovid and the enactment of the elegy, it is also divisive, seeking as it does to set master and servant against one another. In this it displays all the characteristic features of Tucca's discourse. Most obvious is the main accumulation of interrogatives, which gives the speech such 'offensive' power, but straight away it should be added that the use of frequent alliteration, 'all rivals, rascal', 'thy designs and thy discipline', imparts to the language a curious opacity. The material density of the discourse is as active as any simply communicative function so that, in a similar fashion to Subtle's later alchemical discourse, our attention is drawn to the signifying processes more than to the nature of the

signified. One of the main features of Tucca's discourse seems to be its consistent attempt to encompass all possibilities and to exclude nothing. He aims for a plenitude of language, addressed to every one, not just to a single interlocutor. He speaks from outside the predominant discourses of the play, and his bizarre field of language-use possesses distinct attributes of its own. Tucca is a symbol of chaos, military and social, working at the boundaries of the play's groups of characters. He is always on the outside and threatens to constitute a 'rage' of plenitude that is constantly excited within, but which is not realised. Ovid's words, as he laments his banishment, perhaps also construct Tucca's relations to the circles of the play:-

As in a circle, a magician then
Is safe against the spirit he excites;
But out of it, is subject to his rage,
And loseth all the virtue of his art:
So I, exiled the circle of the court,
Lose all the good gifts that in it I joyed.

(IV.viii.10-15)

Tucca seems to be the raging spirit who moves across the play endangering all who contact him. Like the impenetrable labyrinths that come to constitute Bartholomew Fair, fifteen years later, Tucca represents, by enacting it, the full irrational chaos of the world that must so forcibly be excluded from the rigid, moral order of Augustan Rome, the idealised image of Brittain.

The second appearance of the captain repeats the activities of the first. Tucca intervenes to prevent the imposition of order. This time it is being imposed upon

Crispinus who is about to be arrested by the Lictors:-

Why, how now, my good brace of bloodhounds?
Whither do you drag the gent'man? You mongrels,
you curs, you bandogs, we are Captain Tucca that
talk to you, you inhuman pilchers

(III.iv.1-3)

There is something almost blasphemous in the captain's repeated self-nomination. It seems to anticipate the way that Subtle is later to be presented, implicitly, as Satanic in his creativity. Although the language may well have been more readily comprehensible to the contemporary audience than it is to us now, it is nevertheless clearly designed perhaps like Falstaff's, to draw attention to itself and its own development. The audience is required to watch a process of signification rather than merely to receive a communication from him through words as transparent signs. The effect on the audience is, probably, to make them less concerned with the direct 'sense' of what is being said, and more with the actual unfolding of the words. Enck observes:-

Tucca's diametric energies dangle unintegrated so that his threat remains insubstantial and convincingly marks him as nervous, disorganized, opportunistic, and cunning... Tucca, significantly, has the least responsibility in setting forth any of the crowded themes. (29)

Enck's analysis seems precise when he identifies 'Tucca's diametric energies', but to suggest that 'his threat remains insubstantial' seems to directly contradict this. He is a threat to the action because he alters its course at his every intervention. He is also a threat to the dynamics established between play and audience because he

changes the way that language is being made to produce meaning on that level. He challenges the Lictor to release Crispinus from arrest and the Lictor asks the captain if he is coming to the man's rescue:-

Tucc: I, a rescue? Away inhuman varlet. Come, come, I never relish above one jest at most; do not disgust me: sirrah, do not. Rogue, I tell thee, rogue, do not.

Lict: How, sir? Rogue?

Tucc: Aye, why! thou art not angry, rascal? Art thou?

Lict: I cannot tell, sir, I am little better, upon these terms.

Tucc: Ha! Gods, and fiends! Why, dost hear? Rogue, thou, give me thy hand; I say unto thee, thy hand: rogue. What? Dost not thou know me? not me, rogue? not Captain Tucca, rogue?

(III.iv.29-37)

A 'rescue' is used here in a legal sense of forcibly taking a person or object out of custody. In The Comedy Of Errors (1590) Antipholus of Ephesus uses the same sense:-

I am thy prisoner: wilt thou suffer them
To make a rescue?

(IV.iv.112-113)

Tucca, however, dismisses the legal discourse of the Lictor very rapidly and replaces it with his angry, roguish, rascally discourse. The threat is most forcibly directed against coherence. The Lictor's rather baffled response to 'these terms' (at 1.35) indicates the extent to which Tucca's repetitious, aggressive verbal barrage effects both characters and the audience. 'Rogue' is used so widely and with such lack of differentiation that it is never clear whether Tucca or the Lictor is being named; the word is

reduced to its material sound quality. Tucca threatens the ability of discourse to signify through reference. He makes the act of speech itself take on the requirement to signify. The level at which communication takes place is, with his intervention, suddenly altered, made more crude, and consequently the position of the audience is abruptly changed too.

In terms of the action, as I have shown, Tucca is specifically an anarchic force of division and collision; in terms of the audience he has the ability also to widen the perspective in which they regard the drama. In the latter half of act three Tucca brings into collision various different dramatic modes as he celebrates a kind of dramatic banquet. He demands to have performed before him a whole series of dramatic extracts. Firstly the pyrgi perform 'in King Darius' doleful strain' (III.iv.182-187), then they present a piece 'in an amorous vein' (ll.189-196): this turns out to be an extract from the mid-Elizabethan play, Hieronimo Is Mad Again, but the sources for much of the other fragments performed here are unknown. Following these first two pieces, Tucca requests the performance of 'the horrible fierce soldier' (ll.197-201), 'the Ghost' (ll.203-209), 'the murder' (ll.211-226) which turns out to be an extract from Chapman's Blind Beggar of Alexandria (1595-6), and finally 'the Moor' (ll.301-307). This collision of fragments of dramatic discourse anticipates the actual collision, that takes place in the court, when Tucca confronts his diametric opposite Virgil. The series of

brief virtuoso performances also invokes a variety of modes of early English drama that precede Jonson's work. The effect is to draw attention to the kinds of dramatic language being used by Poetaster itself. The wider vocabularies of the Roman setting, the court, rebels, arrests, banishment, and judgement, are all brought into sight on the level of their signifying practices. Comparisons are made between the biblical lament of King Darius, Romance oratory or aggressive militia, acts of murder; each conjured up by Tucca's requests of his actors. The varied possibilities of symbol, allegory and drama are in this way retrieved from the interpretative vacuum of unquestioned, transparent performance to a point of rich self-consciousness. The audience is made to think, not just about what is happening, but how it is being presented.

Tucca seems to work within the play to confront the notion of representation. With the whirling sequence of parodied scenes from earlier periods of English drama, he brings the audience to consider the progress by which different forms of drama, including this one, represent the world, reality and truth. This would seem less curious elsewhere in Jonson's canon, in The Alchemist for example, but here representatives of 'truth' and 'virtue' are already located in the drama. Yet strangely, Maecenas, Horace, and particularly Virgil, seem to be less capable than is Tucca of actually presenting a plentitude of 'truth', precisely because they are locked into a single, absolute presence.

Apart from Cynthia, Virgil is the most prominent

representative of 'virtue' in any of Jonson's theatrical drama. He stands in the position of moral 'truth'; a space that is subsequently left empty in all the later comedies. This seems, in itself, to indicate an awareness of some implicit difficulty in the representation of 'truth'. The 'moral' figures re-emerge, after Sejanus, His Fall, as tainted or in some way corrupted by the world of the play, and this alteration is obviously crucial to the consideration of the function and significance of Virgil in Poetaster. It is only necessary to think of the ambiguous function of Lovewit's return at the end of The Alchemist, thwarting the audience's expectations of the arrival of a force for 'truth', to see that in the dominance given to Virgil, in this text, some uncertainties of mode and form are inevitably displayed.

Virgil's appearance is considerably anticipated in speeches by Horace, Gallus and Tibullus. Under Caesar's careful direction each lauds the bard. Horace begins:-

I judge him of a rectified spirit,
By many revolutions of discourse,
In his bright reason's influence, refined
From all the tartarous moods of common men;
Bearing the nature, and similitude
Of a right heavenly body: most severe
In fashion, and collection of himself,
And then as clear and confident as Jove.

(V.i.100-107)

In this speech Horace attempts to restore the full purity of Virgil's Roman image, but it comes through 'many revolutions of discourse'. It is important to recognise that there is nothing revolutionary about Virgil's discourse, contrary to our modern sense of the word

'revolution', this is a conservative force. Zagorin observes:-

In the seventeenth century the astronomical sense of revolution still prevailed over any other. Hence, even as applied to politics, instead of betokening the event which engenders a new political order, revolution, by a curious irony, described the opposite: the return of the cycle of change to its beginning... And this conception was often tinged with a pessimistic implication of fatality, as though the rotations of human affairs were subject to the same irresistibility as the orbits of the planets. (30)

Certainly Horace is describing Virgil in 'astronomical' terms, he also calls him a 'right heavenly body'. It is also clear that the text, in invoking the Golden Age, is attempting to return to the origins of poetry and morality by trying to take its language back there, and therefore, Virgil's 'virtue' is constructed out of this carefully differentiated discourse. The result is that, for the Elizabethan audience, he appears at first as a spirit rather than as something human. He is constructed outside of the drama as it has been seen so far, taking on a mystical quality that emphasises, not his juridical relevance to the action, but his detachment and distance from 'common men'. This indicates the only way that the drama seems at this point able to represent such a different 'revolutionary' mode of existence. This is echoed by Tibullus:-

...could a man remember but his lines,
He should not touch at any serious point,
But he might breathe his spirit out of him.

(V.i.121-123)

Here again Tibullus emphasises a textual, as well as a spiritual, quality about Virgil. It is his 'lines' which

construct him, even for those within the drama, unlike Horace who shifts and changes. Virgil's only available identity seems to be as the speaker of the fragment of the Aeneid.

With Virgil's entry, the predominant mode of discourse is altered. A sudden upsurge of gnomic phrases, with which Caesar and Horace persuade Virgil to take the honorary elevated seat, and Virgil's own use of sententia to match this, all function to indicate a new proverbial symbolic discourse. Caesar says:-

"Best matter, badly shown, shows worse than bad."

.....
"Virtue, without presumption, place may take
Above best kings, whom only she should make."

(V.ii.23-27)

The audience is suddenly presented with the invocation of ageless, anonymous 'wisdom' in these proverbs, with which Virgil is instantly aligned. This is the discourse of absolute, singular, 'truth'. Virgil counters Caesar's plea with:-

"Poor virtue raised, high birth and wealth set under,
Crosseth heaven's courses, and makes worldings wonder."

(V.ii.33-34)

Then Horace over-rules this:-

"Custom, in course of honour, ever errs:
And they are best whom fortune least prefers."

(V.ii.37-38)

In this quotation and cross-quotation of proverbs the pattern of 'truth' eventually seems to subvert itself. Horace excludes 'custom' in a way that exactly contradicts the formal retracing of customary sayings (31). It is

unnecessary to make a judgement on the nature of the morality as overtly stated here. It is only necessary to indicate how the dramaturgy, in order to cope with the representation of 'virtue', is required to enter a new, differentiated discourse, that is not coherent in itself, and has to stand apart, in opposition to the predominant mode of the drama. Similarly, later on, the outside world of the play has to be barred from entry into this new dramatic world before Virgil can begin to recite:-

Gentlemen of our chamber, guard the doors,
And let none enter; peace. Begin, good Virgil.

(V.ii.54-55)

Virgil's reading from the Aeneid is, in this way, surrounded by a framework of proverbial 'knowledge' that contradicts itself, and is physically divided from the rest of the play's world. Virgil's 'truth' seems only able to function as such inside its closed circle. This closed circle is both a social circle and a circle defined by the way that it represents 'things'. Virgil's circle is necessarily of a highly symbolic order. The passage that he reads from the Aeneid relates how Dido and Aeneas are brought together in a cave as they take refuge from a storm especially created by Juno. In the cave they make passionate love without care or attention to their respective duties and obligations. Like Ovid and Julia, both are lovers who forget their noble backgrounds. Fame then spreads all kinds of rumours about them, both true and false, around 'all the greatest Lybian towns' (V.ii.74), but

Dido becomes recklessly unconcerned by her increasing notoriety. The obvious parallel between the couples in the fragment of the Aeneid and those in the main play does not seem to have been noted by critics before. It confirms the indirect manner in which Virgil's discourse manages to engage with the rest of the play.

The world of the play, however, is manipulated so that it engages very abruptly with Virgil's words. Just as he is describing Fame, 'a monster vast, And dreadful' (V.ii.84-85), Lupus and Lictors burst into court claiming treason and conspiracy on Horace's part. This, in fact, is the culmination of Tucca's conspiracy that is hatched in the beginning of act III. The claim revolves around an 'emblem' that Horace has made, or a 'libel in picture' as Lupus calls it (V.iii.37). The action at this point centres entirely on reading the correct interpretation of the emblem. Lupus is, of course, shown to be wildly misled in his assumptions and the affair is rapidly concluded with an important speech by Virgil:-

'Tis not the wholesome sharp morality,
Or modest anger of a satiric spirit
That hurts, or wounds the body of state;
But the sinister application
Of the malicious, ignorant, and base
Interpreter: who will distort, and strain
The general scope and purpose of an author
To his particular, and private spleen.

(VI.iii.118-125)

There is both piety and vulnerability in this speech. It underlines exactly the difficulty that I have been exploring throughout this chapter; the persistent textual anxiety over representations being misinterpreted and

distorted. It returns the audience to the very starting point of the play, where Envy from the other side of the coin, as it were, asks 'How might I force this to the present state?'. Yet even in Virgil's moment of apparently unambiguous self-assertion, the contradiction that I have been examining reappears. For, in this speech, Virgil is transformed from being the spirit of the Aeneid, its unaltered utterance, to take on a new role as judge and sentencer of the play's malefactors. It is this new Virgil who sets up the arraignment of Crispinus and Demetrius (and finally of Tucca). In the final two scenes of the play he is no longer the speaker of the authentic Augustan discourse, the 'right heavenly body', detached from the 'common men'. He now becomes the juridical instrument of the play's closure, although it is Horace who finally administers the absurd purgative to Crispinus, it occurs with a gratingly paradoxical clash of dramatic modes. It is this clash of the moral and the comical that makes it difficult to find, encapsulated in the purgation of Crispinus, the castigation of a profligate Elizabethan England by the representatives of Rome's higher order.

In Poetaster, the Jonsonian text begins to embark upon the exploration of the ambiguities of dramatic representation and of linguistic decoding that characterise the later work. In attempting to dramatise 'virtue', in the shape of Virgil's heroic texts and Horace's Satires, the questionability of a singular moral and linguistic mode inevitably comes to the surface, and the questioning is

extended even further through the verbal assaults of Tucca. The Elizabethan dramaturgy, however, manifestly fails to absorb wholesale the classical discourse. With reference to the argument between Ovid Junior and Ovid Senior over the neglect of the study of law for poetry, Jonson is reduced, in the Apologetical Dialogue, to saying:-

...how this should relate, unto our laws,
Or their just ministers, with least abuse,
I reverence both too much to understand!

(Apologetical Dialogue, 11.123-5)

This is a rare, and strikingly honest, remark on the part of Jonson as Author which seems to indicate an awareness of considerably more being set loose in the text than can be consciously ordered, or thought out, by the author. The Satires or the Aeneid are able to function, in their own historical contexts, as direct unproblematic representations of 'truth'. Virgil's epic is specifically designed to trace the genesis of the newly-formed Roman empire that existed as the self-evident confirmation of the 'truth' of the text. Transposed into the turbulent, late-Elizabethan context, however, the classical discourse becomes another element among the conflicting domains of language-use, each of which is to be deciphered and given symbolic, or mimetic, significance.

In seeking the authority of the Golden Age texts to stand for 'virtue' and 'truth', alongside the remarkably Elizabethan discourses of the scenes of social satire, Jonson's Poetaster raises questions of historical interpretation which it can not satisfactorily answer. The

power of reappropriated classical language to construct morally suasive identities, such as those of Jonson's Virgil and Horace, is not achieved without a problematic tension. This tension is displayed by anarchic figures like Ovid, on the one hand, whose dual Renaissance identities, as a spirit and a sensualist, question any simple act of transposition in their contrast to his single classical identity; and Tucca, on the other hand, who invokes fragments of the intervening native tradition and thereby brings to bear on the drama a different, less clear, set of perceptions. One of the most logical and coherent steps which can be identified in Jonson's developing dramaturgy is, therefore, the subsequent exploration of history which occurs in Sejanus and again in Catiline.

Notes and References

1. Envy's Prologue, ll.14-15.
2. See, R.A. Small, 'The Stage Quarrel between Ben Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters', Forschungen zur englischen sprache und literatur, Edited by E. Kolbling, (Breslau, M&H Marcus, 1899).
J.H. Penniman, The War of the Theatres, (Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, Series in Philology, Literature and Archeology, 4,iii,1897). H&S,I,pp.422-425.
3. H&S, I, pp.422-427.
4. O.J. Campbell, Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, (San Marino, California, Huntingdon Library Publications, 1938).
See also: E.M. Waith, 'The Poet's Morals in Jonson's Poetaster', Modern Language Quarterly, XII, (1951), 13-19.
5. Campbell, p.129.
6. Campbell, p.117.
7. E.Talbert, 'The Purpose and Technique of Jonson's Poetaster', Studies in Philology, 42, (1945) 225-252, p.251.
8. Knoll, op.cit., p.64.
9. H&S, I, p.441.
10. Jackson, ed. Every Man In, p.20.
11. H&S, I, pp.421-422.
12. J.W.Velz, 'The Ancient World in Shakespeare: Authenticity or Anachronism? A Restrospect', Shakespeare Survey, 31, (1978) p.12.
13. The Metamorphoses of Ovid, Translated by M. Innes, (London, Penguin Books, 1961 reprint) p.76.
This point is also found by Wheeler, op.cit., p.90.
14. R.Pierce, 'Ben Jonson's Horace and Horace's Ben Jonson', Studies in Philology, LXXVIII, (1981) 20-34, p.25.
15. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, Edited by F. Bowers, (Cambridge, the University Press, 1953) I, Satiro-Mastix, 'To the World', p.309, l.8.
16. R. Jones, 'The Satirist's Retirement in Jonson's Apologetical Dialogue', English Literary History, XXXIV, (1967) 447-467, p.453.
17. Satiro-Mastix, Preface, p.310, l.54.

18. Horace's Satires, Translated by H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library, (New York, Heinemann, 1926) p.111.

19. The kind of multiplicity of interpretation that emerges from this has been broached by M. Doran. She finds, in a very relevant example, 'five ways of interpreting a fable from Ovid - that is, the allegorical mode (allegorical in a Christian theological sense), the tropological mode (allegorical in a moral sense), the grammatical, the exemplary, and the rhetorical modes.'
(M. Doran, 'Some Renaissance "Ovids"', in Literature and Society, Edited by Bernice Slote, (Lincoln, Univeristy of Nebraska Press, 1964) 44-62, pp.44-6.

20. A.H. King, 'The Language of Satirized Characters in Poetaster: A Socio-Linguistic Analysis 1597-1602', Lund Studies in English, X, (1941), pp.96, 193.

21. Suetonius, Translated by J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library, (London, Heinemann, 1914) 'The Deified Augustus' pp.230-231, LXX.

22. The original version from the Satire runs as follows:-

... Non isto vivimus illic
quo tu rere modo; domus hac nec purior ulla est
nec magis lis aliena malis; nil mi officit, inquam,
ditior hic aut est quia doctior: est locus uni
cuicque saus.

(We don't live there on such terms as you think. No house is cleaner or more free from such intrigues than that. It never hurts me, I say, that one is richer or more learned than I. Each has his own place)

(Satire, ix, ll.48-52, pp.108-9, Loeb translation).

23. F. Kermode, 'The Banquet of Sense', The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 44, (1961) 68-98, p.74.

24. J.D. Mulvihull has recently argued that Ovid's identity in the play reflects the two Renaissance views of him as spiritual and as a sensualist;
'Jonson's Poetaster and the Ovidian Debate', Studies in English Literature, 22, (1982) 239-255.

25. For a general survey of the background to banquet scenes as they occur in Elizabethan drama and their origins in the classics and in Renaissance pictures, see:-
D.K. Anderson, 'The Banquet of Love in English Drama', Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy, 63, (1964) 422-32, specific references to Poetaster, p.426.

26. Talbert, op.cit., p.244.

27. Jackson, Vision and Judgement, p.25.
28. King, pp.164-165.
29. J.J. Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1957) pp.76-77.
30. P.Zagorin, The Court and the Country: The Beginnings of the English Revolution, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) p.14, see also, p.13.
31. In Discoveries (H&S, VIII, pp.622-3, 11.1926-1980) 'Custom' is given a specialised meaning, it not to be construed as 'common sense' or 'vulgar Custome', but the refined Wisdom of learning; Jonson calls it 'Custome of speech, which is the consent of the Learned'; this definition does not, however, alter the sense of hollowness in the learned men's rhetoric at this point.

CHAPTER III: Sejanus, His Fall and Catiline, His Conspiracy:
Jonsonian Tragedy and the Exploration of History

In choosing to analyse Sejanus, His Fall (1603) and Catiline, His Conspiracy (1611) in one chapter, I am deliberately confronting the mass of complicated historical material from which both plays are built. In what way can readers and spectators in the late twentieth century engage with drama of the early seventeenth century whose subject (if not whose language) is buried in the first century A.D.? How does historical material relate to the dramatic? Can one distinguish between them? Questions of this kind are not only prompted by reading Jonson's tragedies, but seem to me to be integral to dramaturgical processes in which the plays are involved. Jonson seems to be exploring history, as a philosophic idea, quite self-consciously in these plays. In this respect, the tragedies follow quite clearly from what takes place in Poetaster. One particular distinction in approaching 'history' that I shall be pursuing in this chapter is a distinction between 'history' as a set of narratives, or 'annals', and 'history' as a series of events or monumental 'statues' of the past.

The two tragedies are both notorious theatrical failures and yet span the years of three of Jonson's greatest and most popular comedies; Volpone, Epicoene and The Alchemist. Such extremes of public responses are remarkable, but that Jonson, in Catiline, should have returned to such difficult terrain after the failure of Sejanus is perhaps even more remarkable; it is a testimony

both to the importance of the exploration of history to Jonsonian dramaturgy and to the interdependence of the two plays.

The step that takes us from Poetaster to Sejanus is probably the most natural and thought out of any of the progressions in Jonson's developing art. The analysis of an ultimate 'truth', and the problematic possibilities of representing it, are central concerns of the Roman comedy set in the Augustan court, and these recur in Sejanus in a new and more serious light. Gone are the characterisations of classical authors, with fragments of their texts in a fictional plot and, in their place, is the dramatisation of an actual sequence of events from classical history that is brought onto the stage through the multiple discourses of the various, different authors of the times who recorded those events. The political seriousness and darkness of Sejanus is perhaps anticipated in the paranoid statesman of Poetaster, Lupus. Bevington, without making this connection as such, remarks on Lupus' incongruity in the world of the comical satires:-

The government, for its part, is convulsed by hysterical fears of sedition. Asinius Lupus, a magistrate with the self-imposed crusade of protecting national security, is a new and sinister type in Jonson's satirical comedies. (1)

Barish, in a similar vein, remarks:-

Only the fact that Poetaster is set in the reign of Augustus permits it to be a comedy, permits the vicious, meddling tribune Lupus and his scurrilous associates to be defeated, first by judgment, then by laughter. (2)

Lupus would, however, be very much at home in the world of Sejanus.

In Catiline, it seems, Jonson self-consciously returns to the subject of Sejanus and seeks to re-shape his techniques in order to deal with the problems of the earlier play. I will, therefore, be treating the plays together except for the few instances where Jonson's intervening texts obviously illuminate Catiline. Both the tragedies explore, in quite similar ways, the fundamental question of what history is and what is its function in the contemporary world. They are, in my analysis, more complexly interrelated than has been observed before. The two plays might be seen as two sides of the same coin. In Sejanus the noble Germanicans, and the Stoics, passively bemoan the loss of the virtue of their elders, such as 'godlike Cato', while the forces for evil act very rapidly (3). In Catiline, Cicero and Cato, predecessors to the characters of the earlier play, act and speak against a procrastinating force for evil, in a manner which ostensibly is to protect Rome. In their strategies, however, Cicero and his associates reveal a moral duplicity that is worthy of Tiberius and it is this sense of moral ambiguity which also suggests a proximity between the plays.

Furthermore, both plays deal with the rise of a new man (although in reversed processes of success), both plays make a central character, Tiberius and Catiline, leave the action in the final part of the play, and both tragedies make use of a Chorus, or choric group of characters, which moralises

on the action but does not intercede. In addition both plays include scenes concerning cosmetics which are almost set-pieces. They are emblems for the corruption of Rome and function, almost exclusively, on the allegorical rather than the mimetic level. The scenes are presented by Eudemus, Livia and Sejanus in the first play (II.v.1-120), and by Fulvia, Sempronia, and Curius in the later tragedy (II.v.90-215). In both scenes, the public ambiguity of artifice, invested in statues to denote status (discussion of which occupies the major part of this chapter), is extended in the condemnation of the use of cosmetics (as artifice) in the realm of the individual and the human body. Barkan observes:

In Sejanus... the body is not only an analogue to the commonwealth but also a concrete and specific object which Sejanus and Tiberius have depraved. (4)

This would seem to be true of Catiline too. Sejanus presents various rumours of Tiberius' depravity on Caprae (IV.380-401) whereas, in Catiline, this kind of corporeal depravity is presented in the famous blood-drinking scene where the conspirators swear their allegiance to one another (I.480-500). In a surprisingly large number of ways, the two tragedies speak to one another. Almost like the web of Roman intrigues, once one begins to speak about the first play, the second is immediately involved.

The question to which much recent discussion of both plays has applied itself is that of the complicated interaction of the source texts in their own historical contexts, their subsequent dramatisation and presentation to

a Jacobean audience, and the supplement of meaning that is produced by the problematic paralleling of English and Roman historical processes. DeLuna's fascinating work on Catiline seeks to formulate what is termed a 'parallelograph' between the Catilinean conspiracy and the Gun-powder Plot (5). It is, in the end, an over-ingenious attempt to apply a large number of details of the text to actual historical occurrences and, as a result, some strong evidence is detracted from by weaker, increasingly implausible comments. Catiline, in DeLuna's analysis, eventually becomes overburdened with allegorical significance to an absurd extent. Wikander, in treating the earlier play, has more judiciously drawn out the similarities and differences between Sejanus' ambition and the Essex rising of 1601:-

To treat the play as a covert allegory of personalities in the Essex crisis is to commit one kind of oversimplification, but to reject its obvious references to contemporary problems is to ignore Jonson's insistence upon the historian's responsibility to his own times. The links between the world of Sejanus and the world of its audience are of this purely theatrical kind - we are forced to perceive similarities and differences at once and to balance them judiciously. (6)

In my view, Jonson's insistence upon the duties of the historian seems, however, only to extend to a concern for a formal faithfulness. In the preface 'To the Readers', of Sejanus, the insistence is on the familiar figures of 'truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fullness and frequency of sentence' (To the Readers. 11.16-17) (7). These 'offices of a tragic writer' are very much rhetorical and formal matters. The preface is singularly silent with regard to how the material should be

construed.

It seems to me that both Sejanus and Catiline are deliberately ambivalent in their moral statements. The very inconclusiveness of the historical segment that leaves a Macro, or indeed a Cicero, through duplicity in positions of power, within the dramatic world, seems to point towards a recognition, in the tragedies, of the inability of history to provide a single, dominant, exemplary 'truth' or for drama to represent one. As Dorenkamp has observed, the historicity of the matter is emphasised by the openness of the actions at either end (8). I have already shown how, in Poetaster, attempts at a singular, coherent and ordered representation of 'truth' break down and are, ultimately, presented as central problems of the drama. Both tragedies, it would seem, also confront the notion of 'history' in this regard. Dutton observes of Sejanus:-

The radicalism, paradoxically, lies in being so conspicuously conservative; in seeming scarcely to alter the letter of what history provides, and yet to change so much of the tone, the emphasis, the implications and their relevance to the audience, Jonson almost arrogantly seems to be asserting his own right to re-write the 'truth'. The edifices of the past are only stepping-stones to a new construction, which does not so much supplement as supplant them. (9)

It seems to me that what occurs, in and between Sejanus and Catiline, is the further recognition of the limits of dramatic representation in respect to 'truth' and, at the same time, a realisation of its infinite power to present suggestive networks of meanings that pertain to 'truth'.

One of the major differences between the two

tragedies is that Catiline partakes of a popular history in a way that Sejanus does not. I wish, therefore, to step aside slightly in order to trace the presence of the Catiline conspiracy in English fiction through a series of shifting perspectives that culminate in Jonson's own version. This diversion will shed considerable light on the text of Catiline, Jonson's attitude to the writing of history, and will reveal the newness with which Jonson's version treats an already familiar narrative.

The choice of Catiline's conspiracy for Jonson's second tragedy is a curious one which seems to have been taken too much for granted by many critics. It is, however, of some significance given the undoubted need to 'force this to our present state' as posited by the prologue of Envy to Jonson's Poetaster. Sallust's text the Catilinae Coniuratio had been, in fact, the subject of a number of translations into English before Jonson coupled it with Cicero's Orations, and the various other fragments, that make up his dramatised version of 1611 (10). The first recorded translation is by Thomas Paynell (1528-1567), a humanist translator of Erasmus and Vives among others. His Cataline was published in 1541, and was also revised and reprinted, with a translation of Sallust's only other extant work, The History of Jugurth, in 1557. In his preface, and dedication to Henry VIII, Paynell declares:-

What man is he, nay what monstrous beast, that wolde ones thynke to rebell ageynste, or wylfully disobey your regal power, lawes, ordinances, and express commaundementes: yet not withstandynge, we have seen some in our dayes, so slyp from god, that they

attempted gret thynges ageynst your highe majestie.
(11)

In so saying, Paynell specifically opens the text to interpretation in the light of events contemporary with the publication of his translation. This is probably a reference to 'The Pilgrimage of Grace' (1536-7), the great uprising against the dissolution of the monasteries, which so worried Henry VIII and Archbishop Whitgift (12). Paynell's translation seeks, however, to quiet those fears. He goes on to point out the important distinction between the Republic of Rome 'that had many rulers' and the Monarchy of England. His intention is therefore:-

That all that be unlerned maye se, if god amonge the gentiles, wold not suffer riotous rebelles to overrunne rulers and distroye common weales: howe moche lesse then wyll he suffer them to prevayle ageynste a chrysten prynce, his verray image in erthe. (13)

Paynell has no difficulty in the anachronistic imposition of the Christian God to preside over the events that took place in 63BC in pagan Rome. There is ultimately no doubt as to the purpose to which the translator sees the text being put:-

Let all man lerne by this example of Catiline...and evermore hatefully abhore to here speke of this cursed monster, this deadelye poyson in a common weale, Rebellion: but with all wytte, industrie, power, cunnynge, ryches, wyshe for, labour for, love, favour, and maynteyne Obedience. (14)

The opposition of Rebellion by Obedience is the moral lesson, declared in abstract terms characteristic of Tudor interludes, for all the readers of this text to appreciate. Paynell failed, though, to persuade everyone to 'evermore hatefully abhore to here speke of this cursed monster' (15).

In 1579, Stephen Gosson, the Puritan extremist, writes in The School of Abuse that his own play Cataline's Conspiracies was often performed in the Theatre. It was, of course, one of those 'without rebuke, which are easily remembered, as quickly reckoned' (16). He proceeds to explain the concerns of this, no longer extant, play:-

Because it is knowen to be a pig of mine owne sowe, I will speake the lesse of it; onely giving you to understand, that the whole mark which I shot at in that worke was to shoue the rewarde of traytors in Catiline, and the necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero, which foresees every danger that is likely to happen and forestalles it continually ere it take effect. (17)

Here the abstract term, Rebellion, that Paynell used, is replaced by 'traitors', and what God will allow or 'suffer' is replaced by the 'necessary government of learned men'. The text has become more of an overtly political matter that deals, not with philosophised abstractions, but with individuals and their motives. Yet, it remains, in so far as Gosson may be believed, a cautionary exemplum to those who might have seen it performed. Hunter has also described this act of translation, in relation to Tacitus and Livy, that 'effectively turns a political process into an ethical lesson' (18).

In 1608, Thomas Heywood again proceeded to 'speke of this cursed monster' Catiline, by publishing his own translation of both Sallust's texts. Heywood chose, however, not to preface the translation by any words directly attributable to him, but instead added part of another very different text, the first translation into

English of a chapter from Jean Bodin's Methodus, ad facilem historiaram cognitionem (1566). Heywood translates the whole of the book's fourth chapter, which is called significantly 'The Choice of Historians'. Much of the chapter is occupied with a remarkably incisive survey and comparison of the classical historians (19), but near the beginning Bodin remarks, in Heywood's translation:-

Yet let every Author beare his owne blame, whereof if they that have stuffed their monuments of memory with fabulous impostures, be guiltie in one sort, in no lesse fault are the Turkes, who can say nothing of their discent or Originall, neither will suffer any writing thereof to be commended to posterity; beleaving, that no Historiographer can write truely on report....every man being bewitched to tell a smooth tale to his owne credit: or suppose, he be of an unpartial spirit, yet either the feare of great personages, or passion, or mony, will prevaricate his integrity. (20)

This recognition of the equivocal, partial, position of the writer of history seems to point precisely to the underlying subject of both Jonson's tragedies. In both plays there seems to be an implicit admission 'that no Historiographer can write truely on report...'. In the collage of passages that constitutes Jonson's dramatising of the 'tragedy' is a discernible refusal to rely on any single existing narrative account of the events concerned. Bodin pursues his point a little later when he says:-

Historie ought to be nothing but a representation of truth, and as it were a Map of mens actions, sette forth in the publicke view of all commers to bee examined. (21)

Jonson's Poetaster has already begun to explore the problematic nature of just such an ideal of 'representation', and of making a 'map', and his texts

continue to do so from there onwards.

From this brief survey a persistent, but shifting, interest in Catiline's conspiracy seems to emerge on a level that goes beyond the value of the events as mere popular entertainment. It represents a continued concern, on the part of contemporary commentators during the years of the Reformation, for the security of the monarch, and his or her vulnerability to plots and conspiracies. In this sense DeLuna is clearly right to make a connection between Jonson's Catiline and the Gunpowder Plot. In my view, however, this is a shifting interest and one that becomes less and less certain of how the events narrated by Sallust, and indeed also by Cicero, are to be interpreted. For Paynell, there is little doubt that the failure of Catiline's conspiracy should be a comfort, a source of security and certainty to his readers:-

Where shall we reade in all historyes, that raveneous rebelles could obteyne ageynste the soveraygne governours. Surley if ever one possybyle might, L. Catiline the Romaine should have done, for he was in a common weale, that had many rulers, of whom some the chiefest favoured his action (22).

'He seemed invincible...'. Paynell continues, and yet he was defeated. Paynell has no problem in interpreting this as a sign that God will protect His monarchy. Basically this view coincides with Nashe's, in Pierce Penniless (1592), when he says of historical plays:-

They shew the ill success of treason, the fall of hastie climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the miseries of civil dissention, and how just God is evermore in punishing of murther. (23)

Similarly Sir Phillip Sidney, in The Defence of Poesie

(1595), reminds his readers of :-

The high and excellent Tragedie, that openeth the greatest woundes, and sheweth forth the Ulcers that are covered with Tissue, that maketh Kings feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tyrannicall humours, that with sturring the affects of Admiration and Comiseration, teacheth the uncertaintie of this world, and uppon how weak foundations guilden roofes are builded. (24)

Gosson's play, in so far as can be deduced from what he says, seems to have functioned to similar effect, although the shift in confidence onto the 'necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero' is a notable secularisation in interpreting the text, and a significant move towards seeing the text as having allegorical possibilities, in characteristically Elizabethan fashion.

The perspective on Catiline that Jonson's text takes up, without doubt, emerges in marked contrast to the singular view that Paynell took seventy years earlier. In the implication of Caesar in the conspiracy, and in the tacit suggestion that Cicero's techniques, like Tiberius', are not morally 'better' than the conspirators', simply more effective, Jonson's text renders the whole process of events open to analysis. Ornstein points out:-

The curious fact that Jonson undercuts the moral resolution of his tragedy, not through a stern dedication to historical truth, but through a deliberate revision of his sources. (25)

It seems to me, however, that this blurring does not occur out of a 'revision of his sources', but in fact, out of a determination to have 'history' interrogated. Jonson's Catiline and Sejanus seem to ask their audiences, in contrast to Bodin, not to make a 'choice of historians', but

in fact to study all of the records of a particular process of events. Jonson's need, in Catiline, to write a brief extra Prologue 'To the Reader Extraordinary' may well be a testimony to the difficulty of this task.

Both plays concern themselves with how individuals in power, and those who seek it, use history in order either gradually, or suddenly, to become an influential part of that history. The tragedies are also involved, themselves, in an interrogation of the historical materials that they are using. As Wikander has observed, Sejanus is 'a critique of contemporary history writing itself' (26). History is seen to provide a basis for power in two ways; firstly by comparison with and analogy to the present and secondly by direct connection of individuals to the power of a line of inheritance. The distinction is an important one; it serves to divide the individualistic view of history from the view of it as a constant process of events. Sabinus, in the first act of Sejanus, laments 'But these our times/Are not the same' (I.85-86). Arruntius counters this with the more individualistic response:-

Time? The men,
The men are not the same! 'Tis we are base,
Poor, and degenerate from the exalted strain
Of our great fathers.

(I.86-89)

The division is made between the 'times', the process of events as narrated in annals such as those written by Cordus, the historian who has just been presented on stage, and 'the men', the life and action of individuals within the state. The former view sees an active process of changing

power relations, while the latter stills the process, isolates the individuals from the social, political context in which they existed. It is almost a deifying of the person:-

He was a man most like to virtue, 'in all
And every action, nearer to the gods
Than men in nature, of a body' as fair
As was his mind, and no less reverend
In face than fame. He could so use his state,
Tempr'ing his greatness with his gravity,
As it avoided self-love in him,
And spite in others.

(I.124-131)

In this eulogy for Germanicus, spoken by Silius, the emphasis on his 'body', 'face' and 'greatness' gives importance to the physical stature of the man alongside his moral rectitude, although, in the play, speech acquires for him precisely the statuesque quality that is of considerable importance throughout both tragedies. This view of history as consisting of personalities possibly corresponds to Plutarch's writing of the Lives (and the comparison of historical figures) as opposed to Tacitus' narration of the Annals; Jonson makes use of both, with a fully self-conscious awareness of the contradictions involved.

The presentation and function of the historian, Cordus, within the, already historical, context of Sejanus is central to the understanding of both plays. His prosecution contributes to the accumulating picture of state repression under Sejanus' influence, but it also focuses upon the dangers, and the vulnerability, of the writer of history within the state. The question that one of Sejanus' agents, Natta, asks concerning Cordus, when he first appears,

typifies this vulnerability:-

How stands h'affected to the present state?
Is he or Drusian, or Germanican?
Or ours, or neutral?

(I.79-81)

Recalling Bodin's doubts, as I referred to them earlier, the possibility that Cordus should be 'neutral' seems almost unthinkable, appended, as it is, at the end of Natta's question. The answer remains, however, an uncertainty hovering over the action until his prosecution in act III. The concern of an overlooker of 'the present state' recalls Envy's position, as well as her words, at the beginning of Poetaster.

Cordus is accused, by Satrius, of attacking 'the present age' (III.385) in his annals. Natta substantiates his earlier suspicions by specifying the charge, he censures Cordus' praise of Brutus and his affirmation 'That Cassius was the last of all Romans' (III.392). Afer explains to Tiberius, 'Caesar, if Cassius were the last of Romans/Thou hast no name' (III.405-6). In other words Cordus' narration of events refuses Tiberius access as an individual to comparison with a line of honoured men, the line of Rome, upon whom his 'princely' status depends (27). Cordus is forced to defend his writing of history against this. He asks:-

But in my work.
What could be aimed more free, or farther off
From the times' scandal, than to write of those
Whom death from grace or hatred had exempted?

(III.445-448)

On one level, the obvious injustice of the prosecution here

seems designed subtly as another of Jonson's preemptive strikes against criticism. He might also have claimed to have 'aimed...free' and not to have sought to bring 'in parallel' any historical figure with any one living, as Afer puts it (III.396). Yet Cordus' defence has a disingenuous air about it. Tucca's question, in Poestaster, 'Are we not parallels, sir?' still rings mockingly in the air. Barish points out:-

The weakness in Cordus' defence lies in its element of disingenuousness, in Jonson's reluctance to admit that historical writing does, sometimes, allude to current events and is designed to illuminate them. We have, then the odd spectacle of a manifesto of the disinterestedness of historical writing in a piece of historical writing that is itself anything but disinterested. (28)

In fact, neither Sejanus nor Catiline is prepared to deal with history as a set of discrete examples in the way that Cordus seeks to do here and as is perhaps seen in Paynell and Gosson. For Jonson's texts move markedly away from the notion of history as 'truth' or history as 'moral example'. It seems to me that, in Jonson's tragedies, the historical texts of the past become complex refractory lenses through which the present can be better understood, but not necessarily, by means of which it can be ordered or ruled. The question asked by both tragedies seems not to be whether the past relates to the present, as no one in the period would have doubted, but how it does so.

A further, and equally important, aspect of the narrative of history concerns the family lines of descent and ancestry. This matter is of central importance to the Jacobean audience, whose society is witness to a rapid

decline in the influence of the old nobility and the rise of the 'new man', this is a concern to which Jonson's late plays return repeatedly (29). Catiline is a 'citizen of Rome/...a Patrician,/A man...of no mean house/Nor no small virtue', as Cicero calls him (IV.ii.57-60), and Cicero is, in Sempronia's words, 'a mere upstart/That has no pedigree, no house, no coat, /No ensigns of family' (II.119-121). In their rivalry, therefore, Jonson's text finds a striking parallel to the contemporary changes that were occurring in Jacobean society; a parallel that is highlighted by the anachronistic references to pedigrees and coats of arms. In the unworthy reliance on the past by Tiberius, and, inversely, in Catiline's betrayal of his own family line, the tragedies seem to present history as an ambiguous text - a set of shifting narrative discourses that form an open ground upon which the 'present state' is to be variously erected by different interested parties. While Jonson's villains are presented as abusing their immediate past, the dramas, as historical archeology, seek to uncover the processes of the distant past complete with their ruptures and contradictions. For it there, at certain moments, that the construction of the present may be glimpsed.

Jonson's texts take over the iconography of Rome; its temples, theatres and, most important, its statues, in order to reflect through the action of each play upon the use of this iconography to manipulate power. As I have already suggested a statue of Germanicus is referred to at the beginning of Sejanus in such a way as to establish him

in discourse as an emblem of moral virtue. The rise and the fall of Sejanus are, on the other hand, physically mapped onto the play by the erection of an actual statue in Pompey's Theatre (announced in I.519-520) and by the 'wonder' of its disintegration before his fall. In Catiline, too, the plotter sees the fortunes of his conspiracy in terms of its relation to the Roman iconography:-

The statues melt again, and household gods
In groans confess the travail of the city;
The very walls sweat blood before the change,
And stones start out to ruin ere it comes.

(I.278-282)

It is with this, literally iconoclastic, speech that Catiline urges the rebels on to success. In his speech, it is made clear, the anarchy of the conspiracy comes in its rejection of the existing imagery of state. Similarly, before he becomes a traitor to the conspiracy, Curius promises Fulvia that she will be raised above the level of statues by the insurrection:-

...there is a fortune coming
Towards you, dainty, that will take thee thus
And set thee aloft to tread upon the head
Of her own statue here in Rome.

(II.231-234)

The rebels seem to see themselves, not as attaining sufficient status to have statues made of themselves, but as going beyond that into a realm where such images no longer exist.

In Sejanus there are obviously a considerable number of images that contribute towards the presentation of the omniscience of the tyrant, the state, and the heights of

Sejanus' ambition. The presence of tongues, eyes and ears in discourse is made apparent throughout (I.i.7., II.450-456, 475.III.97,498). Similarly, the erection of new buildings, and the alteration, infiltration and destruction of old architecture is a repeated image of the fate of the state (See for example, I.225., II.401, III.748-9, IV.55,61,88-9, 135, 348, V.7, 18.), and equally the felling of trees is a consistently-used image to describe Sejanus' advance (II.500, IV.409, V.15-19, 246-256.). I shall focus my attention on the imagery of Rome's statues because these statues become more than just images. They are the most characteristic symbols of Rome's investment of power in art, not just in Jonson's text, but in the real remains of the Roman world that still exist. The statue in Jonson's text becomes a central actor in the play of power and identity. Statues are presented in a variety of ways, but in each case, the making or breaking of the statue is of central importance to the outcome of the action. Jonson's texts use the statues as an integral part of the discourse of the Roman state.

Statues seem, in fact, to participate in the contradictory view of history that I referred to earlier. They represent an escape from the narrative uncertainty of changing events. They are also used by the narratives of state discourses to confirm situations and relations. In rejecting the offer of divine honours from the people of Spain, Tiberius declares that he would prefer to be praised for his virtue, his worthiness of his forefathers and for

his role as prince:-

These things shall be to us
Temples and statues reared in your minds,
The fairest and most during imagery.
For those of stone or brass, if they become
Odious in judgement of posterity,
Are more condemned as dying sepulchers
Than taken for living monuments.

(I.484-490)

This speech is designed to have the initial effect of self-effacement and succeeds on the surface, for Tiberius, in this respect. But it also contains a sinister anticipation of the destruction of Sejanus' statue and suggests, in advance, the future, hidden, machinations of Tiberius, in his refusal to have his image made public. For, in erecting a statue, the privacy of the individual's body and its personal features are put on display, they become part of the public discourse of state. As such they are susceptible to popular interpretation and the recognition of the multitude. The promise of 'most during imagery' in the mind, as opposed to the less durable imagery of physical statues, is clearly a crucial distinction in Sejanus and in Catiline.

The distinction recurs in the later play, in an extremely similar form, when Cicero praises Fulvia's bravery and virtue in betraying the conspirators to the Consul and in procuring the services of Curius. She will receive high praise now, Cicero promises, and he continues:-

All this is, while she lives;
But dead, her very name will be a statue,
Not wrought for time, but rooted in minds

Of all posterity when brass and marble
Ay, and the Capitol itself is dust.

(III.ii.117-121)

The striking echo of Tiberius, here, has not been noted before by previous commentators and, yet the speech is clearly of importance, intersecting as it does with a central discourse of both plays. Both leaders offer the abstracted status enshrined, in the 'minds of all posterity', as some kind of virtuous end, which contrasts sharply with the intensity of their own power-hunting and power-wielding, that is set very firmly in the present. The image of eternal virtue, that Cicero constructs for Fulvia in 'posterity', is markedly at odds with the sordid reality of her blackmail of Curius and the betrayal of trust. However morally unjustifiable it is, her action only acquires its statuesque nobility if it is abstracted from its context, isolated, solidified and detached, as in the erection of an actual statue, from the realities of its relations in the world. Cicero emphasises this, after their interview, when he condemns her unequivocally:-

What ministers men must for practice use!
The rash, th'ambitious, needy, desperate,
Foolish and wretched, ev'n the dregs of mankind,
To whores and women. Still, it must be so.

(III.iii.225-228)

By cynically damning his 'ministers', Cicero surely also condemns his own mercenary 'practice'. In paralleling Tiberius' speech and behaviour with Cicero's, the text seems to contribute convincingly to the argument that Cicero is as morally defective, and as Machiavellian, as Tiberius.

That the text should so self-consciously repeat the earlier version, whatever the morality of the circumstances, points up the interdependence of the two plays and indicates the importance that is attached to these views of history and 'posterity'. It is, of course a peculiar and confusing situation for the audience of both plays, where the character of Cicero, who is supposed to be speaking in or around the year 63BC, should in fact use words from Tacitus' report of Tiberius' speech of about 25AD. Such are the chronological complexities of these two plays.

The lure of 'posterity' and the status of statues, whether real or abstract, seem to be devices used by both the Roman leaders to distract the attention of their followers from the realities of power relations in the present. While the past can be used to construct the model of princely virtue for the present, the future is used to promise durability to followers. When Catulus, the elderly Senator, says sententiously 'He wants no state or honours, that hath virtue' (III.i.148), he underlines exactly the difficulty that both characters and dramaturgy have in actually finding 'virtue', and the consequent need to find positive-seeming values, invested in outward signs, or in narratives. Catulus says this, at the pivotal point of Catiline, when the anti-hero has been defeated in the election to Consul by Cicero and is thus driven, more intensely, in the rebellion.

The only absolute distinction that it would seem necessary to make, between the abstract statues in 'the mind

of all posterity' and the actual icons of Rome, seems to be in the degree of sophistication with which they are used. In Sejanus the audience is told how, once Tiberius has gone to Caprae:-

Sejanus still goes on,
And mounts, we see. New statues are advanced,
Fresh leaves of titles, large inscriptions read,
His fortune sworn by, himself new gone out
Caesar's colleagues in the fifth Consulship.
More altars smoke to him than all the gods.

(IV.428-433)

The iconography enacts the spread of his power and influence. Yet it remains apparent that 'Caesar hath some scent/ Of bold Sejanus' footing.' (IV.446) and still controls events and the erection of symbols. Sejanus' statues become reflections on the process of events. Their strange transmutation, recounted in Dio's History (58.5-7), becomes in the play, a meta-dramatic enactment of his fate. Terrentius first reports the ominous events; he tells Sejanus:-

I meet it violent in the people's mouths
Who run in routs to Pompey's theatre
To view your statue; which, they say, sends forth
A smoke as from a furnace, black and dreadful.

(V.27-30)

On hearing this, Sejanus instructs that the statue should have the head removed and the problem investigated. In so doing, he demonstrates his own inability to grasp the power of the iconography and, in an action that becomes more symbolic through his pragmatism, Sejanus signals his own imminent downfall. Satrius returns with the further news:-

The head, my lord, already is ta'en off.

I saw it; and, at op'ning, there leaped out
A great and monstrous serpent!

(Natta adds:-)

I have not seen a more extended, grown,
Foul, spotted, venomous, ugly -

(V.35-37,44-45)

The emblematic quality of this is unequivocal. The statue stands at the interface of drama and audience; it draws attention to the artifice of the roles of the characters and to the artifice of the play's performance. In this passage the iconography of Rome is upheld against the traitor and, similarly, in the subsequent episode, where the statue of Fortune turns her head away from Sejanus' sacrifice (V.185), the audience is presented with the emblems of Rome entering the narrative to affect it decisively on the symbolic level. Ultimately both Sejanus and Catiline fail because they ignore this level of significance and its power. At the same time it is clear that, as Hamilton puts it:-

By allowing us to see that which men have called whims of Fortune is actually the clever Tiberius at work, Jonson makes us confront evil in a totally realistic context. (30)

In the final account of Sejanus' dismemberment, in which, according to Terentius, the crowd, tears Sejanus' headless corpse 'limb from limb' (V.811), the image and the man finally coincide. Only in his fall, is the reality finally joined with the artifice, the public with the private, the fate of one matching the fate of the other in the furious destructive attack of the multitude. Barkan observes:-

Sejanus, vainly attempted to turn his body natural into

the Roman body politic, and the two are only united in the fact that both are irrevocably dismembered. (31)

I would disagree with this, my point being that, although Sejanus falls, the body politic is presented as remaining remarkably intact. In the destruction of the man and his statue, Jonson's texts seem to suggest that the Roman state has merely shown how individuals and artifice are instrumental in, but not indispensable to, the wielding of power.

The dismemberment is, as Ricks points out, anticipated throughout the play, but he fails to note that it is a dramatic device new to the version of events in the Jacobean text (32). Other critics seem to have failed to point out that, in Tacitus' Annals, there is an unusual, and unexplained lacuna in the original manuscript (after V.5) where the death of Sejanus is to be narrated. Similarly, in Dio's Roman History, there is no explicit mention of dismemberment. Dio simply writes:-

(Sejanus') body (was) cast down the Stairway, where the rabble abused it for three whole days and afterwards threw it into the river. (33)

A second play, the anonymous Tragedy of Tiberius (1607), which covers the same period of Roman history, presents the death of Sejanus with a different, but equally telling symbolism (34). In the slightly later, and more Senecan play, Tiberius finally sets a burning crown on the head of Sejanus, who dies cursing and swearing revenge. Jonson's text remains considerably closer to the brief description offered by Dio, but nevertheless, the drama takes the opportunity of the historical vagueness to invent a form of

death which is still narrated as offstage action in the classical style. The dismemberment of statue and man is, finally, a highly self-conscious device and one which focuses a concern that is explored in both the tragedies. It is presented in a 'realistic context', as Hamilton suggests, but the presentation is brought about through the stunning use of self-reflexive artifice. The effect is also, therefore, to demand a comparison between the responses of the theatre audience and those of the unseen multitude in the play, who only gather to fill the otherwise empty rows of seats in the play's own 'theatre', in order to watch and participate in the last act of Sejanus' fall. It is a comparison of which Jonson is uncomfortably aware when he remarks, in the dedicatory epistle to Lord Aubigny, that the play in performance 'suffered no less violence from our people here than the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome, but with a different fate, as (I hope) merit.' (Dedicatory Epistle, 11.8-10).

This authorial hint opens up the considerable vein of self-reflexive functions in Sejanus which Marotti has explored (35). In Catiline, there is also a sense of developed theatricality about Cicero's speeches before the audience of the Senate, and in relation to the scenes of conspiracy. Catiline asks Aurelia to befriend many women and to 'begin a fashion/ of freedom and community' (I.176-7), but this, it is rapidly made clear, is only so that such a 'community' could be manipulated later:-

It can but show

Like one of Juno's or of Jove's disguises
In either thee or me, and will as soon
When things succeed be thrown by or let fall
As is a veil put off, a visor chang'd,
Or the scene shifted in our theatres -

(I.180-185)

This passage is notably not an adaptation from the classical sources.

It is a sign of the Jacobean presence in these texts that, in both Sejanus and Catiline, the majority of references to theatres, disguises, cosmetics, or fictions are additions to the original material. Catiline here is made to compare the speed of the insurrection to the change of a disguise or a scene-change in a play. In the reference to the disguises of the gods, this passage also recalls the divine banquet of Ovid, in Poetaster. Ovid's banquet posed, by implication, the same threat that is articulated here of changing the scene and the dramatic mode from the established one.

References to 'vizors' abound in Catiline. They all contribute to a depiction of deception as related to disguise of the natural state of the body; the ultimate form of which is, perhaps, being made into a statue. Sempronia is described by Fulvia as having 'Rather a visor than a face she wears' (II.63). The Chorus at the end of act II, recalling The Alchemist's arch dissembler, hopes that the virtuous will 'Be more with faith than face endu'd' (II.377), and when Catiline fails to be elected Consul, he curses at having waited for the election, 'I grow mad at my patience/ It is a visor that hath poison'd me' (III.i.170-

1). To take on an artificial exterior is presented, in Catiline, as a dangerous ploy, although not necessarily one that is immediately condemned morally, Cicero also acts deceptively, but this, it seems, will condemn him too. Catiline seeks to transform himself and his fellow conspirators, from being 'calm, benumb'd spectators' (I.404) of history, like Arruntius and the Germanicans in fact, into men of 'violent acts' (III.iii.162); he wants the change to be from the stasis of audience to the movement of actors. More subtle perhaps is Cicero's rejoinder to the news, from Fulvia, of the conspiracy:-

Cicero is lost
In this your fable, for to think it true
Tempteth my reason, it so far exceeds
All insolent fictions of the tragic scene.

(III.ii.25)

This, again, is not indebted to any classical source, not surprisingly perhaps since it is such a typically Jacobean view. It is more subtle than Catiline's declamations because of its supposed disingenuousness. Cicero seems to admit here a covert recognition of the theatricality of the action and also points to the hyperbole of Catiline's and Cethegus' discourses. Earlier, Cethegus remarks on Catiline's failure in the election:-

It likes me better that you are not Consul.
I would not go through open doors, but break 'em'
Swim to my ends through blood; or build a bridge
Of carcasses; make on, up on the heads
Of men struck down like piles; to reach the lives
Of those remain, and stand: then is't a prey,
When danger stops and ruin makes the way.

(III.i.187-193)

Certainly the violence and excess of this speech, which is

typical of Cethegus' language, is in marked contrast to the Ciceronian forms of rhetoric. This speech by Cethegus is reminiscent of the language of revenge tragedy, but it is unusual for Jonson's drama, even the tragedy.

Ornstein has commented on the contrast:-

Unfortunately Catiline and his fellow cut-throats inhabit a bizarred Senecan demi-monde in a larger, more realistically conceived Roman society. (36)

Ornstein finds this regrettable because he sees the marked disjuncture of different dramatic modes as a threat to the unity of the play. It seems to me that this disjuncture is made use of in a like manner to the similar phenomenon which I have discussed with reference to Poetaster. The effect is to enact, in dramaturgical terms, the political conflict of forces. This seems to be a logical extension of the threat earlier presented in Poetaster by Ovid's 'banquet of sense'. There the potentially subversive anarchy of a new, conflicting dramatic mode is imposed upon the domination of the Augustan court. Although it is never expressed in the same violent terms (except significantly by Augustus himself), the threat in Ovid's actions seems to represent a model which anticipates the tragic conflict in Catiline.

It is Caesar, after the defeat of Catiline in the elections to Consul, who brings forcefully together the aspect of history being used politically as drama with that which uses its statuesque iconography. Caesar attributes rumours of unrest to Cicero's machinations:-

Do you not taste
An art that is so common? Popular men,
They must create strange monsters and then quell 'em

To make their arts seem something. Would you have
Such an Herculean actor in the scene,
And not his Hydra? They must sweat no less
To fit their properties than t'express their parts.

(III.i.95-101)

Caesar, here, makes characteristic reference to the 'history' of Greek mythology in a way that is similar to that in which Jacobean texts refer frequently to Rome. It is carried out, however, with a self-conscious awareness of the difficulty in making such analogies; his final sentence seems a precise statement of the tragedies' ambiguous relation to its material as 'history'. There seems to be little distinction between the 'strange monsters' of Greek mythology, who are often summonsed only to be defeated, and the statues of ephemeral heroes who suffer a similar fate at the hands of the more powerful rulers. The first are seen through the perspective of what is 'history' to the Roman, the second through the Jacobean perspective. In this speech Caesar describes the exact method that Tiberius used in creating 'strange monsters' out of Sejanus, and Macro after him, only in order later to 'quell 'em' and thereby reinforce his power. Chronologically, this could not be spoken in reference to the later events of the earlier play, but this is precisely the kind of inter-action of which Jonson's two tragic texts make use in order to discuss the narration of history.

The striking irony with which Catiline concludes is the inverse of Sejanus' conclusion, but its significance seems to join with it. It is the captain, Petreius, who describes the death of the anti-hero:-

Then fell he too...
As in that rebellion 'gainst the gods,
Minerva holding forth Medusa's head,
One of the giant brethren felt himself
Grow marble at the killing sight, and now
Almost made of stone, began t'inquire what flint,
What rock it was that crept through all his limbs,
And ere he could think more, was that he fear'd;
So Catiline at the sight of Rome in us
Became his tomb, yet did his look retain
Some of his fierceness, and his hands still mov'd
As if he labour'd yet to grasp the state
With those rebellious parts.

(V.ix.72-84)

The ultimate irony for Catiline is that he finally 'was that he fear'd', he becomes a part of the very iconography against which his struggle was launched. The live body of the intriguer suffers the fate of which Tiberius warned of in Sejanus, becoming his own 'dying sepulcher'. At the same time the discourse retains the doubleness of perspective which I have just described. Petreius uses the analogy of the 'rebellion 'gainst the gods' in order to narrate Catiline's death, while the discourse itself is constituted by a complex mosaic of fragments from Lucan's Pharsalia, Sallust's Catilina, and Claudian's Gigantomachia. It is only through this mosaic that the soldier is given voice. There is more to this than is allowed for simply by invoking Jonson's 'meticulous classicizing', as some editors have done recently (37). Rather than merely validating his procedures, by composition in a classical style that fits the material, Jonson's texts here seem to assert the rights and powers of fictional narration to make use of history to fashion its own contemporary identity.

Typically, in this labour of historical exploration,

Jonson's texts are absolutely in key with the most up-to-date ideas of the period. Jonson's old schoolmaster, William Camden (1551-1623), to whom Jonson had dedicated Every Man In and who, in Epigramme XIV, Jonson called 'most reverand head, to whom I owe/ All that I am in arts, all that I know', was at the very heart of the controversy over the treatment of history that was taking place in England and France at this time (38). His Britannia (1586) represents a considerable change in intellectual attitudes to history and in the practices of the historian. Trevor-Roper describes the two conventional views of history which Camden had rejected. On one hand is the sectarian, ecclesiastical philosophy of history:-

The assumption that history was theologically determined, that its course was decreed by God, revealed by prophecy, and guided by Providence. (39)

On the other hand Trevor-Roper describes the literary philosophy of the humanists:-

To the humanists, history was a rhetorical exercise. They used historical characters as ideal types, whether of moral virtue (or vice) or political virtu. They made politics depend on personalities, ascribed edifying or unedifying motives, and invented appropriate speeches. They set great store by an elegant Latin style. Indeed, they were more interested in style than in objective truth, for history to them had an ulterior purpose: it was 'philosophy teaching by examples', and the examples were chosen, or adjusted, to fit the philosophy. The philosophy itself, of course, could vary. (40)

These two conventional views of history were rejected by Camden and historians in France, such as Bodin and deThou, in favour of a secular study of history which was concerned with political and social conditions and transformations. This was given the new name of 'civil history'. It seems to

me that, in the tragedies, Jonson's texts dramatise the conflicts and the contradictions innate in the two conventional views of history while, at the same time, attempting to synthesise, perhaps somewhat imperfectly, a new dramatic version of 'civil history'. The ecclesiastical philosophy of history, as Trevor-Roper summarises it, is clearly related to the helpless, fatalistic appeals to 'Fortune' of Arruntius and, ultimately, also those appeals of Sejanus. Similarly, as I have already shown, fictitious rhetoric and moral example, are crucial factors depicted in the strategies of both Tiberius and Cicero.

In the preface of Britannia Camden relates how Ortelius 'the worthy restorer of Ancient Geographie', urged him to restore 'antiquity to Britaine, and Britaine to his antiquity' (41). It is this synthesis, of the classical past and the Tudor present, not as one set of events superimposed (as metaphor) over another, but as a continuous, organic process of events, the traces of which are still to be found today, that Jonson's texts attempt to enact. The tragedies of Sejanus and Catiline represent an original and dynamic response to the rather dry, academic work in which Camden was engaged. They show Jonson's texts taking on the real controversies of his day and enacting them on the stage for all to see and to participate in. In Volpone too, this kind of contemporary application is to be found, not immediately in the substance of the plot, but distinct all the same, in the juxtaposition and re-presentation of other 'texts' in the one play.

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30. G. Hamilton, 'Irony and Fortune in Sejanus', Studies in English Literature, 11, (1971) 265-281, p272.

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32. C. Ricks, 'Sejanus and Dismemberment', Modern Language Notes, 76, (1961) 301-308.

Ricks traces the imagery of dismemberment through the play and argues that it represents not just dismemberment of an individual but of the body politic.

33. Dio's Roman History, Translated by E. Cary, Loeb Classical Library, (London, Heinemann, 1924) Vol.VII, p.217).

34. The Tragedy of Tiberius, (1607), Anon., Edited by W.W. Greg, The Malone Society Reprints, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1914).

Greg notes: "As to the history and authorship of the play nothing whatever appears to be known. The publisher, in his dedicatory epistle to Sir Arthur Mannering, describes it as an academic play founded on Tacitus by an author who prefers anonymity, and no subsequent critic seems to have troubled himself about the matter" (p.vi.).

Although the prefaces declares this to be an academic play, the reality is an extremely violent set of actions with multiple stabbings, poisonings, stranglings, and burnings more reminiscent of Revenge drama than coterie works.

For another comparison of Sejanus with the anonymous play, see: F.J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought, (San Marino, Calif., The Huntington Library, 1967) p.229.

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41. W. Camden, Britain, (1610), Translated by Philemon Holland, p.4. See too, a similar discussion of Camden in R. Peterson, Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson, (London and New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981) pp.56-61.

Chapter IV : Volpone, Or The Fox and its Relations to the Fables of Aesop

Good! And not a fox,
Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights,
Mocking a gaping crow?

(I.ii.94-6)

Skilful manipulation of languages is one of the most prominent features of Volpone, Or The Fox (1606), Jonson's best known, and perhaps his greatest play. Whether it be the Magnifico's opening eulogy on gold, his performance as a Mountebank, or his wooing of Celia using Catullus as his text, Volpone's dexterous and learned play with language is at the foreground of the drama, and it is the linguistic qualities of the play that have been much discussed by critics (1).

The relationship between fables, particularly those of Aesop, and the linguistic construction of nearly all the play's characters around animal identities is, however, an aspect of Volpone which has not received a great deal of attention. The animal identities of the characters are nearly always treated within the play, as they are in the quotation above, both with and without irony. This quality of Aesop's Fables, in Volpone, has made it difficult for twentieth century readers and spectators of the play to determine precisely the relevance of the beast fable. Since Partridge's comments and Barish's famous essay on the parallel of Sir Politic Would-be in the sub-plot, 'playing parrot to Volpone's fox', the beast fable and animal identities have begun to be understood as one of the

determining factors in the play (2).

Yet, nearly all critics have seen the beast fable as an universalising element, signalling man's degeneration to the level of the animal. Barish writes:-

With the loss of clear-cut divisions between man and beast, between beast and beast, between male and female, all creatures become monsters. The basic structure of nature is violated. (3)

The indeterminacy regarding the nature of the beast in the play has been seen to bring the play close to the homiletic traditions of morality plays (4). Knoll is another critic to find something timeless in the play:-

Because we know something of the beast fable, our experience with Volpone becomes multiple rather than single. In each action of the play, we see not simply the interplay of specific characters, but we see the latest re-enactment of an archetypal action to be found in all times and all places, from days of legend until now. (5)

Such generalisation presents a problem, however, Knoll later argues that 'the beast fable removes the play from our daily experience' (6). The contradiction within his argument points to the failure on his part (and that of other critics) to take account of the historical context of the play. The beast fable may well remove the play from 'our daily experience' but, in Jonson's age, familiarity with the literature of classical beast fables was widespread, at least, amongst the educated sections of the audience.

In my analysis of Jonson's tragedies, I attempt to reveal a little of the nature of the historical processes by looking at a number of different attitudes to the material which makes up those plays. In studying Volpone I will

explore the play in the light of its relationship to a small part of the material of which it is made up. Aesop's Fables represent only one thread in the complex web of the play; by isolating the many relationships between the fables and the intellectual and social world in which the play was understood, I hope that some new light may be shed on Volpone.

Contemporary knowledge of the animal world derived from various sources, partly from Elizabethan versions of Medieval bestiaries, paintings and observation, but primarily from Aesop's Fables. By 1605 Aesop's Fables were very widely available. They were first published in English by Caxton in 1484, and at least six subsequent English-language editions appeared before 1600, as well as a large number of Latin and Greek versions prepared for use in grammar schools (7). Baldwin surveys the appearance and usage of Aesop's Fables in the period and concludes:-

It should be apparent that the English translations of Aesop are for the most part aimed directly at pedagogical ends. Aesop in the England of Shakespeare's time is a grammar school text. (8)

Aesop, then, may be understood as almost exclusively a device used for teaching purposes. It would have predetermined for the bulk of the Jonson's (as well as Shakespeare's) audiences their understanding of what particular animals signified. Baldwin explains:-

A great deal, if not all, of Shakespeare's animal kindgom is seen through the eyes of Aesop. Even when it does not come directly from Aesop ... yet it is viewed and interpreted in the way that current teaching of Aesop dictated. There was no other literary view. Aesop is responsible for the form taken by a great deal

of Elizabethan natural history. It all had to be moralized. (9)

In the absence of any 'other' view of the animal kingdom, at this time, any discussion of Volpone must take into account that set of literary conventions, and moral usages, evoked by Aesop's Fables.

Volpone's performance as a Mountebank is the first marked treatment, in the play, of one of the fables. The play follows the form of the fable 'Of the frog and the fox' (10). In this tale, the frog climbs up to a high point, and declares that she has a panacea to cure all the other animals' ills:-

She sayeth that she giveth place neither to Hyppocrates
nor Galen. The fox mocked others believing the frog.
The fox sayeth, that she be counted skilful in phizik,
whose face is so pale. But let hir cure hir selfe.
(Thus) the fox mocked, For the frog's face is of a wan
colour. (11)

The closeness of that story related in Volpone's performance to this tale appears in a striking manner in the first song which forms an interlude between the sections of Volpone's great speech. It reads:-

Had old Hippocrates or Galen,
That to their books put med'cines all in,
But known this secret, they had never,
Of which they will be guilty even,
Been murderers of so much paper,
Or wasted many a hurtless taper.

(II.ii.119-124)

The references to 'this secret', i.e. the panacea, and those to Hippocrates and Galen, invoke the classical ambience of the fables. They serve to strengthen the network of meanings already made complicated by the irony that the fox, having first feigned sickness, now proclaims to be in

possession of a cure-all. Parker has shown that this image, of the fox as doctor, was very widely known indeed (12). He concludes:-

In the light of this widely disseminated image and the stories and images of Reynard pretending to be a doctor, it is certain that the mountebank scene in Volpone, far from being the inorganic, over extended episode it has sometimes been called, would have seemed a familiar, almost inevitable scene to its original audience. (13)

Volpone, or Reynard the fox post-Aesop, seems to take on the role of Aesop's frog, whom he mocks in the fable, in order to further his more sophisticated ends. In the process, however, Jonson's text preserves the form of the original fable by giving the fox an animal-audience, in the guise of Sir Pol and Peregrine, whom he can continue to mock. Without making any direct reference to it, or needing to, the structure of Jonson's play operates within the form determined by the beast fables and makes extensions and elaborations from these known points.

Another important fable, associated with the play, is that of the fox and crow referred to in my first quotation (14). It is in Horace's Satires (11.5) that a precedent occurs for elaboration upon this fable. Horace associates the fable of the fox and crow with the captatio (legacy-hunting) and it is clearly with this elaboration in mind that Jonson's play operates here.

Jonson's text does not, however, follow its classical predecessors in any straightforward way. In Jonson, Aesop is re-worked with considerable complexity using a similar mosaic approach to that seen in the tragedies. In relation

to the one fable, of the fox and crow alone, multiple ironies may be seen; the legacy-hunters are presented as believing themselves to be foxing old, crow-like Volpone, while the audience sees the reality, which is that Volpone is fleecing them through his deceptions.

Volpone's feigned sickness is also informed by another Aesopic model. This is the fable of the lion and the fox (15). In this tale the lion pretends to be ill and entices all the animals into his cage where he promptly devours them. Only the fox is wily enough to see that the footprints lead into the cave but that none lead out. As in the fable of the frog and fox, the original model, where the fox is the canny spectator, is inverted. The fox is placed in the other leading role, but the form of the action is maintained. So Volpone becomes the lion trapping all the gullible creatures in his room by his feigned illness, and Mosca perhaps becomes the fox, since he is the only one not to be taken in by Volpone.

The earlier situation, of feigned sickness, later gives way to the feigned death, as the captatio turns to captator captus (the legacy-hunter deceived by his prey). This new situation is also another enactment of a fox's traditional trickery, described on this occasion in a medieval bestiary:-

Vulpis the fox gets his name from the person who winds wool (volpis) - for he is a creature with circuitous pug marks who never runs straight but goes on his way with tortuous windings.

He is a fraudulent and ingenious animal. When he is hungry and nothing turns up for him to devour, he rolls

himself in red mud so that he looks as if he were stained with blood. Then he throws himself on the ground and holds his breath, so that he positively does not seem to breathe. The birds, seeing that he is not breathing, and that he looks as if he were covered with blood with his tongue hanging out, think he is dead and come down to sit on him. Well, thus he grabs them and gobbles them up.

The Devil has the nature of this same. With all those who are living according to the flesh he feigns himself to be dead until he gets them in his gullet and punishes them. (16)

The origins of Volpone's name, revealed here, are clearly apt, Volpone is obviously one 'who never runs straight'. The fox of fable is also seen to be linked to the Devil and, in this respect, other aspects of Volpone's identity are reinforced.

G.K. Hunter has explored the way in which, in The Jew of Malta, Barabas emerges, like Volpone, as not simply a materialist without any spiritual motivation, but as an Antichrist figure. This occurs, Hunter argues, through the subversion and inversion of specific theological conventions. Volpone's opening 'prayer' to his gold, and Barabas' famous desire for 'Infinite riches in a little roome' (1.72), are both known and specific reversals which operate on particular theological precepts (18). Hunter points out the fact that, like Antichrist, Barabas temporarily defeats his enemies by feigning death; the defenders of Malta think the threat is removed, and dispose of his body by throwing him over the city walls (19):-

For the Jewes body, throw that o're the walls,
To be a prey for vultures and wild beasts,
So now away and fortifie the towne.

(11.2060-62)

Yet, Antichrist is not so easily excluded and Barabas returns, as does Volpone, from the dead. The connections between Barabas and Volpone are wider than Hunter has suggested. In the quotation above Marlowe seems, in the language and images of the defenders of Malta, to anticipate the discourse from which Volpone's behaviour will be moulded. Marlowe's reference to the corpse of Barabas as 'prey for vultures and wild beasts' invokes a similar textual attitude to the parasites in Jonson's play. By placing a character with the identity of the fox into the role of Antichrist, when he makes his body prey for vultures and crows, he is clearly enacting the fabled behaviour of the fox-devil as shown in the quotation from the medieval bestiary above (20).

The audience, with a detailed knowledge of the fables, and their respective morals, would become increasingly aware of the extent to which the old popular fictions were being manipulated in ways which are, characteristically of Volpone, rhetorically brilliant, but morally highly disturbing. Parker observes:-

Jonson's original audience would have recognized four or five key incidents in the play as very familiar and 'expected' scenes, with important effects on their sense of the play's unity and tone. (21)

In my view the importance of the beast fables, in Volpone, lies in the fact that they not only answer questions of unity and tone, but also raise specific questions about how such texts had meaning for the first audiences who watched the play.

The very communicability of the fables becomes itself a subject of the play's teasing and testing. When, in his last hours of glory, Volpone feigns his own death, he tries to bring the other characters' attention to the presence of the fable (and perhaps its attendant moral) in what is taking place. He mocks Corvino from behind the safety of his new disguise as a commendatore:-

Methinks
Yet you, that are so traded i' the world,
A witty merchant, the fine bird, Corvino,
That have such moral emblems on your name,
Should not have sung your shame; and dropped your cheese:
To let the Fox laugh at your emptiness.

(V.viii.9-14)

This is a further reference to the fable of the fox and crow which has already been invoked. The contrast is struck here between the static possession of 'moral emblems on your name' and the dynamic functions of enacting the fictions from which the emblems are derived. Corvino and Corbaccio respond to this taunt by merely threatening the commendatore with violence, ignoring the identity beneath the disguise, their attention is now myopically drawn to the new 'heir', Mosca, and they fail to recognise their own participation in the fable.

In this analysis, it should be apparent that the Fables of Aesop, and the conventional attributes of the Fox as defined by the bestiaries, are subject to re-workings and transformations which lend considerable irony and complexity to Volpone. In order to measure how well the audience would have responded to this aspect of the play, it is necessary to turn to the writings of contemporary educationalists who

were, as has been pointed out, instrumental in determining the conventional uses of the fables. There are specific strategies outlined by the teachers and the theorists, which formulate the ways in which significance was to be derived from Aesop. Sir Thomas Eliot, in The Booke Named the Governour (1531), recommends reading to children:-

Esopes fables in greke: in which argument children moche do delite. And surely it is a moche pleasant lesson, And also profitable as well for that it is elegant and brefe... as also in those fables is included moche morall and politike wisdom. Wherefore in the teachinge of them the maister dilligently must gader to gyther those fables whiche may be most accomodate to the advauncement of some vertue, whereto he perceiveth the childe inclined: or to the rebuke of some vice whereto he findeth his nature disposed. And therein the master ought to exercise his witte, as wel to make the childe plainly to understande the fable, as also declarynge the signification thereof compendiously and to the purpose. (22)

Just as was seen in the last chapter, in Paynell's approach to the Catiline text, importance is attached here to the 'morall and politicke wisdom' contained in the fables. Also, interestingly in relation to Volpone, emphasis is placed on how 'the maister dilligently must gader to gyther those fables which may be most accomodate to the advancement of some vertue...or to rebuke of some vice'. In other words, the formal assemblage of different fables from the collection was seen to be of significance in the construction of a particular lesson. In Volpone the formal patterns of numerous fables are submerged under the overall structure of the play, but in a way which is suggestive of exactly this kind of didactic gathering together.

Each pupil in the grammar school was expected to know

the content of the fables and their 'morals' backwards and forwards. John Brinsley the Elder, in his Ludus literarius, instructs:-

So in Esops Fables, besides the examining of every peece of a sentence in the Lectures... Cause the children to tell you, what every Fable is about or against, or what it teacheth, in a word or two. For example, thus:-

Q. What Fable have you against the foolish contempt of learning and vertue, and preferring play or pleasure before it?

A. The Fable of the Cocke, scratching in the dung-hill. ...Cause them to make a good and pithy report of the Fable; first in English, then in Latine: and that eyther in the wordes of the Authour, or of themselves as they can; and as they did in English. For, this practice in English to make a good report of a Fable, is of singular use, to cause them to utter their mindes well in English; and would never bee omitted for that and like purposes. (23)

The emphasis here on the usefulness of the exercise 'to cause them to utter their mindes well in English' is particularly relevant to Volpone in its emphasis on the need for individual interpretation and response to moral texts.

Watson outlines and translates the following method for the rhetorical treatment of fables recommended by Athonius, the 14th century grammarian and author of the Progymnasmata (London, 1583) a text-book which Brinsley used:-

1. Breviter prolata, the concise statement of the fable.

2. Eadem dilatata, ab auctoris laude, the amplification by praise on the writer of the fable.

3. A praefabulari, giving the moral and quoting a proverb in its support.

4. A natura accipitris, illustrative matter.

5. A sermocinatione per prosopopeiam, i.e. attaching a dignity to one's discourse by citing some one else's

saying on the subject.

6. A Collatione, the introduction of Comparison.

7. A Contrario, the production of a quotation or argument as to the opposite of what is maintained in the thesis, together with the refutation.

The Conclusion.(24)

The relatively straightforward kind of exercise, dictated by Athonius' schema, does seem to be related to what occurs in Jonson's text in a more sophisticated and more subversive way. Although it might be futile to attempt any direct identification of stages in the structural development of Volpone with this outline of rhetorical treatment of a fable; it is nonetheless suggestive of the kinds of procedure by which the fables were elaborated in the schoolroom. Athonius' schema also suggests the kinds of developments, changes, and transformations which an educated audience would have been looking for, and would have found, in a play with such clear connections to classical fables as Volpone.

Given such moral and rhetorical knowledge of the fables, as taught in the grammar schools, in coming to Volpone, Or The Fox, a contemporary audience would be made very aware of the extent to which the play emerges from, amongst others, a domain of educational and morally didactic discourse.

It will be recalled that the 'entertainment', within the play, takes the form of a parody of scholastic learning in the tracing of the metamorphoses of Pythagoras' soul. Nano concludes the piece by speaking first to Androgyno, and

then turning to the double audience of Volpone and Mosca,
and the spectators:-

Spoke true, as thou wert in Pythagoras still.
This learned opinion we celebrate will,
Fellow eunuch (as behoves us) with all our wit, and
art,
To dignify that, whereof ourselves are so great, and
special a part.

(I.ii.59-62)

Volpone may, indeed, be seen as a celebration of 'learned opinion', but a celebration which takes the form of a set of questions that are implied by Nano's burlesque anti-masque.

In the sub-plot, learning is also made prominent as Sir Pol explains to Peregrine that the Lady Would-be is abroad:-

Laid for this height of Venice, to observe,
To quote, to learn the language, and so forth -

(II.i.12-13)

While Peregrine sees the comedy in this, he ironically plays along with Sir Politic, and his ingenuous gratitude is also expressed in terms of education. He explains:-

Peregrine: Believe it, sir, I hold
Myself, in no small tie unto my fortunes
For casting me thus luckily upon you;
Whose knowledge (if your bounty equal it)
May do me great assistance, in instruction
For my behaviour and my bearing, which
Is yet so rude and raw -

Sir Politic: Why? Came you forth
Empty of rules for travel?

Peregrine: Faith, I had
Some common ones, from out that vulgar grammar,
Which he that cried Italian to me, taught me.

(II.i.105-114)

So Peregrine supposedly joins Sir Pol to become his student, both of 'grammar' and of 'bearing', in a way that both is and is not ironic, in keeping with the paradoxical qualities

of the play as a whole. It should be recalled that grammar schools were designed to teach, not just rhetoric and oratory, but also every aspect of etiquette which makes up the 'behaviour' and 'bearing' of a gentleman. Knowledge of the structures of grammar and rhetoric is thus intimately bound up with knowledge of the structural workings of society. Gaining the powers of oratory is part and parcel of the young man's acquisition of the power to engage with the mechanisms of government and the law. Such engagement, or at least a perverse version of it, is the crucial object of attention in Volpone.

Having highlighted some features of the educational discourse in the play, it will be fruitful also to examine the well-known dedicatory epistle, addressed 'To the Most Noble and Most Equal Sisters: The Two Famous Universities'. Such a dedication now begins to acquire, not just a circumstantial, but a material connection with the content and subject of this particular play. The dedications to all of Jonson's plays seem to me, however, to need to be understood slightly apart from the play's stage performance. Although they may take a place in the reading experience of the text, they should not be said to have a direct bearing on the theatrical production of the play. There are many reasons, mostly economic or political, why Jonson should articulate an unrepresentatively moral stance in the dedications. Most of them are, unsurprisingly, addressed to his patrons (Volpone is an exception in this respect) and, in so doing, the author no doubt frequently tried to preserve his social and financial position with respect to

his patron. The dedicatory epistle then, should be approached with a certain caution when read in relation to the play that it prefaces.

In the dedication of Volpone, Jonson seems obsessed with the defence of his own work against Puritan critics. He sees their attacks as justifiable in the case of other (in his eyes, lesser) men's plays, but not in the case of his own. In the process he makes a lengthy statement of what he sees as the role of the playwright and, implicitly, what he sees as the role of the play:-

For, if men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any man's being a good poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to inform young men to all good disciplines, inflame grown men to all great virtues, keep old men in their best and supreme state, or, as they decline to childhood, recover them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine no less than human, a master of manners; and can alone, or with a few, effect the business of mankind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride and ignorance to exercise their railing rhetoric upon.

(Epistle, 11.18-30.)

The unequivocal, uncontaminated virtue, required of the poet here, seems at odds with the various perverse practices dramatised in Volpone (25). Yet, in the emphasis on the role of the playwright as 'teacher of things divine no less than human', 'a master of manners', and able 'to inform young men... inflame grown men... keep old men in their best and supreme state', there is a connection with the persuasive actions of the play. The very scale and generality with which the dedication confronts the responsibility of the

pedagogue, links the virtuous, moral poet directly to the vicious, but masterful orator Volpone. I do not see this, however, as a direct linkage of characters, this is not an inverse paralleling of the author with his anti-hero. Instead, what seems to happen in the dedication of the play to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and in the depiction of author as pedagogue, is a significant recognition and announcement of the play's involvement in questioning some of the most profound values of England's education system (26).

The drama inserts itself into the public domain of education as an adult version of the grammar school fables. It both acknowledges and enacts the discourses of grammar school texts by gathering together a number of fables in a highly controversial manner. It is, however, obvious that the dramatic discussion of teaching is far more complex and challenging to the minds of the contemporary audience than actual activities in the schoolrooms themselves.

In other contemporary texts, beast allegories that are based on Aesop, or derive from that type of fable, reproduce the conventional pedagogic usage. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his Instructions To His Sonne and to Posteritie (1632), warns against flattery:-

... for as a Wolfe, a dog, so a flatterer resembleth a friend. A flatterer is compared to an Ape, who because shee cannot defend the house like a dog, labour as an Oxe, or beare burdens as a Horse doth, therefore yet play trickes and provoke laughter. (27)

It is interesting to note that it is in the section on flattery, that most common ploy in Volpone, that animal

fables come to light again as a source of easy moral exempla. In The Advancement of Learning, Bacon repeats the recommendation of the Fables of Aesop because:-

Neverthelesse now and at all times they do retaine much life and vigor, because reason cannot bee so sensible, nor examples so fit. (28)

He practises what he preaches and, in the essay 'Of Goodnesse, and Goodnesse of Nature', he writes:-

Seeke the good of other men, but be not in bondage to their faces or fancies; for that is but facility, and softnesse; which taketh an honest minde prisoner. Neither give thou Aesop's Cocke a gem who would be better pleased and happier if he had had a Barly corn. (29)

The advice given here, in the context of the fable, is a conventional application of the action of the fable to moral ends. Unlike what occurs in Volpone, there is no suggestion that the fable may be a fiction open to interpretation or to transformation. The fable, in this conventional sense, is a specific example of moral point whose whole importance resides in its singularity and in its immutability.

In The Advancement of Learning, however, Bacon does find occasion to glimpse the possibility of a subverted or corrupt reading of a fable. The example is a classical one but, as has already been pointed out, there were consistent attitudes to the fables, of which Aesop's were simply the best examples:-

So in the fable, that Achilles was brought up under Chyron the Centaure, who was part a man, and part a beast, expounded Ingenuously, but corruptly by Machievell, that it belongeth to the education and discipline of Princes, to knowe well how to play the part of the Lyon, in violence, and the Foxe in guile, as of the man in vertue and Justice. Neverthelesse in many the like encounters, I doe rather think that the

fable was first, and the exposition devised, than that the Morall was first, and therupon the fable framed.
(30)

Bacon suggests, in this passage, the mechanics of a possibly corrupt exposition of a fable, but he fails to pursue its implications further than the question of chronology. His disapproval is, however, clearly directed at any attempt, either to alter innate 'truth', or to interfere with the single moral contained in a fable.

It seems to me that one of the principal functions of Volpone is to question the conventional use of Aesopic determinations by parodying the formal educational method of the schools. Sir Pol, in reference to his 'virtuous' wife learning from Venice's corrupt courtesans, invokes the proverb:-

The spider and the bee oft-times
Suck from one flower,

(II.i.30-1)

The conventional significance of this proverb is that different people, of differing moral status, may benefit from the same source of knowledge, but the implication of the text is surely that the Would-bes do, in fact, become inextricably tangled in the corrupt Venetian web. The naivety with which Sir Pol invokes the proverb draws attention to its susceptibility to inversion, or at least, to parody.

Parodies of rhetorical methods are quite common in the period. They frequently work in paradoxical vein. Duncan has explored the relationship between Erasmus' Praise of Folly and Volpone, in their common use of paradoxical

devices (31). Another, less well-known, text of a similar genre is The School of Slovenrie, or Cato turn'd wrong side outward (London, 1605). This was an extremely popular work written by the German satirist Friedrich Dedekind. The book, originally titled Grobianus et Grabiana, first appeared in Latin (Frankfurt, 1549) and received much subsequent publication before, and after, its anonymous translation into English. The specific reference to Cato, in the English title of The School of Slovenrie, places the work in the context of grammar school teaching. Significantly, the reference to Cato only enters the title on its translation into English, suggesting that this debate was more of an English, than a Continental matter. In his address to 'such as love Civilitie', the translator versifies the subversive intentions of the book:-

Give place time-scourging Aristotle, vice-controuling Plato,
 Yeeld learned Tully, deepe Erasmus, and fault-finding Cato:
 And you which by your tedious works, though to your mickie
 paine,
 Did teach behaviours perfect meanes, and manners to attaine.
 This Booke, which from a new found Schoole of late time did
 arise,
 Behaviours pure simplicitie within it doth comprise:
 Then yong and olde that doe desire nurture and education,
 Peruse this Booke each day and houre, with great deliberation.
 (32)

The classical masters are displaced by this text that claims to be altogether new. The content of the book is a little less revolutionary, although it is entertaining, consisting of a series of advices on how to behave in the most slovenly fashion in a variety of everyday situations. The text is of importance, not only because it is involved in the satiric parody of school texts, but also because it does this by

means of a paradoxical discourse that suggests both the Praise of Folly and the convoluted ironies of Volpone. This is signalled, from the outset, by the translator in his preface, which begins:-

To bee a foole in Print, is as ordinarie, as foole at an Ordinarie; and therefore t'were no good fellowship to breake companie. Tis a Proverb, The child thats borne must be kept, though 't be a bastard, seeing tis murder by law to make away even the unlawfully begotten. (33)

This entanglement of logic, particularly in its involvement with the demands of the law, seems in content to have much in common with the forms of the machinations of Volpone and Mosca.

It is, I think, by no means coincidental that Power and the Law are such central issues here. Sejanus, perhaps by coincidence, seems almost to have anticipated the death of Elizabeth and the subsequent struggles and conflicts that would characterise English politics and religion for the next fifty years. The first performance of Sejanus, by the King's Men, closely followed the accession of King James. Volpone's appearance does not coincide with any momentous event, but with a process of emergence, in the House of Commons, of a constitutional challenge to the unique power of the monarchy:-

The House of Commons of 1604-10... was in rapid transition... more active and more self-assertive than its predecessors... In its records may be traced a growing understanding of the larger possibilities for power which could be achieved through a rigid, business-like mode of procedure. From its ranks a definite group of opposition members was emerging. These men were not yet well organized, but they were becoming consistent and increasingly fearless. (34)

Such fearlessness was not only to be seen in parliamentary

processes, but was to emerge in drama, poetry, and in education. In the Dedication to the Ludus literarius, Brinsley argues that education is not simply a matter of humanist or liberal enlightenment, it is also a strategic intervention, designed to win over the subject and 'protect' him from moral, religious and political error:-

Why should wee the liege subjects of Jesus Christ, and of this renowned kingdome, be overgone herein, by the servants of the Anti-Christ? many of whom bend all their wittes and joine their studies, for the greatest advantage of their learning, even in the Grammar schooles, onely to the advancement of Babylon, with the overthrow of this glorious nation, and of all parts of the Church of Christ; to bring us under that yoake againe, or else to utter confusion. (35)

I have already discussed several emblematic ways in which Volpone and the Antichrist are related; it is apparent that while Brinsley seeks to make use of educational material, like Aesop's Fables, in order to defend pupils against the Antichrist and 'utter confusion', Volpone uses the fables to inflict precisely these powers of chaos upon his clients and upon the audience.

The arrival of Volpone's 'clients' involves them, unknowingly, in becoming subjects in the fox's masterclass on duplicity and the audience, willingly or unwillingly, becomes the classroom full of pupils. They must watch and learn the process whereby Volpone's position of power is achieved and maintained. From the outset, Volpone emphasises:-

I glory
More in the cunning purchase of my wealth

Than in the glad possession, since I gain
No common way.

(I.i.30-33)

Volpone emphasises the process rather than the achievement of gaining wealth. It is from the active exploitation of his powers that the audience will be presented with an opportunity to learn, as opposed to the static examples of moralised fables. The play cannot, however, be reduced simply to the level of a lesson, precisely because part of what is at stake here is the integrity of moral education and whether this can be maintained.

That Volpone should refer to those predatory creatures as his 'clients' seems, curiously, to contrast with the opacity of their actual relations with one another. Yet the word is used emphatically:-

Now, now, my clients
Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,
Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey,

(I.ii.87-9)

The word 'client' is used with an awareness of several related, but distinct, meanings. The first and obvious sense of the word is where it means 'one who pays constant court to an influential person as patron; a 'hanger-on', (OED 2). Yet Volpone also uses the word with heavy irony, in its classical Roman sense where a 'client' is 'a plebian under the patronage of a patrician... who was bound, in return for certain services, to protect his client's life and interests' (OED 1.). The paradoxical relations between these two senses of the word make it a particularly apt choice. Clearly it is in Volpone's interest 'to protect his

client's life and interest', even as they are hoping for his death.

Mosca also uses the word 'client' in relation to the first visitor, Voltore, the advocate. Mosca delights in Voltore's delusions of his future success, he expects to be:-

...waited on
By herds of fools and clients; have clear way
Made for his mule, as lettered as himself;
Be called the great and learned advocate:
And then concludes, there's naught impossible.

(I.ii.105-109)

In this speech, Mosca uses the word 'clients' with the awareness of another, more specialised, sense meaning 'one who employs the services of a legal adviser in matters of law; he whose cause an advocate pleads' (OED 3). It will be recalled that Voltore does, in fact, plead the cause of Volpone before the judges in the play's final act. Voltore is also the first of the hangers-on to be presented to the 'ailing' Magnifico. The similarity of the two characters' names serves, perhaps, to emphasise the question which arises continually throughout the play; who is whose client? Voltore performs the overt functions of advocate in the play, pleading before the court, hoping, as Mosca describes so sarcastically, that his legal clients may eventually become his hangers-on, paying tribute to his greatness. Volpone plays out a more covert role which is, in some ways, a shadowy counterpart to Voltore's. Their two performances are closely linked by the legal, 'lettered' tradition of 'declamation' which Voltore practices before the court, but

which Volpone employs to entertain and involve the audience, who in this sense, are also in danger of becoming Volpone's clients (36).

Volpone functions with a self-conscious awareness of the rhetorical traditions from which his identity receives its authority. After the first trial scene, he delights in the triumph of Voltore's oratory. Mosca asks him how well the advocate has performed, Volpone replies:-

Oh "My most honoured fathers, my gravefathers,
Under correction of your fatherhoods,
What face of truth, is here? If these strange deeds
May pass, most honoured fathers -" I had much ado
To forbear laughing.

(V.ii.33-37)

Volpone's delighted repetition of Voltore's words expresses the pleasure he takes at easy deceit, but it is also a recognition of the usage and success of the old rhetorical devices on the judges. The "trick of the repeated word or phrase, used to intensify an emotional appeal", as Waith relates it, is frequently used in the Controversiae of Seneca (37).

The Roman art of declamation is exemplified by Seneca the Elder, in the Controversiae and Suasoriae, the judicial and deliberative declamations. After him, Tacitus and Cicero were both instrumental in elaborating and maintaining the oratorical tradition, and they were writers, in turn, attractive to the Renaissance for their 'copious' style. Waith explains the educational value of the declamation once it had entered the Elizabethan school system:-

The declamation ... was one of several tests of the

student's ability to improvise, and the supreme test of his oratorical powers... To produce a suitable declamation on one of the controversiae the student must project himself into the midst of an exciting fictitious narrative, fill in the outlines of his characters, imagine supplementary situations, give the story life and give it the meaning which would best serve the purposes of his 'client'. Above all, he must compose his declamation with an eye to effective oral delivery. (38)

Waith provides an almost perfect description of the activities of Volpone and Mosca throughout the play; they seem to take these techniques of the classroom and apply them to the sophisticated Venetian world. It is here, perhaps, that the similarities and differences between Sejanus and Volpone are at their most striking. In Sejanus, Jonson's text seems to have worked in close proximity to the ideas and influence of the dramatist's old grammar school teacher, William Camden. Sejanus is, in some ways, understandable as a mature academic exercise, where the invention in declamation seems to be fulfilled with great scholastic devotion. In Volpone, however, that devotion is replaced by a far more ambiguous, although nonetheless intellectual, exercise of the skills of declamation and oratory. Out of anger at the theatrical failure of Sejanus, perhaps, Jonson builds Volpone which includes this persistent concealed use of, and questioning of, the methods which informed Sejanus. Volpone and Mosca are always, in reality, their own clients; they function to invert the moral and didactic values of the classical oratorical skills.

In their self-serving manipulation of others, Volpone and Mosca share qualities with other villains of the period.

Greenblatt makes a comparison between Volpone and Othello which draws together the two Venetian servants Iago and Mosca:-

Like Jonson's Mosca, Iago is fully aware of himself as an improviser and revels in his ability to manipulate his victims, to lead them by the nose like asses, to possess their labour without their ever being capable of grasping the relation in which they are enmeshed... [It is] a mastery invisible to the servant, a mastery... whose character is essentially ideological. (39)

Greenblatt's identification of the relations between the master and the unknowing servants here is interesting. In it we recognise the seed of Mosca's eventual attempt on the position of Volpone's supremacy. There is, however, a marked difference between the significance of Volpone's and that of Mosca's actions. When Mosca uses the word 'client', in reference to Voltore being 'waited on by herds... clients', he takes the word in a relatively straightforward un-ironic sense. When Volpone uses it, however, he does so to far more complex, ironic effect. He invokes that whole declamatory tradition in which the improvisation, and argument for either side, is promoted and in which the employment of Aesop's Fables, and beast fables, is seen as a conventional and legitimate practice 'introduced in the light of their suasive function', as Altman has put it (40). Thus, with the oratory of Volpone, the visitors are simultaneously the figures inside an exemplary, persuasive, rhetorical device and the subjects of the motivation of that device which is so cunningly being manipulated. The invisible, ideological nature of the

relations, which Greenblatt describes, may thus be seen through Volpone, to address itself to the pedagogic activities in the English grammar schools.

There is then a significant difference in the discourses of Volpone and Mosca. Volpone is far more aware of the text's appropriation of the fables and its broad engagement with a pedagogic discourse, while Mosca is the self-seeking mercenary parasite whose self-consciousness is not raised above the machinations of the play's other characters. Mosca seems to stand outside of the Aesopic conventions of the play. As the wily servant he is perhaps more loosely attached to the play's other, New Comedy classicism, bearing a resemblance also perhaps to the morality Vice, and to his Jonsonian predecessor Musco (who becomes Brainworm in the Folio edition of Every Man In). Mosca is a free agent, a virtuoso, perhaps even stronger on improvisation than Volpone. Although, he is less aware of the level on which the play reaches out to the education system of the time, still he is made to describe his 'art' in terms of a science that might be learnt:-

Oh! Your parasite
Is a most precious thing, dropped from above,
Not bred 'mongst clods and clot-poles, here on earth.
I muse, the mystery was not made a science,
It is so liberally professed!

(III.i.7-11.)

He may prove cleverer than the predators, as is indicated here, but he shows no understanding of the interrogative significance of Volpone's identity nor of the direction of the text as a whole. Mosca's actions are directed along the

internal lines of the play's unfolding actions.

Volpone's use of his 'clients', his delight in the play of rhetoric, and his unique adoption of animal nomenclature which characterises the play, and of which no other character seems aware, are all factors which project Volpone onto a level that is at one with the fictionalising creativity of the text; the level on which the drama is generated (41). To this extent Volpone does have a perverse inverted relationship with the 'good poet' of the dedicatory epistle.

Volpone seems, almost self-consciously, involved in the insertion of the play as a whole into the educational domain of moral discourse. He is instrumental in the text's questioning the operation of moral speech. In act II, Volpone's performance as the Mountebank does in fact constitute a form of full-scale declamation, but for motives utterly antithetical to the moralist's aims. When Corvino bursts in on Volpone's performance his reaction is predictable. He exclaims to Celia:-

Spite o' the devil, and my shame! Come down here;

(II.iii.1.)

He seems to recognise the Antichrist that Brinsley and the moral educators sought to repress and that Volpone so actively invokes.

In Volpone the verbal references to, and the declamatory presence of, numerous Aesopic fables are more than simply part of a convenient, universalising allegory. When Volpone refers to the fox of the fable, he locates

himself both in the current fiction and in the pre-existing texts which had then been appropriated by the grammar schools. He does this in a way which is utterly contemporary (so much so that modern readers need the kind of explanation that I have included here in order to recognise it). The transformation of the fables (particularly those of Aesop) must, to a large extent, have been a covert one. Despite the theoretically invigorating practices, described by Waith, of self-projection into 'exciting fictitious narratives', the pedagogic appropriation of the fables seems finally to have served to detract from their fictional status. The texts underwent a change in status which removed the reader's interest from the twist, the 'fine delusive sleights' of the narrative actions, and placed it instead upon the rhetorical, formal make-up of the text, and equally insistently upon the simple moral algebra which was derived from them. Volpone subverts these equations and starts to renew interest in the trickery of the narratives, recharging the texts with moral ambiguity and with the power of narrative movement of which in the schools they had, inevitably, been deprived.

In the two scrutineo scenes (in acts IV and V) mirror images of the law at work are presented (42). The first scene ends with the apparent success of Voltore's oratory; Celia and Bonario are condemned and only wait to hear their sentence passed. In the play's final scene, however, the truth emerges as Volpone is forced to 'uncase'. Justice is, eventually, seen to be done, but not through any success of

the legislature. In the final attempts, symbolically, to fit the punishments to the crime, one sees a last effort by legal conventions to enforce a single reality, a closure, on the ever-unwinding 'labyrinth' of villainous fictions which pour forth from Volpone and Mosca.

When Volpone cries out at the announcement of his punishment, 'this is called mortifying of a Fox,' (V.xii.125), it sounds like a deliberately ironic reference to the conventional fate of the hunted fox, but perhaps it also triumphantly invokes the persistence of the species which convention also describes as always escaping the net. Volpone's possessions are sent symbolically to the house of the Incurabili (V.xii.120) in a way which metonymically relates his identity as the Fox with that of the incurables. Volpone may be morally ill, as opposed to the physical illness he feigned, but the disease is far from terminal. The continuation of the fox's identity is assured when Volpone comes forward to conclude the play:-

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

(V.xii.152-157)

The audience is not asked here to applaud the play itself, but to clap for the fox (although it is recognised that to some extent the presence of the 'good poet' is again shadowed forth in this speech). Turning his last trick onto the audience, nevertheless, Volpone's speech transforms the theatrical convention of applause into an affirmation of his

own durability. There is, in reality, little room here for Volpone to be 'doubtful' or for the audience to 'censure him'. The morally innocent tone of the dedicatory epistle is resumed here, but with Volpone's tongue firmly in cheek.

The play both enacts and asks searching, practical questions of its audience. Earlier, Volpone, frustrated by being caught out, had cried in despair:-

To make a snare for mine own neck! And run
My head into it, wilfully! With laughter!

(V.xi.1-2)

This description of his position also neatly describes that of the audience. The spectators become ensnared in the ambiguous discourses of the play because it is, at least partly, the collision of the moral context with the immoral subject that produces the comedy, but it is also because the drama located its contemporary spectators in a known familiar, position (the school room) which was also a position whose status, when informed by the fiction, became strange. The fictional basis of educational ideology that supports society's precepts is exposed by Volpone and the audience is unsettled and provoked by its compelling unwindings.

In earlier plays, Jonson partially deals with this subject in a thematic way. In Every Man In and Poetaster the conflicts between father and son over the nature of learning and study, to some extent, explore similar ground, but neither of them deals so controversially with the subject. Nor do the earlier plays make so subtle, or so

threatening, the crucial connections between learning, identity, language, and the power of the law. The fox, and the Devil, can now also be seen to teach from the same grammar school texts which are used by the moralists.

Volpone: Notes and References

1. For analyses of Volpone's themes, imagery and language see:-

Volpone, edited by J.D. Rea, Yale Studies in English, 59, (New Haven, 1919).

H. Levin, 'Jonson's Metempsychosis', Philological Quarterly, XXII, (1943) 231-239.

E. Partridge, The Broken Compass, op.cit.

J. Barish, 'The Double Plot in Volpone', in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, op.cit., 93-105.

I. Donaldson, 'Volpone: Quick and Dead', Essays in Criticism, (1971) 121-134.

R. Dutton, 'Volpone and The Alchemist: A Comparison of Satiric Techniques', Renaissance and Modern Studies, 18, (1974) 36-62.

M. Anderson, 'Structure and Response in Volpone', Renaissance and Modern Studies, 19, (1975) 47-71.

C. Manlove, 'The Double View of Volpone', Studies in English Literature, 19, (1979) 239-252.

An outraged account of the effect of Volpone's use of Catullus is given by J. McPeck in Catallus in Strange and Distant Britain, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, XV, (1939) p.115.

McPeck's horror of Volpone's 'indecorous' use of Catallus seems to express precisely the kind of upset and disturbance that, I shall argue, Volpone may be seen to create. A similar point, I have discovered, is also made by J. Riddell; 'Volpone's Fare', Studies in English Literature, XXI, (1981) 307-318, p.317.

2. The Broken Compass, pp.85-86.

Barish, 'The Double Plot', p.96.

See also D.A. Scheve, 'Jonson's Volpone and Traditional Fox Lore,' Review of English Studies, NS I, (1950) 242-244.

Most convincing, however, is the important work recently done by R.B. Parker, 'Volpone and Reynard the Fox', Renaissance Drama, NS 7, (1976) 23-42, 3.42. I am indebted to this article, which I discovered after most of my initial research, because it substantiates much of what I have to say about the presence of beast fables in Volpone. Parker demonstrates that, what he calls the 'beast epic', plays a far more important unifying, and to the first audiences familiar, role in the play than has been previously understood.

3. Barish, 'The Double Plot', p.102.

4. Dessen, Moral Comedy, pp.87-8.

Dessen fails to discuss the relevance of the fable to the play, but he finds the conventionally styled 'animal degeneracy' of the characters enacted in the play in, for example, the movement from Volpone's verbal wooing of Celia, to the physical brutality of the attempted rape.

5. Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays, p.89.
6. Knoll, p.90.
7. English language versions of Aesop's Fables, appeared in the following years; 1497, 1500, 1551, 1560, 1570, 1596. These dates suggest persistent and perhaps increasing interest in the Fables in the period before the writing of Volpone.
8. T. Baldwin, William Shakespeare's "Small Latine and Less Greek", (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1944) I, p.614.
9. Baldwin, p.638.
10. Aesop's Fables in the Orthography And With Grammar Notes, edited by William Bullokar (London, 1585) p.95, No. 91.
11. Bullokar's Aesop, p.96.
12. Parker, op.cit., pp.30-33.
13. Parker, p.33
14. Bullokar's Aesop, No.11, 'of the crow and the fox'.
15. Bullokar's Aesop, No. 43.
16. The Book of Beasts, Being a Translation From A Latin Bestiary of The Twelfth Century, Made and Edited by T.H. White, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1954) pp.53-54. See pp.230-270, for explanatory appendix which discusses the history of this bestiary manuscript, and the genre in general.
17. Hallet has traced the connection between the fox and the devil from the twelfth century; to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He sees the fox, Daun Russell, in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale as allegorising the devil. He also finds equation of fox and devil in Robert Henryson's The Morall Fabills of Esope and the Phrygian, in the May eclogue to Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar, and Joshua Sylvester's translation of Bartus His Devine Weeks and Workes, See:-
C.A. Hallett, 'The Satanic Nature of Volpone', Philological Quarterly, 49, (1970) 41-55.
For a contemporary account of the fox's feigned death see, E. Topsell, The of Historie Foure Footed Beastes', (London, 1607) p.226 and the book from which he translated much of his work, Gesner's Historiae Animalum, (Tiguri, 1551) I. pp. 1081- 1096. Jonson had a copy of this encyclopedic work in his own library.
18. G. K. Hunter, 'The Theology of Marlowe's Jew of Malta', Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 27,

(1964) 211-240.

19. Hunter, p.233.

20. Greenblatt has also drawn the connection between the feigned deaths and returns of Barabas and Volpone; see:-

S.J. Greenblatt, 'The False Ending in Volpone', Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 75, (1976) 90-104, pp.92-93.

It is also revealing to note that, at the end of Titus Andronicus (1594), when the punishments are dealt out, Lucius instructs that Tamora, who has been associated with the black demonic force of Aaron, should be thrown 'forth to beasts and birds of prey' (V.iii.198). She shares a similar fate to Barabas and Volpone, but, of course she does not return to the action.

A further comparison between The Jew of Malta and Volpone is made by R. Broude, 'Volpone and The Triumph of Truth: Some Antecedents and Analogues of the Main Plot in Volpone', Studies in Philology, 77, (1980), 227-246, p.238.

21. Parker, op.cit., p.6

22. Sir Thomas Elyot, The Boke named The Governour, (London, 1531) fol. 30v-31.

23. John Brinsley, Ludus Literarius, or The Grammar Schoole, (London, 1612) p.145.

24. Watson, op.cit., pp.431-432.

25. The Epistle is actually dated 1607, some two years after the play's first performance and thus has a chronological distance, as well as a moral one from the text of the play. For further remarks on this distance between epistle and play, see: Greenblatt, 'The False Ending', p.103.

26. J. Sweeney also sees the play as involved in a close questioning of the social situation. He says Volpone asks repeatedly 'how authority is established in a theatre, or in a culture, where traditional authority has been subverted', he traces this confrontation in the relations between Volpone and Mosca, 'Volpone and the Theatre of Self-Interest', English Literary Renaissance, 12, (1982) 220-241, p.226.

27. Sir Walter Raleigh, Instructions to his Sonne and to Posterity, (London, 1632) pp.39-40. For a discussion of the 'individuality' and the late date of publication of this text, see: A.M. Latham, 'Raleigh's Instructions', in Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies: presented to Frank Percy Wilson, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1959) pp.199-218. More recently an opposing view has come from: R. Helgerson, The Elizabethan Prodigals, (University of California Press, London, 1976) p.19.

28. Francis Bacon, The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon, Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Humane, (London, 1605) II, sig., 18v. It should be noted that this is yet another book relevant to the concealed subject of Volpone published in the same year as the play's earliest performance.

29. Sir Francis Bacon, The Essaies, (London, 1612) p.14.

30. Bacon, Advancement of Learning, pp.19-20.

31. D. Duncan, The Lucianic Tradition, pp.144-146.

32. The School of Slovenrie: Or, Cato Turn'd Wrong Side Outward, Translated by R.F. Gent, (London, 1605) sig. A4v.

33. The School of Slovenrie, p.iii.

34. W.M. Mitchell, The Rise of the Revolutionary Party in the English House of Commons 1603-1629, (N.York, Columbia University Press, 1957) p.26.

35. Brinsley, op.cit., sig., 3v.

36. For a full study of the art of declamation, see Waith's chapter of that name in The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1952) pp. 86-98.

37. Waith, p.92.

38. Waith, p.96.

39. S.J. Greenblatt, 'Improvisation and Power', in Literature and Society, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978, New Series 3, Edited by E. Said, (Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1980) 57-99, p.68.

See also J.V. Crewe, 'Death in Venice: Othello and Volpone', University of Cape Town Studies in English, 4, (1973) 17-29.

40. Altman, Tudor Play of Mind, p.45.

41. Mosca sometimes joins Volpone in alluding to other characters by their Aesopic titles. He does so, however, in imitation of Volpone whose position he eventually seeks to replace by these mimicking practices. He uses images in more colloquial contexts, and in less specific ways, for example when he calls after Corbaccio: "Rook go with you, raven" (I.iv.124), or when he declares his intentions to oust Volpone:-

My Fox
Is out on his hole, and ere he shall re-enter
I'll make him languish in his borrowed case,

Except he come to composition with me:

(V.v.6-9)

The reference here to the boys' game 'Fox-in-the-hole', in which boys hop about hitting one another with leather thongs (OED), suggest perhaps the nature of the mimesis which characterises Mosca's parasitism on Volpone. Through a location of the discourse in the activities of children's games, Mosca remains, even in his ambition, a part of Volpone's perverse family.

42. In relation to this division of judgements and the reversal of the verdict at the play's end see Greenblatt, 'Volpone Quick and Dead', pp.90-104.

Chapter V: 'An acceptable violence': Madness and Intertextuality in Epicoene, Or The Silent Woman

The use of animal names, and their conventional characteristics as described in fables, continue to offer, in Epicoene, Or The Silent Woman (1609/1610), identities for some of the characters. Dauphine, Centaur, Sir John Daw, Captain and Mistress Otter are all, to some extent, defined by received ideas about these creatures. The Daw, 'a small bird of the crow kind' (OED), is 'applied contemptuously to persons... a simpleton, noodle, fool' (OED), and also occurs with reference to the fable of the jay in peacock's plumes, which suggests Daw's affectations of poetic and sexual prowess in the play. Sir John also shows up his own foolishness when pontificating about literature, he insists on giving the 'dor' to Plutarch and Seneca (II.iii.42), while later Clerimont persuades him that Sir Amorous has hatched a plot 'to have given you the dor' (III.iii.24). The punning on 'dor' and 'daw' points out Sir John's basic foolishness. 'To daw' is also 'to subdue or frighten' (OED) and the gallants manage to do just that, when they arrange the fake duel between Daw and La Foole. The two knights' names point to similar identities and, between them, conveniently summarise the main areas of their affectations in their claims about sex, in their use of language, and in their social behaviour. Dauphine is, most obviously, the name of the French heir-apparent and it is, therefore, a suitable name for the heir in the play, but it is also the French 'dolphin' whose quickness, intelligence, and

attractiveness are underlying qualities of this character's identity. The amphibian nature of the otter is transformed into sexual ambiguity in the characters of Captain and Mistress Otter. When they are first mentioned a comic debate is played out concerning exactly which of them is the Captain (in I.iv.20-26). Similarly, in the case of Centaur one of the Collegiate ladies, the confused identity which classical mythology relays is also reworked in the play. The centaur of mythology is, of course, half-horse, half-man; the Jonsonian Centaur is half man and half woman. So, it would seem, some characters are named in this play in a similar fashion to those in Volpone. This similarity may indicate perhaps the larger processes of textual reworking and transformation in Epicoene which may also resemble the processes of the earlier play.

In Poetaster and the tragedies a small number of specific dramatic modes and discourses are quite ostentatiously reworked by the text. In Volpone one domain of discourse in particular is subject to dramatic reworking, but in a less obvious manner. In Epicoene, as is suggested perhaps by the ways that the characters are named, the re-fashioning of known texts and discourses recurs with equal complexity, but perhaps with less consistency, and certainly on a less prominent level of the dramaturgy (1). Barish points out that in the translations of passages from Ovid's Ars Amatoria (in I.i.93-7, 101-11, IV.i.32-110):-

Jonson casts overboard all of the allusions to myth and legend used by Ovid to lend dignity and authority to

his statements, and keeps only the bald advice couched in the baldest fashion. (2)

The deliberate reduction of mythic allusion, observed here, stands in marked contrast to the earlier practices of translation in Poestaster where mythic allusions are, as I have shown, frequently increased in Jonson's versions. The effect in the earlier play is to draw attention to the classical status of the discourse. In Epicoene the intertextuality of translation is subdued, relegated to the function of flesh under the text's make-up; the emphasis is placed on the modernity of the discourse not on its classical origins. Ovid's discourses on cosmetics become, in Epicoene, themselves subject to the effects of artifice. Ovidian discourse is transformed into Jonsonian discourse by cosmetic practices which, in a formal sense, run parallel to the practices described and detailed in the translated passages. As part of the debate on cosmetics, which crops up at several points in the play, the song that Clerimont's boy sings in the opening scene contains a telling couplet:-

Though art's hid causes are not found,
All is not sweet, all is not sound.

(I.i.84-5) (3)

This phrase, and indeed the whole song, seem to suggest the moral disapproval of cosmetics and 'face-painting' which is implicit in those curiously emblematic scenes in the tragedies and which recur in The Devil Is An Ass.

The text of Epicoene also hides the 'causes' of its 'art', just as the Collegiate Ladies hide their real flesh under layers of make-up, and their real genders 'with most

masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority' (I.i.70-71), as Truewit puts it. In the same way, of course, the true nature of the 'silent woman' is hidden under two layers of artifice, the first relating to the extent of her engagement in discourse, the second to 'her' gender. The cosmetic surface of the play has been frequently celebrated as achieving great success as light farce. Partridge describes it as 'bright and gay (whatever the darker notes sounded by Morose's surly humour and its castigation)' (4). Yet, the presence of 'hid causes' in the text suggests to me a curious combination of light, witty comedy and a more serious form of almost macabre burlesque. It is this kind of duality that may well be described as a form of 'acceptable violence' (IV.i.75); the nervous phrase with which Truewit justifies his style of wooing, but which is clearly capable of being extended to describe his approaches to Morose (5).

W.D. Kay finds 'it hard to mourn very long over the treatment of Morose', and does not, therefore, see the torment of the central character as important in comparison with the 'playful collaboration of the three gallants' (6). This attitude may indicate an unwillingness, on the part of some modern critics, to perceive the impact of a comedy of afflictions where the lightness of the comedy is a dependent counterpart to the darkness of the afflictions. The 'playful collaboration' of the wits can only have meaning in its opposition to the isolation of Morose. It is this play of ambivalence, in a drama full of sexual, literary, and moral transformations, which I seek to

illuminate in Epicoene.

George Parfitt observes,

the way in which Jonson organizes the plot-strands of Epicoene to create the maximum cumulative torment for Morose. (7)

Much of the comedy occurs along these 'strands' of the plot, although it is nearly always humour achieved through the mockery, humiliation, or frightening of a victim, as opposed to humour derived, for example, from small instances of irony, or from word-play, which are common devices elsewhere in Jonson's drama. In the partially developed sub-plot between Captain and Mistress Otter, where the husband is continually harassed and humiliated by his wife, the audience is presented with a wholly comic counterpart to the humiliation and torment of Morose by his newly-acquired 'wife'. Captain Otter is shown to be utterly defeated by his wife's verbal assault which the three gallants watch unseen, along with the audience, and which they only interrupt so as to prevent Mistress Otter from 'worrying' the Captain to death (III.i.47). Later, however, the apparent sympathy of their intervention is subverted when the gallants, as part of their overall noisy torment of Morose, contrive to provoke Otter to a battery of insults against his wife, for which they then bring her on stage to hear (IV.ii.44-111). This incitement to verbal violence is a comic counterpart to Truewit's earlier encouragement of Morose (in III.v.52-105) to swear fiercer and fiercer revenge on Cutbread for inflicting the noisy Epicoene on him. The 'sounds' and 'battle' that follow Otter's

cursings, and which Truewit and Clerimont delightedly proclaim, are accompanied by the entry of the musicians, 'with drums and trumpets' blaring, and the subsequent descent of Morose flourishing his long sword. This peak of carefully orchestrated sound constitutes the high point of violent noise and action in the play. The familiar mode of city comedy derived from a conventional marital argument, in which the wife beats the husband, is suddenly, almost inexplicably, transformed at the entry of the musicians producing an aural confusion reminiscent of Bedlam. 'All is not sweet, all is not sound', exclaims the boy in Clerimont's song, and this suggests the violent interplay set up throughout the drama, between 'of all sounds, only the sweet voice of a fair lady' (II.v.21-2), which Morose desires on first meeting Epicoene, and the 'sons of noise and tumult' (IV.ii.108-9) which he later calls his tormentors. For Morose, all is sweet that is not sound, while, for Truewit, all is sweet that is sound, and he does his best to procure the services of any sound-makers available. For the drama, as a whole, the paradigm, 'all is not sweet, all is not sound', suggests an attitude of moral queasiness to all the extremities induced in the play's world. In the affliction of Morose the height of comedy is equalled by the height of torment.

By returning to the 'hid causes' of Morose's name some light is to be shed on why his torment should be seen as so severe and why 'all is not sound' in the play where 'th' adultries' of its art, tell much about the location of

meanings in the play.

In Wagers' late-Tudor interlude, The Longer Thou Livest The More Fool Thou Art (1569), the following passage is found:-

There is nothing more intolerable
Than a rich man that is covetous,
A fool wealthy, a wicked man fortunate,
A judge partial, an old man lecherous.
Good Lord, how are we now molested.
The devil hath sent one into our country,
A monster whom God and man hath detested,
A fool that came up from a low degree.
My name is People, for I represent
All the people where Moros doth dwell,
Such a person as is with nothing content
So that we think him to be a devil of hell.

(11.1687-1698)

People is one of several, abstracted, choric characters who converse with, or comment to the audience, on Wager's central hero, Moros. People's description offers some basic views of the malcontent which are also applicable to Jonson's Morose. Morose is rich and covetous, he is also a fool, and lecherous. His identity, although much more fully developed than that of Moros, still coincides with stereotypes offered by the late morality tradition. Jonson's Morose and Wager's Moros have not been placed alongside each other before by critics (mainly, probably, because the orthodox view of Morose sees the character's origins in Libanius' character Morosus) and indeed the differences between Wager's character and Jonson's remain greater than their similarities. Comparison of the two, however, is illuminating.

The interlude takes a conventional form for a morality play. Moros is shown to develop from youth, to adult, to

old man (Jonson's Morose is an old man throughout). Moros at the end of the play, is carted off to the Devil on the back of the Vice Confusion (at 1.1858). Throughout the play, Moros plays with language, distorts words and names of characters (Pleasure becomes Play-sure, at 1.806; 'Avoid, trudge, and get thee away', at 1.982, becomes the nonsensical 'Accloyed, grudge but not deny' at 1.985.) It is this quality of the character's use of language which might well have appealed to Jonson, but it is not, perhaps surprisingly, the inflexions of discourse which link the two characters beyond the closeness of their names (8). Instead it is the ultimate fate of the two fools which has more in common than might be supposed. Moros is struck down by the 'sword of vengeance' wielded by the representative of God's judgement (1.1790) and carted off to Hell. Morose is struck down by a kind of madness which seems to have been imposed from outside, rather than welled up from within, but the vice, Confusion, who disposes of Moros, is also symbolic of the sort of social confusion that, in Morose, becomes madness and which determines his fate in Jonson's play. Judgement cast upon Morose is of a social, not a religious kind, his hell is the lunatic asylum which his house becomes and to which Truewit seems to consign him in the play's last speech.

Dessen has noted that in Wager's play the falling of the 'sword of vengeance' is clearly contrasted with the numerous instances when Moros uselessly flourishes his sword (9). This flourish of the long sword, Dessen explains, is a

conventional sign in the late morality interludes, which denotes foolishness and error on the part of the character waving the sword. This sign recurs quite pointedly in Jonson's *Morose* (in I.i.146, in II.ii.11, and IV.ii.104). In the play's first scene Clerimont explains Morose's obsessions to Truewit:-

This youth practised on him one night, like the bellman; and never left till he had brought him down to the door with a long sword: and there left him flourishing with the air.

(I.i.144-147)

This anticipates the climax of Morose's torment, when his house is invaded by guests and the noise of music and drumming is at its peak. It is, at this point, that he is actually seen to descend flourishing the long sword to banish all the persecutors (in IV.ii.104). The audience seems to be asked to link Morose's dramatic identity with that of the fool of the late morality interludes.

This association is strengthened when Truewit first appears to Morose to try to dissuade him from getting married (in II.ii.). Truewit enters carrying a post horn and a halter. These emblematic items also partake of the iconography of the morality interludes. In Lodge and Greene's A Looking Glass for London and England (1590) a usurer is tempted by an evil angel who offers him a knife and a rope; which is also perhaps what Truewit produces in the same scene (II.ii.12). The post horn persists as an emblem of the devil as late as 1607. In Barnes' The Devil's Charter (performed in that year) a devil is announced by the

sound of a post-horn and enters disguised as a post, or messenger (10), it will be recalled that Truewit tells Morose that he is a messenger from Court. It is also to be observed that, although Truewit's previous dominant discourse is characterised by its classical overtones upon which Clerimont comments (I.i.54) and which is the focus of Barish's analysis, in disguising his identity to approach Morose, Truewit also adopts a discourse that has some of the qualities of the earlier morality genre:-

Alas, sir, I am but a messenger: I but tell you what you must hear. It seems your friends are careful after your soul's health.

(II.ii.48-9)

Truewit's disguise of concern for Morose's 'soul's health' and the way in which he insists, fatalistically, that the old man must hear 'what you must hear' is suggestive of the Vice, disguised as Virtue, who often preys upon the central characters in the morality interludes.

If Morose's identity seems to be shaped, to some extent, by conventions of the morality drama, this may well also be the case for Truewit's identity. When Truewit tells Dauphine that he dissuaded Morose from marriage, Dauphine replies in a fury:-

Did I not tell you? Mischief! -

.....

...If the most malicious enemy I have, had studied to inflict an injury upon me, it could not be a greater.

(II.iv.18-24)

The references here to 'Mischief' and to 'the most malicious enemy' are suggestive of the Devil and his vicious agents. Similarly, Truewit reveals his disguise to Morose later on

in the play, in the same terms. He calls himself 'the bird of night', (III.v.9) and tells Morose that he adopted the 'voice of a night-crow', (III.v.14-15). Then again Truewit describes the marriage in demonic terms:-

The spitting the coughing, the laughter, the neezing, the farting, dancing, noise of the music, and her masculine and loud commanding and urging the whole family, makes him think he has married a Fury.

(IV.i.7-10)

This way of seeing the marriage is consistent with the way in which it is presented elsewhere in the play; as a demonic torment.

In his use of language, and in the way in which he describes the action, Truewit is very much a 'stranger' to the play. In the very first scene he describes the pastimes of the gallants, the horse-racing, betting, bowls, and womanising, he observes:-

These be the things wherein you fashionable men exercise themselves, and I for company.

(I.i.35-6)

Truewit's reference to himself is syntactically separated from the main clause of the sentence. His presence in the world of the play, as enacted in his discourse, is represented by the aside which has the air of an unfinished second phrase. There may be a second meaning, hinted at in what Truewit is in fact doing 'for company'; the final phrase seems almost to imply that a different (perhaps unspeakable) kind of activity has been deliberately left out of what he says. It is important to see the way in which this character is made distinct from the 'fashionable

gentleman' of the play. This distance suggests, from the outset, a more abstract role for him which may have significance in a completely different dramatic mode.

Truewit is curiously without motive in the plot and this seems to be a further affirmation of his role outside the immediate, material ends of the play's other characters. Although Dauphine's device of disguising Epicoene finally 'lurched' his 'friends of the better half of the garland, by concealing this part of the plot' (V.iv.191-192), Truewit's tricks and devices still play the largest part in the action of the drama. It is revealing to find that the words 'strange' and 'stranger' frequently occur in discourse relating to, or spoken by, Truewit. He is initially ignorant of Morose's search for a wife. Clerimont says:-

...why, thou art a stranger, it seems, to his best trick yet.

(I.ii.20)

Here, the colloquial, predicative usage of 'a stranger to' acquires the added connotations of 'outsider', 'foreigner' or 'alien'. The added connotations seem to place him close to the members of the audience in that, they too, are strangers to the unfolding of the action. Thus the audience joins with Truewit's entry to the world of the play and acquires perhaps some complicity with him. Further on, Truewit does not understand Clerimont's and Dauphine's anger at his having apparently, so successfully, dissuaded Morose from marriage. He says to them:-

My masters, do not put on this strange face to my
courtesy: off with this visor.

(II.iv.30-31)

Here Truewit produces an effect he calls 'strange' in other people, a false reaction, which induces an 'alteration to the norms of their behaviour' (OED). They do not simply become 'distant or cold in demeanour' (OED), the strangeness of their 'face' is addressed to Truewit's 'courtesy'. 'Courtesy', then, becomes the subject ironic variance. In the sequence of events, it serves as a simple reference to Truewit's having forbidden the banns and having broken the match (II.iv.5-6). It is also associated with Truewit's first excited demand, in this scene, that Dauphine 'fall down and worship' him (II.iv.4-5), when he enters bringing his news. This demand has some of the arrogance of the Devil in it which is not reciprocated by Dauphine, nor emphasised with any consistency, but it reinforces the view of Truewit as an agent of the Devil. When it later emerges that his action has, in fact, had the opposite effect on Morose, Truewit tries to take the credit for this too, which Clerimont rejects, saying:-

Away, thou strange justfier of thyself.

(II.iv.70)

Again, there is a sense of something curiously 'unsound' about Truewit. The word 'strange' is recurrent in association with him. It seems to be instrumental in emphasising his alienation from Dauphine and Clerimont, and

it is associated with his morally suspect manipulative skills. With reference to the Collegiate ladies, he says to Dauphine:-

Thou would'st think it strange if I should make 'em all
in love with thee afore night!

(IV.i.127-8)

Here the word suggests 'something magical, to be wondered at' (OED), in Truewit's abilities. Further on Truewit is describing, to Daw, La Foole's apparently murderous appearance as the manipulator sets up the fake quarrel between the two knights:-

Some false brother i' the house has
furnished him strangely.

(IV.v.91-2)

Truewit, of course, is the 'false brother' and it is his falsity which never allows the audience to see his actions as simply another of 'the things wherein your fashionable gentlemen exercise themselves'.

This cluster of associations which constitute Truewit's discourse and position in the play, establishes a particular level of significance in the central relationship between Epicoene, Truewit and Morose. It seems to ask the audience to understand the torment of the old man, at least in part, as a demonic torment. This is how Morose, himself, comes to see the position:-

O my cursed angels, that instructed me to this fate!
...
That I should be seduced by so foolish a devil, as a
barber will make!

(IV.iv.1-4)

What Morose fails to recognise is the true, witty identity of the devil tormenting him here. Like the fool of the morality plays he will be subject to the temptations, deceptions, and vexations of vices disguised as virtues of whom it may well be said 'all is not sweet, all is not sound'. In consequence, although the plot allows Dauphine to engineer the disguise of Epicoene, the doubly disguised boy-actor must also be understood, in terms of the dramatic mode, to constitute a part of the demonic torment of the fool.

This is important because it seems so much at odds with the witty exposure of affectation that occurs around Daw, la Foole, Otter and the others. With the manipulations of Clerimont, Dauphine, and Truewit, the play seems to conform to the conventions of citizen comedy. These gallants recall earlier Jonsonian characters, like the Young Knowell and Wellbred, and they anticipate later wits like Quarlous and Winwife. Shapiro observes:-

Jonson presented the three gallants - Dauphine, Clerimont, and Truewit - as coherent images of the way true aristocrats relate to a fallen world. (11)

I believe that the position is not, however, quite as straightforward as this view implies. Grene points out a crucial disturbing factor in the presentation of the gallants:-

The distribution of audience approval among the wits in Epicoene is a matter of genuine importance in the structure of the play. Jonson's technique, in fact, appears to involve never allowing his audience to settle into a confirmed preference for one of these three over the other two. (12)

Grene's point is very important because the whole structure

of this play seems to involve the invocation of different dramatic modes each of which makes equal demands on the audience. Separately, and together, the gallants are responsible for activating these different dramatic modes on different levels of significance in the play, and it is for this reason that there can be 'no confirmed preference' for any one of the gallants. As I have shown, Truewit (and Epicoene) may be understood in relation to a late morality dramatic mode. When Truewit and Dauphine are together, they partake of a classical, scholarly and very fashionable, comic mode of drama, but Dauphine invokes another dramatic mode in his own relations with Morose.

In the struggle of a nephew with his uncle for possession of a legacy, Jonson's play recalls Middleton's A Mad World, My Masters (1604-6) and A Trick To Catch The Old One (1608), and anticipates Massinger's A New Way To Pay Old Debts (1621) and Jonson's own The Staple Of News (1623). These, and other such plays, all use a similar configuration of characters and motives that virtually form a sub-genre of their own (13).

One recurrent feature of the sub-genre, important for the present discussion, is the madness which frequently occurs in the morally condemned characters by the end of each of these plays. At the end of A Mad World, My Masters, Follywit surprises Sir Bounteous (his uncle) by telling him of his secret marriage; Sir Bounteous responds:-

A wife? 'sfoot, what is she for a fool would marry thee, a madman? When was the wedding kept in Bedlam?
(V.ii.270-2)

In this instance, the greed is on the part of the nephew not the Uncle, it is subject to a clear moral judgement when it transpires that Follywit's new wife had previously been Sir Bounteous' prostitute. The important point, however, is the centrality of the madness in the fate of the anti-social character. In the later play the uncle becomes the covetous party, as in Epicoene, and the eventual madness of the anti-social character is a crucial part of the formula. Massinger's play, in a quite self-conscious way, brings together elements of Middleton's and Jonson's texts, yielding a definitive version of the struggle between uncle and nephew upon which the The Staple of News subsequently elaborates. Overreach, the uncle who threatens the inheritance, is driven to madness and is despatched with the following characteristic instruction: 'Take a mittimus, and carry him to Bedlam.' (V.i.374-5).

The madness is perceived here in social terms and the remedy supplied is a contemporary one. It is revealing to compare the lines, quoted above, with the words of the The Bishops' Mitimus, a warrant issued for the confinement of the 'bishops' thirty years after Epicoene was first performed:-

It is thought fitt and commanded that the Masters Warders and keepers of the Prison ordained for the entertainment of distracted and franticke persons toe take into their Custodie the persons of the said Archbishop of York etc., and use means for the restoring of them to their former understanding, as shall be requisite. (14)

Sending someone to Bedlam, or the 'prison ordained for the entertainment of distracted or franticke persons' is clearly

an instrument of political, as well as of social control. Madness, in the context of such a *Mittimus*, is not an absolute identification of a person with insanity in any modern clinical sense; it is more a political expedient for dealing with those whose beliefs and behaviour fall outside the acceptable or 'requisite' norms. In Epicoene Morose may be understood in exactly these terms.

Morose, in rejection of 'all discourses but mine own' (II.i.3-4), and in his insistence that he should only be answered 'by signs' (II.i.5), and 'not by speech but silence' (II.i.7-8), poses a direct threat to the dominant, verbal order of the drama and, by implication, that of society. He establishes the possibility of a different, silent dramatic mode as an alternative to the conventions in which he is presented. He cites an example of what he means:-

The Turk, in this divine discipline, is admirable, exceeding all the potentates of the earth; still waited on by mutes; and all his commands so executed; yea, even in the war (as I have heard) and in his marches, most of his charges and directions, given by signs, and with silence: an exquisite art!

(II.i.26-30)

It is not strictly accurate to call Morose anti-social (he still wishes to participate in the social convention of marriage). He is, however, eccentric to the social and dramatic norms of the world of the play.

Truewit is formally set against the restrictive, anti-dramatic figure of Morose, the malcontent's fanaticism is presented as distasteful and to be mocked into submission.

In the formal configuration of the play the epicene nature of numerous other dramatic personae produces a metaphorical re-presentation of a corrupt and decadent society in which the commitment of an individual to 'madness' is a social gesture, an instrument of self-justification, which guarantees the validity of one set of identities through the repression of an Other. In this case, Morose becomes a scapegoat, perhaps only the extreme example of the folly loose in the play's world. The general form of folly is enacted in the movements between genders that is such a pervasive theme of the play.

Undoubtedly the popular contemporary fashion for effeminacy in men and masculinity in women was regarded to a great extent as a form of folly, Grene notes:-

From the very start of the play, we are made aware of female sexuality as something grotesque and perverse.
(15)

Equally, male sexuality is presented as proud, boastful, and ultimately false. Ten years after the first production of the play, the fashions do not seem to have changed noticeably. The narrator of a pamphlet called Hic Mulier: Or The Man-Woman is still to be found complaining of women, that they,

were, are, and will be still most Masculine, most mankinde, and most monstrous. (16)

Morose partakes of this same discourse, in Epicoene, when he accuses the Collegiate Ladies of being a 'mankind generation' (V.iv.19). Further on, in the same pamphlet, the association is made between 'unnatural' masculinity among women and folly:-

Looke to your reputations, which are undermined with your own Follies, and doe not become the idle sisters of foolish Don Quixote, to believe every vaine Fable which you reade. (17)

It is recalled that Truewit encourages Dauphine to stop reading Don Quixote (at IV.i.50), and to explore an outside world, if he wishes to understand the Collegiate Ladies, and their behaviour. Yet ultimately, in Epicoene, the Collegiate Ladies do indeed become 'the idle sisters of foolish Don Quixote' when their blindness is revealed at the denouement. Morose is not just an English equivalent of Cervantes' madman, but there are definitely similarities (18).

Morose's 'madness' is, perhaps, almost as difficult to pinpoint as Hamlet's although for very different reasons. Even crudely it will be seen that Hamlet's madness is, at least at the beginning, a self-imposed strategy of behaviour which fits the conventions of 'the mad-man'. For Morose madness is, increasingly, a question of being called 'mad' by other people and of having the madness imposed on him from outside. Amidst the play of irony upon irony, surrounding variant genders, disguises, and deceptions, the crucial identification comes in the way in which Morose's behaviour is exaggerated and projected by the other characters, to the point where finally it may be diagnosed in technical terms. His 'wife', Epicoene, turns to Morose saying: 'They say you are run mad, sir', (IV.iv.40). The others then proceed to try to define the precise nature of his condition. Clerimont affirms: 'Aye, it's melancholy'

(IV.iv.50). Daw makes it marvellously clear in the end:-

The disease in Greek is called Mavia, in Latin, Insania, Furor, vel Ecstasis melancholica, that is Egressio, when a man ex melancholic, evadit fanaticus.

(IV.iv.59-61)

The nature of Morose's madness seems to require to audience to understand it in more than one sense, just as Daw describes it in several different ways here. Morose is, in part, the anti-social character, eccentric and subversive. He is highly dangerous to dramatic norms and social coherence and must, therefore, be relocated in Bedlam at the margins of society. Yet, at the same time, underlying the social view of the mad man, there is also the morality-play view, in which People calls Morose 'a monster whom God and man hath detested' and 'such a person as is with nothing content, so that we think him to be a devil of hell'. In this perspective Truewit becomes the Vice, Confusion, preparing to carry off Morose on his back. Unlike the Middleton's earlier character, Follywit, Truewit (like his later relative, Lovewit) questions in his functions the meaningfulness of his dramatic name.

Morose's madness seems to be controlled by two conflicting theories held in the Jacobean period. First, is the humourous theory most famously outlined by Bright and later, in his Anatomy, by Burton where madness is associated with melancholy. 'Melancholie', in Bright's view, may take the form of a humourous 'excrement' which,

if it corrupt and degenerate further from itselfe and the qualitie of the bodie; then are all the passions more vehement, and so outrageously oppresse and trouble the quiet seate of the mind; that all organically

actions thereof are mixed with melancholic madness.
(19)

This passage is typical of Bright's elaborate 'scientific' method, it is part of a much more 'rational' discourse than that which constitutes the second theory of madness. This is the popular superstitious view of the mad person as possessed by the devil. Reed observes:-

The fact is that the theories, the humour theory and the idea of devil-possession, appear to have been awkwardly correlated and, in a tenuous relationship, they survived not only well into Elizabethan times, but, when reinforced by the persistent belief in witchcraft, well through the seventeenth century.
(20).

That Morose's madness is implicitly related to possession by the devil is not overtly emphasised by the text and has been avoided by critics. Yet it adds a dimension to the play which, in my opinion, makes it much easier to understand, and provides a means of reconciling some of its opposites.

The dual nature of the madness in the play may, perhaps, elicit a dual response of its spectators. Through their own superstitious beliefs, may come condemnation of Morose, but in the light of a more humanistic awareness, there may also have been a concern that this is perhaps a disease to be cured. Certainly, the play seems to look forward to the attitudes to the insane of the Age of Reason, as well as back to Medieval attitudes. The result of this dualism, in Morose's character, is that modern critics have tended to explain it in other ways. Partridge produces a slightly contradictory description:-

Morose is comic, rather than psychopathic, because he is selfish and vain... we hear the voice of a proud, not sick man... Morose's affliction is a disease, but a ridiculous disease. (21)

This seems to me to be an over-psychological view imposing largely twentieth century emotional and ethical values upon the character but, more recently, Grene too constructs a novelistic explanation of Morose:-

Morose's desire to conceal himself, to hide away from the noise of the public world, is related to a possessiveness.. a desire to have absolute control over what is his. (22)

Morose is so curious a character that the critical views of Epicoene are often dominated by explorations of the intriguing convolutions of his mental state isolated from the rest of the play. The failure of many of these typical views lies, not simply in their artificial constructions of a psyche for Morose, but also in their neglect of the contemporary context in which his presentation exists.

Morose is not mad in the sense that Lear is mad, he does not enter the realms of a metaphysical torment, nor does he undergo devil possession in the way that is imitated at the end of Volpone (in V.xii.). Volpone displays some mocking use of the idea of devil possession when Voltore makes a vain attempt to extricate himself from the judgements of the avocatori by pretending to exorcise from within himself, with the cooperation of Volpone, a devil who caused all his testimony to be invalid.

In Epicoene, Morose does not writhe on the ground spitting out pins and vomiting blue frogs, as Voltore pretends to do, but his situation increasingly resembles the

tormented fate of the morality play fools and his discourse veers towards an almost surreal invocation of the Ship of Fools (23).

When the Collegiate Ladies arrive in his house, he cries out in despair:-

Oh, the sea breaks in upon me! Another flood! An inundation! I shall be overwhelmed with noise. It beats already at my shores. I feel an earthquake in myself for't.

(III.vi.2-4)

Here the flood of Folly is related to the biblical flood; Morose fears that divine intervention and punishment have occurred. At the same time the absurdity of this idea is suggested in his depiction of himself as a country whose 'shores' are threatened by disaster. Subsequently, Dauphine delights in Morose's attempts to escape his persecution:-

He has got on his whole nest of nightcaps, and locked himself up i' the top o' of the house, as high as ever he can climb from noise. I peeped in at a cranny, and saw him sitting over a cross-beam o' the roof, like him o' the saddler's horse in Fleet Street, upright; and he will sleep there.

(IV.i.18-23)

In this description there is an allusion to the action of Chaucer's Miller's Tale where 'hende Nicholas', 'like a mayde meke for to see' - thus suggesting perhaps both Truewit and Epicoene - forces his old Landlord up into the loft of his house to await the second flood which, the young man has convinced him, is imminent, while downstairs the young man seduces the young wife. In both cases the biblical ark is turned inside out and becomes the Ship of Fools invoked through the deception of the old man by the young wit.

Earlier Truewit recommends to Morose:-

The Thames being so near, wherein you may drown so handsomely; or London Bridge, at a low fall, with a fine leap, to hurry you down the stream.

(II.ii.17-19)

Morose appears, within the discourse of Truewit, as a passenger on a tide of folly which is indeed ready to hurry him down the stream. Later, in act IV, he tries to rid his house of the people who have occupied it; he cries:-

Rogues, hellhounds, stentors, out of my doors, you sons of noise and tumult, begot on an ill May Day, or when the galley-foist is afloat to Westminster!

(IV.ii.108-110)

In these watery allusions a discourse of folly constructs Morose's position. He seems to invoke the very flood of noise and folly which engulfs him and sweeps him along. Even the Lord Mayor's 'galley foist' becomes, for him, transformed into the Ship of Fools, afloat on the Thames, threatening to carry him off. Trapped in the gaps between masculinity and femininity, between words and language, between his house and the world, Morose cannot find a space allotted for him (and his desires) in his own culture. He bears a marked resemblance to the picture of the madman, abstracted by Foucault, from the continental literary and pictorial texts of the period:-

Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage. And the land he will come to is unknown - as is, once he disembarks, the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland, only in that

fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him. (24)

Deprived of his private territory, eventually banished from the ending of the play, Morose seems to stand at one with other European Renaissance figures of madness so expressively depicted here.

Morose's identity is the site of a collision between the two predominant contemporary ideas of madness. The 'anti-social' aspect of his identity is constructed around the obsessive, repetitive, and restrictive functions of his discourse. The most obvious linguistic instance of this is in his repeated use of the phrase 'unless it be other wise'; Morose demands that his mute servant bow to affirm the answers to his questions: 'unless it be other wise' (II.i.8.12,16). Here he appears, as Lyons understands Jonson's view of the madman, 'mechanical, unreasonable and inappropriate' (25). In a more complex fashion his relationship to Truewit and to Epicoene is also that of a man being possessed by demonic agents. It will be recalled that, in Middletons' A Mad World, My Masters (IV.i.), a succubus, literally, appears before the aptly named Master Penitent Brothel to tempt him with sins of the female flesh, in which form the devil disguises himself. Feder discusses the contemporary connections made between lunacy, woman, witchcraft and possession by the supernatural:-

Though by no means the only such vehicle, the image of woman, whether as idealized vessel of purity or as agent of devilish lust, served throughout the European Middle Ages and Renaissance as both denial and unconscious projection of the chaotic inner reality that threatened the emotional and intellectual repression enforced by the rigid hierarchy of church

and court. (26)

Certainly, the presentation of Epicoene to Morose involves exactly the opposition between the image of 'her' as an 'idealized vessel of purity', and as an 'agent of devilish lust'. Morose too may be seen in terms of an extreme manifestation of 'emotional and intellectual repression' confronted by a 'chaotic inner reality'. The general pattern of repression and threat, outlined by Feder is, indirectly, exhibited throughout Epicoene. Crucially, however, the presence of the images of demonic possession seemsto be unconsciously produced. They are the product of the text's use of conflicting contemporary dramatic modes and the discrete discourses which they contain. This is a complex picture, yet the underlying structural coherence which it seems to offer provides a wide-ranging view of the play as produced out of the ideas, fears and desires of the contemporary audience and culture.

Jonson's use of conventional romance, as well as city comedy elements, in Epicoene, is also revealing in this context. The romance elements seem to undergo various transformations and re-workings in the text too. In both Jonsonian and Shakespearean comedies, for example, disguise of gender is used as a crucial structural and narrative device. Yet whereas, in the earlier Elizabethan comedy, the unmasking produces a more or less straightforward resolution with the final prospect of marriage (e.g. in Twelfth Night, or, in a variant form, even in As You Like It), here it

produces an ironic dislocation of meaning, and only a formal resolution of the action, without any of the romance strands of the plot being concluded at all. Similarly, whereas in romance comedy dismay and confusion tend to occur at the centre of the plot and are resolved by marriage at the end, here the marriage represents the high-point of confusion both, overtly, in terms of Morose's horror at the discovery that Epicoene is 'O immodesty! A manifest woman!' (III.iv.36), and then, ironically, in the discovery of the actual nullification of the marriage. Parfitt observes:-

Of course Jonson is using the romantic convention of disguise here but his particular version of it rules out the romantic solution, offering instead the comic divorce. (27)

Indeed romance conventions seem to be reversed throughout the play. It is a form of reversal that is previously anticipated in the deliberately weak presentation of Celia and Bonario in Volpone. Here, however, the text produces a specific mis-use of the romance conventions, of marriage and judgment, in order to underline the structural antithesis of its own new form to the earlier convention. Baines observes:-

The plot... reverses the traditional New Comedy plot by celebrating a marriage in the middle of the play, and bringing about a happy ending when the marriage is dissolved. (28)

I am less certain than Baines about the happiness of the ending, but certainly there seems to be a deliberate reversal of the Shakespearean, and as Baines points out, of the New Comedy dramatic forms. Jonson's text works itself against the grain of dramatic conventions to confound the

expectations of the audience in more than just the incidents of the plot. The process of transformation, of the known forms into unfamiliar shapes may, perhaps, produce a sense of insecurity in the audience concerning the overall nature of the new play. So deliberate is the revision of conventional comic forms, through specific antithetical references, that the contemporary audience must have made some comparison between the two.

There are clear similarities in the plot between Jonson's new comic form and earlier plots. In addition to the struggle between nephew and uncle, Herford and Simpson point out another coincidence of action:-

The efforts of Sir Toby and Fabian in Twelfth Night (III.iv) to bring about a quarrel between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the disguised Violar resemble so closely the tactics of Truewit with Daw and La Foole that one of these scenes must be a copy of the other. (29)

They inevitably conclude that Jonson 'copied Shakespeare', although whether such a conclusion is of great importance is less clear. Indeed the resemblances between Twelfth Night (1600?) and Epicoene do not stop there. Morose and Malvolio are both, fundamentally misanthropic, Puritan-like characters who are driven to distraction by those around them. Holdsworth notes that Shakespeare's comedy, also makes full use of sexual disguise, but argues that:-

In its exposure and correction of characters dominated by idees fixes it marks Shakespeare's closest approach to Jonsonian humour comedy; and Malvolio is broadly similar to Morose, who is also an opponent of the principle of cakes and ale, is cruelly baited for his opposition, treated as a madman, and allowed to leave the stage baffled and unredeemed. (30)

Certainly one senses a greater proximity between Twelfth

Night and Epicoene than between any other plays of Shakespeare and Jonson, but the important point is the willingness of Jonson's text to revise earlier texts.

In a similar light, it can be seen that the presence of remodelled forms of passages from Ovid and Juvenal are an acknowledgment, typically ostentatious, of the text's own historical debt, and an assertion of this text's power to rework its own history, just as was seen in the relations of the tragedies to their 'sources'. Kay observes that Truewit's

subtle distortions, so well analyzed by Barish, in the Ovidian sources of his defense of cosmetics and of his lecture of the art of seduction, are best understood as the purposeful subversion of Ovidian arguments. (31)

That Epicoene displays this formal subversive tendency is an indicator of how closely linked the play is to Jonson's earlier dramatic activities, while its tight and concise action anticipates the structural coherence of The Alchemist.

As the play progresses, Truewit increasingly manipulates events for his own delight, he solicits the favours of Morose on one side of his discourse and organises afflictions and vexations on the other. Epicoene criticises 'her' new husband for not preparing suitable entertainment for the wedding guests and Truewit joins in:-

By that light, you deserve to be grafted, and have your horns reach from one side of the Island to the other. Do not mistake me, sir, I but speak this to give the ladies some heart again, not for any malice to you.

(III.vi.93-6)

In this double-edged discourse Truewit places himself, as I have already suggested, outside of the social relations which oppose Morose to the Collegiate ladies. He emerges not as part of the society, but as a manipulator of it. Truewit's role is stage-manager or director to the blundering actions of the other characters and, rather than being the play's 'principal spokesman' (32), he seems to serve to generate allegorical or, at least, abstract significance from the impurely mimetic ground of the action.

Truewit also introduces a variety of forms of madness in other characters as well as in Morose. He invents the quarrel between Daw and La Foole in which each believes the other to have gone mad and to be in a fury. Daw becomes an 'enraged soul' (IV.v.138-9), in Truewit's words to La Foole, and, in the trickster's approach to Sir John, he supposedly accurately relates Sir Amorous' mad desire for vengeance:-

'oh, revenge how sweet are thou!
I will strangle him in this towel.

(IV.v.157-8)

Both fops are led to see each other as mad with anger at the other, while the audience witnesses an extension of Truewit's powers over the characters in the play, and his curious ability to induce a sense of madness in all the occupants of Morose's house. Madam Haughty suggests to Epicoene that she should accompany the Collegiate Ladies on a social tour 'to Bedlam, to the china-houses, and the Exchange,' (IV.iii.22-23). At a mimetic level Bedlam is a place to go outside of the play's setting; one of the myriad wonders of contemporary London where there are,

so many masques, plays, puritan preachings, mad folks,
and other strange sights to be seen daily,
(II.ii.29-30)

as Truewit put it earlier. Yet, on the more metaphoric level, all of these references import their subjects into the centre of the play's world. Morose's house becomes his cell where the fashionable ladies may visit and bait him. Once in the house, however, the ladies are driven to argument and rivalry as a result of Truewit's manipulating each of them into falling in love with Dauphine, in consequence of which he too is tormented. Clerimont asks him if he has 'quit' himself of these females:-

'Slight, they haunt me like fairies, and give me jewels here, I cannot be rid of 'em.

...
...I was never so assaulted. One loves for virtue, and bribes with this. Another loves me with caution, and so would possess me. A third brings me a riddle here, and all are jealous: and rail at each other.

(V.ii.41-47)

To varying degrees Truewit seems to inflict madness upon the residents of Morose's house and on all the visitors to it. Having started out by playing the parts of those fashionable people, who visited Bedlam for entertainment, they are turned into creatures more closely resembling the inmates. Indeed, Truewit demonstrates his ironic awareness of this; he tells Morose:-

Alas, Sir! Your nephew and I have been ashamed, and oft-times mad since you went, to think how you are abused. Go in, good sir, and lock yourself up till we call you; we'll tell you more anon, sir.

(IV.vii.27-30)

Truewit then goes off to arrange the final affliction of the old man.

Truewit's final piece of staging, the 'learned' debate between the two divines, the disguised Otter and Cutbeard, draws together the strands of the action in a way which exposes all of the madness, lies, affectations which have gone before and provides the ultimate torment of Morose. In his desperate attempt to secure his divorce from Epicoene, and to achieve a 'kind of calm midnight' (IV.vii.17-18), Morose is forced to declare 'I am no man, ladies,' (V.iv.38). Epicoene however replies that she does not accept the truth of Morose's confession. Then the wits force the two knights to pretend that they have slept with 'her', but even this 'adultery' is not deemed to be a sufficient cause for divorce by the two false causuists. Morose's reaction is utter despair:-

Oh, my heart! Wilt thou break? Wilt thou break? This
is worst of all worst worsts! That Hell could have
devised! Marry a whore! And so much noise!

(V.iv.125-127)

In Morose's final cry of defeat emerges, once again, the implication that it is indeed 'hell', through the agency of Truewit and Epicoene, that has devised his torment. The 'worst' was in fact sometimes used to mean the 'Evil One' or the Devil (OED). The view of the 'woman' as image of devilish lust', as described by Feder, emerges fully here.

Eventually, in pointed opposition to Morose's declaration that he is 'no man', and the knights' supposed manliness in sleeping with her, Epicoene is finally

discovered to be no woman, but a boy (V.iv.174). The plot is quickly concluded as Morose signs over the inheritance to Dauphine, and the final tricks of artifice are dissolved as Otter's and Cutbeard's disguises are also revealed. Morose leaves the stage without another word.

Throughout Epicoene, from the initial appearance of Truewit to Morose's silenced exit, 'art's hid causes' are hinted at, and pointed to, in many different ways. Through the adaptation of different modes, which are part both of the native and the classical traditions, and through the articulation of the discourses that function in those domains, Jonson's play brings together two variant notions of madness and social acceptability. In an almost dream-like atmosphere of the farcical and the macabre, of noise and silence, of manly women and womanly men, of torment and delight, the play asks its audience to consider how identity is shaped by the powers of dramatic forms and language, both within the conventions of the play and in society at large, and to consider what is, and is not, an 'acceptable violence' in ordering the world (33). Similarly the identity of the madman is presented in multiple perspectives which, as I have shown, are largely controlled and brought into existence by Truewit, but which the drama, perhaps unconsciously, constructs out of conflicting contemporary ideas about insanity.

Although, in the concluding sentiments of the play, Truewit merely asks:-

Spectators, if you like this comedy,
rise cheerfully, and now Morose is gone in,

clap your hands. It may be, that noise will cure him,
at least please him.

(V.iv.214-216)

The effect of the dramaturgy, overall, is to bring to the attention of the spectators, in a lively and a humorous manner, the power of the languages of literature, and of erratic individual uses of language, to fix or shift people's relations with one another, and to control their identities in society. The play also displays in its uses of different dramatic modes and non-dramatic discourses, the extent to which superstitious, early beliefs and perceptions, still shaped the processes of thought in Jacobean society despite constant attempts to revise them.

Epicoene: Notes and References

1. For discussion of the overt sources of the play in texts by Libanus and Plautus, see:-

H&S, II, pp.75-79, see also:-

Epicoene, Edited by E. Partridge, (Yale University Press, London and New Haven, 1971) p.199.

O.J. Campbell, 'The Relation of Epicoene to Aretino's Il Marescalo,' PMLA, 46, (1931) 752-62.

It is worth pointing out that one 'source' commonly suggested for the name Morose is Libanus' Sixth Declaration. This is, like Aesop's Fables, a rhetorical exercise and didactic text which suggests, by the partial re-working it receives in this play, that Jonson's text may still be operating close to the domain in which I have seen Volpone working.

2. J.A. Barish, 'Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman', PMLA, 71, (1956) 213-24, p.218.

Barish's article is re-evaluated in:-

J. Ferns, 'Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman: A Reconsideration,' Modern Language Review, 65, (1970) 248-253.

The problem with this debate seems to be the fact that it takes into account only the Classical discourses imported into the play and does not examine those other discourses of the native tradition which my argument will show also play an important role.

3. Partridge (op.cit., p.176) notes that this song is not of Jonson's own writing, but is another piece of his art of 'imitation'. The song 'converts the substance of a poem found in the Leyden manuscript of the Anthologia Latina... it had been published by Scaliger in 1572.' See also: H&S, X, p.6.

4. Partridge, op.cit., p.1.

5. In a passage which draws heavily on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, this phrase, significantly, is of Jonson's own making, coming in an isolated section which links two passages of translation.

6. W.D. Kay, 'Jonson's Urbane Gallants: Humanistic Contexts for Epicoene,' Huntingdon Library Quarterly, 39, (1976) 251-266, p.265.

7. G. Parfitt, Ben Jonson: Public Poet and Private Man, (J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1976) p.139.

8. It seems unlikely that Jonson would have read Wager's interlude since there was only one edition of the play in 1596, and it was not reprinted, but perhaps Jonson has seen the play performed. At any rate the conventional attributes which Morose displays could have been seen in numerous different interludes originating from that period of Jonson's youth.

Cf. W. Wager: The Longer Thou Livest., Edited by M. Benbow, (Regents Renaissance Drama Series, Edward Arnold, London, 1968) p.xx.

9. A.C. Dessen, Elizabethan Drama and The Viewer's Eye, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1977) p.40.

10. H&S, X, p.13.

11. M. Shapiro, 'Audience Vs. Dramatists in Jonson's Epicoene and other plays of the Children's Troupes', English Literary Renaissance, 3, (1973) 400-417, p.411.

12. N. Grene, Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere: The Comic Contract, (Macmillan, London, 1980) p.122.

13. M.Shapiro, Children of the Revels, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1977) p.86.

14. 'The Bishops' Mittimus to goe to Bedlam upon their accusation of high Treason.' (London, 1641), p.7.

15. Grene, op.cit., p.114.

16. Hic Mulier: or the Man-Woman: Being a Medecine to cure the coltish disease of the staggers in the Masculine-Feminines of our Times. (London, 1620) sig.A3.

See also: Three Pamphlets on the Jacobian Anti-feminist Controversy, Facsimile Reproductions with an Introduction by B. Baines, (Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, Delmar, New York, 1978) p.vii.

17. Hic Mulier, sig., B3.

18. Herford and Simpson (X,p.30) observe that Jonson was hostile to both Amadis de Gaule and to Don Quixote. Their evidence for this comes from 'An Execration upon Vulcan' (The Underwood, XLIII,29-31) where both are mentioned. The point seems to be erroneous, however, since the poem quite clearly treats the early chivalric romance in the same satiric manner as it is treated in Cervantes' novel. Indeed Jonson's poem indicates a familiarity with chapter VI of the book which is concerned with 'the pleasant and curious

search made by the Curate and the Barber of Don Quixote's Library'. The 'search', it will be recalled, involved throwing the books, of which Amadis de Gaule is the very first, out of the window with the intention of burning them. This, of course, coincides with the theme of Jonson's poem which was written, in 1623, after the destruction by fire of Jonson's library. The first translation of Don Quixote into English was by Thomas Shelton, published in 1612, but Shelton explains, in the dedication of the book, that he translated the work some five or six years previous to its actual publication. It is possible, therefore, that Jonson may have seen the work before the first production of Epicoene. The evidence seems to suggest, not hostility, but familiarity and pleasure derived from the Spanish text, indeed Cervantes' Barber may even suggest Jonson's garrulous Cutbeard. Cf. H&S, I.73-74; VIII, 12-15, 202-12; XI, 73-81.

19. T. Bright, A Treatise Of Melancholie, (London, 1586) p.2.

20. R. Reed, Bedlam and the Jacobean Stage, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1952) p.12.

21. Partridge. Broken Compass, p.171.

22. Grene, op.cit., p.119.

23. cf. The Shyppe of Fooles (Wynkyn de Wordde, London, 1517) Frontispiece.

See also for broad survey: Fr. Aurelius Pompen, The English Versions of the Ship of Fooles, (Longmans, London, 1925).

Benbow, (op.cit., p.xi) also notes that Wager's Moros belongs to the satiric tradition of The Ship of Fools.

24. M. Foucault, Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason; Translation by R. Howard, (Tavistock Publications, London, 1967) p.11.

25. B.G. Lyons, Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971) p.27.

26. L. Feder, Madness in Literature, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980) p.143.

27. Parfitt, op.cit., p.80.

28. B.J. Baines and M.C. Williams, 'The Contemporary and Classical Antifeminist Tradition in Jonson's Epicoene', Renaissance Papers, (1977) 43-58, p.49.

29. H&S, X, P.38.

30. Epicoene, Edited by R.V. Holdsworth, (The New Mermaids Series, Ernest Benn, London, 1979) p.xxvi.

31. Kay, op.cit., p.259.

32. Cf. L.G. Salinger, 'Farce and Fashion in The Silent Woman', Essays and Studies, 20, (1967) 29-46, p.35.

33. It will be recalled that, for Mistress Otter, her dreams shape her perceptions of the world. She relates (in III.ii.51-66) the details of a dream she has 'which is always very ominous to me' concerning the election of a Lady Mayoress. She explains how she had asked Lady Haughty to interpret it for her 'out of Artemidorus' the second century Greek interpreter of dreams. Her social aspirations are reflected in her dreams. Her behaviour and identity come to be understood, by her, in the revelations offered by the Greek text in the same way as, in Every Man Out, Sordido's whole existence is dictated by what he reads in his 'prognostications'. For the play, as a whole, the description of the dream by Mistress Otter also adds a concrete instance of dream-activity which the play's action may echo and parallel.

Chapter 6: Here's now mystery and hieroglyphic!': The Alchemist

The serious and the comic are never far away from each other in Jonson's The Alchemist (1610). Even as absurd situations are engineered and characters are lampooned by the most hilarious satire, a depth of questioning remains close at hand. One is constantly aware of the main duality in the play where the theatricality of the action is contained, and commented on, by the dramaturgy itself. There is also frequently a reversal so that the action itself comes to comment on, or confront, the moral status of the whole performance. An actor plays Face, who as a character, resembles an actor, changing identity through his disguises as The Captain, Lungs, Eulenspiegel, Mammon's 'zephyr', and the smooth-faced Jeremy Butler. He also stagemanages the other rogues in their only slightly less complex disguises:-

God's will, then, Queen of Faery,
On with your tire; and Doctor, with your robes.
Let's dispatch him, for God's sake,

(III.iii.77-9)

Face instructs his accomplices as Dapper arrives at an inopportune moment. Subtle also instructs the others and comments on the variety of his own performances:-

Face, go you, and shift.
Dol, you must presently make ready too,

(I.iv.9-10)

He is directing the action as the gulls approach. When Ananias is about to enter, Subtle prepares to greet him 'In

a new tune, new gesture, but old language ' (II.iv.27). The brilliant use of 'old' and 'new' languages in the play repeatedly accentuates the duality of reciprocal comment between action and dramaturgy as a whole.

The ferocious argument that begins the play plunges the audience immediately into a world of discourse that seems, both startlingly familiar, and strangely distorted. In the first scene there are references to 'Your master's worship's house, here, in the Friars' (I.i.17), Pie Corner, cooks' stalls, the artillery yard (I.i.25-31). These are all well-known locations in the City of London; the play itself was first performed at the Blackfriars theatre. There are also references to the current rage of the plague in the city, to Gamaliel Ratsey, who was a famous highwayman executed in 1605, Simon Read who was charged with dealing in spirits in 1608, but was pardoned, Henry the Eighth's law against witchcraft, Puritans selling feathers in the Blackfriars district, and to Clim-o'-the-Cloughs, a famous outlaw of the day whose name is also associated with the Devil (1). So, as Duncan puts it, the play 'is a tour de force of exact topicality and contemporaneity' (2). Dutton also emphasises the 'almost journalistic' interest to be found in the topical detail for the first audience (3).

Yet, while the 'vivid' picture of Jacobean London life is being marvellously set out, a questioning pursuit of the nature of illusion and reality is also taking place in relation to it.

Who am I, my mongrel? Who am I?

(I.i.13)

Face demands furiously, in the first lines of the play, and then asks:-

Why, I pray you, have I
Been countenanced by you? or you, be me?

(I.i.21-22)

Face's questions point to the awareness, in the rogues, of their construction as characters; to be 'countenanced' is literally to be given a face. Yet, Face constantly changes his identity, as reality is altered to suit the fantasy of each gull that arrives at the alchemist's studio. Sale comments:-

There is no one Face: each is as real as the other seen, reported, and sometimes simultaneous Faces. (4)

Equally, each of these Faces is to be seen as illusory.

Donaldson finds the same perplexity in this character:-

Who, indeed, is Face? He slips quickly from one role to another, and Lovewit's final words to him, "Speak for thy self, knave", do not resolve the problem. Is the speaker of the epilogue Face, or Jeremy, or the actor playing the role of Face-Jeremy? (5)

The question of distinguishing between reality and appearance, in and out of the drama, recurs in numerous forms throughout the play; the answer is always uncertain. 'Good faith, I think I saw a coach!' (V.ii.34) mumbles the first neighbour, at the end of the play, when Face simply denies all of the citizens' claims that a whole 'ging' had been gathered to the house. The function of the drama to create illusion is paralleled to the rogues' artificial constructions of fantasies for the gulls. The supposedly

moral effect of the former is played off against the frankly opportunist and capitalist aims of the latter, so that the whole meaning of 'moral comedy', it seems to me, is brought into question as a viable medium. This contradictory parallelism finds its prime focus, of course, in the role and function of alchemy and the language of alchemy in the play. Alchemy occurs as both an act of faith and a product of delusion, while the drama itself is perhaps seen as the reverse, an illusory act produced out of a faith in its own efficacy.

In The Alchemist Jonson's drama, for the first time, adopts a specific, special language with which to focus attention on its concerns. Unlike the previous two plays, Epicoene and Volpone, The Alchemist foregrounds its intertextual functions, in appropriating the discourses of various alchemical texts, and various satires on alchemy, rather than leaving them submerged as Jonson's drama has done before (6):-

And here's now mystery, and hieroglyphic!

(II.vi.24)

proclaims Subtle; and the play is crucially concerned with the morality and meaningfulness of the statement. Criticism, recently, has tended to present the The Alchemist as a total satire on alchemy, and a trivialisation of alchemists, magicians, and necromancers. Bryant regards both Subtle and the play as totally dismissive of any potential truths in alchemy (7). Flachman concurs:-

The Alchemist, in the spirit of Chaucer's The Canon's Yeoman's Tale (c.1395), Lyly's Gallathea (1584), and

Jonson's own Mercury, Vindicated from the Alchemists (1616) offers a patent expose of all the "tricks of cosning".(8)

Leggatt too (with an awareness of Blissett's argument) declares:-

What we see in most of the play is more a comic miniaturizing of society than a blasphemous challenge to God's universe. (9)

Yet, the problem with each of readings is that they pay little attention to the attitudes to, and the functions of, alchemy and necromancy in Jacobean society (10), nor do they examine the processes and discourse of alchemy as they occur in the text except as 'a unifying metaphor' (11) or as 'a metaphor for the exposure of dupes' (12). These critics have demonstrated that the alchemical metaphor is extremely effective in measuring what gold can be extracted by the rogues from the gulls' 'base metal'. Yet, the presence and function of alchemy in the play goes beyond this activity of language. It also seems to partake of the audience's knowledge and belief in the practice of magic, to make them question what is occurring in their own lives while they watch the play.

Jonson's drama had not previously incorporated a technical jargon with such consistency or accuracy. The texts of the Every Man plays and Cynthia's Revels, for example, all contained specialised terms used by affected courtiers or gallants and, in The Poetaster, the whole question of an appropriate field of language-use is in the foreground of the play, but the audience had not previously been presented with such a thorough, precise and prolonged

use of a special abnormal language. The discourse of alchemy is precisely language such as men do not use, to reverse the words of the Prologue to Every Man In. E.H. Duncan points out:-

Jonson's remarkable knowledge of alchemy [is] a knowledge greater than that of any other major English literary figure, with the possible exceptions of Chaucer and Donne... Jonson did not, in this play, essentially alter or exaggerate the bizarre conceptions and marvellous claims of alchemy, ...his characters make no more extravagant assertions regarding it than writers of alchemical treatises make for it themselves. (13)

Allen also points to Jonson's 'grasp of the fundamental principles of witchcraft' (14). William Vaughan, in The Golden Grove (1600), observes:-

Nowadays among the common people, he is not adjudged any scholar at all, unless he can tell men's horoscopes, cast out devils, or hath some skill in soothsaying. (15)

Jonson's scholarship may not have been unusual among 'cunning men', but among playwrights it was surprising. The presence in the play of a discourse which is baffling, and almost totally foreign to the ears of the majority of the audience, but is also at times, as I shall show, surprisingly communicative, promotes a general interest in the process of verbal and non-verbal communication which contributes towards making The Alchemist one of Jonson's most excitingly theatrical plays.

The mainstream of Humanism in the Renaissance had traditionally regarded alchemy with cynicism. Erasmus had been highly critical of its functions. In the appendix to the Colloquies, De Utilitate Colloquarium, he warns:-

By no means the slightest of human afflictions is alchemy, a disorder so intoxicating, once it strikes a man, that it beguiles even the learned and prudent. (16).

For Erasmus, alchemy was actually to be seen as some kind of disease. Modern criticism of The Alchemist seems, on the whole, tacitly to have accepted this view. The jovial and mocking attitude to alchemy, as expressed by Jonson in the epigramme 'To Alchymists', is seen to be entirely at one with the attitudes in the play (17):-

If all you boast of your great art be true:
Sure, willing povertie live most in you. (18)

This is a jibe at impoverished contemporary alchemists, such as Sir John Dee, whose material and economic failure seemed in marked contrast to his early claims to have successfully produced gold (19). The actual fate of this man seems more likely to have been due to the removal of Queen Elizabeth's patronage rather than a specific judgement on his practice. By contrast, Simon Foreman, a follower of Dee's, made a healthy living from purveying his astrological, and alchemical knowledge to members of the court; at his death he apparently left of a legacy of £1200 (20).

Similarly the view expressed in the masque of Mercury Vindicated From The Alchemists (1616) is now frequently seen to sum up Jonson's attitude. The scene for the anti-masque is set in a laboratory, or alchemist's workhouse, a location which is never actually shown in the play. The masque explores the abstracted opposition between the art of alchemy and Nature's role. Midway through the action, the laboratory is banished, and the scene is changed to a

glorious bower where Nature is placed with Prometheus at her feet, their triumph thus complete. The specific terms of this opposition are only briefly brought into the play. At one point, for instance, Face turns to Subtle after his successful gulling of Druggier, and calls him 'you smoky persecutor of nature' (I.iii.100), but he does so, with a good deal of sarcasm, only to emphasise Subtle's reliance on him to 'have stuff, brought home to you, to work on' (1.104). Face's use of alchemical discourse here serves ironically to suggest that his work is the real 'alchemy' and Subtle's is just a sham. Face frequently undercuts the seriousness with which Subtle takes his art. Their sexual and business rivalry also contains the opposition of views about alchemy; Face is clearly dismissive of it; Subtle is more deeply involved, as I shall show.

The satire on alchemy, in the masque, merely involves Mercury explaining his view of the laboratory:-

In yonder vessels which you see in their laboratory
they have enclosed materials to produce men,
... the first that occurs, a master of the duel, a
carrier of the differences.

...
Then another is a fencer i' the mathematics, or the
town's cunning man, a creature of art too; a supposed
secretary to the stars, but indeed, a kind of lying
intelligencer from those parts (21).

The claim that is being attacked here is that the alchemists could reproduce human beings. Jonson makes Mercury cleverly turn this claim around to suggest that the only replications that the alchemists could possibly make would be more 'cunning men' and frauds like themselves. This would obviously be received very well in King James' Court where

the official attitude was that alchemy was a felony and something to be eradicated (22). The masque does not achieve the scholarship or the insight into alchemy that is attained in the play, but does serve quite clearly as excellent propaganda for the monarch.

James' opposition to the hermetic sciences, and magic in particular, is well known. His Daemonologie, first published in 1597 and subsequently reprinted in 1604, makes clear, however, that his prime aims are to prove 'that such divelish artes have bene and are', as well as to declare 'what exact trial and severe punishment they merite' (23). In 1604 James had introduced a new statute which stiffened the penalties for offences of this kind, over and beyond the illegality of witch-craft that had been already declared in Elizabeth's act of 1563 and in the earlier law of 1541, passed by Henry the Eighth, which prohibited the practice of all sorcery including alchemy (24). Face threatens Subtle with the earliest of these laws in their argument at the opening:-

Away this brach. I'll bring thee rogue, within
The statute of sorcery, tricesimo tertio,
Of Harry the Eight: ay and (perhaps) thy neck
Within a noose, for laundering gold, and barbing it.

(I.i.111-114)

In this threat Face and Subtle again invoke, albeit in an ironic context, the controversy that was raging over the validity and acceptability of all kinds of sorcery. Harris observes of the period:-

On the limited evidence available, there does seem to have been an upsurge of witchcraft persecutions during the early part of James's reign. The scholarly

writings of this period also reflect the monarch's published views, giving an overall impression of intolerance which compares unfavourably with the humane attitudes expressed in some of the learned works on witchcraft printed during the Elizabethan era. (25)

Thomas, nevertheless, describes how a large number of magical functions were still being performed by cunning men and women at this time. One of their most common roles was, in fact, the detection of theft and the recovery of stolen goods, a matter for which society made very little alternative provision (26). This lends considerable irony to the activities of Subtle, Dol and Face, while it also serves to underline the fact that, although the language of alchemy is exotic and strange, familiarity with, and indeed respect for, white magic was widespread. It is not, in the period, the superstitious nonsense that some modern critics have depicted. Thomas continues:-

Until at least the later seventeenth century the verdict of village wizard on questions of theft or similar crimes was a matter of consequence. Officers of the law are known to have apprehended the supposed culprit on the basis of such identifications. (27)

It is to be recalled that Subtle's practice as a sorcerer is depicted as much wider than simply carrying out those activities that the audience sees. Like the village wizard, he is described by Face, as:-

Searching for things lost, with a sieve and shears,
Erecting figures, in your rows of houses,
And taking in of shadows, with a glass,
Told in red letters.

(I.i.95-8)

Even when Face is abusing Subtle, he calls him a 'conjurer' and a 'witch'. Surly also describes Subtle's wider activities:-

... he is the Faustus,
That casteth figures, and can conjure, cures
Plagues, piles, and pox, by the ephemerides,
And hold intelligence with all the bands,
And midwives of three shires? while you send in -
... damsels with child,
Wives, that are barren, or, the waiting-maid
With the green sickness?

(IV.vii.46-53)

This all seems to suggest that the presentation of Jonson's 'rogues', working in the manner that they do, is less an attack on commonly-held superstitions, but by presenting it controversially, more of an attempt to make the audience question the nature of what was being done at their visits to wizards. At the same time, the play remains in favour with the opinions of the Court by means of the satire. No doubt it was also the case that the new metropolis had its cynical effects on the superstitions and practices of rural people, but Thomas concludes:-

Until at least the later seventeenth century, a cross-section of the English people took the astrologers very seriously.

Their almanacs and prognostications were snapped up as soon as they appeared, while their consulting-rooms can seldom have been empty. Some contemporaries attributed their success to 'the blockish stupidity of many of our ignorant country people', but the astrological practices for which most evidence has survived were metropolitan in character. The clients who flocked to Forman, Lilly and Booker included aristocrats, merchants and persons of outstanding intellectual and artistic distinction. (28)

It would seem that, in presenting the knowledge of astrology, alchemy, and other black arts, in the hands of a bunch of rogues, Jonson's play is, on the surface, pandering to the predominant view held by the monarchy. Yet, the accuracy of the language and the extent to which quantities

of alchemical discourse are presented in detail to the audience suggests that the magic and alchemy here should not be lightly dismissed as merely a highly activated metaphor, among several, at work in the fiction. Certainly in The Alchemist the treatment of magic and alchemy is very different from that in either the Masque or the epigramme (29).

The ambivalence innate in alchemy, where method, order and precision are combined with intuition, mystery and obscurity, is fully played out in Jonson's drama. It is reflected in the whole construction of the play. The Alchemist achieves an extraordinarily harmonious structural coherence. The classical unities of time, place and action are almost perfectly preserved, while a sense of symmetry is developed for the audience in the careful balance and juxtaposition of the groups of characters who come to visit the alchemist's laboratory. Dapper and Druggier balance each other in act one, while in acts two and three Mammon and Surly, and Ananias and Tribulation, are clearly set against one another, both Surly and Ananias taking the part of the doubtful cynic. Clarity of pattern and a visible method in construction are important in contributing to the aesthetic coherence and harmony of the play, but also to its comic success. A repeated series of actions and manoeuvres orchestrates the process whereby the gulls are misled and robbed by Subtle, Dol and Face. This pattern consists of an entrapment, set up generally by Face, followed by promises and encouragements in which Dol usually plays some part (as

the mad sister that Mammon glimpses or as the putative Faery Queene), and finally a fulfilment or disillusionment, generally brought off by Subtle (his production of a sign for Druggier, and a fly for Dapper). The audience gains increased familiarity with, and ironic insight into this pattern as the drama unfolds, for although the different rogue characters modulate their performances to suit the personalities of their visitors, the course of the deception with each gull remains quite similar, only the scale alters with the scale of each gull's desires and wealth.

Yet, surrounding the fast-flowing clarity of The Alchemist's surface, and between the broad divisions of its structure, is a mass of detail which constitutes the substance of the play. Subtle's alchemical and necromantic dialects, the discourse of the 'venter tripartite' with its imagery of an inner state or 'confederacy', and its constant unstable rivalries that continue beneath the surface of the gullings from their first appearance in the opening scene, and the ironic language of deceit itself (30); each of these different fields of language-use imparts to the drama a set of constructions that alter and repeatedly undercut (often through incoherence) the clear organisation of the action and its relations with the audience. So, just as alchemy is clear and methodical in its procedures but strange and mysterious in its pronouncements, so is The Alchemist.

Very often the language used, the speed with which it is delivered, and the sometimes simultaneous voices which further obscure it, suggest that the sound of the play

would, more often than not, be of a confused and obscure babble (30). Doran sees this as a perilous function, 'Jonson was liable to let the strong framework of his structure be obscured by the heaping up of detail' she writes (12), and Brown adds:-

The effect of the play's various powerful jargons is to prevent, or baffle, or mutilate meaningful communication between characters whenever the dramaturgy requires that communication should be stifled. (33)

Communication between characters is often obscured, and it is also often obscure for the audience too. Although, as I shall be going on to discuss, there is much sense concealed within the babble, the blasts of incoherence also serve an important function and represent a crucial aspect of the theatrical experience of the play. Their effect is, precisely as Doran describes it to endanger or subvert the harmonious strength of the play's structure. The audience is made to sense, almost violently, a division between the ordered progress of the dramaturgy and the chaotic, extempore progress of the rogues in their trickery. The effect is to intensify the impact of the play's different languages, but also to make the audience aware, almost physically, of a major conflict in the play between order and chaos.

Where the discourse of alchemy is discussed in the play, it is often perceived with a sense of its parallels to drama and to poetry. If alchemical texts are not available then the alchemists invent them:-

Mammon: Will you believe antiquity? Records?
I'll show you a book, where Moses, and his sister,
And Solomon have written of the art;
Ay, and a treatise penned by Adam.
Surely: How!

(II.i.80-3)

In Mammon's obsessive view of alchemy's omniscience, not only books, but objects that are famous in mythology become a text for the study of alchemy:-

I have a piece of Jason's fleece, too,
Which was no other than a book of alchemy,
Writ in large sheepskin, a good fat ram-vellum.
Such was Pythagoras' thigh, Pandora's tub;
And all that fable of Medea's charms
...
Both this, the Hesperian garden, Cadmus' story,
Jove's shower, the boon of Midas, Argus' eyes,
Boccace his Demogorgon, thousands more,
All abstract riddles of our stone - How now?

(II.i.89-104)

Mammon's invocation of, and reliance upon, a variety of mythological texts are reminiscent of the behaviour of Sordido toward his 'prognostications' in Every Man Out. Both characters regard the authority of the text as above all other authorities, and the more obscure are the origins of the writing, the more authoritative they become (34).

Mammon is, however, far more sophisticated and grandiose a character than Sordido, both in his language, presence and the excess of his desires. The prognostications that the miser relies on, in Every Man Out, are simply predictions of how the weather will be, whereas Mammon's alchemical texts are more obscure 'abstract riddles of our stone' that offer for him the key to 'a perpetuity/ of life and lust' (IV.i.165-6).

The difference is one of degree and, of course, that

the texts upon which Mammon depends have to be interpreted, and acted on for him by alchemical scholars. The idea is basically the same and what seems to be condemned, in the later play, may not be specifically Mammon's belief in alchemy, but his belief in one absolute truth that can be derived from the texts, and the trust that he places in his agents Subtle and Face who will carry out, what he thinks to be, his will.

Surly, on the other hand, challenges the 'art' as a whole. He criticises the most obvious feature of the play 'all your terms... would burst a man to name' (II.iii.182-198) and he lists a huge number of alchemical terms. To this, Subtle replies:-

And all these, named
Intending but one thing: which art our writers
Used to obscure their art.

(II.iii.198-200)

Subtle draws attention to the manner in which different forms of 'art' function in the play to hide one another, alchemy masking robbery is one, yet the distinction between words that mask the truth, and words that reveal it, is not an easy one to make here either. Subtle proceeds:-

Was not all the knowledge
Of the Egyptians writ in mystic symbols?
Speak not the Scriptures oft in parables?
Are not the choicest fables of the Poets,
That were the fountains, and first springs of wisdom,
Wrapped in perplexed allegories?

(II.iii.202-207)

The language of alchemy, as it is presented in the play, does indeed consist of 'perplexed allegories'. It is

volatile substance' may well suggest Mammon's wealth, particularly since 'to draw' can mean 'to steal' as well as 'to pour off'. 'The gripe's egg' is perhaps suggestive of Surly. In Greene's The Second Part of Conny-Catching (1592), among a list of 'the words of art, used in these Lawes', occurs the memorable phrase, under Vincent's law (Coosenage at Bowls), 'He that betteth, the Gripe. He that is coosened, the Vincent' (36). Surly clearly is ready to bet on the chances of Mammon being gulled (II.iii.297-311). Yet, sense emerges obscurely from the words, no single significance could be produced definitively, this is not so much a code and more a new language from which translation can only ever be approximate.

The hieroglyphic mode, in which the alchemical language functions, is already anticipated in the Folio's acrostic format for The Argument. Very simply, it spells out THE ALCHEMIST, down its left hand margin (a form also used in the prologue of Volpone). This commonly seen Elizabethan device is given a more than usually pointed function in this play which develops and extends the hieroglyph to a sophisticated point.

There are numerous passages where this doubleness of language is brilliantly elicited from the discourse of alchemy. Further on Subtle explains:-

For two
Of our inferior works are at fixation.
A third is in ascension. Go your ways.
Ha' you set the oil of Luna in kemia ?

(II.iii.96-99)

Here, more clearly than before, a secondary meaning emerges.

'Two inferior works' may well suggest
Drugger and Dapper; 'A third is in ascension' thus referring
to Mammon, who might be seen as being 'in ascension' because
of the large amount of money he believes he is producing.
Kernan observes:-

This kind of dual significance of alchemy, identifying
the chemistry with the swindle, helps to establish
alchemy as not just the means of an elaborate
confidence game but the governing symbol of the play
which contains, defines, and judges all the various
actions and persons of the drama. (37)

It is interesting, however, that although alchemy may well
be said to 'contain, define, and judge' everything else in
the play, the attitude of the text to alchemy itself remains
uncontained.

Nearly all drama, including Jonson's, requires an
absent scene, or process of events, to be imagined and made
present, to complete what is occurring on the stage. In The
Alchemist, the text enjoys a cunning game, not just with the
language of the drama, but also with its scenic
construction. In the device of the absent laboratory, the
text alludes to the conventional requirements of the
contemporary drama that its audience must imagine absent
events (a function the author condemns in the Prologue to
Every Man In) (38), but it does so in order to confuse the
situation, to make it amusing, and to point questions at the
audience. The spectators are required to ask themselves how
many of the practices of alchemy, necromancy and astrology,
are merely dramatic devices, and if not mere fictional
devices, then what is their status?

For King James, in Daemonologie, all such activities, even the most commonplace trickery that Subtle practices, stem ultimately from the teachings of Satan:-

In like manner he [Satan] will learne them manie juglarie trickes at Cardes, dice, and such like, to deceive mennes senses thereby: and such innumerable false practiques; which are proven by over-manie in this age: As they who ar acquainted with that Italian called Scoto yet living, can reporte. (39)

Scoto, it will be recalled, is the 'mountebanke' whose disguise Volpone used to attract the attention of Celia. In The Alchemist, however, Subtle occupies the position of alchemist, conjurer, and wizard from start to finish. Despite Face's accusations Subtle uses the discourse of alchemy in a serious fashion. So, although these particular practitioners are basically swindlers, Subtle's and Dol Common's knowledge and expertise in the discourse of the black arts, still locates them in a position of potentially being identified as witch and necromancer. Jackson suggests that Subtle half-believes his alchemical mumbo-jumbo (40). It seems to me that modern criticism has been too ready to make the assumption that all the magic referred to in the play is merely 'mumbo-jumbo'. Modern psychology and medicine are readier now than they used to be to accept the effectiveness of a placebo, and the success of the rogues here lies precisely in their ability to convince the fools of an altered reality. As Blissett has convincingly demonstrated, Subtle, Dol and Face represent, through a series of allusions, and through their presentation, the old alliance of the Devil, the Flesh and the World (41). The association that the rogues have with characteristics of

morality-play's Vice figures is also shared in their use of language. The manner in which they increasingly multiply the significance of their discourse is another quality of old Vice figures which I have shown also to be adopted by Brainworm in Every Man In. The Alchemist sees an extension of this mode of speech. By stages through the play Subtle, Dol and Face make meanings proliferate to a point where they become almost infinite and ultimately absent. Abel Drugger, for instance, asks Subtle to produce a shop sign for him. Subtle proudly spells out:-

He first shall have a bell, that's Abel;
And, by it, standing one, whose name is Dee,
In a rug gown; there's D and Rug, that's Drug:
And, right anenst him, a dog snarling 'Er';
There's Drugger, Abel Drugger. That's his sign.
And here's now mystery and hieroglyphic!

(II.vi.19-24)

In this brilliant improvisation, Subtle rapidly invents a new system of script that relies on both graphic and verbal forms of communication. It is at once phonetic, graphic and associative in its use of equivalence like 'a bell' for Abel, or the dog snarling the single syllable 'Er', or in its required popular knowledge of 'one whose name is Dee'. It is a totally arbitrary system because there is no visible rationale behind the relation of signifieds to signifiers. The same sign might be equally validly understood as 'Bell de Gown dog', or as 'Chime cloth Snarl'. Or the sign might be seen to designate a peculiarly eclectic shop selling Bell, Cloth, and Dogs. In his creation of a mystical sign, Subtle effectively deconstructs the conventional Western

verbal and visual system of script, replacing it with one where meaning can be located equally randomly. Yet, the images which he puts to work in his new script are all drawn from contemporary London where the bells tolled continually to mourn those dead of the plague, where dogs ran wild in the street, and where John Dee, the famous Elizabethan magus, was reduced to the poverty of wearing a coarse woollen gown until his death in 1608 (42). Subtle's new system of script is, of course, a brilliant evocation of Egyptian hieroglyphics (so central to the core-texts of authentic alchemy) made utterly contemporary to the Jacobean world. It combines both ideogram and phonetic units to bridge the gap between Western and Eastern scripts. Here again there is a hint that Subtle's knowledge and practice are more informed than mere trickery would suggest is necessary.

In the fleecing of Dapper, Subtle and Face again present a revised version of conventional discourse. On this occasion they do so through their pretended translation of the language of the elves, who are supposed to be searching Dapper for any last pieces of gold, before giving him audience with the Queen of Faery, the disguised Dol. Dapper's willingness to give up all his possessions is questioned by Subtle, acting as both elf and interpreter:-

Ti ti, ti ti to ta. He does equivocate, she says:
Ti, ti do ti, ti ti do, ti da. And swears by the light,
When he is blinded.

(III.v.41.42)

This hilarious scene shows up Dapper's miserliness, the

rogues' skill and, later, their quick wits when Mammon returns too soon and they have, hastily, to remove Dapper. It is based on an actual trick performed by a couple, John and Alice West, 'falsely called the King and Queene of Fayries', who were eventually tried and convicted at the Old Bailey three years after the first performance of The Alchemist (43). In this scene, language is completely fragmented by Subtle and Face, who then act as interpreters of the fictive elven discourse (44).

Dapper and Drugger are both subject to an altered and fragmented form of language in which the deceits that are practiced upon them are contained. This reduced form bears remarkable similarity to that ancient, occult process of communication that the Puritan divine, Hugh Broughton (1549-1612), describes in A Concept of Scripture (1590):-

A learned linguist shall see how therein moreover the ancients used communion in vowellles and consonants, that wisdome which Pythagoras held most eover the ancients used communion in vowellles and consonants, that wisdome which Pythagoras held most high to comprise all sounds of voices in few marks of letters.
(45)

This passage is in fact, one of those that Dol Common spouts in her fit of talking (IV.v.). Kernan notes in reference to the passage that 'the absence of vowels referred to here suggests a middle-Eastern language such as Hebrew' (46). What is not pointed out, however, is the resemblance that Broughton's description bears to the reduced and condensed linguistic practice that Subtle and Face use in their gullings of Drugger and Dapper. In their separate forms, both Drugger's shop sign, and the elven discourse, do

precisely 'comprise all sounds of voices in few markes of letters'; they contain the benign surface of the deceit and its real presence.

The twists, changes and reconstructions that Subtle, Face and Dol effect on language are, as I have suggested, some of the conventional qualities of Vice characters. As such their manipulation of language suggests their evil moral status, but it is also responsible for the brilliant and extraordinary way in which the text of The Alchemist is able to produce complexes of meanings. For, on a meta-dramatic level, Dol's fit of talking provides simultaneously a source for, and a commentary upon, these exciting linguistic practices operating in the play. To state merely that the fit of talking is 'another instance of Jonson's central satiric targets' and a satire on Broughton's impossibly obscure writing, as Kernan notes (47), is to fail to see that Jonson's text also extracts passages from the more lucid preface of Broughton's text with which to make its points, and, more crucially, that Broughton's analysis of 'ancient' practice is, in fact, put to work in the play. The fit of talking can, of course, be seen as an instance of intense irony in the play's performance, the division between a reading of the text and its performance is never so strong as here; the spectators will respond primarily to 'all sounds of voices' encapsulated in the passage, while the reader will be more attentive to the 'few marks of letters' which give rise to this discussion.

I have already talked about the double, compound

discourse which occurs in the gulling of Mammon, higher up the scale of gullings from the reduced language that the rogues use on Dapper and Drugger. In the compound discourse there are, as Farley-Hills explains it, always two voices:-

The voice needed to sustain the fantasy world with which the dupes indulge their feelings and the voice that reminds us of the actual situation as the intriguers have engineered it. (48)

In case any of the audience are still not aware of the doubleness of the discourse, Subtle's encounter with Surly, in disguise as a Spanish Don, confirms it. For here, Subtle and Face are presented with a gull, 'his great Verdugoship', who it seems,

has not a jot of language;
So much the easier to be cozened.

(III.iii.71-72)

It seems, to them, that they will be able to declare their intentions, in the most brazen way, without fear of discovery:-

Subtle: Don, Your scurvy, yellow, Madrid face is welcome.

Surly: Gratia.

Subtle: He speaks, out of a fortification.
'Pray God, he ha' no squibs in those deep sets.

Surly: Por dios, Senores, muy linda casa!

Subtle: What says he?

Face: Praises the house, I think,
I know no more but's action.

Subtle: Yes, the casa,
My precious Diego, will prove fair enough,
To cozen you in. Do you mark? You shall
Be cozened, Diego?

Face: Cozened, do you see?
My worthy Donzel, cozened.

Surly:

Entiendo.

(IV.iii.30-40)

At the height of the rogues' confidence, the drama informs the audience, they are at the most risk of discovery. Subtle goes on:-

Yes, praesto senor. Please you
Entratha the chambratha, worthy Don,
Where if it please the Fates, in your bathada,
You shall be soaked, and stroked, and tubbed, and
rubbed:
And scrubbed, and fubbed, dear Don, before you go.
You shall, in faith, my scurvy babioun Don :
Be curried, clawed, and flawed, and tawed, indeed.

(IV.iv.94-100)

Subtle's ridiculous mock-Spanish is spoken to serve the same function as the alchemical discourse; to conceal a deception whilst revealing only favours. Here, unknown to Subtle, the process is reversed in a situation similar to that, in Volpone, where Mosca encourages Corvino to denigrate the supposedly deaf Magnifico who, in reality, can still hear all that is said (I.v.50-82). So, by introducing Surly in disguise, the drama itself seeks to comment on the rogues who in turn comment on the gulls.

In Dol's fit of talking another passage from Broughton, on the concealed meanings within discourse, may be seen to apply directly to Subtle's basic techniques:-

And these
Be stars in story, which none see, or look at -
...
For, as he says, except
We call the Rabbins, and the heathen Greeks -
...
To come from Salem, and from Athens,
And teach the people of Great Britain -
...

To speak the tongue of Eber, and Javan -
...
We shall know nothing.

(IV.v.10-17)

This passage also comes from Broughton's preface; the Dedication to Queen Elizabeth. The 'stars in story' may be connected to those sets of meanings that Subtle and Face reveal to one another, and to the audience, whilst fleecing the gulls who do not 'see, or look at' them (Surly of course does see, but he is the exception, and has little chance to answer back). Jonson's text appropriates the millennialist tone of Broughton's, reapplying its attempts to 'teach the people of Great Britain', in a totally different context. The 'stars in story' provide an apt image, offering a metonymic link with the superior position and glow of satisfaction that the audience feels, as it understands these metaphoric points of light in the darkness of alchemical obscurities. In this sense, then, the audience, Subtle and Face are all made to feel superior by being equated with the learned 'rabbins, and the heathen Greeks' who can translate from the sacred tongues.

The surprising clarity and applicability of the sections from Broughton occurs, I have already pointed out, in a ridiculously ironic context. For, while Dol spouts descriptions of the linguistic practice here at work (and her own is obviously to be included in this), Mammon and Face are both talking at once, trying to find out what is happening, and to silence her. The fit of talking scene

may, as Donaldson suggests,

be viewed as a Parody of the Pentecostal miracle when the Apostles 'began to speak with other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance' (Acts.2:4). But instead of universal comprehension, there is here universal obscurity; instead of union, there is division. (49)

There is indeed absolute division, not only between the experiences of the characters, but between the experience of reading the play here and seeing it performed in the theatre. In the theatrical performance, obviously, the lucidity which I have been analysing would hardly be discernible, if at all. The chaotic confusion of speech, which is, as Donaldson goes on to suggest, actually more like Babel than the Pentecostal miracle, would be the most likely effect to be transmitted to the audience.

Yet, the The Alchemist suggests that there may still be intellectual value in the study of writings for concealed 'stars in story, which none see, or look at'. Such an indication is hardly articulated in the performed text (except perhaps in Subtle's half-belief in what he practises), but at the moment of dramatic confusion that is Dol's fit of talking, Jonson's text covertly reveals an attitude to 'more removed mysteries' which does not conform at all with the predominant dismissive orthodoxy. It is unlikely that any official censor would read the text of the play so closely as to discern the presence of this suggestion and so perhaps Jonson felt able to include it without fear of discovery, except by those who had already proved in their attentiveness, their serious devotion to his work.

Jonson's textual delight in the infinite communicability of languages is such that even the taboo practices of the occult provide texts and processes of signification that he cannot resist using. Ultimately, it seems to me that the attitude to alchemy, displayed in The Alchemist is not unlike that implied by Sir Francis Bacon in The Advancement of Learning (1605):-

Surely to Alchumy this right is due, that it may be compared to the Husbandman whereof Aesope makes the Fable; that when he died, told his sonnes that he had left unto them gold buried under ground in his Vineyard; and they digged over all the ground, and gold found they none; but by reason of their stirring and digging the mold about the rootes of their vines, they had a great Vintage the yeare following: so assuredly the search and stirre to make gold hath brought to light a great number of good and fruitful inventions and experiments, as well for the disclosing of Nature as for the use of mans life. (50)

For Jonson's text, alchemy is clearly of 'use' as a source of fruitful linguistic 'inventions and experiments' which go to make The Alchemist the brilliant play that it is, and to enrich the author's later work, but the play also clearly wants its audience to consider the significance of alchemy and magic in their own lives.

In terms of the rhythm of the play, the chaos of speech, where Mammon, Dol and Face all speak at once, is clearly followed by the silencing appearance of Subtle. He has supposedly been disturbed in his works, and his entry causes them all to 'disperse' in awe. Subtle instantly attacks Mammon for his 'unchaste purpose', in trying to woo Dol the 'mad sister', and conveniently connects this with the failure of the experiment. This is followed by the unexpected impact of the explosion from the laboratory that

sends all the 'works' 'flown in fumo'. Dramatically this is a stunning piece of theatre, and the climax of the play, although there is much of substance to follow. Even as the rogues simulate the collapse of the alchemical process, so their downfall is signalled to the audience. As Partridge puts it:-

The explosion of the furnace in the fourth act is an objectification of what happens to the plot. (51)

The laboratory explosion is a turning point in the play. When Subtle is recovered from his 'swoon', Mammon is sent home with instructions from Face that still contain faint mocking hope of his acquiring the stone:-

Aye, and repent at home, sir. It may be,
For some good penance, you may ha' it, yet,
A hundred pound to the box at Bet'lem -

...

For the restoring such as ha' their wits.

(IV.v.92-95)

The bluntness with which Face points to Mammon's lack of wits here is indicative of the height of confidence which the rogues now display and the peak of the gull's madness. From this scene onwards the mode of illusion is altered, however, as the disguised Surly enters and affects the action. In the following scene Surly attempts to rescue Dame Pliant from the 'nest of villains':-

I am a gentleman, come here disguised,
Only to find the knaveries of this citadel,
And where I might have wronged your honour, and have not,

I claim some interest in your love. You are,
They say, a widow, rich: and I am a bachelor,
Worth naught: your fortunes may make me a man,
As mine ha' preserved you a woman. Think upon it,

And whether I have deserved you, or no.

(IV.iv.8-15)

It is immediately clear that Surly's 'interest' in Dame Pliant is as financial as that term implies (52). Surly's equation of wealth and status reveals his motivation to be almost as mercenary as the rogues' (53). The directness and bluntness with which he articulates his 'interest' comes in contrast to the intricate duplicity of Subtle and Face and, eventually, he is unable to sustain the onslaught of his attack on them against their skilled manipulation of the other gulls. While Surly seems to have Subtle cornered, Face directs the anger of Drugger, Kastril and Ananias against the intruder, and they literally 'quarrel him out o' the house' (IV.vii.34). Ananias declares that Surly is 'Sathan' and sees him as 'Antichrist, in that lewd hat' (IV.vii.55); these terms ironically, like the anger of the gulls, are better directed at Subtle and Face. Yet their skill is such that the force of cacophonous language itself is again manipulated to achieve their ends as previously it had been to defeat Mammon. It is striking that, in the passage where Surly is forced out of the house by the shouting (IV.vii.35-58), Subtle and Face stand by, in complete silence, observing the scene with the satisfied detachment of the audience.

At the discovery of Surly, a new element of suspense is introduced into the play as the rogues' illusion is again threatened, and this threat is increased with the news of Lovewit's return. As soon as it is clear that Lovewit is

back, Face instructs Dol and Subtle to pack up and prepare to leave. The final act is almost entirely taken up with the brazen denials that Face is forced to make, firstly to the neighbours, then to all the returning, furious and abusive gulls. He has to construct another new fiction to replace the old ones. During this, Face speaks in numerous asides to the audience so that the play's spectators seem to become accomplices in the new 'deceptio visus' (V.iii.62). First Mammon and Surly return and, at Face's denial of their accusations, Surly retorts: 'This's a new Face?' (V.iii.21), which of course, ironically, it is. Face has transformed his identity again to 'appear smooth Jeremy' (IV.vii.130), and, at this point of most intense pressure, he seems to begin to change his style of working. 'Surly come!' he despairs in an aside:-

And Mammon made acquainted? They'll tell all.
(How shall I beat them off? What shall I do?)
Nothing's more wretched, than a guilty conscience.

(V.ii.45-47)

Face's discourse seems about to alter in character. His reference to a 'guilty conscience' seems to recall the cries of repentant sinners in earlier dramas, and in contemporary tragedies, but it is merely a temporary faltering. It helps to generate the audience's expectation of a conventional, judgemental conclusion. Yet Face does not repent and neither does Lovewit fulfil the expectations that his return generates of pronouncing judgements or restoring a moral order. When Kastril returns Face whispers to the spectators in another aside:-

(Oh me,
The angry boy come? He'll make a noise,
And ne'er away till he have betrayed us all.)

(V.iii.30-32)

The cacophony of languages, the 'noise', which was before so useful to the rogues in their defence, now becomes the greatest threat to their survival. Furthermore, when Face talks about the betrayal of 'us all', there is a strong sense in which he seems to embrace the theatre audience as well as Subtle and Dol.

Face's discourse is split here utterly between the fiction that he seeks to construct, for his master and the neighbours, and the reality which constantly impinges. The next betrayal comes as Dapper begins to cry out from the Privy where he has been locked away. Lovewit demands 'who's that?' to which Face replies, first aside and then, to his master:-

(Our clerk within, that I forgot!) I know not, sir.

(V.iii.63)

The brilliant re-introduction of Dapper, when Face and all the audience will have forgotten him, makes an excellent comic moment. It also draws the audience further into complicity with Face. His confiding use of 'our clerk' again carries the suggestion that the audience now has some share of the responsibility. The split that occurs in Face's discourse takes the form of direct and obvious contradiction. It is a contradiction that is played out to the audience, and which they must somehow find a way to resolve.

Face easily manages to draw Lovewit into his schemes by promising him 'a widow/ In recompense' (V.iii.84-5) for his cooperation. So, while Lovewit is preparing the disguise of the Spanish Don again, the Venter Tripartite is able to carry out its last deception. Subtle seems delighted by Face's persistent skill and when, he hears that Lovewit has been put off, he replies:-

Why, then triumph, and sing
Of Face so famous, the precious King
Of present wits.

(V.iv.12-14)

This slightly awkward rhyming couplet suggests the hollowness of the praise. As soon as Dapper has been dispensed with, in the trick that 'determines the Venter Tripartite', the presentation of the gull to the Queen of Faery, Subtle privately declares, to Dol, his intention to,

take our leaves of this o'er-weening rascal,
This peremptory Face.

(V.iv.78-9)

The contradiction that ranges between Subtle's earlier praise and this condemnation runs parallel to the contradiction already seen within Face's discourse. It clarifies the manner in which the lines of allegiance are re-drawn at the end of the play.

Subtle and Dol must leave hastily as the officers outside the house threaten to beat down the door. Yet, the shifting patterns of language-use that characterise the text remain remarkably consistent. Subtle leaves with a final confirming parting shot:-

Rogue, I'll hang myself:

That I may walk a greater devil than thou,
And haunt thee i' the flock-bed, and the buttery.

(V.iv.146-148)

Subtle's identification with the devil is made here again, as Blissett has argued, and this final self-defeating declaration confirms to the Jacobean stage that the Devil is an ass, while Face's worldly triumph looks more and more certain (54). Nevertheless, right up until the end, Subtle predicts a future for their rivalry, that is also a bond, and is reiterated beneath all of their cheating discourses throughout the play.

As soon as Dol and Subtle have left, the furious cheated gulls burst into the empty house with accompanying officers:-

Lovewit: Hold gentlemen, what means this violence?

Mammon: Where is this collier?

Surly: And my Captain Face?

...

Mammon: Madam Suppository.

Kastril: Doxy, my suster.

Ananias: Locusts
Of the foul pit.

Tribulation: Profane as Bel, and the Dragon.

Ananias: Worse than the grasshoppers, or the lice of
Egypt.

Lovewit: Good gentlemen, hear me. Are you officers,
And cannot stay this violence?

(V.v.10-17)

This is the final instance of the linguistic chaos of Babel taking over the action. The barrage of sound which previously masked the rogues' trickery (in Dol's fit of

talking), then served their purposes in avoiding discovery (Surly being quarrelled out o' the house), and later seemed to threaten the new illusion-making (as the gulls returned for the first time), finally becomes hollow, futile and ineffectual. The contrast is again made between the 'violence' of the chaotic language (which is only endowed by Dol with any meaningful content) and the intricate subtle, form of discourse that supplies the utterances of Face's final covert threats:-

My part a little fell in this last scene,
Yet 'twas decorum. And though I am clean
Got off, from Subtle, Surly, Mammon, Dol,
Hot Ananias, Dapper, Druggier, all
With whom I traded; yet I put mayself
On you, that are my country: and this pelf,
Which I have got, if you do quit me, rests,
To feast you often, and invite new guests.

(V.v.158-165)

Face's last words pull together a number of threads that have been running through the play. His promise 'to put my self/ On you, that are my country' seems, in line with conventions, to be a request to the audience that they judge him. Kernan sees this as 'an appeal for a jury of one's peers' (55) but, contained in this phrase, there is also the idea that, just as Face has put himself upon the dupes and his accomplices finally, so he will now put himself on the audience. It is recalled that, in All's Well That Ends Well (1602), Lavache the clown in the Countess's household, defends himself against Lafeu's accusations that he put tricks on the horses. The Clown replies:-

If I put tricks upon 'em, sir, they
shall be jades' tricks, which are their own right

by the law of nature.

(IV.v.63-65)

To 'put on' something, in this sense, means to practice some kind of deception or trickery (56). Similarly, in The Devil Is An Ass, Meercraft accuses old Gilthead of trying to pass off fake gold in his loan to Fitzdottrel:-

You ha' there now
Some Bristol stone, or Cornish counterfeit
You'd put upon us.

(III.i.263-265)

Both these examples occur in contexts that are reminiscent of exactly the kinds of activities with which Face is associated. The Jonsonian example, in particular, shows a similar situation that deals with questions of fake or real gold. A secondary sense, then, would seem to be carried here, in which Face actually declares himself to be a trick put on the audience. Face's final, deceptive speech draws the spectators close to him, bringing to a climax the instances in which they are made accomplices in his deceptions. The audience is shown that such intimacy is morally dangerous, and that they are already involved, more than they recognise. In the very act of working out the subtleties of the rogues' discourse, 'the stars in story' that fill their utterances, the audience finds itself stretched, even compromised by the final applause with which they, by convention, must finish the play. Duncan observes:-

The audience-jury will confess by its applause that it has been bribed into passing an erratic verdict, thus owning its share in the conspiracy of greed described by the play. (57)

The Alchemist is concerned, as Duncan argues, paradoxically to expose the greed of both its gulls and of its audience. My point is that The Alchemist also sets out carefully to present, on the stage, the dismantling and the reassembly of strange and familiar forms of language in such a way that the reality (or separate realities) for each gull, is seen to derive entirely from linguistic perceptions of the world prepared for them. When Lovewit finally declares that 'a young wife, and a good brain' may 'stretch age's truth sometimes, and crack it too' (V.v.155-6) he is referring most directly to young Jeremy's effect on his old master (58). Yet, 'age's truth' may also refer to the very age in which the play has been so carefully set; indeed seen throughout The Alchemist, is precisely the stretching and distorting of 'truth' right to the very breaking point where it too, explodes all 'in fumo'. 'Truth', with language, finally cracks open in the play and what remains, for the audience, is the brilliant twinkle in Face's eye and the disturbing, contradictory forces that seem to run throughout any field of language that he uses.

The Alchemist: Notes and References

1. Clim-o'-the-Cloughs is the name given to a celebrated archer and outlaw of the North (see H&S, X, pp.61-62), but Thomas Nashe in Pierce Pennilesse (1592) connects the name of Clim-of-the-clough with hell, damnation, and the Devil, see The Workes of Thomas Nashe, edited by R.B.McKerrow, Reprinted with corrections and supplementary notes by F.P. Wilson, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1966) I, p.206. Tyl Eulespiegel, whose disguise Face also adopts, is a German folkdemon who is also closely associated with the devil; his powers of mischief seem to be derived from the fact that he was baptised three times - which itself suggests the 'venter tripartite', see: A Mery Jest of a Man called Howleglass, (London, 1528?) 'Howleglass' is an English translation of Eulespiegel; for an interesting survey in German of Eulenspiegel tales in Elizabethan texts, see: F.W. Bire, 'Eulenspiegel in England', Palaestra, XXVII, (Berlin, 1903). A more recent study of The Alchemist also relates the 'venter tripartite' to the presence of the Devil. W. Blissett sees Subtle, Face and Dol, as the Devil, the World, and the Flesh respectively, in 'The Venter Tripartites in The Alchemist', Studies in English Literature, 8, (1968) 323-334.

2. D. Duncan, The Lucianic Tradition, p.193.

3. R. Dutton, 'Volpone and The Alchemist: A Comparison in Satiric Techniques', Renaissance and Modern Studies, 18, (1974) 36-62, p.47.

See also: R.L.Smallwood, '"Here in the Friars": Immediacy and Theatricality in The Alchemist', Review of English Studies, ns.32, (1981), 142-160.

4. The Alchemist, edited by A. Sale, (University Tutorial Press, London, 1969) p.v.

5. I. Donaldson, 'Language, Noise and Nonsense: The Alchemist', in Seventeenth Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar edited by E.R. Miner, (University of California, Berkely and London, 1971) p.74.

6. Herford and Simpson (H&S,X,pp.46-7) provide the following list of some sources of Jonson's alchemical passages with some of the relative scenes in brackets afterwards:-

Chaucer: The Canon's Yeoman's Tale.

Martin Deliro: Disquisitiones Magicae. (II.iii.131-207)

Lazarus Zetner: Theatrum Chemicum.

Arnold of Villa Nova: Rosanium Philosophorum. (II.i.39,40; 65-7; II.iii.106-114).

Geber: Summa Perfectionis. (II.v.35-6)

Paracelsus: Manuale de Lapide Philosophico. (II.i.25-8; II.v.28)

Robertus Vallensis: De Vertitate et Antiquitate Artis
Chemicæ. (II.i.101-104)

Chaucer, Lyly, and Erasmus all wrote satires on alchemy but whether this can be said to fully constitute a tradition of such writing is less easily concluded.

7. J.A. Bryant, The Compassionate Satirist: Ben Jonson and His Imperfect World, (University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1972) p.123.

8. M. Flachmann, 'Ben Jonson and the Alchemy of Satire', Studies in English Literature, XVII, (1978) 259-280, p.259.

9. A. Leggatt, op.cit., p.32.

10. Two recent articles have sought to explore contemporary attitudes to alchemy to a greater extent, but both of these critics return from interesting exploration to less satisfactorily conventional analyses:-

J.S. Mebane, 'Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: Utopianism and Religious Enthusiasm in The Alchemist, Renaissance Drama, 19, (1979) 117-139.

G.H. Cox, 'Apocalyptic Projection and the Comic Plot of The Alchemist', English Literary Review, 13, (1983) 70-87.

11. J. Arnold, 'Lovewit's Triumph and Jonsonian Morality: A Reading of The Alchemist', Criticism, XV, (1969) 151-166, p.152.

12. Flachmann, op.cit., p.267.

13. E.H. Duncan, 'Jonson's Alchemist and the literature of Alchemy', PMLA, 61, (1946) 699-710, p.699.

14. H.E. Allen, 'Influence of Superstition on Vocabulary: Two Related Examples', PMLA, L, (1935) 1033-1046, p.1035.

15. W.Vaughan, The Golden Grove, (London, 1608) Chpt.45, sig:Z8 - Aa1.

v
16. The Colloquies of Erasmus, Translated by C.R. Thompson, (University of Chacago Press, Chicago and London, 1965) p.631.

17. Cf. Flachmann, op.cit., p.259.

18. H&S, VIII, p.29, Epigramme VI.

19. F. Yates, The Occult Philosophy in The Elizabethan Age, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1979) pp.91-2.

It should be noted that, although Yates sees Jonson as set on attacking Dee in person (Yates, op.cit., p.162), the hostility shown by the characters in the play may not necessarily be taken at face value. Levy has pointed out Dee was a friend of Jonson's old teacher, Sir William Camden. Indeed, it seems to have been Dee's famous library

that Camden frequently used and through Dee that Camden met, Ortelius, the Flemish cartographer who inspired the English historian to commence the Britannia. The allegiances and prejudices of the past seem less conveniently clear cut than has been suggested and ultimately one can only return to the text of the play. See: F.J. Levy, 'The Making of Camden's Britannia', Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 26, (1964) 70-97, p.83.

20. K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England, (Wiedenfield and Nicholson, London, 1971) p.321.

21. The Complete Masques of Ben Jonson, Edited by S. Orgel (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1969) pp.219-220.

22. Thomas, op.cit., p.245.

23. James I, Daemonologie, (London, 1597) p.xii.

24. A. Harris, Night's Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in 17th Century English Drama, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1980) pp.7-19, for further details of these laws and their application, see also:-

The Alchemist, edited by C.M. Hathaway, Yale Studies in English, 17, (1903) pp.31-2.

25. Harris, op.cit., p.15.

26. Thomas, op.cit., p.213.

27. Thomas, p.216.

28. Thomas, pp.321-2.

29. Duncan (E), op.cit., p.699n. makes the same point.

30. J. Van Dyke has thoroughly analysed the constant rivalry between Subtle and Face as it receives a form of covert articulation in the jargon with which they gull the fools: 'The Game of Wits in The Alchemist', Studies in English Literature, 19, (1979) 253-269.

31. See Donaldson, op.cit., pp.76-79 and passim.

32. M. Doran, Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama, (The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1954) p.342.

33. The Alchemist, Edited by D. Brown, (New Mermaids Series, Ernest Benn, London, 1966) p.xxii.

34. See Chapter 2.

35. H&S, X, p.77.

36. R. Greene, The Second Part of Conny-Catching, (London, 1592) p.3.
37. The Alchemist, Edited by A. Kernan, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1974) p.212.
38. Every Man In, Prologue to the Folio Edition, 11.13-20.
39. King James, Daemonologie, op.cit., pp.88-89.
41. W. Blissett, 'The Venter Tripartite'.
42. Frances Yates sees Subtle's sign as a satire on Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica (Yates, Occult Philosophy, p.161), but Herford and Simpson report that such rebuses were quite common (H&S, X, p.90). Just as Jonson's use of the acrostic in The Argument becomes more significant in this context, so does the rebus. Jonson's text seem to gather together domestic or commonplace devices which make use of non-Western modes of script and puts them in one place where their particular linguistic qualities can be better understood in the context of their origins and their association with the occult philosophy.
43. H&S, X, p.98.
44. See also, Donaldson, p.77.
45. H.Broughton, A Concoct of Scripture, (London, 1590) sig. Ai-Ai .
46. Kernan, op.cit., p.152.
47. Cf. Kernan, p.223.
48. D. Farley-Hills, The Comic in Renaissance Comedy, (Macmillan, London, 1981) p.53.
49. Donaldson, p.78.
50. Francis Bacon, The Two Bookes... of the Proficiencie and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Humane, (London, 1605) Bk. I, fol.22 .
51. E. Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.114.
52. Partridge draws out, very fully, the business terminology that runs through the whole play, (The Broken Compass, pp.139-148).
53. For a different view of Surly as a figure of defeated virtue, like Bonario, see: D.F. Finnigan, 'the Role of Surly in The Alchemist', Papers on Language and Literature, 16, (1980) 100-104.

54. Blissett, op.cit., pp.333-334.

55. Kernan, op.cit., p.199.

56. OED 21c & 23d.

57. D. Duncan, op.cit., p.190.

58. R. Dutton has pointed out how Lovewit's marriage represents the 'universal bourgeois happy ending' and a return to the context of the nuclear family ('Volpone and The Alchemist, p.59). This ideal situation, it should be noted, is declared to be in a state of disruption at the start of the play when subtle refers to the death of Lovewit's wife (I.i.58). It may also be suggested that, at the end of the play, Lovewit's 'Old-man-young-wife' marriage leaves him in a position still vulnerable to being cuckolded by Face.

See also, W.A. Rebhorn, 'Jonson's "Jovy Boy": Lovewit and the Dupes in The Alchemist', Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 79, (1980), 355-375. Rebhorn sees Lovewit as Face's final dupe whose function it is to draw the audience's attention to the implications of their final applause as self-condemnatory.

Chapter 7: Articles of Disagreement in Bartholomew Fair

Bartholomew Fair (1614) is one of the masterpieces of Jonson's theatrical art. The virtuosity with which a large number of speaking parts, and multiple discourses, is handled is unparalleled in the corpus of his work. Bartholomew Fair extends Jonson's dramatic explorations into a new realm of invention. By loosening the bonds formed in the rigid plot and the close-knit group of manipulators, seen in The Alchemist, Jonson's text allows itself freedom of action and flexibility of focus, guided by a more general narrative structure. This flexibility enables the drama to create its own discourse of nonsense, a 'vaporous' dialect in its own right, which articulates the anarchy and the madness at the edges of popular contemporary culture.

Bartholomew Fair has been seen as 'slight' by some critics in comparison to the moral strictures which they find in Volpone (1). More recently, however, Barish has discerned a strength and satisfaction in the 'fairness' of the Fair. He argues that the play:-

Strikes a delicate balance between the claims of poetic justice and the realities of a world in which clear sanctions are not to be found. (2)

I shall argue that the play suggests that 'clear sanctions' are only to be derived from language and that this clarity is constantly undermined in the action and speeches of the play. As a result the whole notion of a poetic justice, or any other form of justice, becomes severely troubled (3). Several critics have found the play insufficiently 'moral'; Cope sees the play, in fact, as a stylised 'anti-morality'

play (4), while Levin is certainly worried by the final outcome where:-

The plays's three notorious representatives of the institutions of education, religion, and justice are silenced and rendered as ineffectual as if they were indeed placed in the stocks, while the fools and criminals, good natured though they may be, are allowed to prosper unchecked. (5)

One of the difficulties about reading this play is the tendency, commonly found, to read it either in terms of the visitors to, or the dwellers in, the Fair. One seems to require either one half of the characters, or the other to be disregarded, in order to derive a singular moral order from the drama. As a result critics have often failed to respond fully to numerous dramatic complexities of the play.

Thus Hibbard:-

The people of the Fair, fascinating though they are in themselves, exist to create and provide conditions in which the main drama can take place. They are not the subject of that drama. (6)

In this way the critic almost blots out half of the play. This may make it more manageable, but it fails to reveal the extent to which the whole drama exists in the interaction of all its characters and the impact of the entire action upon its audience. Gardiner recently summarised the position:-

The 'vitalist' critics view the fair principally as a place of sensual pleasure of which Jonson is tolerant. They concentrate on the fair itself. The 'moralist' critics instead see the fair as a place of crime and follies of which Jonson is critical. They concentrate on the fair visitors. (7)

It is important to any argument, in view of this observation, that the visitors to the Fair, and the dwellers in the Fair, are treated in an equal fashion because the

play itself deliberately involves the collision of the two groups, their integration and, eventually, their levelling to similar moral status and dramatic importance.

In the 'Articles of Agreement', which form a major part of the Induction to Bartholomew Fair, an interesting 'clause' relates to the audience's rights of judgement over the play:-

It is further agreed that every person here, have his or their free-will of censure, to like or dislike at their own charge, the Author having now departed with his right: it shall be lawful for any man to judge his six pennorth, his twelve pennorth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place: Provided always his place get not above his wit.

(Induction. 11.75-80)

The connection made here, between the price of a seat and the right to 'censure' or 'judge' the play, might easily pass without question (indeed one of the first paradoxes of the play is that the Articles of Agreement are not actually subject to the agreement of the audience). It is an interesting passage because it draws a relationship between financial capacity and the critical faculties. This relationship seems to be one that is, tacitly, explored throughout the play. The wealthier figures of Busy and Overdo seek to censure the play of the Fair while, more complexly, the indiscriminate bounty of Cokes is contrasted with the calculating manoeuvres of Quarlous and Winwife, and centred around their changing relations to Grace Wellborn and her valuable inheritance.

In turn, the gallants' criticisms of the gulls of the Fair are specifically paralleled with the activities of the

theatre audience. For example they return to the stage, after their fight with Ursula, having failed to witness Edgworth's prowess in picking Coke pocket (in II.vi.).

Quarlous exclaims:-

We had wonderful ill luck, to miss this prologue o' the purse, but the best is, we shall have five acts of him ere night: he'll be spectacle enough! I'll answer for't.

(III.ii.1-3.)

A parallel between a theatre audience and an on-stage audience of both naive and cynical on-lookers at the Fair continually arises but, whereas at the outset the hierarchy of power is established around financial capacity, by the end of the play, this criterion is completely banished and the monetary activities of the visitors and thieves appear very close to each other.

To this extent, then, the play will be seen to concern the failure of the relations between individuals, and between people and the law, through the failure of written contracts to enact what they claim, in discourse, to be. From the very beginning, the articles of agreement, ironically allow of no agreement and they, themselves, occur in a contradictory setting. Before the arrival of the Scrivener and the Book-holder, to act as the play's solicitors, the Stage-keeper addresses the audience. He begins by telling the spectators that Master Littlewit is just making some last-minute repairs to his costume and that:-

He plays one o' the Arches, that dwells about the Hospital, and he has a very pretty part.

(Induction. ll. 4-5)

We are informed that this refers to the Court of Arches in Bow Church, 'court of appeal from the diocesan courts' (8). Thus, on one level, this statement informs the audience of the immediacy, local scope and reference of the play but, since we are also told that the actor involved is mending a 'stitch new fallen in his black silk stocking' (1.3), there may also be a visual reference to his bending over to mend it, and thus, forming an 'arch'. In this case his 'very pretty part' perhaps also refers to his backside. This is a familiar, crude pun to begin the play and a typical diversion of reference, from artifice, to the body of the artist. The pun, in a sense, is a reminder of the contiguity in Jonson's texts, of theatre, location, play and actors. With its references to hasty back-stage activity and also to latter-day glories of the Fair (11.12-20), the Stage-keeper's part of the induction forms a metonymic bridge, from the external realities of Jacobean London, into the artifice of the play (9). The Stage-keeper's discourse is also concerned with all the possible characters, and features of the Fair, that the author has excluded from the play:-

... he has ne'er a sword and buckler man in his Fair, nor a little Davy, to take toll o' the bawds there, as in my time, nor a Kindheart, if anybody's teeth should chance to ache in his play. Nor a juggler with a well-educated ape to come over the chain for the King of England, and back again for the Prince, and sit still on his arse for the Pope, and the King of Spain! None o' these fine sights!.... Nothing!

(Induction, 11.12-19)

This is, perhaps, an attempt to present, implicitly, all

that is absent from the play about to be seen. Yet, it is also an ironic satire of other kinds of dramatic fiction. From the very start, the text displays great energy as it reaches towards a sense of plenitude that can encompass all experience, trying to make immanent that which is absent. Blissett describes the possibility of such a phenomenon, in this case, one particular to the performance held before the King:-

At the end of the performance of Bartholomew Fair at court, the elements of the masque to balance its anti-masque-like character are not merely absent but conspicuous by their absence, to the point of being present in their absence. (10)

The Stage-keeper's discourse of absence is itself subsequently excluded by the arrival on stage of the Book-holder and the Scrivener. The Book-holder explains:-

... not for want
of a Prologue, but by way of a new one, I am sent out
to you here.

(Induction, 11.51.-2)

The Induction appears, in the Articles of Agreement, to be agreeing the terms on which the audience may judge the play, and thus specifically articulating the nature of the relationship between audience and fiction. In effect, however, the contradictory quarrelling of this prologue is reminiscent of the prologues to Cynthia's Revels and to Poetaster (11). It actually establishes a different, more turbulent, relationship with the auditors.

The turbulence that surrounds the Articles of Agreement is carried over and reproduced around the marriage contract, the licence, which Littlewit so proudly shows off in the

play's opening scene. As in the contract between the play and the audience, the licence (which is for the marriage of Grace Wellborn and Cokes) becomes very literally the site of contradiction and struggle, as it is bought, stolen, misplaced, and finally re-written through the course of the play. Quarlous realises by the end that the licence is ultimately only a matter of 'scraping out Cokes his name, and tis done' (IV.iii.98-9). This problem is anticipated early on (in I.ii) when the rivalry between Winwife and Quarlous emerges in their both being suitors to Grace. In Volpone, it will be recalled, there is, perhaps deliberately, no exploration of the social difficulty involved in pairing Celia and Bonario. Even though Celia is a married woman, in symbolic terms, the pair are clearly placed next to each other. The symbolic, and moral, pairing of the play's only good characters is, however, opposed to the (mimetic) actual social bonding of Celia and Corvino. This opposition is left to stand unresolved in the play. Similarly, in Bartholomew Fair, the social bonding of Cokes and Grace, as yet unfixed, is set against the continual wooing of Grace by Winwife and Quarlous. The play deliberately presents a potential relationship that can be understood in conventional dramatic terms (a romantic, tragi-comic, rivalry between suitors) in opposition to a more naturalistic, mimetically conceived, potential relationship between two unsuited partners. On the one side stands Cokes, supported and endorsed by parodies of powerful institutions in his kinship to Overdo and in his tutor,

Wasp. On the other side stand Quarlous and Winwife, who invoke the forces and conventions of romance drama to further their part in the play. Grace understands and articulates the predicament:-

If you both love me, as you pretend, your own reason will tell you, but one can enjoy me; and to that point, there leads a directer line, than by my infamy, which must follow, if you fight. 'Tis true, I have professed it to you ingenuously, that rather than to be yoked with bridegroom is appointed me, I would take up any husband, almost upon any trust. Though subtlety would say to me, (I know) he is a fool, and has an estate, and I might govern him, and enjoy a friend, beside. But these are not my aims, I must have a husband I must love, or I cannot live with him. I shall ill make one of these politic wives!

(IV.iii.6-15)

The irony derived from the fluctuating status of the licence during the course of the play is the result of this opposition. Grace sees the activities of Quarlous and Winwife as actions which, in their battle for her legacy 'do but breed one another trouble and offence' (IV.iii.1-2), and 'trouble and offence' are precisely the subject of the play (12).

Inheritance-hunting is a recurring concern in Jonson's texts. I have already touched on it, in Volpone and in Epicoene, and will explore its presentation and significance further in analyses of The Staple of News and the other late plays. It is often the sole activity of gentle-folk, the middle-classes and the lapsed nobility. In the last act of Bartholomew Fair it is revealed as being the real occupation of Busy and Dame Purecraft too (in V.ii.44-62). Making money illicitly is, perhaps, one factor which covertly binds together the dwellers in, and the visitors to, the Fair. It

is to be noted that Littlewit makes his money, in the play, precisely by selling the licence to Cokes. In this sense, then, the activities of the thieves in the Fair may be seen to coincide with the activities of the gentle-folk.

The Fair is seen as symbolic by those who visit it and, equally, by those who trade in it. It is not, therefore, presented solely as a criminal underworld, or the site of multiple vice, but a re-presentation of the world. The Fair is an example of the *Theatrum Mundi* paradigm common in the period; it moves beyond a simple geographical London location or, more importantly, a simple class location in the low-life. The Fair becomes symbolic of Britain and then the world, and the newly capitalist world at that. Whit declares:-

I tink I am the patientsh man i' the world, or in all
Smithfield.

(IV.iv.188-9)

He speaks ironically for the play even though it may be in terms of the lowest common denominator. Grene expands on this; he observes that the play,

... provides a strange instance of the Tudor and Stuart concepts of the union of the nations... If in the earlier acts of the play we seem to be watching the usual sort of city comedy, with its close but limited view of the world of London, through acts III and IV the spiralling movement of the action seems to circle out to take in the provinces and the whole of the rest of Great Britain (13).

The close similarity of the behaviour of Fair dwellers and visitors, which is partially responsible for producing this image, is emphasised by the third contract that circulates in the play. It is again a verbal inscription that forbids,

or allows, human behaviour and upon which a livelihood is dependent. This is Trouble-all's dependence on Overdo's warrant and the absurdity with which he needs it to fulfil any action and to define his identity. It is brilliant, unsettling satire on pedantic subservience to the law only made socially comprehensible, inside the play's world, by being termed 'mad'. It should be noted that ultimately it is Trouble-all, when the play's topsy-turvy reversals are at their height and Justice Overdo is in the stocks, who is asked to fulfil romance conventions and to write the name of Palamon or Argalus (both of whom are typical romance lovers) in Grace's notebook, in order to decide which gallant will marry her. He becomes the non-judge in a new, blindly drawn-up contract and, as a result, is given the emblematic title of Fortune by the suitors and bride to-be. Trouble-all's marginal existence enables him to participate equally in undermining contracts of law or those of romance fiction; in relation to him all emerge equally absurd.

Contracts, Articles of Agreement, licences, warrants, the linguistic laws established by society to order behaviour, and relations between its subjects; these are the central concerns of the play. It is the instability, the paradoxes, and the necessary breakdown of relations as inscribed in the contract which are central to my argument. The play seems, to me, to confront arbitrary social mores, and the paradoxes of written law when they fail to deal with the simplest of human needs in society. Two carefully juxtaposed incidents typify the dramatic approach to this in

Bartholomew Fair. At the end of act III, after his attempt to break up the Fair and its stalls 'the merchandise of Babylon' (III.vi.80), Busy is arrested and marched off to the stocks. Immediately afterwards Win expresses, or rather fails to express, her desire to visit a privy. She says rather desperately to Littlewit that it is 'a thing, that I am ashamed to tell you' (I.106), but he completely fails to understand, she repeats 'I have very great, what sha' call 'um, John' (II.111-2). Much is made of her embarrassment and a parallel emerges between the physical arrest of Busy for his linguistic oppression and Win's verbal inhibitions about her most basic need. As if to emphasise this, the virtually identical scene is repeated towards the end of act IV. On this occasion, Wasp is arrested after abusing the watchmen, and this time it is Mistress Overdo who expresses an elementary human desire. Again she is presented as unable actually to say what wants to do:-

I cannot with modesty speak it out, but - (s.d.
Whispers him)

(IV.iv.172)

The instances of juridicial inhibition of Busy and Wasp are placed in parallel with the linguistic inhibitions which are imposed on Win and Mistress Overdo. The ultimate extension of this, which brings together the imperatives of the legal warrant and human needs, is when Knockem, in exasperation, says to Trouble-all:-

'Sblood, thou'll not stale without a warrant, shortly.

(IV.vi.5)

Trouble-all is the enactment, and the summation, of everything that troubles the law and, therefore by direct implication, its subjects. He is the embodiment of madness and folly which, as I discussed it in relation to Epicoence, Jonson's texts present as lodged ambiguously in human desires and are often absorbed through the 'segmentation' of society and the need to call some of its subjects 'mad' (14). The noise and nothingness (the neutral gender of the epicene) inflicted on Morose in order that he may be pushed out of society, and labelled 'mad', is epitomised in the nonsense of Bartholomew Fair presided over by Trouble-all, but he manages, unlike Morose, to liberate this role from its circumstances as victim.

The day before the play's action, we are told (in I.v.23), Wasp, Cokes, and Mistress Overdo have visited Bedlam itself, while Purecraft is said to visit the asylum 'twice... everyday' (I.ii.47). By implication the Fair itself has a qualitative closeness to the madhouse; it lurks persistently on the play's perimeter. The madness within the play, however, emerges as less inhibited and less restricted than the confined lunatics' brand of madness, and seems also more liberated than the social standards of the nobility and the bourgeoisie.

One might, therefore, seek to express these ideas as a multiple polarity, drawn by the play, between order and chaos, sense and nonsense, the law and criminality, knowledge and ignorance. The crucial point that emerges from the drama, however, is that these polar opposites,

clearly definable though they may be, do not all coincide. Each apparently positive ideological factor does not line up on the same side as every other one. There is criminality within order (the inheritance hunting that is frowned on in others, but is rarely punished), there is an order in carrying out crimes (the excellent synchronisation of ballads from Nightingale and pick-pocketing from Edgeworth), and similarly there is a law within the chaos (Trouble-all writes the identity of the bridegroom in Grace's book). The drama enacts the paradoxes through, often violent, oscillations between clarity and confusion and this is forcefully conveyed to the audience.

In structural terms Bartholomew Fair consists of a series of concentric frames each of which encompasses a form of artifice that challenges and plays upon that which it surrounds and that which surrounds it. I have already shown how the induction leads us into the play, by dealing with the audience's relations to it, and by suggesting perversely what the audience will not find in the play.

The induction forms an outer frame for the drama which the audience passes through into act I. Here a new location (John Littlewit's house), and new characters, define the next field of the drama's operations as all the visitors to the Fair are introduced and their relationships begin to be explored. Then, with each successive act, the play seems to move deeper into the Fair. There is an extraordinary sense of perspective achieved, particularly in reading the play, as the dramaturgy plunges forward. It is a movement from

the width of the Induction, into the narrower domain of Littlewit's house, into the more confined area around Ursula's booth, then on into the labyrinthine vaporous convolutions of the Fair, via the constrictions of the stocks, finally to arrive at the benches in front of the diminutive world of the Puppet-show. Here the play's perspective finds its own literal vanishing-point as dramatic illusion is hilariously dismissed with the revelation of the neutral gender of the Puppet Dionysius (in V.v.91) who, in lifting his robe, refutes the standard Puritan criticism, raised by Busy, that actors blaspheme in dressing up as women.

As Latham has observed:-

Jonson [has] given his play the form of a Chinese box in which each plain of reality is enclosed within another. (15)

The accumulating structure is a series of artificial frames, which lead into and out of one another, and which pull the audience further and further into the 'reality' of the play's world while, at the same time, making them increasingly aware of its artifice. The process is, perhaps, reproduced in Overdo's description of the events which result in his being beaten in act III:-

To see what bad events may peep out o' the tail of good purposes! The care I had of that civil young man I took fancy to this morning (and have not left it yet) drew me to that exhortation, which drew the company, indeed, which drew the cutpurse; which drew the money; which drew my brother Cokes his loss, which drew on Wasp's anger; which drew on my beating: a pretty gradation.

(III.iii.11-17)

The passage may be read as a paradigm for the structure of

the play. This is not simply an account of a particular causality but, in the semantic variations on the verb 'to draw', the language enacts the kind of sliding movements which are characteristic of the play. A variation in the use of the verb occurs at the moment when the theft is narrated, the sense of 'to draw' meaning 'to attract', suddenly changes to the sense where it means 'to remove'. A shift of meaning is equated with a sleight of criminal hand. The form of the discourse itself, however, is imitative of nursery rhymes in which simple acts are given an increasingly more complicated causality, but in which the ritualistic recitation of the verses acquires more significance than the content of what is being recited. The noticeable feature of this kind of nursery rhyme is that it is traditionallly recited extremely quickly, the participants competing to see who can recite the verses most quickly and coherently. The speed of recitation can all too quickly end in gibberish; a form of nonsense familiar to Bartholomew Fair. That such a nursery discourse should be invoked here seems further to reflect Overdo's naivety; it should be noted that, among adults, the recitation of this kind of verse is often a playful indicator of how drunk, or sober, is the speaker.

The dramaturgy seems, in structural terms, to be involved in two different modes of presentation which do not rest comfortably together, but produce a struggle in the spectator which is reminiscent of some of the difficulties of an optical illusion. The powerful sense of depth through

perspective, which I have been talking about, is countered by the fractured, dispersed, presentation of the characters. The function of the play is described by Levin as working in a process of 'collision, disintegration, and re-alignment' (16). Grene, in a similar vein, describes the dispersal effect:-

The whirling movement of the fair acts as a centrifugal force in which bonds of social relationship vanish until there is a mere mass of human atoms in accidental conjunction. (17)

This process seems to be crucial in that it recurs in the increasingly unsettled discourses of the characters, as I have just shown with Overdo, but is contradicted by the careful framing of event and location.

It may be useful to illuminate this contradiction in the mode of presentation by exploring it briefly in terms of historical changes in visual depiction occurring at this time, at least partly as a result of the work and influence of the Italian architect, Alberti (18). As Edgerton has recently explained, Renaissance perspective implies a kind of spatial homogeneity, a single overall vantage point, unlike Medieval depiction, which tends to represent experience from many different angles simultaneously. These two different attitudes to visual representation have different emphases, one gives information more concerned with the nature of the separate objects themselves, while the other reveals more about their relative size, locus and the spatial separation between them (19). Edgerton goes on to explain, very succinctly, Alberti's theory of

perspective:-

His whole system of perspective and his exhortations about learning geometry were seen as being in service to the art which he called istoria, or history painting. Alberti's istoria entailed the depiction of human figures according to a code of decorous gesture. It called for the representation of a higher order of virtu, onore, and nobilita. the persepectival settling itself was to act as a kind of visual metaphor to this superior existence, for Alberti believed the world functioned best when everything in it obeyed the laws of mathematics. Hence, istoria implied more than verisimilitude or 'realism'. Its major function was didactic: the improvement of society by placing before the viewer a compelling model based on classical ideas and geometric harmony. (20)

Alberti's theory of istoria shares much with Jonson's own stated theories of poetry, and his presentation of ideas in the masques, particularly in the notion of the production of a compelling didactic model. Inigo Jones' experiments with perspective in the masques are well-known and it was, after all, what Jonson is supposed to have seen as the over-elaborate extension of these experiments (among other things) which seems eventually to have led to the split between the two men. The importance, for Alberti, in going beyond simple versimilitude seems directly to relate to the more morally didactic aspects of Jonson's poetics. Yet, most striking is the fact that this mode of presentation, upheld by the structure of Bartholomew Fair, is so carefully and effectively contradicted by other functions of the dramaturgy. The text seems to toy with the notion of perspective, in terms reminiscent of Alberti's istoria, but it ultimately demonstrates little faith in the practice of istoria alone and constantly contrives for the audience's lines of vision to be cut through or disrupted by the action.

This is perhaps best seen in the high degree to which groups or individuals watch one another, and also set up small performances to deceive one another, within each scene. To list just a few, there are Win's first faked longing for pig, Overdo's disguises as Mad Arthur of Bradley and then later as a Porter, Quarlous' and Winwife's constant voyeurism, then Quarlous' later disguise as Trouble-all, Edgeworth's and Nightingale's 'music-while-you-thieve', and finally, of course, the Puppet show itself. Each of these small, internal performances (and there are still more) function to amass complexity of artifice in a way which sets the functional boundaries in opposition to one another. This is a much more complicated dramatic activity than, for example, is seen in Epicoene. There is one famous scene in the earlier play (IV.vi) where such multi-levelled drama occurs, with the Collegiate Ladies watching the foolish knights from a balcony, but in Bartholomew Fair, watching, spying, performing and deceiving are almost constant activities of the drama.

Screens are set up, barriers to knowledge, which characters look over at one another, in rather the same way that Volpone looks over the top of a screen at the clients when they come to visit Mosca, supposing the Fox to be dead. The different modes of presentation clash with one another, as each new internal performance produces its own discourse, and its own ironies.

Given an awareness of a degree of academic debate at work in the play it is revealing to discover that the

setting of Bartholomew Fair does in fact have a related tradition of academic disputation. In A Survey of London (1598) John Stow describes the activities of schoolboy scholars which took place at the same time, and in the same location, as Jonson's play:-

The arguing of Schooleboyes about the principles of Grammer, hath beene continued even till our time: for I my-selfe, in my youth, have yearely seene, on the eve of St Bartholomew the Apostle, the schollers of divers Grammer schooles repayre unto the Churchyard of St Bartholomew, the Priorie in Simthfield, where upon a bank boorded about under a tree, some one Scholler hath stepped up, and there hath apposed and answered, till he were by some better scholler overcome and put downe: and then the overcommer taking the place, did like as the first: and in the end the best apposers and answerers had rewards. (21)

No other critic seems to have pointed out this connection before and it seems to illuminate the full context of Bartholomew Fair. This place, and this time of the year, have specific intertextual, academic associations with the debating of the 'principles of Grammer'. At the time of the play's performance, therefore, the Smithfield location would certainly have put such activity into the minds of Jonson's audience. It is a connection which confirms the integral link between the childishness of some of the play's discourses and the intellectual, academic argument that is also enacted, in the play's construction, in its configuration of action and speech. The passage from Stow also draws a connection between the context of Bartholomew Fair and that of Volpone, as I have already discussed it, in relation to education and to teaching grammar in particular. In terms of the discourses of Bartholomew Fair itself, it should be added that one might now see the verbal

babble of the 'vapours' as a specific satire on the learned disputations of the scholar school-boys (22). The 'vapours' emerge as a form of discourse which can not be simply read as nonsense; its meanings may be slight, its significance however is of some importance.

The discourse of nonsense is a paradoxical domain of language-use. In earlier texts, in Poetaster, Volpone, Epicone and in The Alchemist, audiences became familiar with a battering, hyperbolic use of language, which I have discussed already, and in Bartholomew Fair it comes to the foreground. It is a discourse which uses its very plenitude of sound to produce a void, it serves to dislocate an audience from positions of coherent perception of the drama, to a place where they literally understand next to nothing. Yet this is vital since, following the condemnatory attacks of Jonson's satire, the nonsense shifts the audience to a position of great potential where the spectators may reassess and renew their understanding of their own values and attitudes.

'Nothing' is a common word in Bartholomew Fair and it occurs in contexts that continually leave themselves open to reflexive readings. In the Induction the Stage-keeper describes all the things that are not included in this play, and ends with a deeply frustrated, or a deeply ironic, 'Nothing!'. Then the Book-holder and the Scrivener enter and interrupt the Stage-keeper, the Book-holder asks him: 'What's the business?', to which he replies:-

Nothing, but the understanding gentleman o'
the ground here asked my judgement.

(Induction. 11.43-4.)

Superficially 'nothing', here, is simply a guilty disclaimer on the Stage-keeper's part. In more reflexive terms, however, the Book-holder might be understood to ask what is the 'business' of the play, in which case 'nothing' suggests an ironic mocking summary. 'Nothing' and 'nonsense' represent one half of the play's ground which oppose the rigid Law of Justice and of Rhetoric, and seek to replace them with confusion, noise and a lack of inhibition. Indeed the Scrivener suggests, when he reads from the Articles of Agreement, that the play is 'as full of noise, as sport' (1.72). Further on the audience is promised 'a consort of roarers for music' (11.108-9). The audience is, throughout, reminded of the presence of threatening or liberating nothingness. After he has been drinking, Quarlous tells us, he recalls 'nothing' (I.iii.17-18). Wasp, when in a hurry or drunk, or at most other times, knows 'nothing' (I.iv.18-21) and Trouble-all constantly questions 'nothing' (IV.i.12-13). In fact Trouble-all seems to ask the question that 'nothingness' asks, he issues a challenge, which as Heffner puts it:-

Leads to a re-examination of the motives of all the characters, a new scrutiny of what warrant they really have and what they pretend to have for their beliefs and their deeds. (23)

This re-examination is not limited to individual characters, however, it takes place in the play's own fields of language-use, and therefore reaches out to the audience.

Nothingness becomes, paradoxically, an active force in the play. It functions as a spiritual void, a lawless wasteland, and as an open teeming space which is dynamic, attractive, anarchic, and which, above all, fails to be identified or controlled by the representatives of the dominant order, or by their conventional discourses. It is characterised by a variety of contradictory, illogical forms and by the brilliant new discourse of nonsense.

John Littlewit begins the nonsense with his stream of puns and 'conceits' at the start of the play. His very first lines are illuminating:-

A pretty conceit, and worth the finding! I ha'such luck to spin out these fine things still, and like silkworm, out of myself.

(I.i.1-2)

In the context of this speech, the 'pretty conceit' superficially refers to the 'Barthol'mew upon Bathol'mew' pun, but this only becomes clear, afterwards, at line 7. At first there is another sense in which Littlewit arrives on the stage and looks into the auditorium, at the start of the play, and expresses his surprise in discovering the spectators (just as Asper does in the Induction of Every Man Out 11.51-52). In this sense a 'pretty conceit' may refer to the audience, Littlewit treats the spectators as artifice, just as they might seek to treat the play as reality, both actor and audience are led to recognise the mutual reciprocity and reversibility of their contract. Littlewit's constant finding himself in puns and little jokes which evoke his delighted responses such as '(There I

am again la!))' (1.16) suggests a figure finding its own construction in language, and this is typical of the play where language is upheld, but then subsides, producing a crisis of meaning and morality for character and audience alike. Littlewit's proliferating use of 'conceits' draws attention to the fiction; the 'conceit' that is the play. Interestingly, however, this reflexive awareness always emerges as an interjection, literally bracketed off, and forms a split discourse in which one part talks about the Other. In this sense Littlewit's first speeches reinforce, formally, the quarrelling rhetoric of the play as a whole in which an excluded chaos continually breaks in to the order of events. Littlewit anticipates this development of the play's discourses when he says:-

I do feel conceits coming upon me, more than I am able to turn tongue to.

(I.i.28-29)

Here he seems almost possessed by the unconscious voice of the text, and anticipates the garbled, tongue-twisting terms of the vapours. Before the vapours incident, the audience is already introduced to a prime speaker of the discourse of nonsense. At the beginning of act III, Captain Whit is languishing on duty:-

Nay, tish all, now! Dish tish, phen tou vilt not be phitin call, Mashter Offisher, phat ish a man te better to lishen out noishes for tee, and tou art in an oder'orld, being very shuffishient noishes and gallantsh too, one o' their brabblesh would have fed ush all dish fortnight; but tou art so bushy about beggersh stil, tou hast no leshure to intend shentlemen, and't be.

(III.i.1-6.)

This is certainly discourse from 'an oder 'orld' and various critics have 'translated' the Elizabethan stage-Irish; eventually, sense can indeed be derived from it. Whit is belabouring his fellow watchmen for going after beggars to arrest for breaches of the peace, instead of gentlemen, since the pickings to be had through bribery of the higher class of prisoner would be enough to feed them all for a fortnight. Yet, such an activity of translation seems to defeat the function of the speech. The translation is surely a derivation of sense from effective nonsense. Parker supposes that Jonson's use of the 'nuisance value of noise, of words divorced from meaning' suggests that:-

One of his basic comic concerns was to expose and explode aggression, the atavistic readiness of adrenalin which is no longer useful in a settled society. (24)

Provocative though it is, Parker's account seems to suggest that the play is related to a 'settled society', which might exist somewhere other than in the imagination, or that it is opposed to the real turmoil of contemporary society from which Bartholomew Fair emerges. Yet, surely, there would have been little need to 'expose' aggression in a society in which public order was a myth and where duels, brawls, feuds and riots were commonplace. On the contrary, what were needed urgently by state and populace alike, and what Bartholomew Fair seems so humorously to explore, were the sources of that violence, what language accompanied it, and for what needs it spoke. The problem in the play is partly how to 'explode' aggression, but over and above that, the play comes up against the primary problem of uncovering the

extent to which power and aggression are lodged together, and institutionalised, to become the source of the single dominant discourse of the law and of juridicial power.

The nonsense forces the auditor to examine what is happening on stage in a new light. Fowler has described this process, in linguistic terms, in relation to how an audience might interpret an 'ungrammatical string' such as Captains Whit's above:-

As well as recovering whatever grammar the string has... i.e. acting on the assumption that the string is a deviant string of his own language, the native interpreter is prepared to scan a deviant utterance for any structure which is NOT dictated by the grammar of his language; in this latter respect he is not behaving as a native speaker-hearer behaves towards a grammatical sentence of his language. (25)

The kind of difference in approach, the change in position, that Fowler describes may not just occur in the attempt to comprehend unusual words, but also in relation to comprehending moral and political situations, and in judging them. Nonsense seems to offer a new perspective, not just on language, but on the social context around it. Bakhtin has usefully described how this kind of 'deviant utterance' can become a new dialect in its own right:-

Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They were and are still conceived as a breach of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability. These elements of freedom, if present in sufficient numbers and with a precise intention, exercise a strong influence on the entire contents of speech, transferring it to another sphere beyond the limits of conventional language. Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing

themselves verbally. The marketplace crowd was such a collectivity, especially the festive, carnivalesque crowd at the fair. (26)

In Bartholomew Fair exactly the kind of entirely new discourse, described by Bakhtin, derived directly from common people, seems to be deployed in a way which specifically questions the established faith in singular meanings and singular effects of language. OED attributes the coinage of the term 'non-sense' to the text of Bartholomew Fair and the importance of this, as a departure on the English stage, should not be ignored.

Stewart has observed that 'nonsense must of necessity be a kind of taboo behaviour' and goes on to explore what a use of nonsense involves:-

It is the realization of the possibility that the discourse of everyday life could become totally conscious of its own procedures: it is the dispersal of attention from a purpose at hand, a halt to the ongoing nature of social discourse, and an extreme movement away from any conception of such discourse as natural.
(27)

It seems that, in dramatic terms, nonsense may be seen to stop the play of normal communicative discourses, and to interrupt the interplay between audience and drama. As I have suggested, it seems capable of forcing a reassessment of the criteria for distinguishing the legal from the illegal, the rational from the irrational, and so on. In the vapours argument, of IV.iv., this reassessment is enacted in the text. Wasp, for example, declares:-

I have no reason, nor I will hear of no reason, nor I will look for no reason, and he is an ass, that either knows any, or looks for't from me.

(IV.iv.34-36)

The sternness of this warning is enough to make any critic wary of passing comment. These words are indeed spoken by the voice of 'un-reason', or of nonsense, and they come from beyond the merely absurd identity of Wasp; just as I suggested earlier occurred in the case of Littlewit, the unconscious, chaotic, voice of textual anarchy comes bubbling through. It is the widespread acting out of Wasp's individual denial of reason that might produce a dislocation of the audience and which might force the spectators to consider the controlling effects of language upon them. The kind of distraction from a purpose at hand, and the movement away from the conception of a natural discourse, which Stewart and Bakhtin describe, has already been seen, ironically in the discourse of Justice Overdo, but in the vapours argument it reaches a new peak. The participants begin to discuss the nature of vapour itself, and whether an utterance of Wasp's is a sufficient vapour:-

Knockem: He is i' the right, and does utter a sufficient vapour.

Cutting: Nay, it is no sufficient vapour, neither, I deny that.

Knockem: Then it is a sweet vapour.

Cutting: It may be a sweet vaour.

Wasp: Nay, it is no sweet vapour, neither, sir, it stinks, and I'll stand to 't.

Whit: Yes, I tink it doesh shtink, Captain, All vapour doesh shtink.

(IV.iv.45-51)

The level at which the discourse of the vapours is aware of its own procedures does seem to be such that there can be no

further progress forward in these terms. When Cutting says 'I deny that', she speaks the process of the discourse, she refers to exactly the processes of denial and contradiction which characterise the vapours. From then onwards, the fully arbitrary nature of their terms becomes clear. It is equally meaningless to call the vapour 'sufficient', 'sweet', or to say that 'it doesh shtink'. In The Alchemist, language becomes increasingly broken up by its skilful manipulators, here the language moves beyond manipulation to a point of sheer anarchy.

Yet, there appears to be a very clearly defined frame to, and intention behind, the production of this anarchic situation. At the beginning of the scene, it will be recalled, Knockem and Whit conspire to initiate the vapours 'for a lift' (1.2.), that is as a cover for their attempt to steal the licence from Wasp. The vapours could thus be viewed as simply another device of the crooks to practise their profession, as seen in The Alchemist, or in Nightingale's ballad of the cutpurse earlier (in III.v). It seems to me, however, to become something new and exciting because of the level of incoherence involved. Although a coherent rationale is given for what transpires (in the confusion the theft will go unnoticed) this is not the effect of what occurs for the audience. Whereas, in the singing of the 'Caveat against Cutpurses', the levels of action are arranged visibly so as to place the audience in a position of priority and superior knowledge, here the audience is much more likely to be actively involved in

trying to follow and getting lost in the nonsensical progress of the vapours (although, clearly, this would have a lot to do with the way in which the scene is staged). There is little doubt, however, that the novelty of such language and such verbal chaos on-stage would be the cause of fascination and delight in the first audiences, as well as subsequent confusion and bafflement. The theft itself may well go unnoticed by the spectators, even if it is seen, it will be secondary to the tangles of language that are being unwound so drunkenly centre-stage.

In the theft under the cover of the vapours, the audience is also, perhaps, presented by a subtle, symbolic re-enactment of some ideological functions of language. The implication, at first, seems to be that disordered words produce disorderly actions, yet the one is not presented as an organic development of the other. After all, it was precisely the orderliness of Nightingale's song that distracted Cokes from the theft of his purses. In the same way the 'lift' of the licence during the vapours is the motive for the whole game, the theft does not just get 'spoken' into existence by the nonsense, the entire situation is set up for that purpose and, perhaps because the subject to be frisked is now Wasp who is a little more canny, the theft needs to be more sophisticated. Beyond the mere movements of the plot, however, the use of the discourse of nonsense serves to reveal to the audience a fuller more motivated construction of language. What occurs here is the symbolic exposure of the artificiality of all

discourses, as opposed to their appearance as 'natural' formations, and with this comes the revelation of the different, opposed, interests vested in all discursive formations. It is, therefore, important to distinguish between the questioning of criteria which the nonsense carries out, by diverting the action, and the attempts to stop the whole play by the expostulations of the authority-figures (28). Nonsense seems to threaten to change the direction and the form of the play's world, the interventions of the authority figures threaten its closure.

The interrogative abilities of nonsense are again exercised in the scene after the vapours. Littlewit has just left his two ladies in the care of Captain Whit who immediately persuades Mistress Overdo and Win to stay with him and to become 'fowl i' the Fair' (IV.v.12), Madams, or prostitutes:-

Yes fait, dey shall all both be ladies, and write Madam, I vill do't myself for dem. Do is the vord, and D is the middle letter of Madam, DD, put 'em together and makes deeds, without which, all words are alike, la.

(IV.v.80-3)

This conundrum illustrates Whit's wittiness, over and above Littlewit's, whose affected 'la' he parodies. It is a comparison made all the more pointed by Whit's occupation of Littlewit's vacated place, playing opposite Win. The notion that words become all 'alike', through lack of action, is exactly what the audience has just been baffled by in the previous vapours scene. Whit's discourse also ironically

re-enacts the thieving and sharp play which characterise the crooks and the rogues of the Fair. In the prestidigitation of 'D's', there is a displacement of the materials of language from the jurisdiction of one unit of meaning to another, in order that the discourse construct its speaker's desired position. The crooks take delight in controlling words to suit them, while the institutional figures profess to abide by the word of the law.

There is a subtle difference between Whit's discourse and, for example, Busy's casuistry. Here, for example, is a typical piece of his discourse on the eating of pig:-

Surely, it may be otherwise, but it is subject to construction, subject, and hath a face of offence, with the weak, a great face, a foul face, but that face may have a veil put over it, and be shadowed, as it were.

(I.vi.60-63)

What happens here is a blurring of language, an evasion of its meaning, whilst still apparently observing and retaining its singularity. Busy renders literal the metaphor 'a face of offence', and it becomes the subject of 'construction', but the reality of what it would mean to 'have a veil put over it' is left unspecified. Similarly Overdo, at one point, exclaims with delight:-

I am glad to hear my name is their terror yet,
this is doing of justice.

(II.ii.25-6)

The absurd reliance upon the singular power of his name, the word and letter of the law, stands in total contradiction to the lack of reality in his disguise and the fact that he fails to hold a single court of the 'pie-powders' that day.

The language is upheld as a standard of action in its own right, without reference to its status as discourse. The literal construction of law is continually emphasised by the investment of the law in the physical, material stability of words. While Busy and Overdo are presented as hypocrites, or just plain naive, in their attempts to operate the written law in a consistent singularity, the speakers of the discourse of nonsense come to be seen as changers of social status and identity through the change of words.

When (in V.iv) the company is assembled in the puppet theatre, Leatherhead explains that they are just waiting for Littlewit, the author, to return with his wife, before they start the show. Win, who is already there but masked by the crooks who accompany her, proclaims her identity and presence, 'That's I, that's I' she cries (1.60), but Edgeworth replies:-

That was you, lady; but now you are no such poor thing.

(V.iv.61)

The women have been persuaded by the new dialect that they now have superior identities to those which they held before. The rogues have exercised their powers of language to effect a transformation in the meanings of the women's identities; this change seems to operate on almost the same level as the dramatic artifice as a whole.

Overdo and Busy rant at the 'enormities' of the Fair and attempt to deny its right to exist; Cokes, however, becomes lost in its labyrinthine ways. Nothingness and nonsense are shown to work on him almost mercilessly, but in

a way which does allow the audience to rise above his failure. In IV.ii. he is left fleeced, by Edgeworth and Nightingale, of all but his doublet and hose. He is finally alone and denied any place in the Fair; effectively he has not only been changed by nonsense; his whole identity has been removed. At this point of total nullification, Trouble-all, master of nothingness, appears and Cokes asks him:-

Friend, do you know who I am? Or where I lie? I do not myself, I'll be sworn. Do but carry me home, and I'll please thee, I ha' money enough there, I ha' lost myself, and my cloak and my hat; and my fine sword ...

(IV.ii.69-72)

Trouble-all's comic role allows for little pathos in Cokes' lack of identity, his response is, of course, to ask for the fool's warrant. The dialogue that follows enacts the horror of an emptiness, and a sense of loss pursued by a rigorous logic, which perhaps induces in the audience an anarchic recognition of the arbitrary status of the institutional authorities in the play, but also suggests the need to find some specific bases from which to relocate identities and action. The necessity for this is emphasised by a final nonsensical parting shot from Trouble-all that defeats any attempt to construct coherent meaning in his discourse, as locations, both topographic and metaphoric, become empty. The madman discovers that Cokes wants to be taken to the Justice's house because he does not know the way. Trouble-all, therefore, makes him an excellent proposition:-

Sir, I'll tell you: go you thither yourself, first, alone; tell your worshipful brother your mind: and but bring me three lines of his hand, or his clerk's, with

'Adam Overdo' underneath; here I'll stay you; I'll obey you, and I'll guide you presently.

(IV.ii.89-92)

The excruciating logic of Trouble-all's proposed agreement informs the whole play in its questioning of all apparently straightforward reasoning. His actions, and his wider effects, make act IV of Bartholomew Fair (if not the whole play) one of the strangest, most surreal events of the Jacobean theatre.

Stow recounts an interesting 'rumour' concerning another fool, who moved from Smithfield to a house in Harrow-on-the-Hill, where Cokes is a young squire (I.i.3, and V.iv.72). This fool is Friar Bolton, the last prior at the St. Bartholomew priory which overshadowed the site of the annual Fair. Stow claims that he is merely following the words of Edwarde Hall who was, himself, 'following a fable then on foot' in the following passage:-

The people... being feared by Prognostications, which declared that in the yeare of Christ 1524 there should be such Eclipses in watrie signes, and such conjunctions, that by waters and flouds many people shoulde perish, people victualed themselves, and went to high groundes for feare of drowning, and especially one Bolton, which was prior of St Bartholomewes in Smithfield, builded him a house uppon Harrow on the hill, onely for feare of this floud; thither he went and made provision of all things necessarie within him for the space of two Moneths. (29)

This early account of behaviour, popularly condemned as foolish, and centred in Smithfield, reveals perhaps an adumbrating desire to preserve oneself against imminent disaster and chaos, a desire already explored in Morose's struggle with the noisy follies of Epicoene. Stow's work indicates a persistence of this rumour, in popular

consciousness, precisely because of his attempt to suppress it as a mere 'fable then on foot'. In the minds of a contemporary audience, perhaps, the Fair might become both the place where provision could be made 'of all things necessary' to save oneself from the flood, and also a lurid invocation of the flood, itself, a flood of folly as much as a literal deluge.

Jonson's texts do indicate a knowledge of Friar Bolton. In The New Inn, the Host declares that his 'rebus' is as clever and ingenious as the one created by Friar Bolton (I.i.20). The association between Bolton's linguistic and emblematic juxtapositions, and his desertion of St. Bartholomews, brings together a concern to fix one's identity in a single meaning with a desire for self-preservation against chaos and folly. Broad and general though these interests are, they nonetheless stand at the centre of Jonsonian dramaturgy. It is, after all, precisely his identity that Bartholomew Cokes has lost, and no doubt in popular lore Friar Bolton was, as a result of this 'fable', one of the most well-known 'cokes' of all the Bartholomewes district.

The last act of Bartholomew Fair is, in some ways, as complex as the rest of play put together. It is presented in a way that partially separates it from the body of the play in its relocation in the puppet theatre. As Jonson's texts are to manifest subsequently, in The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady, and as has already been seen in Volpone, the final act is given a sense of separateness and self-

sufficiency that enables the conclusion to take place without too many worries about loose-ends in the plot, although in fact, in Bartholomew Fair, the plot's multiple vagaries are, in formal terms, closed with remarkable dexterity and satisfaction.

Act V indeed, almost seems to begin as a recapitulation of the whole play. Leatherhead establishes the puppet show in very similar terms to those of the Induction's Stage-keeper:-

Oh the motions that I, Lanthorn Leatherhead, have given light to, i' my time, since my Master Pod died! Jerusalem was a stately thing; and so was Nineveh, and the city of Norwich, and Sodom and Gomorrah; with the rising o' the prentices and pulling down the bawdy houses there, upon Shrove Tuesday; but The Gunpowder plot, there was a get-penny! I have presented that to an eighteen -, or twenty-pence audience, nine times in an afternoon. Your home-born projects prove ever the best, they are so easy and familiar, they put too much learning i' their things nowadays: and that I fear will be the spoil o' this.

(V.i.5-15)

The reference to other plays, and the complaint against 'too much learning' both seem to echo the Stage-keeper's remarks. Similarly, V.ii. brings Overdo on stage in a new disguise that recalls his first in the beginning of act II. He says here:-

This later disguise I have borrowed of a porter shall carry me out to all my great and good ends; which however interrupted, were never destroyed in me: neither is the hour of my severity yet come, to reveal myself, wherein cloud-like, I will break out in rain and hail, lightening and thunder, upon the head of enormity.

(V.ii.1-5)

This new disguise and the new declaration of intent are

particularly important to the last act because Overdo's discourse typifies the parodic mode into which the play has now firmly moved. It parodies both itself and other plays. Overdo's speech specifically recalls the speech of an earlier Shakespearean noble who spends his time in a way that seems, at least morally ambivalent if not dangerous, among the riotous members of the lower classes. I refer to Prince Hal and in particular to his speech at the beginning of I Henry IV. (1597?):-

Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

(I.ii.185-191)

It seems quite likely that Overdo's speech is a deliberate, parodic misquotation of Hal's soliloquy. The substitution for 'herein' of 'wherein' initiates the recollecton; while Hal is presented imitating the sun breaking through clouds, Overdo next inverts the emblematicism, becomes 'cloud-like', ironically breaking out in thunder, lightning and hyperbole. Both seek to break through, or break out of, obstructions that hinder them and, it would be quickly recalled by the contemporary audience, Hal specifically refers to 'vapours that did seem to strangle him'; in Bartholomew Fair, of course, the vapours are endemic. Finally it should be noted that Hal refers to the moment when 'he please again to be himself' in a way that sounds as if he will, metaphorically, divest himself of a disguise; of course, with the cruder

Overdo this is literally what happens.

Overdo's parody of princely behaviour emerges specifically in the distorted invocation of an earlier popular dramatic discourse. It anticipates the same process of parody in the puppet play. Here Marlowe's Hero and Leander (completed by Chapman in 1598) and Richard Edwards' Damon and Pythias (performed at court in 1564) are combined, vulgarised and parodied. As Waith points out:-

The incongruous combination of the two stories is in itself a satirical commentary on some Elizabethan drama. (30)

It also signals the ultimate extension, to all of literature, of the treatment of warrants, licences, contracts and texts, as arbitrary and transformable. Quarlous comes to realise this in the same scene as Overdo's parody of Hal. Quarlous recognises that the validity of the licence 'is but the razing out one name and putting in another' (V.ii.76); in this is contained exactly the kind of interchangeability of identity which has been seen in, for example, the fate of Win and Mistress Overdo. Following Quarlous' discovery, Overdo mistakes Quarlous for Trouble-all whom he is trying to placate and whose costume and identity Quarlous has taken on, the judge offers Quarlous his seal and signature to a blank warrant, at which Quarlous explains:-

Can a ragged robe produce these effects?
If this be the wise Justice, he bring me his hand, I
shall go near to make some use on't.

(V.II.99-102)

From within the disguise, the paradigm of drama itself, Quarlous begins to recognise that anything may be achieved

within the play of fiction. He enacts the re-working and re-tracing of the written form, in relation to the warrant, in the same way that Overdo's discourse does in relation to Hal's speech. Quarlous is not, however, the virtuous nobleman that Hamel depicts:-

Quarlous offers a worldly and tolerant point of view thoroughly proper in the play and unworthy of contempt.
(31)

This seems inappropriate when it is recalled that Quarlous is as guilty of hypocrisy as the other visitors to the Fair. This emerges in a comparison between his powerful condemnation of inheritance hunters (in I.iii.50-89) and his subsequent pursuit of the hand of Grace in order to win her legacy.

The notion of re-working of a written form receives its fullest articulation in the puppet show. Undoubtedly, the lusty pursuit of Hero echoes those, almost equally comic, romantic pursuits in the main play, while similarly the ridiculous arguing of Damon and Pythias, through the repeated insults and curses which Leatherhead 'relays' to the audiences (at V.iv.220-239), recall the vapours of Whit, Wasp, Knockem and company. The twists of artifice upon artifice reach their absurd conclusion in Busy's disputation with the puppet Dionysius. Here, the audience would surely have heard again a parody of the scholarly arguments of the grammar school boys on the eve of St. Bartholomew's day, as recorded by Stow, in addition to the common rant of Puritan

preachers. Indeed, as Cokes says, when Leatherhead produces Dionysius to argue against Busy:-

That's excellent! Indeed he looks like the best scholar of 'em all. Come, sir, you must be as good as your word now. (V.v.33-34.)

Ultimately Busy, and Overdo after him, are both only as good as their words and their words, as the drama has so brilliantly indicated, are as unreliable as anybody's when it comes to making singular sense. It is not only Overdo's humiliation at the sight of his wife being sick, (V.vi.61.) in the last scene of the play, that prevents any of the characters being punished. It is because the vested interests in all of the discourses have been exposed in the play and no single moral or legal position has emerged uncorrupted or uncorruptible. There seems to be no possibility at the end of Bartholomew Fair of a compelling classical model of moral or political stability, in the style of Alberti's theories or of Jonson's earlier attempts, because, the dramaturgy seems to imply, its opposite is always close at hand to challenge it in the manner of the academic dispute or in the manner of the private duel. An optimistic note is still struck at the end of the play, however, which is not as sombre in tone as its implications seem to be; in the naivety of Cokes' desire to 'ha' the rest o' 'the play at home' (V.vi.104-105); the last lines of the play perhaps still suggest a potential for social and political change through the medium of dramatic invention and exploration.

Bartholomew Fair is still interested in re-working

earlier writing in a manner that resembles the kind of activity discussed in relation to Jonson's earlier plays. On the whole, however, the presence of subverted forms of other texts is mainly visible in parodies, such as the puppet-show, or Overdo's recollection of Prince Hal's speech; parody of that particular speech obviously emphasises the extent to which Overdo is, himself, a parody of the disguised duke-figure of romance comedy. Yet, Bartholomew Fair also works on language in a variety of ways which were only anticipated in earlier Jonson plays. The invention of a full discourse of nonsense, and the triumphant pleasure in its articulation, represents a considerable progression from the violent language of *Tucca*, or even of *Truewit* or of *Subtle*. This form of nonsense no longer ensures the full complicity of the audience. Its effect is more often, like that of *Trouble-all* on the other characters in the play, to make the audience reconsider their attitudes to language and to the identities of the speakers. Most importantly, Bartholomew Fair's nonsense forces the audience to reconsider the institutional power invested in discourse, its effectiveness and its failures, and the innate power of language as the material of dramatic 'reality'. That power to construct identity and 'reality' in the self-consciously artificial, dramatic world, becomes the centre of attention in Jonson's later work.

Bartholomew Fair: Notes and References

1. Bartholomew Fair, Edited by E.A. Horsman, The Revels Plays, (Methuen, London, 1960) p.xiii.
2. J.A. Barish, 'Feasting and Judging in Jonsonian Comedy', Renaissance Drama, NS.V, (1972) 3-35, p.30.
This view resembles that of Potter, who finds in the play a conflict between 'moral hypocrisy' and 'moral realism': J.M. Potter, 'Old Comedy in Bartholomew Fair', Criticism, X, (1968) 290-299, p.294. The sense of the fairness of the Fair is explored by several critics, notably; N.Greene, Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere, pp.1-18, G.Hamel, 'Order and Judgement in Bartholomew Fair', University of Toronto Quarterly, 43, (1973) 48-67.
3. My starting point is, to some extent, where Heffner concludes his useful essay, and in particular, his remarks about Trouble-all, Ray Heffner Jnr., 'Unifying Symbols in the Comedy of Ben Jonson', in Ben Jonson: Critical Essays, Ed. Barish, pp.133-146.
4. J.I. Cope, 'Bartholomew Fair as Blasphemy', Renaissance Drama, VIII, (1965) 127-152, p.128.
5. L. Levin, 'Replication as Dramatic Strategy in the Comedies of Ben Jonson', Renaissance Drama, NS.V, (1972) 37-74, p.67.
6. Bartholomew Fair, Edited by G.R. Hibbard, New Mermaids Series, (Ernest Benn, London, 1977) p.xix.
7. J.K. Gardner, 'Infantile Sexuality, Adult Critics, and Bartholomew Fair', Literature and Psychology, 24, (1974) 124-132, p.129.
8. Bartholomew Fair, Edited by E. Partridge, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, (Edward Arnold, London, 1964) p.6n.
9. There is further discussion of this in chapter I, and in C. Leech, 'The Function of Locality'.
10. W. Blissett, 'Your Majesty is Welcome to a Fair', in The Elizabethan Theatre IV: Papers given at the Fourth International Conference at Waterloo, Edited by G. Hibbard, (Macmillan, London, 1974) p.100.
11. See Chapter II, for further discussion of the effects and significance of this type of prologue.
12. For an alternative view of Grace as representing the figure of Wisdom in the play, see. C. Smith, 'Bartholomew Fair: Cold Decorum', South Atlantic Quarterly, 71, (1972) 548-556.

13. N. Grene, op.cit., p.10.
14. Chapter 5 deals with this more thoroughly, but one useful further study of madness and melancholia is M. MacDonald, Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in 17th Century England, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981) especially Chapter 4, pp.112-172.
15. J. Latham, 'Form in Bartholomew Fair', English, 21, (1972) 8-11, p.9.
16. R. Levin, 'The Structure of Bartholomew Fair', PMLA, LXXX, (1965) 172-179, p.176.
17. N. Grene, op.cit., p.7.
18. It is known that Jonson studied the classical architect Vitruvius, two important editions of his work are in Jonson's library; that by Daniel Barbaro (Venice, 1567) and that with a commentary by Philander (Lyons, 1586) - see H&S, XI, p.599. It seems likely that he was also familiar with Alberti's work, at any rate, the Italian's ideas were already circulating among English intellectuals through the reports and publications of such men as Sir Henry Wooton, a close friend of Jonson's.
19. S. Edgerton Jnr., The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective, (Harper and Row, London, 1976) pp.9-11.
20. Edgerton, Perspective, p.31.
21. John Stow, A Survey of London (Reprinted from the text of 1603), Introduction and Notes by C.L. Kingsford, 2 Vols, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1908, reprinted and revised 1971) I, p.74.
22. The game of vapours has also been read as a parody of scholastic disputation by Beaurline, Jonson and Elizabethan Comedy, pp.218-223, but he has not connected the particular site of Smithfields with the disputation.
23. Heffner, op.cit., p.143.
24. R.B. Parker, 'The Themes and Staging of Bartholomew Fair', University of Toronto Quarterly, 39, (1970) 293-309, p.298.
25. R. Fowler, 'On the Interpretation of Nonsense Strings', Journal of Linguistics, 5, (1969) p.78.
26. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, Translated by H. Iswolsky, (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1968) p.187.

27. S. Stewart, Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978) p.88.

28. In making a comparison between Bartholomew Fair and The Praise of Folly, Duncan has pointed out that the harangues of Busy, Wasp and Overdo constitute attempts to 'stop the play' as a whole; D. Duncan, The Lucianic Tradition, p.210.

29. Stow, Survey, II, p.27.

30. Bartholomew Fair, Edited by E. Waith, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963) p.197.

31. Hamel, op.cit., p.60.

Chapter 8: 'Old Truth, Under a Supposall of Noveltie': The Muse and the News in The Devil is an Asse and The Staple of News

Whereas Bartholomew Fair thrives on the contradictory directions of its different languages, on the jargon generated at the Fair, and the threatening emptiness of nonsense that succeeds it, The Devil Is An Ass (1616) is a much more contained, almost formulaic, drama. Although potentially exciting in its continual ability to throw up new ideas, particularly in the stream of 'projections' invented by Merecraft, the action remains grounded in the absolute gullibility of Fitzdottrel and in the repeated defeats of Pug's attempts to do evil; it is these which provide the literal basis for the title.

The kind of re-working of older popular conventions that is found anarchically present in Bartholomew Fair's puppet-play and elsewhere in that play does not seem to be repeated in The Devil Is An Ass. Instead, the drama seems to assert its contemporary position in relation to one particular field, the earlier devil plays. The Prologue makes specific reference to The Merry Devil of Edmonton (1603/4) (1.22), and to Dekker's If This Be Not A Good Play, The Devil Is In It (1612) (1.26). Yet, rather than re-working the old conventions to comic effect by having particular characters make parodies of the old forms (and thereby of themselves), as occurs in Bartholomew Fair, here the drama asserts its own ability to do this with the more narrow objective of showing how sophisticated are the modern

manifestations of Vice. It is to this extent that the play may be seen as formulaic. Knoll suggests:-

The Devil Is An Ass is supposed to be seen as the latest in a series of plays stretching back to early Elizabethan times. (1)

The dramatic joke, on this level, is dependent on a single trick (the outwitting of the old Morality school in Pug) rather than on a variety of such literary games as in the earlier work.

Dessen, nevertheless, concedes that one must admire,

Jonson's ingenuity and skill in adapting the devil play of the popular tradition to his own ends. Steering a course between the horseplay of The Merry Devil of Edmonton and the serious diabolic action of If this be not a good play or Doctor Faustus, Jonson has used the inept devil as depicted in Grim The Collier of Croydon while also recalling the relationship between Satan and the Vice found in late moralities such as Like Will to like. (2)

The emphasis that Knoll and Dessen have placed on the play as a devil play represents, however, only one aspect of the whole. Much of the action is not articulated in the context of a morality play discourse, but in the discourse of city comedy, where contemporary social affectation, immorality and criminality are dissected. Gibbons sees The Devil Is An Ass as 'the terminal point in Jacobean City Comedy'; he continues:-

This masterly play presents the tradition which was the genre's origin within the rich, subtle, new comic form which evolved out of it. (3)

and concludes:-

The Devil Is An Ass clearly enough gives a last and a brilliant dramatic life to the main subjects and characters of mature City Comedy, conventional in the plays of Middleton, Marston and Jonson from 1602-1607. (4)

Whether or not it can be said that the play represents the last life of city comedy, it would seem that at least two distinct genres can be distinguished at work in The Devil Is An Ass: the devil-play discourse that revolves around Pug, and the city comedy field of language-use that is constituted in Merecraft's unending supplies of con-tricks and in Fitzdotterel's credulity.

In the action that occurs in Wittipol's wooing of Mistress Fitzdotterel, however, one finds different elements which are almost tragi-comic in the seriousness with which they are pursued. The set-piece, in act I, where Wittipol exchanges his cloak for a quarter-of-an-hour's discourse with Mistress Fitzdotterel, and the ensuing set of responses, courtships and discoveries, are carried out with a sense of purpose which far outweighs, both in the dramatic emphasis placed on them and the space devoted to them, that which had been seen in earlier Jonson plays, even in the romance of Ovid and Julia in Poetaster.

Act II scene vi is a well-executed fragment of tragicomedy, where Mistress Fitzdotterel and Wittipol act out their love scene, in archetypal fashion, between two windows, 'as out of two contiguous buildings' (stage direction at II.vi.40). The explicit eroticism of Wittipol's advances, at l.71 the stage-direction reads 'He grows more familiar in his courtship plays with her paps, kisses her hands, etc.', the seriousness of his song (ll.94-114) and the violence of Fitzdotterel's intervention (II.vii), all go beyond even the treatment of Celia in

Volpone in the magnifico's ardent attentions, and Corvino's physical violence.

Yet, typically, the seriousness of the love scenes is never deflated in any way by the comic context of the whole. The audience is frequently presented with comic incidents, occurring around the romance, but never in the romance. One example of this is the comic ease with which Fitzdotterel's protestations are repeatedly silenced by Wittipol simply threatening to take back the cloak (I.vi.74, 110, 150-152, 195). Another example might be Pug's realisation, after he has informed Fitzdotterel of the lovers' interlude, that he has 'profited the cause of Hell/But little in the breaking off their loves' (II.vii.25-26). The romance is a centre around which other characters become fools (Lady Taile-bush, Lady Either-side and Fitzdotterel are all gulled by Wittipol's disguise as the Spanish Lady which becomes, in turn, a further extension of his courtship of Mistress Fitzdotterel). The protagonists of the romance remain serious and, finally with the aid of an over-neat transformation in Manly, they become honourable representatives of the moral standards supposedly upheld by the play.

There is, however, one function of these scenes which to some extent acts as an obstacle to the action acquiring the full status of a tragi-comic interlude. The obstacle comes in the form of the rhetorical posturing that takes place as a concomitant to Wittipol's courtship. The invocation of rhetoric comes first from Fitzdotterel when he

encourages Wittipol in his endeavour:-

Use all the tropes
And schemes, that prince Quintilian can afford you:
And much good do your rhetoric's heart.

(I.iv.100-102)

This notion is entirely in keeping with the nature of the exchange. In terms of the plot, Wittipol's approach to the Lady is part of a commercial transaction for which he and Fitzdotterel draw up a full verbal contract (repeated at I.vi.63-70). Equally, in terms of the dramatic direction of the whole play, Wittipol's 'covenant' with Fitzdotterel is a design, or an exercise to show up the gull's 'extremities' of Vice. The notion of a rhetorical exercise is further increased when Wittipol, in response to the Lady's silence, tells her:-

Let me take warrant, Lady, from your silence,
(Which ever is interpreted consent)
To make your answer for you: which shall be
To as good purpose, as I can imagine,
And what I think you'd speak.

(I.vi.144-148)

In so doing, Wittipol loosens the ties between discourse, speaker, and meaning. In his speaking of what he 'thinks' would be Mistress Fitzdotterel's part, and again in his role as the Spanish Lady, Wittipol imitates, within the dramatic world, one of the mechanisms with which it is created. Wittipol becomes, literally, a double for the male actor who is already playing Mistress Fitzdotterel's part.

Similarly when Mistress Fitzdotterel sends her message to Wittipol, through Pug, she does so in a way that loosens the straightforward links between the speaker and what is spoken. She sends Pug to tell Wittipol, in very precise

wording, to stop 'his acting to me,/ At the gentleman's chamber-window in Lincoln's Inn there/ That opens to my gallery' (II.ii.52-54). Here the meaning of the message is to be completely reversed; this in fact a very carefully phrased invitation, and not, as it appears, a prohibition. Later, when Wittipol carries out his remarkable discourse on the fashions of the Spanish court (in IV.iii and iv), he taunts and ridicules the fashionable affectations of the Ladies and Fitzdotterel, in a manner that they utterly fail to perceive. Fitzdotterel later declares that the Spanish Lady is the 'The top of woman! All her sex in abstract! I love her, to each syllable, falls from her.' (IV.iv.244-5). In this remark one sees again a concentration, by a gull, on the concrete material of discourse, 'each syllable' is a reminder of the gulls in the Every Man plays and their false obsessions with 'un-in-one-breath-utterable skills'.

Plutarchus and Guilt-head are, in this respect, closely linked to the central synchrony of ideas. Whereas Knoll finds the presence of the two characters totally irrelevant (5), it seems to me that in Guilt-head's desire for his son to become a gentleman, and in his consequent act of naming him Plutarchus, 'In hope he should be like him: And write the lives of our great men!' (III.ii.24-5), the money-lender repeats the familiar desire to achieve new status, or a change of identity, through an affected use of language.

Identity comes into question throughout the play. Initially it is seen as a troubled notion in Pug who is incapable of convincing the mortals of his true identity.

This problem remains suspended over the play throughout most of the action. As I have already suggested, Wittipol's disguise most obviously renders his identity uncertain to the dramatis personae except for Manly, Mistress Fitzdotterel, and of course, for the audience, who all eventually recognise him. Even Merecraft, who hires him to act the part, is ignorant of Wittipol's relations with Mistress Fitzdotterel, and therefore remains unaware, until he is himself cozened (IV.vii.32), of Wittipol's ulterior motives. When Wittipol finally discovers himself to Fitzdotterel, the gull reacts in horror: 'Am I the thing I feared?' (IV.vii.61). Wittipol takes this to mean, superficially, 'Am I a cuckold?' and assures him that he is not, but in conjunction with Merecraft's persuasive attempts to transform the gentleman into the Duke of Drowned-Land, it is apparent that (recalling Cokes' loss) Fitzdotterel's whole identity is now in question. Act four ends with Fitzdotterel trying to reassure himself that 'I will be what I am, Fabian Fitzdotterel, Though all the world say nay to't' (IV.vii.93-4). Interestingly, although this is not developed very far in the play, Merecraft is described in a similar light. Lady Taile-bush's usher, Ambler, describes him as: 'An honest gentleman, but he's never at leisure/ To be himself: He has such tides of business' (V.i.52-53). To be oneself seems to be an elusive condition for crooks, gulls and gallants alike.

The 'tides of business' recall the tides of Folly that overwhelm Morose in Epiccoene. As in that play and in

Bartholomew Fair, a lack of an adequately defined identity results in the gull-figures being driven almost to madness. While Fitzdotterel feels himself 'run out o'my wits' (IV.vii.92) by the events, Pug is forced to use a discourse of madness to evade the accusations of Ambler who has recognised the thief of his clothes. Pug's strategy seems, for the interim, to work and Ambler ends up uncertain of what is taking place between them in discourse:-

Does he mock me trow, from purpose?
Or do not I speak to him what I mean?

(V.iii.36-7)

Eventually, of course, Pug is physically arrested and carted off to Newgate, from where he is relieved, if humiliated, in being returned to Hell by an angry Satan and a chuckling Iniquity who departs with the final reversal of the morality genre:-

The Divell was wont to carry away the evil;
But, now, the evil out-carries the Devil.

(V.vi.76-7)

The play rings one more change on the morality-play conventions as Fitzdotterel finally feigns possession by the devil to escape the charges being brought against him, until the news comes that the Devil has been at Newgate (V.viii.125), at which point he confesses all and quickly despatches Everill and Merecraft to the punishments that they deserve.

In all of these faltering identities, changes and disguises, attention is frequently drawn to the interconnection between the dramatic world and the real

world. This effect occurs in Fitzdotterel's repeated desire to go to see the play called 'The Devil is An Ass' (I.vi.21. III.v.38). If there is a simple message in this, it may be interpreted as the drama pointing out to the audience the extent to which they are already involved in 'dramatic' action akin to the play they are watching. Yet, the relations between the real and the dramatic worlds are not so easily distinguishable.

The play seems to suggest that as long as you know what is a play and what is reality (a distinction which Fitzdotterel in particular is shown to be incapable of making), then you will not have moral problems. Yet, in presenting the vice of 1616 as more evil than that of 1560 (as opposed merely to being subject to a different mode of presentation), the play seems to come across the same problem itself. For the purposes of moral evaluation, the emblematic drama of the morality plays and the more mimetic drama of citizen and tragi-comedy appear to be approached in the same light. This is, of course, a problem posed by the Gossips in The Staple of News and I shall discuss it again later in this chapter. Jonson's comic skills finally seem to have produced a confusion of the supposedly 'mimetic' scenes of deceit, disguise, and cozening with the self-conscious artifice of the whole. The more intellectualised the text's assertions become the less easily resolved they are.

Fitzdotterel is involved in the fictions that have been constructed for him, by Wittipol and Merecraft, to an

extraordinary degree. In IV.viii, it is revealed that he has a 'dependence', or case, in Merecraft's fictitious office of Dependences against Wittipol and is trying to sue him for the advances he made to his wife, and at the same time, Fitzdotterel has fallen totally in love with the disguised Wittipol and wants to make over his entire state to the fictitious Spanish Lady. Fitzdotterel is, most pointedly, a gull because he cannot recognise the speaking of dramatic, artificial discourse, and its enactment, when it confronts him. The play as a whole presents a confused, familiarly Jonsonian, and still unresolved, set of ideas in its approach to the relations, on the one hand, between different genres of drama, and, on the other, between the theatrical experience as a whole, and the real world.

In its satire on the devil-plays, and its concomitant use of highly contemporary material such as the satire on monopolies, projectors, courtly fashion-mongers, and devil-raising, The Devil Is An Ass has much in common with The Staple of News (1626). The office of dependences which Merecraft talks about, but which is never seen, closely anticipates the news office shown in the subsequent play, while in the use of romance, or tragi-comic, elements this play anticipates aspects of The New Inn. Wittipol's courtship of Mistress Fitzdotterel, in its ambivalent rhetorical stylisations, seems to anticipate the discourse in The New Inn's Court of Love which I shall discuss in the next chapter. It will be useful next, however, to discuss The Staple of News.

There are several outstanding 'peculiarities' in the make-up of Jonson's next play The Staple of News (1626). These peculiarities have frequently been made use of to condemn the play as an 'artistic failure', signifying the end of Jonson's successful dramatic career. This conclusion is unsatisfactory primarily because it assumes that The Staple, in particular, and the late plays more generally, must in some way still be working in a similar vein to the acclaimed 'mid-period' plays. I shall take a close look at some of the 'aberrations' in The Staple of News and examine the ways in which these function to suggest that an innovative and experimental aspect may have entered Jonson's later dramaturgy. It is an aspect which, I think, finally shows this play to be a highly significant text and one that is intent on the analysis and judgement of its own historical position, both artistically and culturally, in a manner that goes beyond what Jonson has earlier achieved. It is this, intensely self-aware, contemporary quality of the text which has previously left critics strangely unimpressed.

The first odd characteristic of The Staple that I shall look at is its use of previously published material, actual speeches, as well as ideas, from other texts. His audience may have been used to Jonson incorporating other writers' work in his own, but to plagiarise himself seems odd. It is well-known that the idea of a monopolistic news office, which disseminates ludicrous news, and much of the dialogue between Peniboy Junior and the news men, Cymbal and Fitton,

in act I of the play, come from Jonson's masque: News From The New World Discovered In the Moon, presented six years previously, at court, before King James. Several speeches from the masque Neptune's Triumph also re-appear in The Staple of News.

Since Dryden's first criticisms, this self-plagiarism has been cited as indicative of the great man in his 'dotage' (6). It is not my interest to prolong biographical conjecture on this matter, but I shall suggest reasons for the presence of these re-appearances and I propose some positive functions which reveal The Staple of News to be a text which invokes, and is engaged in, a crucial argument with its time, centred on the very nature and function of the dramatic form, both in the theatre and in the larger field of literary and non-literary writings.

I will begin with a long speech by Lickfinger the play's eccentric cook. The speech, with only minor differences, originally appeared in the masque, Neptune's Triumph performed at Court on Twelfth Night 1624. In the masque, the cook confronts the poet by interrupting him, before he can declaim the prologue and, after some disputation between them, the cook declares:-

Seduced poet, I do say to thee
A boiler range, and dresser were the fountains
Of all the knowledge in the universe.
And they are the kitchens, where the master cook -
(Thou dost not know the man, nor canst thou know him,
Till thou has served some years in that deep school
That's both the nurse and mother of the arts,
And hear'st him read, interpret, and demonstrate!)
A master cook! Why, he's the man o'men,
For a professor! He designs, he draws,
He paints, he carves, he builds, he fortifies,

Makes citadels of curious fowl and fish,
.....
And teacheth all the tactics, at one dinner:
What ranks, what files, to put his dishes in;
The whole art military. Then he knows
The influence of the stars upon his meats,
And all their seasons, tempers, qualities,
And so to fit relishes and sauces,
He has nature in a pot 'bove all the chemists,
Or airy brethren of the Rosy Cross.
He is an architect, an engineer,
A soldier, a physician, a philosopher,
A general mathematician.

(IV.ii.11-37) (Neptune's Triumph, 11.70-112)

In neither the masque nor the play, does this marvellous speech have any great integral link with its context in the plot but, in its opposition to the assertions of a 'poet', it is clearly an important declaration. Although it comes quite late in the play, the speech presents the idea of distant authorial power together with a strong sense of self-mockery. The authority, ironically depicted, here stands at the back of the play as a persistent indicator of the power of its author, but also perhaps of the uncertainty his role; Lickfinger's 'man o' men' may perhaps be read as an ironic self-portrait of the author. The 'master cook' described here is certainly a glorious parody of the Renaissance Magus, capable of all power and knowledge, and of a protean identity. Yet, the identity of Lickfinger, and his function in the play, have been handled only with difficulty by critics, or have been ignored altogether, since Lickfinger apparently has no crucial role in the plots of the news-office, or of the wooing of the Lady Pecunia, even though he makes several lengthy speeches and is frequently on stage. His only major contribution to the

plot is his fortuitous mistake, in giving Peniboy Canter's 'deed' to a messenger from Peniboy Junior and not, as he supposed, to Picklock's porter (in V.iii.).

The above speech is one of the longest passages to be assimilated, unchanged from another text, into the present one. Why should such a passage re-emerge in this text, after its initial appearance in Neptune's Triumph two years beforehand, and why should it be given to such an awkward character? The remainder of this chapter is an answer to the question, but the close reasons, I believe, lie in the effusive connections between Lickfinger, the Jeerers, the Gossips, and the anarchic barrages of language meted out by them.

Lickfinger's speech suggests an opposite view of the social and creative hierarchy to the one proposed by the coherent progress of the text. It is not simply in the use of inverted imagery which substitutes conventionally lowly, kitchen items for higher forms of life (1.11.), but Lickfinger puts forward a view which invokes an entire system of knowledge, an elusive network, which can only be learnt 'in that deep school'. He brings to bear upon the play an eccentric absent authority, a master, whose power, although subject to apparent ridicule, is implicitly beyond the range of the text's satire. Together with Lickfinger's other long speeches, this speech forms part of a rhetoric, which is opposed to the main stichomythic forms of the body of the play's dialogue. Whereas the dominant language pattern of the text is broken up between speakers and

interrupted, this esoteric discourse is lengthy, (only Canter's speeches are longer), diffuse (it refers to nearly every form of 'science') and seems to stand oddly apart from the moral concerns of the play's action.

The text contains, in this, its own opposition. Where the apparent centres of activity are the allegorised, and the 'realistic', goes-on around Pecunia and the News office, Lickfinger's speech also identifies and constitutes the presence of a less easily defined, inaccessible means of study, understanding, and communication. The comic notion that a cook should possess the key to understanding the universe is, of course, also a satire on the Hermetic tradition (7), hence the references to 'the chemists... (and the) ... airy brethren of the Rosy Cross.' At the same time, however, it suggests that the forms and movements of the play may themselves actually contain something of the complexity of those more obscure communicative acts just as Subtle's discourse seemed to have been used to hint at something similar earlier.

Lickfinger's speech may openly satirise the occult, but within the elaborate condemnation there perhaps exists a hidden obeisance. Lickfinger himself is not rejected along with the jeerers at the conclusion of the play, and his bizarre utterances cannot be so easily rejected either.

His old-new speech inversely proposes an absent mode of understanding: 'Thou dost not know the man, nor can'st thou know him'. The suggestion is that there is a definite means of access to a form of knowledge, but that it and its mode

of communication are elusive, the nature of the 'knowledge' sought is ambiguously framed. It may be construed as external to the text, as referring to the broadest outlines of the 'knowledge in the universe' or again, reflexively, readers may see this as an allusion directly to their own work in the theatre, or in study, to understand the way that this 'universe' of discourse is in operation. There is, Lickfinger makes clear, a master 'who can 'read, interpret, and demonstrate!' and in this, the spectators, and readers, may well recognise their own activities. Lickfinger's speech anticipates the very action of the play, it anticipates it by two years and reinforces itself, as it recurs midway through the play, as something that must have seemed perplexingly obscure and yet familiar, at least, to its court, if not to the general audience. Its germ is already written, and published, it is already known. In this overt use of earlier material, the suggestion of the very concerns of the play with time, and with historical processes, is raised. The nature of this new form of assimilation, of a passage from a Jonsonian text into the present, is significant both in its departure from Jonson's earlier use of other texts and in what it proposes.

The text is so full of meanings, interpretations and demonstrations, given by various characters, that it is difficult to disentangle them all. There are, for example, Madrigal's recitations, his interpretation and development of his self (his name), (at IV.ii.95-118), or Canter demonstrating that the jeerers are the real Canters (at

IV.iv.37-60), or Piedmantle's canting reading of Lady Pecunia's pedigree:-

She bears (an't please you) argent, three leeks vert
In canton or, and tasseled of the first.

(IV.iv.25-26)

In response to this Peniboy Canter asks Junior if he understands it which, naturally, he does not, nor does the majority of the averagely informed audience:-

But it sounds well, and the whole thing
Is rarely painted.

(IV.iv.28-29.)

The emphasis is clearly on the superficial qualities of sound and appearance, the content and the form go by the board in the eyes and ears of the Canters and jeerers. Audience and characters alike are caught up, and immediately involved, in the very acts of producing the words and images in a celebration of non-communication which, since Bartholomew Fair, Jonson's texts use more freely, and which reproduces very powerfully its own significance once the audience can detach itself sufficiently to recognise their own folly. Levin comments on this; he says that the canting,

... actually uses language against itself, as it were, undermining its very existence as a medium of communication. (8)

To this extent, one can see the modus operandi of the text. The Gossips, jeerers, the purveyors of news are all enmeshed within themselves and in their different uses of language in a way that precludes immediate or unproblematic apprehension of the drama. Although it invites the audience's

involvements very quickly, everything awaits the final revelations and condemnation of the last act. Beaurline comments on an aspect of this as it occurs in the prologue:-

Worlds of game and fact confuse a mock apology to the audience, and they throw us off our bearings. (9)

This is an observation which I think has validity for much of the rest of the play. Being 'off our bearings' is a repeated function of the jeerers' harangues against Peniboy Senior and, undoubtedly, such an effect would have also been strong when the false 'News', related in act III, could seem even more absurdly close to the possible as the events referred to were fresh in the audience's mind. I shall, later on, discuss the nature of 'Newes' and its status in the period - it continually enters into the argument - but first it is important to turn to the very beginning of the play and to examine another 'peculiarity'. This is the presence of the Gossips in a prologue and frame that is extended into a form of Intermean enacted between each act.

The OED informs us of two distinct meanings of the word Gossip. The first of these is the less familiar to us, and yet is perhaps more relevant initially, to the contemporary location of the play. It is first apparent when Mirth justifies the ladies' desire to sit on the stage; the Prologue challenges her, asks her what the Nobles will think of the Gossips sitting there:-

Why, what should they think? But that they had mothers, as we had, and those mothers had gossips, if their children were christen'd, as we are, and such as had a longing to see plays and sit upon them, as we do, and arraign both them and their poets?

(Induction, 11.16-19)

A gossip in this light is obviously, 'one who has contracted spiritual affinity with another by acting as a sponsor at a baptism' (OED.1.), also 'A familiar acquaintance, friend... especially applied to a woman's female friends invited to be present at a birth.' (OED. 2b.). In this sense, the gossips are presented as participating in a ritual social tradition at the birth of the play. This recalls Envie's Prologue to Poetaster where (11.14-15) she claims herself as a witness to the birth of that play, in its writing stages. Once the action begins, it becomes clear, the gossips are also witnesses to the birth of a gentleman, as Peniboy Junior calls on the audience:-

To see me at best advantage, and augment
My form as I come forth.

(I.i.7-8.)

The formulation, to 'come forth', is an important participant in the birth discourse. It reinforces the sense of an emergence of the fiction into the real world, the projection of the drama into the theatrical world. It humanises the act of being an audience, making the audience take part in a familiar, non-dramatic activity, the christening of an infant. The audience is put in an adult position, supervising the growth of a child through the institutionalising function of the gossips. They ritually designate a position for the object of their attention, they give it a role and purpose in the world as it appears. These conditions of emergence and function are drawn attention to, the play stakes out its claim to an individual

identity by applying, to itself, the analogy of an infant whose growth and development the audience must watch.

There are gossips in other plays of the period. In Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (1613), gossips argue over who is to stand closest to the baby (at II.iii.58ff.), but there the notion of 'gossiping' (II.i.169) is merely used to mean a christening, here their functions acquire much more complex proportions. In the gossips, the responsive audience itself is allegorised in its different qualities of Mirth, Tattle, Censure and Expectation. Their ritual activity also has the effect of effacing the body that is giving birth. The social context is not referred to and the author himself becomes fictional; interestingly he is allowed to enter the text, transformed into a body in labour:-

Yonder he is within... rolling himself up and down like
a tun, i'the midst of 'em, and spurges; never did
vessel of wort or wine work so!

(Induction, II.55-57)

The poet is fictionalised, becomes in fact 'the most miserable emblem of patience' (Induction, l.66). As McKenzie comments: the 'audience has to make its own play' (10).

Another meaning of the word 'Gossip', however, indicates something more at work. A gossip is also, of course, 'A person mostly a woman, of idle and trifling character, especially one who delights in idle talk; a newsmonger, a tattler.' (OED. 3). The very first thing that Gossip Mirth says is:-

Come, gossip, be not ashamed. The play is The Staple
Of News, and you are the mistress and lady of tattle,

let's ha' your opinion of it.

(Induction, 11.2-4)

The ambiguity around the word is immediately made of use to place the women in more than just the allegorical roles designated by the sense of their names. They are God-parents, both to the birth of the play and to its protagonist (as he becomes a gentleman), and they are newsmongers forming a judicious, if foolish, disseminating frame around the action, even before it has begun. In similar fashion to the marginal notes, which I discuss further on, the gossips point out for the audience, not specific judgements but the need to judge, interpret, and unravel, throughout the action.

Immediately with this, however, comes a problem for the audience. There is the duality of the gossips' function in their being called allegorical names, but there is also the familiar teasing out of the fiction into reality because the gossips do represent an audience, their names do represent audience reactions, and so real spectators are placed simultaneously on the stage and not on it. This produces an inevitable wariness for the spectator, a difficulty of access to the action. Fricker writes:-

The audience thus admitted to the stage, is allegorized and at the same time made the target of satire. The effect is exactly the opposite of what might be deduced at first glance: the spectators find themselves barred from the play by a clearly defined line. The mingling of the actors and the audience... cannot take place.
(11)

A literal 'mingling', physically of actors and audience, such as that which concludes the masques, does not take place nor does it in any of Jonson's comic drama. There

is no movement of dance or revelry that concludes these forms. Yet, a more elusive entanglement does occur. Fricker's 'clearly defined line' is, I suggest, only defined by its ability to transform its boundaries from fact into fiction and back again as cultural, and dramatic practice are drawn together and interwoven.

The role of the gossips is brought into close proximity with the roles of characters inside the action too. In I.v. Fitton and Cymbal make use of the discourse of birth to describe the emergence of the news-office. There is prolonged play on natal imagery which, finally, Peniboy Junior concludes when he says to Cymbal:-

you must be a midwife, sir!
Or else the son of a midwife (pray you pardon me)
Have helped it forth so happily!

(I.v.77-79)

The parallel is again apparent, in the repetition of the phrase 'help'd... forth', during the gossips witnessing the bringing forth of the play, the bringing forth of the new gentleman Peniboy Junior into the play's society, and finally the helping forth of the news office by Cymbal and Fitton. The OED confirms such dual use of 'to come forth' as 'to come into existence, be born' (OED.1.b) and 'to become published' (OED.1.c). We recall the painter and the poet at the beginning of Timon of Athens (1608), the painter asks:-

When comes your Booke forth?

(I.i.26)

Thus, the event, the 'coming forth', and the dissemination

of the fact of the event, both become the concern and activity of the play. A circularity is produced between the clear fiction of the play, fictive spectators, the fact of the audience, and the fictional facts that begin to pour in and out of the news office. Lickfinger's requirement that we hear the master, 'read, interpret, and demonstrate!', is being borne out.

The function of the gossips, extended beyond the mere gateposts at the beginning of the domain of the text into a dynamic part of its structure, does not make Lickfinger's prescriptions any easier for the audience. As soon as the first act is over, the text continues with the gossips in *The First Intermean After The First Act*. Mirth instantly interjects:-

How now, gossip! How does the play please you?

(I.Intermean, 1.1)

By butting in just as the act closes the gossips increase the resilience of the fiction. The intermeans are as important a part of the dramaturgy as the internal action. The gossips force a consideration, a critical appraisal of the play so far, and it must be a particularly rigorous appraisal on the part of audience and critics. As McKenzie comments, many of Mirth's remarks are likely to convert 'criticism to paraphrase' (12). They pre-empt the audience's reaction and increase the height of the fiction, in the sense that when the audience stops looking at the set-piece, conventionally presented, a new fiction that previously seemed closed, completed, is now reasserted in a

new frame and a new unconventional location. The framing of the event by the fiction is undercut - as I suggested occurs in Bartholomew Fair - it is qualified, superseded by a further framed event (the comments of the gossips), adding difficulty to the acts of reading, interpreting or demonstrating.

More conventionally, movement in and out of the action occurs at the arrival of Peniboy Canter. His entry is marked by a change in dramatic mode from the citizen comedy of Peniboy Junior, and the various attendants to his needs, which occupies the first two scenes. Canter enters 'in a patched and ragged cloak, to them singing'. His entry constitutes a self-contained emblem of noble poverty. His song describes his presence there as being, to 'see what riches thou bearest in thy breaches,' (I.iii.3), but this change is more than a simple emblem; it signals some other difference attached to the character's status. This is confirmed and emphasised when, as Peniboy Junior pays his debts to his various tradesmen without checking their accounts, Canter makes a telling aside to the audience:-

See!
The difference 'twixt the covetous and the prodigal!
'The covetous man never has money and
The prodigal will have none shortly'!

(I.iii.38-41)

The opposition between the covetous and the prodigal is precisely the one which will be shown, contrasted in the action that follows, between Peniboy Senior and Junior. Thus, in his visual appearance, in the ragged cloak, in his

changing of the dramatic mode by the asides and by song, Peniboy Canter's discourse signals 'something other' about his status. It displays to those familiar with the conventions that he is something different from that which is suggested by his appearance. He is on the side of the writing; he displays and constitutes knowledge of the action. As Gossip Mirth eventually comes to see, Canter is 'akin to the poet' (IV, Intermean, 1.4). He still does not, however, possess that elusive 'knowledge' referred to by Lickfinger. That still remains unarticulated, unarticulable, invoked perhaps only in the formal shifts and transformations that accumulate within the structure of the drama. Peniboy Canter appears and changes the dramatic mode; it is, however, the ability of the design to bring about the change, its ability to adapt, to be flexible, which begins to allow a formulation of the ideas working behind the drama as what is, and what is not possible emerges. As in Bartholomew Fair, or indeed in Measure For Measure, the conventional figure, representing a form of prioritised justice in disguise, eventually emerges to take control of a kind, but it is the manner in which that emergence takes place, the relationship between its appearance and the other parts of the play, which reveal, albeit with more problems, the unspoken formulations, rifts and contradictions behind the play. So, as in Epicoene, the twist is already there, signalled from the very beginning, and at least part of the pleasure for the audience is to see it unfurl and to see where the self-discovery finally

erupts, and to see what it displaces when it does occur.

Peniboy Canter, throughout the text, wields a very blunt moral pointing stick. Partridge finds this overbearing, he criticises the play for its 'obtrusive moralizing'; he writes:-

By means of the Canter who, as symbol of the liberal and wise man, is the chief raisonneur of the moral, Jonson keeps pressing a point which, in his best plays, was left to the listener's inference . (13)

Certainly this criticism is valid. The Canter's first words, about 'the covetous and the prodigal', form a clearly sententious moral imperative and are, in fact, translated from Seneca of De Remediis Fortuitorum (10.3). Yet, there are many other things going on in the play that must be explored before the Canter's moralising can be dismissed. What is, perhaps, of greater interest here is that in the line following Senior's moralising, Junior asks his elder what he was just saying, thus pulling him back into the mode from whence his aside had taken him; Peniboy Canter literally cannot repeat the words of the play's moral discourse. The text forces a recognition of the different spaces and domains within the dramaturgy. The son occupies a space which does not allow the other discourse of 'truth' to intervene. Peniboy Canter has to reply differently (as he does at 11.44-45). It should also be noted that all the modern textual directions, calling for an aside here, are Cunningham's Victorian institution. Although, on the level of stage-craft, they might simply be seen as a mere guide to the actor for the speaking of the lines, their position in the text without being called 'asides' produces a slight,

but important difference to the performance and to the reading of the play. Instead of actors speaking the lines to the audiences with a crude display of deceit, from behind a guarding hand, the speeches which are unattended by the other characters, not responded to and, in fictional terms 'unheard', must be understood not as spoken by a voice emerging into 'truth' out of 'fiction', but as part of the multidimensional weave of the action. In this way, the lines preserve the lack of illusion and the multiplicity of the piece, as opposed to being located outside of the carefully constructed artifice, in an aside, in a mistaken attempt to maintain a non-existent singularity of 'naturalistic' discourse.

It is not easy to imagine the way in which the audience would respond to Peniboy Canter. After his first appearance (in act I) a primary reaction is perhaps forestalled, when Tattle declares:-

I cannot abide that nasty fellow, the beggar; if he had been a courtbeggar in good clothes, a beggar in velvet, as they say, I could have endured him.

(I, Intermean, 118-10)

If naive elements in the audience have desired merely to reject the Canter, previously, this speech would make such a reaction less easy. The satire of the gossips' reaction demands a more considered response from the audience.

Champion observes:-

In the course of the action the spectator realizes that Junior's father is not dead. Disguised as poor attendant upon his newly rich son, Canter comments throughout the play as the choric observer. (14)

Although, in the end, Champion is right, it is important to

realise that the recognition of Canter's disguise does not in fact come from his Classical choric function, but from the effect of English morality conventions. The visual iconography of the ragged cloak, to which Tattle takes such pointed exception, and the discursive practice of the aside, are signals to be attended to by the audience. It is in breaking the dramatic artifice, cutting across the naturalistic frame (Fricker's 'clearly defined line'), in order to speak to the audience, that Peniboy Canter indicates his hidden power. The unmaking of the theatrical illusion is the necessary counterpart to the making of the drama in which he later reveals his disguise. Champion comments further on the Canter:-

The father in disguise as a beggar-companion to his son is a feature not found in any previous dramatic treatment of the prodigal son theme... the "dead" father is in itself a curious turn; in the Biblical parable it is the son who twice is referred to as dead by the Father: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again." (15)

Here, again, is testimony to the innovative directions of The Staple. It is interesting to compare this to a Jewish notion of death. When the subject steps beyond the bounds of religious duties, outside of what is acceptable to the faith, he is regarded as if he were dead; very often the relatives of the subject will actually go into mourning: hence, perhaps, the biblical perception of the Prodigal son as dead by his father. Similarly, but inversely in the drama, by taking on a disguise, the father moves outside what is acceptable to the naturalistic terms of the action. His presence participating in naturalistic discourse,

therefore, can only be accounted for by being called 'dead', even though the play shows more than this dimension of the 'real' to the audience. The point is significantly emphasised when Peniboy Senior says finally:-

None but a brother, and sent from the dead,
As you are to me, could have altered me.

(V.vi.32-33)

The 'alteration' that Peniboy Senior finally undergoes is a necessary, reductive culmination of the persistent multiplicity of dramatic modes in the play.

Beneath the heavily allegorised struggle between Prodigality and Covetousness (Peniboys Junior and Senior), lies the dramatic configuration which I discussed in relation to Epicoene. It is the rivalry between a nephew and his uncle for the rightful possession of an inheritance. Here, the inheritance comes personified in the form of the Lady Pecunia. The struggle is fully enacted (in IV.iii) when Senior confronts Pecunia and her ladies in the tavern, where they are revelling with the jeerers and Peniboy Junior, and demands that they return with him. The Lady refuses and, as he abuses them all, he is kicked out of the tavern. Only after this seeming triumph is Junior mortified by the judgmental appearance of his father. The similarity of the formal configurations in The Staple and Epicoene comes out clearly in the repetition of a phrase which almost becomes the signature for the theme. It is first used in Volpone; in trying to set up his trap to ensnare Corbaccio, Mosca tells Bonario:-

This very hour your father is in purpose
To disinherit you...
And thrust you forth
As a mere stranger to his blood.

(III.ii.43-45)

Similarly, Morose swears to dishiherit Dauphine; he declares:-

I will... thrust him out of my blood like a stranger.

(II.v.88-9)

In The Staple, again as part of a subtle sub-plot, Picklock tells Peniboy Junior:-

My tender scrupulous breast
Will not permit me see the heir defrauded,
And like an alien, thrust out of the blood.

(V.i.81-83)

It is also worth noting that, in Massinger's A New Way To Pay Old Debts, Overreach tells the nephew Wellbourne:-

Thou art no blood of mine. Avaunt thou beggar!

(I.iii.40)

To be 'thrust out' is the direct opposite, then, of being 'brought forth'. Furthermore, the theme of disinheritance is constructed by a clearly identifiable discourse, and seems, as a result, to operate on an almost archetypal level. In The Staple this theme, and its constructing dramatic configuration, are throughout placed within reach of an easy formal resolution because of the disguised presence of the displaced Father. When Picklock makes his promise to Junior, the Founder has already become the Father and the configuration is in fact dissolved, but in this speech its basis is made clear retrospectively to the audience. As soon as the disinheritance theme is dissolved, Peniboy

Senior's position in the drama is negated, he is made redundant. His ensuing madness may be seen, like Morose's, as a necessary piece of dramatic isolation and alienation. Just as Peniboy Canter had to replace a 'dead' Father, now Senior must be 'mad' and, again, the similar pattern is recognised at the end of A New Way To Pay Old Debts. It is a displacement that only the all-authoritative Father can do anything to 'alter' (and theological connotations of the Father here are strong).

The added business of Picklock's trickery works further changes on the formulations. By taking Peniboy Junior into a rivalry with his father, he seeks to construct a dramatic configuration where the uncle is replaced by the father disinheriting his son. The movement is a formal indication of the falsity of Picklock's position. It is earlier suggested in his claim to Fitton:-

.. I am Vertumnus;
On every change or chance, upon occasion,
A true chameleon, I can colour for't.
I move upon my axle, like a turnpike,
Fit my face to the parties, and become
Straight one them.

(III.i.34-39)

The protean vice-figure, familiar in other Jonson comedies, appears again, this time under the invocation of Vertumnus, the Roman god of change. In act V, Picklock attempts to produce a situation where a totally unconventional configuration (father disinherits son) would become dominant. He is, however, moving beyond what is possible in terms of dramatic convention and, in this sense, reveals the

extent to which the drama remains subject to the discourses of the period. In terms of the allegory, Picklock may represent the final, semi-biblical temptation of the Prodigal by the Vice, but in terms of dramatic convention, the formulation he seeks to prescribe is simply not viable. The theological, spiritual connotations of Peniboy Junior's and his Father's relations, at this point, are so closely linked to a kind of holy (economic) trinity in which Pecunia may suggest the spirit, that, even though it is threatened, no further variation or collapse is conceivable, within the Christian conventional discourses of the play.

Rivalry, between conventional formulations, is a possibility and a fruitful direction for the drama to take, as I have shown, but Picklock's demonic efforts to shift direction are unequivocally to be defeated. His presentation as a Vice is, however, skilfully executed. For example, when he approaches Peniboy Junior to set him against his Father, Picklock seeks to declare his own integrity. He assures the prodigal that:-

(His) thoughts do dwell
All in a lane, or line indeed.

(V.i.74-75)

The significant contradiction is enacted in the discourse here. He declares that he thinks only along one 'lane', but immediately the word appears it generates another, along one 'line'. His discourse indicates his duplicity; the falsity of Picklock's words emerge in the act of his saying them. Peniboy Junior will not eventually be 'thrust out of his blood', but it is not Picklock who will 'save' him.

Picklock nevertheless proceeds with his insinuations:-

The laws forbid that I should give consent
To such a civil slaughter of a son.

(V.i.84-85)

Despite his pious protestations it is, of course, Picklock who is attempting here to perpetuate a dramatic illegality, a falling out from the literary laws of convention which placed Uncle and Nephew in opposition, but not Father and son.

Tom Barber, who prefaces the arrival of the 'Vice' with an account of the collapse of the news-office, also implies an awareness of law and dramatic conventions. The last function of the news-office is to impel the dramatic action into a new situation. Tom tells Peniboy Junior of the office:-

The last hum that it made was that your father
And Picklock are fallen out, the man o'law.

(V.i.51-20)

The last clause of this phrase is typical in the way that is tacked ambiguously onto the end of the sentence: 'the man o'law'. It suggests that the audience should give it more emphasis, strangely so, since within the speech it enacts a cumulative disorder that might represent a 'natural' speech pattern. The phrase should describe Picklock, but in this position and in the wider discursive context, this sense seems free to drift a little, allowing the entry of another sense of the men having fallen out of the law. Whilst enacting a speech pattern, Tom Barber's (like Picklock's) language also displays the discursive field in which it is

constructed: a domain in which presence and absence, emergence and disappearance are constantly inter-acting. It will be recalled that Tom too is a man out of the law now, as bankrupt as the Staple and, like Peniboy Junior himself, the legality of his position is something from which he has 'fall'n out'. Significantly, Tom follows this speech by hiding himself away, out of sight but in ear-shot, behind the arras, to come back into the action again later, in order to condemn Picklock out of his own mouth as the legal witness. Similarly, the very name Picklock is suggestive of the attempt he makes to falsify his entry into relations with the play's central characters and with its fictive modes.

The 'ins and outs' of the play are extraordinarily elaborately interwoven. Attention is drawn to the divisions and the segregations of the fictive domains. Limits are imposed on the discourse of the gossips, and of the Prodigal, but at the same time transgressions, and a degree of overlapping are permitted, which convolute the text's signifying practices, challenging the subject's position and the audience's ability to comprehend it all. For example, Peniboy Junior is delighted to find that his own 'coming forth', as a gentleman, is one of the first items in the news:-

Nat: There is a brave young heir
Is come of age this morning, Master Peniboy.

Pb.Jnr: That's I.

(Peniboy rejoiceth
that he is in)

(I.v.84-85)

All the previous talk of the truth or falsehood of the 'news' (11.30-45), however, renders the information ironically less reliable. One area of the action then, casts doubt on another. The event is focused through different discourses and receives different values. The intersubjective responses of the audience are fully tested for, indeed, with the revelation of the Canter as the Father, Peniboy is suddenly no longer 'of age', no longer the heir to be celebrated.

The play seems to be exploring through different forms, and modes of representation, the concept of the drama of events. Through parallelism, analogy and antithesis, the single event of the boy's coming of age, which thus occupies almost the entire play, is magnified, doubted, echoed, and mocked, withdrawn and only finally permitted. The drama of events is a birth of a child, and of a man, and it is also the first appearance of a play, this play. The position of Peniboy Junior is presented, not as constructed out of the single event, his 'coming of age', but as the nexus of differing perceptions. The audience cannot simply go along with his enthusiasm as he senses:-

Since I came of mature age,
... a certain itch
In my right eye, this corner here, do you see?
To do some work, and worthy of a chronicle.

(I.vi.90-93)

The desire he expresses, to do something historical, is superseded by the chronicling functions of the fiction and its ability to differ and to qualify. In a return to the

analogy offered by the gossips, it can be seen that the process of events which the audience watches, the play, cannot be understood as singular or unified in the manner it apparently desires. The spectators are led to understand the events in several different contexts which each produce their own readings and interpretations. Junior is not simply the prodigal of the morality plays, he is also the subject of news and, as we see, he repeatedly becomes the subject of other characters' plans. He must join the rest of the world in wooing Pecunia, and he must establish a rivalry with his father; so, strangely, the protagonist's identity is caught between, among others, that of the Everyman archetype, the morality model of Prodigality, the partner in the Pecunia relations, and the 'realistic' news item. None of these identities becomes dominant, each maintains its difference from the other, until the very last moments of the play. Then, finally, the contradiction emerges within the structure of the play, between its own designation of itself as unique, individual, and the determining plurality of its forms.

The discontinuity of the play is most apparent in the difficulty critics have found in drawing together the two main actions; the building up of the news-office and the wooing of Pecunia. Herford and Simpson compare the 'allegory' to the 'more matter of fact business' and they conclude:-

No art could make the mixture of elements so discrepant altogether acceptable. (16)

Partridge, more generously, is prepared to find some kind of

bridge, and concedes:-

The Staple plot and the Pecunia-Peniboy plot are joined somewhat loosely by Pecunia herself, whose coming to the Staple office will make it immortal. The power of money to immortalize a news office or deify an heir gives a certain unity to a play which is otherwise loosely ordered. (17)

The highly contemporary nature of the news-office, in comparison to the more timeless settings of Bartholomew Fair or an absent merchant's house, have also been seen as reason for the 'artistic failure' of the play. Dessen writes:-

The contrast between the titular centre of this play and more effective dramatic centres (Lovewit's house, the Fair) suggests the limitation of Jonson's critique of nascent journalism as a container for his satiric thrusts. (18)

Unsatisfactory though the contrast may be, I shall take a closer look at what replaces the 'more effective dramatic centres'. It seems to me that the modern need to find an overall thematic and narrative unity has, perhaps, obscured the possibility of this text working successfully and deliberately in several different modes, which enable it to move reflexively along the lines of its own dramatic contradictions.

I shall take a look at another oddity of the text of The Staple of News, a typographical one. I refer to the large number of marginal notes, in the play, commenting on the action.

The brilliant passage (in III, ii), for example, where details of recent news are requested by various visitors to the office, is highly annotated. There has been some discussion as to whether these notes are authentic (19), but

most critics now ignore the odd suggestion that these are the printer's addition and accept them, more or less, as a 'peculiarity' of the authentic text. In the most recent edition of the play, Kifer observes:-

In any event it is at least as difficult to explain why the printer should have added them as it is to explain why Jonson himself wrote them. (20)

This seems to me, however, a possibly inattentive argument. If one turns to the early newspapers, satirised here, one discovers the frequent use of the same form of typography and perhaps a reason for the marginalia. Many of the early news-pamphlets, or 'corrantos', adopt this kind of annotation in similar typographical forms which presage the modern convention of headlines. It was a habit which had a good deal in common with the synoptic titles so familiar to readers of the literature of the period. Jonson's text, it seems to me, may be making the same typographical gesture by way of formal reference to the corrantos.

In this transference, it seems that there are also some important questions being asked of the contemporary audience which become apparent once the connection is made; how is this modern, up-to-date, play different from a news pamphlet? After all, both give an account of the times, both mix a fair amount of fact and fiction (21), and both aim to inform, to illuminate, to make the readership, the spectators, 'understanders', and so 'What will the new news-pamphlets do that this kind of dramatic performance-text can not do?' and perhaps also, 'What is and what is not news?'. Each of these questions seems to become crucial to the late

period of Jonson's writing.

It is recalled that there were repeated edicts, issued by the government, banning the production of news-pamphlets, and there was also, for related reasons, considerable Puritan pressure to have the theatres closed. I am concerned to explore, therefore, the significance of the dramatic posing of this kind of question, rather than necessarily finding specific answers which is provided by the history of both bodies of writing. These are not questions which can be clearly identified as coming directly from an authorial concern. Although Jonson must have been interested in defending the theatre, I suspect that they are more implicit than explicit in the nature and targets of his work here. Overtly perhaps the drama is simply asserted as a superior form to that of the news-pamphlets.

The profusion of marginal notes almost produces a subtext for the reader, apparently mapping out the essential actions of the play, but also eccentrically noting odd moves or gestures, for example (at II.v.25) is found the note reading 'Young Peniboy is angry', or (at IV.ii.58) one which reads 'They all begin the encomium of Pecunia'. This kind of note does not add information, it is quite evident from the action what is going on. Perhaps, therefore, the notes also display some self-conscious anxiety about the creative acts which they annotate. The marginalia construct a quasi-novelistic form that also has a disturbing effect on the action. For Jonson's text here, may also be parodying the notational conventions of academic and scholastic texts

(with which he was, of course, very familiar and which had already been subject to different forms of parody in earlier Jonsonian texts). In their duplication of information the notes could also serve to draw attention to the faulty authority of the discourses of newspapers and academic papers (22). This peculiarity (which The Staple of News shares with The Devil Is An Ass; both plays were printed at the same time) cannot be viewed as a 'melancholy sign of Jonson's failing power' (23), on the contrary, it is a specific and, for the times, a unique parody of typographical devices which indicates an alert sense of humour, and suggests that there is something forward-looking and innovative at work in the play. It is ironic that such activity is discernible, after all, in a text condemned as a failure for its archaic allusions, for example Dessen concludes:-

Perhaps inevitably, the Jonsonian play which on the surface is most like the morality turns out to be the least successful of his attempts at moral comedy. (24)

Yet perhaps the 'peculiar' nature of the play is an indication that it is not merely another attempt at 'moral comedy' (which is, after all Dessen's own label), but a more progressive, open field of drama in which the events and disturbances of the period have a greater resonance than Dessen can admit to his thesis.

Thus the very typography of the play asks questions about the news and about the corrantos. The Staple of News appears to address itself specifically to these other, emergent, forms that were beginning to make an impact on the

margins of what we now consider to be 'literature'.

McKenzie has pointed out:-

The play itself is properly larger than the Staple, for it is Jonson's own Staple of news. It is not synonymous with the city news office but is offered in serious public competition with it. (25)

That the corrantos were taken as seriously as McKenzie suggests can be in little doubt, particularly in the light of their eventual strident evolution. Frank, discussing the English newspapers until 1655, comments:-

People viewed them as 'books' of news; hence their title pages and their being 'authored' rather than 'edited'. (26)

The situation is further complicated by the wide definition of 'news' at the time.

It is necessary to break down the modern, more rigid, notions of what is and is not news in order to understand the Caroline product. News was first and foremost, as it is today, the recounting of political, military, and unusual or exotic events, typified by the 'corranto' pamphlets produced by Nathaniel Butter, for example The Certaine Newes of the Present Weeke (1622), (27). Significantly, however, the corantos only reported foreign news (28). There was a total avoidance of any news relating to events in England due to governmental opposition. The events of the Thirty Years War spurred on the popularity of the corrantos, but also almost fully occupied their pages. It is clearly these that are being satirised in act III of The Staple when Peniboy Junior asks for some news to be read to Pecunia:-

Pb.Jnr: Any, any kind.
So it be news, the newest that thou hast,
Some news of state, for a princess.

Cymbal: Read from Rome, there.
Tom. Barber: (News from Rome)
 They write the king of Spain is chosen Pope.
 Pb.Jnr: How?
Tom. Barber: And Emperor too, the thirtieth of February.

(III.ii.18-21)

There then follows, in the next forty lines, in swift succession; 'News of Spinola', 'the fifth Monarchy', 'A plot of the house Austria', 'More of Spinola', 'and his Eggs', 'Galilaeo's study', and 'The Hollanders Eel'. Each new piece of information is more ludicrous than the last and each is noted solemnly in the margin as in a real corrantio. Significantly the list is bereft of English, home news, the play itself seeks to constitute that.

In The Prologue for The Court, the text anticipates this when the audience and the King in particular are told:-

Wherein, although our title, sir, be 'news',
 We yet adventure here to you none;
 But show you common follies, and so known
 That though they are not truths, the innocent Muse
 Hath made so like as fancy could them state,
 Or poetry without scandal imitate.

(11.9-14)

The paradoxical style of this prologue, and the careful blurring of distinctions between 'truths' and that which 'fancy' or 'poetry' could 'state' or 'imitate', seem deliberately to invoke the persistent power of fictionality in the written text around which Jonson's dramas have so constantly played. The formal configuration of rhyming 'News' with 'Muse' is a precise, but paradoxical enactment of the opposed concerns in this play.

'News' did not simply consist of the corrantos and their tales of mid-European conflicts. There is another,

more courtly, emergence of a form called 'news' which, in its writing, has close connections to Jonson himself. This is called the 'conceited' news.

In 1614 a book was published which had considerable bearing on Jonson's play. It was the Conceited News of Sir Thomas Overbury And His Friends (29). Its popularity and importance is indicated by its subsequent appearance in eighteen different impressions (30). The book contains numerous examples of a quasi-literary form popular at the time among the courtiers and wits of the Jacobean and Caroline gentry. It is the 'Letter of Newes', a form of witty exchange, which seems to have occurred in court circles as a sophisticated game played by some of the greatest writers in the country, and some lesser-known ones. The names of Donne, Ford, Marston and Jonson himself have been suggested as contributing to these courtly anthologies. Savage, the modern editor of the Overbury letters, writes:-

The rules of this game of 'Newes' seem to have been very strict, both as to the manner of composition, and the social status of the writers. (31)

Savage finds close literary analogies to the practice of the game of 'news' in the 'dorrings' of Cynthia's Revels, in the 'vapours' of Bartholomew Fair, and in the 'jeering' of The Staple of News. Indeed, Savage actually attributes to Jonson the formulation of the rules of the game of news and finds their articulation in Jonson's satirical poem: An Epigramme on the Court Purcell (32).

The complete Overbury collection of news letters is

headed: Newes From Any Whence. Or, Old Truth, Under A Supposall Of Noveltye. (33.) The humour of this paradox is akin to Jonson's use of morality devices, or 'the Old truth', in The Staple. It is a point which Gossip Mirth explicates, when Gossip Tattle hankers after the morality Vice with his wooden dagger:-

That was the old way, gossip, when Iniquity came in like Hocus Pocus, in a juggler's jerkin, with false skirts, like the knave of clubs! But now they are attired like men and women o'the time, the Vices, male and female!

(II, Intermean, 11.3-16)

One might add that this is also a clear repetition of one of the points of The Devil Is An Ass, which play is also discussed in this play. Both Overbury's and Jonson's texts make conscious reference to the past, to the 'Old Truth', in their new presentations. It is a practice in the news-office that the journalists doubtfully condemn:-

Cymbal : Nor shall the stationer cheat upon the time,
By buttering over again -
Fitton : Once, in seven years,
As the age dotes -
Cymbal: And grows forgetful o'them,
His antiquated pamphlets, with new dates.

(I.v.57-61)

A textual awareness of the play's own problematic historical position is therefore continually being foregrounded.

Another contributor to Overbury's 'conceited news' was Captain Thomas Gainsford. Gainsford is also the author of books of News Letters. One was titled: The Secretaries Studies: Containing New Familiar Epistles or Directions for the formal, orderly and judicious indicting of letters

(London, 1616) (34). It is a formal letter of this variety that Peniboy Junior refers to in his dialogue in the last act, with Picklock:-

I was a-sending my father, like an ass,
A penitent epistle, but I am glad
I did not now.

(V.i.94-96)

Gainsford's 'Secretarie' gives instructions on how to write 'Excusatory' or 'penitent' epistles (35). It is however 'Nuncupatorie, or Letters of News' which complete Gainsford's list of different kinds of letter. Each is headed with the name of the addressee and then, in the margin, is written the source or location from which the news comes. This is not a surprise since Gainsford was also a major publisher of news-corrantos and was an associate of the much punned-on Nathaniel Butter (36). Nathaniel, in The Staple, is thought by some to be modelled on Butter and there is a reference to Gainsford in the play too. When Register reprimands a woman customer for being too pushy, he says:-

Do, good woman, have patience,
It is not now as when the Captain lived.

(I.iv. 16-17)

It is of significance that the present time of the text, its own historical situation, is again given attention. The web of intertextuality is complicated and filled with gaps and inconsistencies for, as Herford and Simpson point out, this speech has another echo, of the The Spanish Tragedy (III.xiv.111.), 'It is not now as when Andrea liv'd' (37).

This is not the only invocation of earlier texts in The

Staple of News. There is another such allusion which helps to cast much light on the play. In the midst of the dispensation of lunatic news to Pecunia and Peniboy Junior, at the very centre of the play, and at the height of the success of the news office, Register gives it a new name with added resonance:-

'Tis the house of fame, sir,
Where both the curious and the negligent;
The scrupulous and careless; wild and staid;
The idle and laborious; all do meet,
To taste the cornucopiae of her rumours,
Which she, the mother of sport, pleaseth to scatter
Among the vulgar: baits, sir, for the people!
And they will bite like fishes.

(III.ii.115-122.)

This designation of the news office as House of Fame clearly invokes Chaucer's dream poem. The particular reference, to 'the mother of sport', is especially suggestive of the fickle activities of Chaucer's Lady Fame. It is ironic that the narrator of the dream poem is given similar reasons for being taken up, by the eagle, to the House of Fame as those which sustain the news office. The eagle tells the narrator:-

Thou hast no tydnges
of Loves folk yf they be glade,
Ne of noght elles that God made;
And noght oonly fro ferre contree
That ther no tydyng cometh to thee,
But of thy verray neyghebores. (38)

Clearly the news 'fro ferre contree' is not of the same order as the dubious material distributed from the Staple office, and yet some kind of connection seems plausible. Koonce gives a theological reading of the differing kinds of news in Chaucer's poem:-

Whereas the tidings of his 'varray neyghbores' are tidings of the worldly or earthly love, the tidings of a 'ferre contree' are tidings of that heavenly country which is the source of all true felicity. (39)

The opposition between the earthly and the heavenly tidings, which Koonce finds in Chaucer's text, is not exactly reproduced in Jonson's text. If it is, it is only by broad implication. Obviously, the 'ferre contree' of the House of Fame can not be the site of the Thirty Years War which preoccupies Jonson's text. Nevertheless, as I have already suggested, there is a kind of spiritual level initiated in the relations between the Father and Son, and one might perhaps be able to draw some wider parallel in this 'device to try' the Son. The satire on those who come in search of rumour is very much of the same order. Chaucer's narrator is led from the House of Fame itself on to the House of Tydyngs (also called Laboryntus, which might anticipate the labyrinthine convolutions of framed action in The Staple):-

And every wight that I saugh there
Rounded everych in others ere
A new tydyngge prively,
Or elles tolde al openly.

(11.2042-2046)

This narrative fits well the 'folly or hunger and thirst after publish'd pamphlets of news' that Jonson refers to in his note 'To the Readers' before act III.

There is also a structural connection, between the House Of Fame and The Staple's office, both are 'let fall most abruptly' (IV.Intermean.73). Champion remarks:-

Interestingly enough, when the staple explodes, it vanishes into thin air and vapour, just as Chaucer's house stood in mid-air. (40)

As far I know, no critic has drawn attention to the abrupt break which concludes Chaucer's text and that which brings to an end the titular centre of Jonson's play. Champion justifies the cessation of the Staple:-

That the staple should dissolve with the departure of that which motivates it... is quite logical. (41)

At least one side of that motivation is not, however, removed; the desire for news. Chaucer's poem ends with the narrator on the point of meeting a man of 'gret auctorite'; the news of the Staple's collapse follows closely on the revelation that Peniboy Canter is the Father and the 'wise and honour'd brother.' (V.vi.31). This formal, configurative link suggests a new way of seeing The Staple of News. It suggests that the play might be construed as Jonson's own early critical contribution to the debate surrounding Chaucer's magnificent 'disrupted' poem. The finished Jonson text answers the open Chaucerian one, by an act of completion. The act, which closes the series of receding frames that characterises both texts, is a highly self-conscious one; it is the revelation of the man of 'gret auctorite' as having been in the midst of all the plotting from the start. It would be extremely satisfying to draw a final union between Lickfinger's master of the 'deep school', the Founder/Father-figure and Chaucer's 'gret auctorite', but obviously this would be a falsification. The three elements are connected, but the freedom and the fluctuations of significance between them is as importantly maintained as any simplistic unification.

The sense of following historical processes, and the 'times', is not only confined to allusion and intertextual reference. Piedmantle, the 'pursuivant at arms and heraldet', serves to introduce history and descent into the very action. Picklock has already described Pecunia to Peniboy Junior:-

A great lady,
Indeed, she is, and not of mortal race,
Infanta of the mines; her grace's grandfather
Was duke, and cousin to the King of Ophir,
The subterranean.

(I.vi.40-44)

Now Piedmantle attempts to be brought before the lady having 'drawn a pedigree for her grace' (II.ii.7-8) and, as Broker keeps him at bay, the text is able further to depict her history. Piedmantle says he has 'deduc'd her' geneology, but Broker already knows it, interjecting:-

From all the Spanish mines in the West Indies,
I hope: for she comes that way by her mother
But, by her grandmother, she's duchess of mines.

(II.ii.12.14)

The importance of genealogy and the family line is well known. Stone also points out that much admission to the peerage involved the forgery of pedigrees, genealogy, and coats of arms. Genealogies were a national obsession among the rising middle classes (traders, professional men, etc.) (42).

Piedmantle's attempts to see Pecunia on this occasion flounder, but the importance of history, not only in terms of the family and the state, but also, by inference in terms of dramatic modes, is not neglected. Pecunia herself

proclaims her pedigree (at IV.iv.7-14), and then in his great speech of self-discovery Peniboy Canter, now taking his place as the father-figure, condemns the vices of the jeerers and Peniboy Junior's 'tail of riot' (V.i.18), but significantly he refers especially to Piedmantle:-

Here is Piedmantle,
'Cause he's an ass, do not I love a herald?
Who is the pure preserver of descents,
The keeper fair of all nobility,
Without which all would run into confusion?

(IV.iv.150-154)

This is an important assertion of the status of history within the dramaturgy. The Staple Of News embodies and extends a complex line of English drama and demands the audience's attention in considering the matter.

Yet, simultaneously, it asserts forcefully its own unique individuality by applying the analogy of the single, unified, human subject, whose well-being the audience is finally asked to applaud, as Pecunia concludes the play:-

And so Pecunia herself doth wish,
That she may still be aid unto their uses,
Not slave unto their pleasures, or a tyrant
Over their fair desires; but teach them all
The golden mean: the prodigal how to live,
The sordid and the covetous how to die:
That, with sound mind; this, safe frugality.

(V.vi.60-66)

In these closing words the effort towards reconciliation and the attempt to resolve the problems of the play do not totally succeed. Pecunia's invocation of the 'golden mean', as a way to achieve a satisfactory closure, reveals itself as inadequate by the very terms that it uses. Her references to the 'covetous' and the 'prodigal' point back

to the idealised allegory of her own presentation so that this last speech stands, as an abstract discourse, suspended unsatisfactorily above the pertinent contemporary discourses that the play also invokes.

I have shown how the importance of inheritance and family descent is crucial to the plot, and the importance of these matters will recur in the next chapter. I think it is clear that, permeating the whole play in various configurations, allusions and in the subject matter resides a concern with the historical position in which the play finds itself. This concern for a means of historical understanding is, however, much more aware of the actual social realities than was seen in Jonson's earlier more intellectual explorations. The use of medieval, and morality forms, the incorporation of masque material and associated stylistic twists, suggests a wavering awareness of the multiple construction available to drama, while its discursive patterns are evolved with an almost defensive concern for propriety. Jonson's text takes a highly conservative stand against the non-literary journalistic forms that were then becoming fashionable, but in seeking to prevent them from impinging on the 'literary' domain, the text in a sense, takes part in the opening of the flood gates. It is significant that Gainsford's other term for letters of news, in his Secretarie, is 'Nuncupatorie', that is 'designating' or 'naming'. Jonson's text enacts supremely the game of news, but at the very moment at which it seeks to designate monopolistic independence to The

Staple Of News, it reveals the larger, impersonal forces of history and society which produce it and the stability the text displays, like the news office, dissolves into more questions.

Notes and References: The Devil is an Ass and The Staple of News

1. Robert Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays, p.165.
2. A.C. Dessen, Moral Comedy, p.235.
3. B. Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston and Middleton, (Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1968) p.193.
4. Gibbons, p.197.
5. Knoll, p.168.
6. Literary Criticism of John Dryden, Edited by A.C. Kirsch, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1966) p.48.
7. D.J. Gordon, 'Poet and Architect: The Intellectual Setting of the Quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones', Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XII, (1949), 152-178, pp.162-3, points out that the Cook is obviously here enumerating subjects familiar to Vitruvius.
F.A.Yates, Theatre of the World, (Routledge Kegan Paul, London, 1969) pp.89-90, also makes specific reference to this passage, seeing it as a modified version of Vitruvian subjects listed with a knowledge of the work of Robert Fludd, one of the Elizabethan hermeticists.
8. R. Levin, 'The Staple of News; The Society of Jeerers, and Canters' College', Philological Quarterly, 44, (1965) 445-453, p.448.
9. Beaurline, Jonson and Elizabethan Comedy, p.29.
10. D.F. McKenzie, 'The Staple of News and the Late Plays', in A Celebration of Ben Jonson, Edited by W. Blissett, J. Patrick, R. Van Fossen, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1975 paperback edition) p.96.
11. F. Fricker, Ben Jonson's Plays in Performance and the Jacobean Theatre, The Cooper Monographs, 17, (Francke Verlag, Bern, 1972) p.118.
12. McKenzie, op.cit., p.93.
13. The Broken Compass, p.186.
14. L.S. Champion, Ben Jonson's "Dotages": A Reconsideration of the Late Plays, (Kentucky University Press, Lexington, 1967) p.47.
15. Champion, p.65.

16. H&S, II, P.171.
17. Broken Compass, p.187.
18. Dessen, op.cit., p.236.
19. H&S, VI, p.151.
20. The Staple of News, Edited by D.R. Kifer, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, (Edward Arnold, London, 1976) p.xxiii.
21. J. Frank, The Beginning of the English Newspaper: 1620-1660 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1961) pp.1,7.
Frank discusses the dubious nature of much early news and also the 'bookish' way in which they were received by the public.
22. This idea has been suggested in relation to the marginalia in the later works of Sterne and Joyce, see, S. Benstock, 'At the Margins of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text', P.M.L.A., 98, (1983) 204-225.
23. H&S, VI, p.151.
24. Dessen, p.241.
25. McKenzie, p.94.
26. Frank, op.cit., p.7.
27. British Library Call-mark, L.R. 263, C.1/4/5.
28. Frank, p.5.
29. The "Conceited Newes" of Sir Thomas Overbury and His Friends. A Facsimile Reproduction of the ninth impression of 1616 of Sir Thomas Overbury, His Wife, with commentary and notes by J.E. Savage, (Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, Gainseville, Florida, 1968).
30. Details listed in The Miscellaneous Works of Sir Thomas Overbury, Edited by E.F. Rimbault, (John Russell Smith, London, 1856) pp.xiv-xxviii.
31. Savage, p.xxiii.
32. Savage, pp.xxiv-xxvi.
33. Savage, p.223.
34. Thomas Gainsford, The Secretaries Studie, (1616), (Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., Amsterdam, Norwood, New Jersey, 1974).

35. Gainsford, pp.68-82.
36. Frank, op.cit., pp.9-13.
37. H&S, x, p.265.
38. The House of Fame, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by F.N.Robinson, (Oxford University Press, Oxford and London, 2nd Edition, 1978 paperback impression) p.288.11.644-649.
39. B.G. Koonce, Chaucer and The Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1966) p.148.
40. Champion, p.55.
41. Champion, p.147, n.20.
42. L. Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, pp.41-3.

Chapter 9: The New Inn, or the Light Heart and The Magnetic Lady, or The Humours Reconciled: 'The Rebus 'gainst all humours'.

The popular damnation of The New Inn (1628/9) began on the night of its first performance when, as Jonson puts it:-

It was never acted, but most negligently played, by some, the Kings Servants. And more squeamishly beheld, and censured by others, the Kings Subjects. (1)

Critical contempt has continued almost unabated since then. Readers are seemingly unsettled by a flimsy text, a minimal action, and an apparently absurd plot. The play has received relatively little critical attention as a result. Much of the existing discussion has revolved around the status of the piece as either an ironic, or as a more nostalgic, allusive play. Is it a courtly satire on the neo-Platonic love cult of Henrietta Maria, or is it an Elizabethan-style romance to be seen without irony (2)?

Champion summarises the critical view of the play as satire when he concludes:-

The intent of Jonson's satire is quite consistent with that of his other work, but the plot, constructed to point obliquely, through parody, to the faults of the royal court, is simply too subtle - and hence too complex - for the stage and had little chance of being understood, especially on that first night by an audience largely unfamiliar with court intrigues and doctrinal fads (3).

Barton, however, argues that the work of Jonson's late plays is to re-direct attention to the 'golden' period of Elizabethan drama. Jonson had, she writes,

a virtual obsession at this point with a dramatic past he had once scorned but with which, at the end of his life, he finally came to terms. (4)

The revival of the Elizabethan age in this period of the seventeenth century, she argues, renders Jonson's play, far from being ironic, a specific and deliberate recollection of Shakespearean comedy:-

The New Inn is riddled with... memories of the past, references and allusions, both structural and verbal, to a vanished world. Jonson was defending something more than his own particular artistic reputation when he reacted so passionately to the denigration and misunderstanding of this fine and haunting play. (5)

To argue that the play makes 'structural and verbal' reference to Romance comedy should not be to argue for an unproblematic continuity. Nor should a reading of the play as a satire refuse the notion of its engagement with more than a mere courtly cult.

The New Inn is indeed a 'fine and haunting' play, but its power, it seems to me, derives less from the obvious, if elaborate, movements of its plot and more from the ways in which the drama produces a series of shifting 'realities' out of its subtle and varied verbal forms. Whether or not the play is ironic remains a debate grounded in the belief of the drama's essential referentiality to the external world. Yet, one of the most striking differences between Jonson's last two completed plays (The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady) and his earlier work is the extent to which they derive their effects more from internal complexity and self-reference than from external reference and allusion.

While Barton makes a persuasive case for continuities with a dramatic past and for much allusion to it, I wish to seek out first of all, some discontinuities. One of the

ways in which The New Inn differs from earlier romance drama is in its structural formulation. Although one recognises the movements from chaos to resolution, from disguise to discovery, and from separation to marriage in the drama, the enactment of this movement takes a new form.

Firstly, the disguises of all the characters are unknown to Jonson's audience, unlike the case in Shakespeare's plays where irony is frequently derived from such knowledge. It is only in a reading of Jonson's play, incorporating the prefatory notes which constitute the 'argument' and the 'characters', that such irony would be discernible.

Secondly, the structural movement of the play hardly reproduces the action of a Shakespearean comedy. One of the identifiable formal qualities of those plays is the three part structure defined by Coghill, refined by Barber and developed by Frye and Bakhtin (6). The movement they describe is, crudely, from the confines of an old 'constricting' order, into the chaos of a 'green-world', with a final shift into the new 'enabling' order. This is not discernible in The New Inn. Clearly there are other criteria than these by which a play may be determined a comedy of the romance type, but the remarkable consistency of this structure amongst those plays of Shakespeare that the canon dubs 'comic' does make the presence or absence of this form a significant indicator.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the reunion of the Host and his wife, at the end of the play, is not the joyous

marriage of a young couple, but something more complicated and considerably less specific. A retrieval of lost faith perhaps, the reunion of the older couple separated before the beginning of the play seems to have more moralistic, conservative connotations which relate closely to the concerns about inheritance and genealogy that persistently bothered the aristocracy of the time. It is striking that such a major issue goes almost unspoken on the surface of the play.

With the marriage of Lovel to Lady Frances, and Beaufort to Laetitia, the romance conventions are assumed. Finally all the couples are ready to unite, without even a probationary year to forestall the proverbial 'four bare legs in a bed' (V.v.138) anticipated by the Host. Yet, the resolution seems hasty and unsatisfactory in anything except the most schematic formal terms.

It should be recognised that Barber's and Bakhtin's notion of a topsy-turvy world of festivity, carnival and Saturnalia is present in the play. We see it in the 'below-stairs' scenes, and in the catalytic function of the maid Prudence's promotion to Sovereign of the Sports in which much is made of her simultaneous superiority and subservience to Lady Frances. At the end of act II, for example, Prudence and the Lady argue with one another over the manner of their role-playing. The Lady tells Pru not to be 'tyrant', while Pru replies by asking the Lady not to be a 'rebel' (II.vi.126). The full reciprocity of this reversal of positions emerges when Beaufort praises Pru's

speech, at which the Lady remarks:-

Yes, cry her up, with acclamations, do,
And cry me down, run, all with sovereignty:
Prince Power will never want her parasites.

(II.vi.136-138)

Such oscillations of antithesis characterise the play's topsy-turvy world, and, as I shall argue, are crucial to its dynamics. In a sense, the whole of the play is fixed in the 'green world' of the country pub, but it is also a site isolated from the movement of Elizabethan formulations. It may, for example, equally recall Chaucer's The Tabard Inn with its jovial Host that is the starting point for The Canterbury Tales.

In his efforts to eject Lovel, the Host recommends other taverns, where such a characteristic as Lovel's 'melancholy', would not be in opposition to the norms of the place:-

If you have a mind to be melancholy and musty,
There's Footman's Inn, at the town's end, the stocks
Or Carrier's Place, at sign o'the Broken Waine,
Mansions of State! Take up your harbour there;

(I.ii.5-8)

A kind of topology of character and place is established - all of the places, it is to be noted, are 'Mansions of State' - and the capitalised 'State' might suggest an emblematic Britain as well as the more obvious sense of 'stately' or 'noble'. The audience is led to see a specific opposition between being in this particular Inn and out of it. The sense of a symbolic topology recalls that at work in Every Man In His Humour. Unlike that of the earlier play,

however, the topology here is merely drawn out for a moment and not actively explored. Instead the focus is on the exploration of one symbolic site. The interiority of the Inn and its larger symbolic qualities are therefore elaborated. As Barton observes, it is a 'state of mind as well as a physical place' (7).

The secure abstract terrain, the light heart of the Inn is, however, threatened by its own innate function, that of letting in strangers. Lovel's presence, the arrival of the Lady Frampul and her train, the faked arrival of Laetitia/Frank/Frances, and that of Stufe and Pinnacia, all have significant and problematic effects on those already inside. The Inn gains something of the qualities of an internal, mental domain, that is stylised and emblematised, but it also comes close at times to the lesser rarified chaos of Bartholomew Fair's drinking tents.

It is above all an exploratory space, neither fully engaged in the pastoral or romance mode, nor completely retaining the life of the city inns seen in the earlier plays.

To ask generic questions about The New Inn may not, however, be the best way into the play. If one turns to the text and pursues the patterns outlined by the play itself in terms of a self-derived, self-conscious irony, the debate to which I referred before concerning the play's referential irony or lack of it becomes less central. A form of self-derived irony stems from a knowledge of the 'story', provided by Jonson's notes in the argument and dramatis

personae, which describe in some detail the characters and their pre-textual as well as their textual relations to one another.

The fullness of these notes, reproduced with the first publication of the play in the Octavo of 1631, lends a depth of irony and a complexity to reading the play that are different from the referential or the merely tabula rasa approach. The notes demand a reading audience. In the Dedication to the Reader, Jonson writes:-

Howsoever, if thou canst but spell, and join my sense;
there is more hope of thee than of a hundred fastidious
impertinents, who were there present the first day, yet
never made piece of their prospect the right way.

(Dedication To The Reader, 11.3-7)

The address to the single, private reader and the emphasis on 'the argument', which is almost a full synopsis of the story, seem to require an approach that must be more attentive than is perhaps possible in the theatre. This does not necessarily explain the theatrical failure, but it does lead to the possibility of a fuller reading of the play's intricacies.

The Host launches the drama with his refusal to allow Lovel to stay at the Inn:-

And if his worship think, here to be melancholy,
In spite of me or my wit, he is deceived;
I will maintain the rebus 'gainst all humours,
And all complexions i' the body of man,
That's my word, or i' the isle of Britain!

(I.i.7-11)

Lovel is an anomaly in the jovial Inn, his 'melancholy' cannot apparently satisfy the requirements of the Host and

the Light Heart. The anomaly also represents an emblematic opposition between two figures, Mirth and Melancholy, Host and Lovel contain the abstractions of these qualities, although the subtlety of the presentation is a notable change from the morality style of the Gossips in The Staple. This emblematic opposition is the first indication that the play may perhaps be read as a complicated dramatic Rebus, neither static nor tableau vivant, but a mysterious network of signs whose meanings shift and move as the play unfolds.

A typical extra clause 'i' the Isle of Britain' intrudes on the end of the Host's speech to notable effect. Apart from the comic contradiction of his concluding with 'That's my word' and then adding more, the addition suddenly and unexpectedly broadens the frame of reference (8). The Host's speech significantly recalls the site of the coinage of the word 'rebus'. No other critic seems to have pointed out that the first use of the word is found in the work of Jonson's master. William Camden, in his Remaines of a Greater Worke concerning Britaine (London, 1605), describes how the art of the Rebus was practised in France:-

They which lackt wit to expresse their conceit in speech, did use to depaint it out (as it were) in pictures, which they did call Rebus. (9)

When the habit came to England, it became very fashionable, Camden continues:-

He was nobody that coulde not hammer out of his name an invention by this wit-craft, and picture it accordingly. (9)

Camden devotes an entire section of the book to the Rebus and its complex and widespread usage. As such this

deliberately enigmatic representation is presented as part and parcel of the construction of Britain's people. It should be noted that Camden's work is sub-titled 'Concerning Britaine, the inhabitants thereof, their Languages, names, Sur-Names, Empresses, Wise speeches, Poesies and Epitaphs.' This supplement to the famous Britannia is designed to reveal the linguistic forms of expression, communication, and the construction which give access to the history of the country. Reference to the Rebus in The New Inn may be, therefore, a pointer to the domain in which the text is itself established. The concern for the 'Isle of Britain' and the state of its people, 'all the complexions i' the body of Man', is inextricably linked with the apparently ludicrous 'phantasie' that might at first seem to be all that constitutes the play. The 'preposterous story of the Frampul family' which, to Partridge, 'sounds like a parody of itself' (10) is in fact enigmatically, rather than referentially, related to condition of the country.

The problem for the late plays remains, to the end however, that any 'truth' the drama might hold relating to the 'real world' is offset by the intricacies of language which I shall pursue here, where truth is always a function of discourse.

As a linguistic puzzle The New Inn seems, on the one hand, to enact a series of antitheses and reversals which seek to fill out neat rhetorical figures. One notes the oppositions between, for example, Lovel and the Host, Prudence and Lady Frances, Lovel and Lady Frances, Beaufort

and Latimer, The Court of Love and the Militia below stairs. On the other hand, at each stage the plenitude of the figure, its coherent completeness, is made empty by the disclosure of an enigma which seems to drain meaning away from the component parts of the rhetoric. We are presented with the Host and Lovel in a stylised debate, but quickly we are led to see them as not merely abstractions of their humours. So although 'the argument' explains the mysteries of the play away, in one sense it 'spoils' the story, in a different sense it accentuates an interest less in what happens, than in the ways and means by which enigmas are posited and the forms that their emergence will take. I shall examine this coy unravelling of mysteries, especially in the first part of the play, in some detail because it governs the whole of this play and The Magnetic Lady. What seems to be at stake is a conflict between orderly, rhetorical forms of presentation and a desire to undercut such straightforward perceptions as appear to derive from rhetoric, a desire to explore the possibilities of 'truth' beyond rhetoric.

Antithesis seems to be the main figure of rhetoric which the play uses throughout the first and second acts. The Host and Lovel form a rhetorical figure which is developed and enacted within the frame of the Inn. Their exchanges of speeches, the dialogue concerning the life of a page, the exchange of secrets, followed by the Host's declaration of a bond between the two men all function to elaborate and extend the possibility of seeing them as an

internal counterpart to the Rebus that the Host constructs at the outset. Antithesis is present not merely in the relations between characters, but also in their different uses of language.

The speeches (in I.iii) between the Host, Lovel, Frank, and Ferret display the intricate variabilities of discourse available within the text. While the Host praises the boy's knowledge of Latin, Ferret ridicules it in the following series of definitions which the youth apparently gives to 'a wench':-

A wench, i' the inn-phrase, is all these;
A looking-glass in her eye,
A beard-brush with her lips,
A rubber with her hand,
And a warming pan with her hips,

Host: This, in you scurril dialect. But my inn knows no such language.

(I.iii.9-14)

The sexual innuendo of each of these different meanings of 'a wench' constructs Ferret's crude identity. Each of Ferret's definitions is metonymically a sexual emblem of a woman and, although it is derived from ridiculing the patchy vocabulary known to Frank, its own metonymic ingenuity suggests that it also works on a similar level of rebus-like signification as the other coding discourses devised by the different guests at the Inn. Lovel and Frank exchange phrases in Latin, in opposition to Ferret's parody of 'inn phrase' and the 'scurrile dialect' that the Host calls it.

In this opposition of discourses there is a further attempt to fill the figures, to encompass within the rhetoric, the range of the Inn's discourses and present them

as comprehensive and cohesive. Enigma revolving around the Host and Frank, however, functions like a drain on the meaning, subverting the formal certainty of the full figure. References to the effects of language and the contrasts of different discourses proliferate through the play. Lady Frampul, for example, refers to Frank as 'A modest, and a fair well-spoken child.' (II.ii.26). Here the reference to the boy's use of language, as well as his appearance, is a hint at his hidden identity as the long lost sister. Further on, just after the installation of Prudence as Sovereign of Sports, she reprimands the Host for making vulgar reference to a 'chamber pot'. She corrects him:-

The Looking-glass, mine host, loose your house
methaphor!
You have a negligent memory, indeed:
Speak the host's language. Here's a young lord,
Will make't a precedent else.

(II.vi.6-9)

Here, an artificial resistance to vulgarity, and a shocked reaction to its display are simulated by Pru in such a way as to draw attention to her precious courtly discourse, but also to contrast it with the 'house methaphor', and 'the host's language', each of which is distinct. Yet, in her insistence that the Host 'speak the host's language', Pru draws attention to that enigmatic gap in him between the speaker, the discourse spoken, and the discourse that 'truly' speaks his identity.

Another 'house metaphor' is epitomised by Fly and Tiptoe who speak, what Latimer describes as, 'Some inginous strong words' (II.vi.66). Tiptoe is always seeking to augment the

house language with 'expressions...a little more Spanish' (III.i.4) and the repeated use of 'In Cuerdo', are typical examples of words becoming meaningless noise out of drunkards' mouths, as seen in earlier Jonson texts, although the reference to Spanish manners may still form a parody of the fashionable interest in the Spanish courts.

Discourses seem to be rigidly distinguished from one another in the text in a way which prepares for the powerful rhetoric of Lovel's Court of Love speeches. Yet, in being swept up into full rhetorical figures, or neat formal configurations which appear meaningful and coherent, the reader is still being made aware of an undercutting of those figures and a persistent difficulty which renders meanings more elusive. This is perhaps the reason for the critical division over the play's irony. The text is not specifically an ironic one, in the sense of court-parodies, but perhaps it is in a more complex elaboration of symmetries and symbols which are there to be deflated by an underlying enigma of which the audience is erratically reminded. If the text is read ironically it must be with the knowledge of the identity of the Host as Lord Frampul; this is revealed in the 'argument' and imposes an attendant doubleness on every event - a delight in recognition - as small 'clues' to the 'truth' are given away.

The early dialogue between Lovel and Frank leads into Lovel's debate with the Host over the worthiness of a career as a page. Lovel asks if the Host would place his son in Lovel's service. This request is contiguous with Lovel's

main desire to court the Lady Frampul. It is a sunken, metonymic request that covertly announces Lovel's actual desire to make a romantic connection with the family Frampul. At this stage, however, the request must be denied, it is the wrong request and foregrounds the shift in social status of the Frampuls' lost family. The drama must still elaborate its patterns further before such an approach can be rectified and made understandable. Here, the text must designate it as the inappropriate approach and the request must be denied. The drama plays on a similar inappropriate approach, which revolves around Frank. Throughout the Court of Love scenes, Beaufort constantly woos and kisses Frank who is disguised as Frances. Beaufort's approach is inappropriate because it offends the distanced relations of courtly love being enacted in the scene (and thereby extends the antithetical rhetoric of the drama). It is, of course, doubly complicated because, on the one hand in terms of the plot, Beaufort is apparently being fooled by Frank's 'disguise'. On the other hand, in terms of the reading informed by 'the argument', Beaufort is actually wooing Laetitia whom he will eventually marry as Frances and who will, only then, emerge as the acceptable Laetitia.

In the Host's rejection of the way of life of an apprentice page, 'that desperate course of life' and Lovel's offer to help Frank (I.iii.39), the audience is presented with a further indication of the complexity of the Host's character, not in terms of his 'psychology', but in terms of

his ambivalent 'true' or deceptive identity as Host. In the subtext of predetermined 'real' roles, Lovel's request is wrong because his desire is to marry the elder, not the younger daughter (who is Beaufort's bride to-be) and because it is the wrong kind of social contract. In terms of the plot, on the surface, the request is utterly transformed and points only further to the Host's unwillingness to be a Host.

While Lovel's wistful literariness is confirmed by his reference to the 'reverend Chaucer' (I.ii.69), whom he cites as being in favour of the apprenticeship of pages, and through which he anticipates his later courtly discourse of Love, the grounding of the Host's identity remains teasingly ambiguous. His reply takes the faint ecclesiastical discourse and turns it on its head directly refuting Lovel's argument and continuing his attack on the demeaning lifestyle of 'Pagery, or rather Paganism' (I.iii.83). This exchange of opposites outlines the figure which places Prudence as the temporary symbolic Sovereign of the Church of Love and Lady Frances as an initiate in it. Significantly, the exchange between the Host and Lovel then reveals a little more the presence of an enigma concerning the Host's position. He here admits to being called 'Good Stock' (1.98) while Lovel confirms that:-

You confess it,
Both i' your language, treaty, and your bearing.

(I.iii.99-100).

Lovel refers to the Host's constant linguistic 'confession' of his true identity, so that a form of

religious discourse also contributes to the revelations.

Religious discourse seems to guide the audience in the direction of mystery and the search for 'truth' as it does the characters within their Church of Love. Yet, it is apparent, the 'religion' of love has a dubious theological status in the play. It is apparently the object of Lady Frampul's mockery when she confesses:-

What penance shall I do to be received,
And reconciled to the Church of Love?
Go on procession, barefoot, to his image,
And say some hundred penitential verses,
There, out of Chaucer's 'Troilus and Crisyde'?

.....

For I have trespassed, and blasphemed Love.

.....

Now I adore Love, and would kiss the rushes
That bear this reverend gentleman, his priest,

(III.ii.214-226)

Whether or not this speech is genuine or dissembling remains an open issue. The way in which it is read has a determining effect on the understanding of the entire play. Whilst the transformation in the Lady Frampul's affections does take place eventually, her declarations here seem to be parodies of actual penitence. Moreover the notions of 'penitence' and 'blasphemy' in the Church of Love seem not to be taken entirely seriously.

The variability of references and referents persistently invites ambiguities and the kinds of larger shifts of meaning that are by now familiar to Jonson's audience. The best example of this is the uncertainty of the actual effect of Lovel's speeches on Lady Frampul. After her raputurous greeting of his speeches (in III.ii),

Prudence warns the Lady to be cautious in what she says and does, while Latimer is even less certain:-

Pru: Beware, you do not conjure up a spirit you cannot lay.

Lad: I dare you, do your worst,
Show me but such an injustice: I would thank you
To alter your award.

Lat: Sure she is serious!
I shall have another fit of jealousy!
I feel a grudging!

Host: Cheer up, noble guest,
We cannot guess, what this may come to yet;
The brain of man or woman is uncertain!

(III.ii.251-256)

The Host's last remark to Lovel also describes the position of the audience. Uncertainty revolves around the Lady's response as to its irony or its truth, and that the Host should be the one to observe the uncertainty represents a further drawing of attention to his own 'uncertain' position within discourse.

I return once more to act I, however, to the point at which the Host's enigma has been made present. At this moment the text moves rapidly to the rhetorical opposition between being in the Inn and 'Out i' game which all the world is' (I.iii.107). The interiority of the Inn is further extended by this analogy of the world as a play (I.iii. 128ff). An extensive analysis of this analogy has been made by Hawkins (11), but the significant point for me is the way that such an analogy, which is a commonplace to the period's drama, is closely associated with the enigma of the Host's identity. His displacement from his 'good stock' is clearly connected to his residence in the Inn, contemplating the world:-

I have got

A seat to sit at ease here i' mine inn,
To see the comedy; and laugh, and chuck
At the variety and throng of humours
And dispositions that come jostling in,
And out still, as they one drove hence another:

(I.iii.131-136)

He sits at the point of entry and exit to the play in a way which describes his own actorly disposition. The direction of the play, it is signalled, will therefore be towards closure through the resolution of the enigma by the Host's active participation in the play of the Inn's game, the 'day's Sport'.

This signal is closely followed by the Host drawing attention to a false enigma: that of Lovel's 'mouldy passion'. The Host says it is a 'wonder' why Lovel should have taken,

Fidlers' Hall, the seat of noise,
And mirth, an inn here, to be drowsy in,

(I.iii.143-4)

Attention is, once more, diverted away from the mystery of the Host and back to more easily resolved problems. The reader is encouraged, possessors of mysteries will have their secrets divulged. The 'wonder' of Lovel's presence in the Inn is easily solved, it is voluntarily ended in the following soliloquy scene, where Lovel answers all in his reference to the tyranny of love under which he labours. The Host actually offers three alternative reasons for the melancholy:-

As if some cloud from Court had been your harbinger,
Or Cheapside debt-books, or some mistress' charge,
Seeing your love grow corpulent, gi' it a diet

By absence, some such mouldy passion!

(I.iii.146-149)

Lovel immediately admits to having been found out although the Host has not been specific. It is the audience alone that is given the answer to this mystery in the soliloquy (I.iv). A variety of potential solutions to the enigma is offered, and all involve the notion of existing 'by absence' from a position of 'reality' for the subject. Lovel's mystery is closed by his own admission and this is encouraging, but it also emphasises the lack of a solution of the Host's secrets.

Lovel, in his soliloquy, laments that the Host has found out his secret, even though the Host is to him:-

The log, a little o' this side the signpost!

(I.iv.12)

This statement, for the time being, also represents the position of the audience, to one side of the 'signpost' of the text, contemplating the rings of its log for an indication of its history, the history that brings to the reader of 'the argument' a series of uncertain signs. The Host seems to be both the source of, and the key to, mysteries.

With the news of the arrival of 'guests o' the game' (I.v.2) there is more evidence that reversal, opposition and the transformation of 'difference' into 'resemblance', will be the formulation of the enigma throughout. Lovel, on hearing the news, immediately prepares to leave in accordance with the Host's earlier instructions and in line

with the characteristics of his melancholy. This, in turn, produces a reversal in the Host's imperatives. Antithesis between Mirth and Melancholy must be maintained in order to take the text through its full course. While the two abstracts may be set at odds by their different significances, the antithesis by which their rhetoric works binds them formally together. The audience suddenly finds that instead of complying with Lovel's decision to leave, the Host seeks to prevent it. He proceeds to portray a whole series of reversals and transformations which, he says, he would perform on the Inn before he would allow Lovel to go:-

She [Necessity] shall command me first to fire my bush;
Then break up house: or, if that will not serve,
To break with all the world. Turn country bankrupt,
I' mine own town, upo' the market-day,
And be protested, for my butter, and eggs,
To the last bodge of oats and bottle of hay;
Ere you shall leave me, I will break my heart:
Coach, and coach-horses, lords and ladies pack;
All my fresh guests shall stink! I'll pull my sign
down,
Covert mine inn, to an Almshouse! Or a spittle,
For lazars, or switch-sellers! Turn it to
An academy o' rogues! Or gi't away
For a free-school to breed up beggars in,
And send 'hem to the canting universities,
Before you me.

(I.v.26-40)

This series of transformations on the Inn stems from a significant elision on Lovel's part. He initiates the Host's outburst by insisting on the 'Necessity' of his departure:-

But--
Necessity's a tyrant, and commands it

(I.v.25-5.)

The dash at the line-end represents the space where the elision occurs. The audience does not have far to think back to recall that in Lovel's soliloquy it is not Necessity but Love that is 'tyrannous' (I.iv.12). The Host's list of changes emerges directly out of this elision of Lovel's, where Tyranny and Necessity conceal the presence of Love, this clearly invokes romance, comic conventions where Love is always a ruling passion and indicates one of the determining factors producing Lovel's identity. It is, later on, the same tyrannous necessity of the Court of Love's conventions that renders obscure and ambiguous the Lady Frampul's 'real' loving response to Lovel's speeches.

It is also possible to see, from a different perspective, that the Host's speech threatens first economic and domestic remedies (11.26-34), but then develops into the symbolic dismantling of the 'sign', the Rebus. Although it displays itself as 'The Light Heart', the Rebus in the rhetoric of the drama, also contains Lovel's melancholy. Furthermore, within the Host's speech, lies the exact movement of his pre-textual change. His social relegation, from Lord Frampul to the Host, emerges here in his discourse. When he suggests the transformation of the Light Heart into an 'Almshouse', the audience is shown a direct corollary to the transformation of the Lord's family residence into the public ordinary. The whole social range and mobility, from aristocracy to leper, is thus invoked, but the central lapse of the aristocrat and his family is occluded by reference to a relegation in a lower stratum of

society. Instead of talking about his own history of decline, the Host invokes another further decline which illuminates the metaphoric nature of the Inn and offers a gloomy alternative to the solution finally achieved in the play.

The text evades one of the most important issues which it raises here. The convention of courtly love which is allowed to dictate Lovel's behaviour also covers over the question of Lord Frampul's action. It is made clear, in the prefatory notes, that he abandoned his family and his wife 'Because she brought him none but girls' (I.v.71). A pragmatic attitude to the non-appearance of a male heir produced a rejection of the nuclear family unit, and yet this action is not questioned; it is merely explained away as resulting in the fact that Frampul later 'out of his cock-brained resolution, entered into as solemn a quest of her' (Argument. 11.19-20). This becomes the received truth of the fore-plot.

In the Host's speech the same act of rejection is reproduced, the abstract 'Necessity' which Lovel invokes out of the courtly love convention induces the threatened dismantling of the social unit, the Inn. Yet, the issue is not questioned, the Host's threat to 'turn country bankrupt' invokes the whole of his previous other self's action, as the underlying dynamic of the drama, but the text steers away from confronting it. The Host is the central character of the play, but always seems to be pushed to one side to serve the purposes of the maintenance of an enigma. The

interest and attention of the audience are made to rest on the mystery rather than on the actual issues involved, and these are kept separate. Perhaps if these two elements of the play had been better integrated it would have found more success.

The text seems to find itself divided between the conventional necessities of a romance comedy, of which the disguise is a crucial element, and the narrative irony more commonly associated with Jonson, where a detached, witty observer is needed. The Host participates in both of these modes, but substantiates neither, leaving in the process the most important issue unquestioned and poorly glossed over. The fact that the Nurse is in 'reality' his wife is not even made the source of any ironic comedy, it is simply and inadequately left to be revealed in the final coup de theatre.

Lovel's reaction to the Host's tirade is to stay, but only on the condition that he is hidden. This request, it emerges, is due to yet another secret:-

The secret is I would not willingly,
See, or be seen, to any of this ging,
Especially, the lady.

(I.v.45-6)

Finally Lovel's 'secret' is tied unequivocally to the Host's as this bizarre request is produced from the story of the Frampul family and its dispersal. Lovel unfolds the complete pre-textual narrative of the 'strange division of a family' (I.v.75) of which the Host demonstrates an ironic partial knowledge. It is significant that the Lord Frampul

should have travelled with a 'motion man' (1.62) and taken employment as a 'puppet-master' (1.61). The actorly, theatrical abilities of Frampul are suggestive of disguise and transformation, obviously connoting the disguise of the Host. He is referred to as 'The mad Lord Frampul' (1.65) and, as in the cases of Morose and Peniboy Senior, madness indicates a state of both dramatic and social alienation. A mad character is one made discontinuous with the action, but he is not absent from it. It is also notable that the mother is described by Lovel as having gone 'away in a melancholy' (1.70). Here, the narrative emphasises links between Mirth and Melancholy, the subtextual pairing of Lord/Lady is represented by the textual pair Host/Lovel, so that the wife and Lovel occupy the same position in relation to the Host, Lovel eclipsing, in the Inn, the space of the 'absent' wife. A figure of social unity is transformed, for the course of the drama, into a figure of rhetorical unity. A reference to the young Lady Frampul describes her as making use of all 'the authorized means of riot' (1.80) to gain what she desires. This would also seem to contribute towards a symbolic morality-style metaphor. A configuration of archetypes is suggested where Mirth and Melancholy confront, and are confronted by, Riot and her play. The configuration seems to exist behind the drama in a vaguely defined mode, but one which does recall a similar ambivalence in The Staple of News revolving around the 'real'/allegorical function of Lady Pecunia, an uncertainty that endures to the end of that play.

Lovel's literariness and his engagement in a biblical discourse, here produces a prime definition or summary of the Frampul family's fate. He says that they are 'scattered, as i' the great confusion!' (1.76). The invocation of the chaos of Babel at this point is significant. It is highly suggestive of the different, confusing languages at work in the text, but also reaches out into the turmoil of the state too. In an anonymous address to Parliament, published in the same year as The New Inn's first performance, a protestant author appeals against the prelacy. He writes:-

Rome must fall by the sword, yet the word must both instruct Princes, that Babell can no other wise be healed. (12).

And, further on, this anonymous declaimer looks forward to:-

A dashing of Babell's bratts against the stones. (13)

Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) reveals a similar attitude when the author hyperbolises:-

The Tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues as the chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms. (14)

Babel exists it seems as an image of both linguistic and political uproar. Furthermore, the coincidence of these two domains on a single discursive point is important. It is not just Jonson, but the ideology of the period which locates its condition in this mythic precursor. Foucault observes the manner in which the symbolic sense of linguistic dispersal was constructed in the period:-

In its original form, when it was given to men by God himself, language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them.

The names of things were lodged in the things they designated... This transparency was destroyed at Babel as a punishment for men. Languages were separated and incompatible with one another only in so far as they had previously lost their original resemblance to the things that had been the prime reason for the existence of language (15).

Foucault identifies as a particularly sixteenth and early seventeenth century concern, the exploration of the doubts and uncertainties in the knowledge of how a sign may in fact designate that which it signifies (16). The New Inn seems to bear this out in a more elaborate and explicit way than perhaps any other earlier Jonson play. The subjects of the play are not the sites of single, constructed identities, but the sites of struggle and uncertainty. The problematising of the subject's identity functions, apparently, in opposition to the well-known Jonsonian aphorism 'Speak that I may know thee.'. It seems to derive from the persistent presentation of characters, particularly the Host and Lovel, within the distracting context of the enigma.

In the case of the Host, it has already been shown that his discourse betrays to the audience an inability to know identity, but such inability, or inaccessability, rises most prominently to the surface in an incident with Lovel. When confronted by Prudence's request that he participate in the 'day's venture' (I.vi.79), he is silent and makes no reply. The Host addresses him:-

What say you, sir? Where are you? Are you within?

(I.vi.80)

The character at this point has simply become the physical

body of the actor: there is no language for him to speak, he has fallen into a gap in discourse when addressed by Pru who is the agent of his love. Gifford adds a stage direction at this point, the Host 'Strikes Lovel on the breast' (17), but this is not a physical absence, and the addition is an unnecessary diversion. It is an absence of centred speech in Lovel. The Host's interrogation offers itself as a part of the symbolic order which reveals a silence that indicates Lovel's lack of a position. In asking where he is, the Host questions Melancholy's entire position and Lovel's constitution within this identity. The Host foregrounds the problem already elaborated, of the Melancholy in the Light Heart, but also draws attention to the gap between the character, Lovel, and the abstraction, Melancholy, which fails wholly to construct his identity. Lovel's silence here is not a romantic daze, but an absence in him of a discourse which can speak his identity. After Prudence leaves, he is finally able to specify Love as the cause of his condition, Love directed towards the Lady Frampul and, therefore in romance convention, silenced by her too. He declares that before being taken over by this passion, he was:-

The most unprofitable sign of nothing.

(I.vi.88)

Now, however, Love specifies him, gives him a paradoxical place in the text, the dislocated one. He is the melancholic, the undisguised counterpart to the mad Lord Frampul, 'impotent', unable to act, and unable to answer

when the Host pointedly asks:-

But is your name Love-ill, sir, or Love-well?

(I.vi.95)

Lovel emerges as the subject in antithesis. He cannot answer, there is no answer available. His identity is unknown to him, and unknowable to the audience. He is constituted semantically by the ellipsis of his name. It is logical therefore that he should have sent anonymously to the Lady, 'toys, verses and anagrams' (1.104), because the function of his love is seen to be channelled into sourceless 'riddling' (1.107). The lack of position indicated in his name(s) renders him powerless; he cannot speak as a subject, but can only veil his presence in the emptying signifiers of the courtly rhetoric.

The sense of a divided subject in Lovel finds some further confirmation through a denial of its possibility by Lady Frampul:-

As if I lived
To any other scale than what's my own?
Or sought myself without myself from home?

(II.i.58-60)

Lady Frampul's 'self' is presented as centred firmly in her 'real' 'scale'; she is not, she claims, disguised or subject to the text's enigmas. In the struggle to get her dress to fit Pru, however, the problem of identity in the play is further anticipated. The dress that is too large, with its excess of material to be 'girted hard' by Pru (II.i.1-5), signifies the extra enfolding material that will eventually be made to fit the play. Hidden in the over-large lengths

of Lady Frampul's dress may be seen the tissue of connections, and the reality of her relations to her family position, which is currently obscured by its displacement onto another model.

Such a symbolic view of the dress, as intimately connected with the true system of relations between the members of the Frampul family, is reinforced in act III. Fly brings 'News, of a newer lady' (III.ii.269), interrupting the process of the court, he brings tidings of:-

A finer, fresher, braver, bonnier beauty,
A very bona-roba, and a bouncer!
In yellow, glistering, golden satin.

(III.ii.271-273)

The new enigma of the intruding 'newer lady' is fully exploited in the scenes that follow until, in IV.iii, Lady Frampul interrogates the 'Countess Pinnacia' and discovers the deceit. The dress, worn by the counterfeit 'Countess', is the missing dress that was not brought for the Lady Frampul. The full confession is extracted from Pinnacia of her strange practice of putting on the tailor's, her husband's, newly made clothes, in order to make love in them with him, before they are delivered to their rightful owners. The dress gains increased symbolic importance after its anticipation in act II. Here a false enigma is again uncovered, and it furthers the main one. The falsity of this 'other' rival, great lady intensifies the sense of the transformability of subjects' identities. The dress comes to emphasise the problematic status of the subject, not

wholly present in their exteriors, pointing forward to the eventual 'truth' of the final discoveries, but also to their innate falsity, to their absolute theatricality.

The parallel is discernible between the false history of the dress and the false history of the Host. Yet, it does nothing to help to assert confidence in the actual status of the aristocratic characters. Prudence reacts by exclaiming 'to rag and cinders burn the idolatrous vestures' (IV.iii.94). This is a return to the religious discourse that disguises the insecure position of the Lords and Ladies. The case of the dress undresses every character. Latimer exclaims in shocked admiration of Stuff the tailor:-

He lies
With his own succuba, in all your names.

(IV.iii.80-1.)

Latimer literally draws attention to the 'evil spirit' in all of their names. This is partly their fallen nature, their vulnerability to transformation by Vice, but more importantly, it seems, transformation by the excesses of language. The Host refers to 'the very figure of preoccupation' (1.79) which brings together the rhetoric, and the symbolism, of what has occurred. This in turn leads to recognition that descent, family heritage, history itself cannot avoid being already occupied by a fallen language and the prophanity for which Babel was the linguistic punishment.

With the announcement of Beaufort's marriage to Frances, who is Frank and who the Nurse then reveals, in fact, to be Laetitia, the tissue of disguise, false

discourse, and familiar disintegration is suddenly lifted. The drama of self-revelation rapidly unfolds as the Nurse, the Host and Fly are all discovered and the various obstacles to the couples' unities are removed. Only Lovel, in his penultimate speech, displays any hint of dissatisfaction in this efficient closure, when he asks:-

Is this a dream now, after my first sleep?
Or are these fantasies made i' the Light Heart,
And sold i' the new inn?

(V.v.120-2)

The Host, however, now even more fully in control than before, merely deflects interrogation of this final enigma of the artifice, in his anaesthetic advice:-

Best go to bed,
And dream it over all. Let's all go sleep,
Each with his turtle.

(V.v.122-124)

The play neatly closes itself up asserting its right not to question any further the nature of its own artifice. Yet, the elaboration of clear rhetorical patterns around falsified centres, the construction of false histories and false identities seem to reveal a profound anxiety about lost status and failed morality in a society where the patterned rituals of law and order, and of social hierarchy were rapidly being undermined by lawlessness and confusion.

Despite the apparent desire to have one sense only extracted from his work, Jonson is clearly aware of the extent to which his previous drama has contributed to the activation of the audience, and to the stimulation of their willingness to interpret. In a second Epilogue to The New

Inn, 'made for the play, in the poet's defence, but the play lived not, in opinion, to have it spoken', Jonson attacks the criticism which the play apparently received. The row was about Pru who had, in the play's first performances, apparently been called Cicely, a name which was taken to be a reference to a member of the Queens's retinue (18). Jonson replies by addressing his second Epilogue to:-

... men that have more of ears
Than eyes to judge us: such as will not hiss
Because the chambermaid was named Cis.
We think it would have served our scene as true,
If, as it is, at first we had call'd her Pru,
For any mystery we there have found,
Or magic in the letters or the sound.
She only meant was for a girl of wit,
To whom her lady did a province fit:
Which she would have discharged and done as well
Had she been christened Joyce, Grace, Doll or Nell.

(Another Epilogue, 11.6-16)

This delightful, if exasperated, plea seems to underline Jonson's reluctant awareness of the 'mystery', 'magic' and power of language to signify beyond his absolute control.

In coming to The Magnetic Lady (1632) one finds an undeniable weariness of the need for this continuing conflict which itself seems to become part of Jonson's subject matter:-

The author... finding himself now near the close, or shutting up of his circle, has fancied to himself in idea, this magnetic mistress... who having a young niece, ripe for a man and marriageable, he makes that his centre attractive, to draw thither a diversity of guests, all persons of different humours to make up his perimeter. And this he hath called humours reconciled.

(The Induction, 11.83-95)

It is hard not to hear Jonson feeling his age in these lines. His desire for self-dramatisation has been visible

throughout the late plays. It will be recalled that Fitzdotterel repeatedly panics because he thinks he will be late for his visit to see The Devil Is An Ass, and in The Staple the Gossips also discuss that play, while The New Inn is referred to by Sir Diaphanous in the discussion of valour in The Magnetic Lady. Diaphanous is discussing the nature of public and private valour, and whether he need challenge Ironside to a duel after the affront against him at the dinner table. Diaphanous exclaims at one point:-

Oh, you ha' read the play there, The New Inn,
of Jonson's, that decries all other valour
But what is for the public.

(III.vi.92-94)

There are also many references, such as that in the Induction above, to the 'author' and to 'Ben Jonson' not just in the framing induction scenes where one might accept it as deliberate blurring of reality and artifice, but by characters inside the dramatic world too. Compass has just finished giving the 'character' of the parson Palate. Ironside asks him whether he made up the sketch himself, to which Compass replies, 'No, a great clerk as any is of his bulk, Ben Jonson, made it.' (I.ii.33-34). The effect is to dramatise Jonson as 'the author' in a manner reminiscent of the early dramatisation of authors, like Horace and Virgil in Poetaster. Jonson, as himself, returns repeatedly to the last plays in the form of an extra character, another of the 'diversity of guests' who are attracted into the fantasy of his dramatic world. Perhaps, in building his own identity into his plays, Jonson felt he would achieve the kind of

overall control which he could not acquire over theatrical audiences.

The 'centre attractive' of The Magnetic Lady, however, is one of the weakest titular centres in any of Jonson's works. The metaphor of Lady Loadstone, drawing 'all persons of different humours' to her, is only weakly applied. Compass does, at the beginning of the play, stand as some kind of measure of the Lady's magnetism. At the arrival of Sir Diaphonous and Practice in the opening scene, he exclaims:-

No; here they come! The prime magnetic guests
Our Lady Loadstone so respects: the Arctic!
And the Antarctic!

(I.vi.1-3)

After the introduction of the main characters, however, the magnetic metaphor becomes very faintly visible and this is primarily because it is given no integral connection with the material of the play's action and subject. One of the main effects of this unintegrated titular, and metaphoric, centre is to reduce the overall impact of the play as a verbal puzzle. There is no satisfying application of the magnetic theme to the action as there is of the lightness of heart in The New Inn. The Magnetic Lady does, however, retain a considerable element of mystery, which in this case is not given away as it is in the previous play by an all revealing set of prefatory notes. The Magnetic Lady, unlike The New Inn, demands that the audience sits passively and watches the unfolding of a riddle, rather than enjoying the process of discoveries; the emphasis is on the delight

of final revelations.

It is apparent that what occurs in The Magnetic Lady is another redefinition of the audience's role and one which places them in a single position of enquirers after mystery, as opposed to the earlier more radical demand for a re-assessment of their own position as a result of a series of dramatic dislocations such as, for example, those produced by the imposition of nonsense as a crucial part of the dramaturgy in Bartholomew Fair.

This new, single position is articulated in the Induction, by the boy, who speaks 'authoritatively' for the Poet, and explains,

not out of mine own dictamen, but the author's, a good play is like a skein of silk: which if you take by the right end, you may wind off, at pleasure, on the bottom, or card of your discourse, in a tale, or so; how you will: but if you light on the wrong end, you will pull all into a knot, or elf-lock; which nothing but the shears or a candle will undo or separate!

(Induction, ll.114-121)

This is the most categorical insistence on the singularity of interpretation to be found anywhere in Jonson's texts. Yet, the strength of the warning against anyone who might 'light on the wrong end' of the play is such that it only emphasises the susceptibility of the text to different readings. Jonson aimed this caveat primarily at the officials of the Censor's office and at Courtiers who, like Damplay in the second chorus, seek to find parallels or sketches of public figures in the characters of the play:-

But whom doth your poet mean now by this - Master Bias?

What Lords' secretary, doth he purpose to personate, or perstringe?

(Second Chorus, 11.1-3)

Conversely Mr Probee, in the final chorus entre-acte observes:-

our parts that are the spectators, or should hear a comedy, are to await the process and events of things, as the poet presents them, not as we would corruptly fashion them.

(Fourth Chorus, 11.9-11)

This hollow attempt to speak for, and thereby to control, the audience's response could hardly succeed. Apart from the further attempts to define the role of the audience, two stylistic features identify The Magnetic Lady as a late play and these features figure, in some form, in all of Jonson's late work. The first is the basic configuration of the characters. This may be described as always displacing the father from the nuclear family and usually replacing him by an uncle. This is seen in The Staple, and in The Magnetic Lady (where there is also the relatively inactive Lady Loadstone, the aunt, who spends most of the play locked up in her bed-chamber despite being the 'centre-attractive' of the play's title). The uncle is always a powerful force for evil, a usurous Vice-like figure, whether it be Peniboy Senior-'Old Covetousness' as the Gossips call him - or Sir Moath Interest. The displacement of the father also occurs in The New Inn, but it does not receive the same reorganisation that produces an evil surrogate in the other plays. The absence of the father in the Frampul family does, nevertheless, produce a

similar discourse that of the other plays where the offspring - on this occasion Lady Frances - behaves in 'riotous' or 'Frampul' ways as a result of being unleashed from the parental trammels.

There is clearly a connection here with the prodigal son genre. Beck discusses the prodigal son paradigm and finds considerable variation in its adaptations. He says:-

The most important fact about the hero... is not that he is a prodigal, but that he is a son who denies or misvalues his heritage and has to learn through experience to appreciate it. (19)

The insistence here on the misvaluing of the inheritance draws all of the late Jonson plays together and draws them close to the prodigal son paradigm. Only The Staple is actually defined by Beck as taking part in the genre, but clearly the 'riotous' behaviour of Lady Frances in The New Inn is also linked to it (even if her femininity is an unusual variation). Similarly, the displacement of the father, in the late plays, is a factor which draws them close to the biblical paradigm. It is in this rapprochement that it is possible to see the break between the early and middle plays, and the late comedies, for the earlier comedies have strong links with the Roman New Comedy. Beck continues:-

The basic assumptions of prodigal-son comedy are fundamentally opposed to those of Roman New Comedy: New Comedy is adulescens triumphans; prodigal-son comedy is senex triumphans. (20)

This contrast is repeated in the works of Jonson. We can compare the final victory of the Young Knowell over his father with the re-assertion of order that the reappearance

of both Peniboy Canter and Lord Frampul produces. A radical departure from the earlier assumptions emerges in the late plays. Beck also observes that this is particularly true in relation to character-development. Whereas the earlier heroes were incapable of change and were tied to the classical ideas of decorum of character, a fact that their names often indicated, in the late plays one sees a clear movement from riotousness to maturity and responsibility. This change is seen in Peniboy Junior and equally in the passified Lady Frampul. In The Magnetic Lady it is interesting to note that the movement of character, from good to bad to good again, is enacted between Placentia and Pleasance. The niece Placentia is virtuous at first and her virtues are extolled to her suitors. Then her pregnancy is discovered, her reputation is dashed, and finally she is revealed to be a changeling and the new niece. Pleasance is able to be seen as pure and chaste. Significantly, the break is taking place in Jonson in an almost totally unstated way. The subtitle of the play, The Humours Reconciled, makes a specific connection with his earlier comedies, but it has little formal basis. This, I think, can only be explained by accepting, despite Jonson's careful and demonstrative articulation of his views, a meaningful unconscious element in the fabric of the texts produced.

The recurrent absence of a father-figure seems not to have been recognised by critics of the late plays nor has its significance been studied. Instead, attention has been

paid to the symbolism of the imagery which is marked by several distinctive features. The clearest of these is the exaggerated dehumanising of women. This is achieved by equating the women with commodities and seeing them presented as money. Pecunia, in The Staple, is the most obvious example of this. Partridge has done the earliest and most detailed work on this subject (21). The quest for the marriage of the nephew or niece is always symbolically undermined and seen as financial acquisitiveness on the part of the suitors. In The Magnetic Lady, Mr. Practice, a lawyer, and Sir Diaphanous Silkworm, a courtier, become in this way the Law and the Court vying for economic control. Thus the conventional view of Jonson is reached. The plays are seen as attacking usurous social obsessions, but also finding in money a potentially ameliorative function for those who can, like Compass, use their 'portion' correctly.

If, however, one sets aside the symbolic elements and the diachronic analysis of the imagery and looks instead at the formal movements of the play, the configuration of the shifted family-unit comes more clearly into the foreground. The wealth of the family inheritance is vested in the nephew or niece, but the Uncle has charge of it until the youngster marries. Marriage is usually the deciding factor in these matters and this is seen prominently in The Staple and in The Magnetic Lady where it is most dominant of all. In The New Inn the re-uniting of the Lord and Lady Frampul does not specifically constitute a marriage, but in formal terms a unification occurs and is paralleled by the marriage of

Prudence to the Lord Latimer, Laetitia to Beaufort, and Lady Frances to Lovel. All these certainly provide the celebratory, wedding ambience upon which the Romance depends although, as I have suggested, the scale of the celebration does not match the extent to which any of the family's problems are solved.

There is something fundamental and archetypal about this displacement of power within the family, as the subject of dramatic presentation. Obviously, it is seen in isolation in many different places which have little bearing on Jonson's late plays. Hamlet is the most obvious example where Claudius' murder of his brother puts the play from the outset into a different order.

The historical fact seems to be that the power of the uncle was a common phenomenon Lawrence Stone writes:-

(Among the landed gentry) Uncles and aunts, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, and sons-in-law were still called upon to serve surrogate or interchangeable roles with members of the nuclear family. (22)

Equally, among the middle classes:-

Just as with the elite, there is plenty of evidence that the closer kin relatives, particularly paternal and maternal uncles, continued to play a large part in family decisions, especially when the parents died and the children had to be found jobs or husbands. (23)

The presence of the uncle has a clear factual basis, and the wickedness of the uncle can be well understood from a psychological and a financial point of view. In the event of there not being any close kin, Stone explains again:-

The death of a father leaving a young unmarried heir often inspired a flurry of intrigue for possession of wardship... Men invested in these commodities like any

other, in the hope of financial gain or political advantage, and they were rarely disappointed. (24)

The factual basis for what is dramatised in the late plays is ample and yet its presentation, in the stylised manner that I have described, seems particularly with such repeated emphasis both to lend more to the situation and to detract from it. It seems that there is an almost Manichean dualism being drawn. The nephew or niece may come to represent, in this light, a Christian figure tussling with temptations under the hardened circumstances, in which the Father has been replaced by the wicked brother, Satan.

Here, the second identifying element of the later comedy is of importance. The specific and, at times absurd, use of a single 'secret' to swing the whole outcome of the play points to an increasing interest in closure, an intensification of the desire for things to work out well. This is certainly a part of the interest in romance where such closure is insisted upon. The incredible, and frequently exaggerated, use of a single secret seems to indicate an almost insurmountable confidence in the fiction being produced and in its powers, not so much to convince, (who was really convinced after all?), but in its abilities to formalise and elaborate its own patterns in a coherent manner and thus to satisfy (25).

At the same time, the inevitable thrust towards closure that is produced by the suspension of the revelation of a secret, also has the effect of lessening the interest of the audience in the play's synchrony. The ambiguity and undercutting of forward movement that are so marked in the

'major' plays do not occur here. The incoherent babble of the 'vapours', or of Dol Common's 'fit of talking', is not equalled by the lady-in-waiting Polish's loquacity. For example, in V.v, Polish harangues Doctor Rut on his apparent incompetence and his supposed libel:-

You are a foul-mouthed, purging, absurd doctor;
I tell you true, and I did long to tell it you.
You ha' spread a scandal i' my lady's house here,
On her sweet niece, you never can take off
With all your purges, or plaster of oaths;
Though you distill your damn-me, drop by drop,
I' your defence. That she hath had a child,
Here she doth spit upon thee, and defie thee;
Or I do't for her. Rut: Madam, pray you bind her
To her behaviour. Tie your gossip up,
Or send her unto Bedlam.

(V.v.27-37)

Despite the vitriol of the attack, the audience is given no sense of force behind Polish; she lacks the impact of her predecessors. The reality is, we recall, that it is Polish, herself, who is responsible for the 'scandal i' my lady's house here', but there is no use made of the irony. Her vice is not dangerously attractive, nor does her discourse move beyond the bounds of the play's dominant mode. Indeed, she is striving to maintain the original version of it. There is little sense, throughout The Magnetic Lady, of a set of dominant discourses, threatened by an anarchic drive away from coherence, which proves so interesting and so radical in the earlier plays.

The revelation of the secret, at the end of the play, has what might be termed a 'discourse-reversing' effect. When the secret is finally revealed, a massive ironic backlash overwhelms the whole play, as it suddenly washes

over all the discourses of the text. Whether it be in the revelation of Peniboy Canter as the Father, the true character of the Host Goodstock as Lord Frampul, or in Placentia's and Pleasance's switching, the irony with which the whole play must subsequently be re-read is devastating. Here is a kind of subversion, but it takes a different form from that in the middle plays. I say it is devastating because this seems to be an accurate term for a potential audience's reaction. Delighted though Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences were by conundrums and riddles, these 'single-secret' plays must have been overwhelming, they were in the end insultingly clever, pedantically demonstrative of the inability of any audience to keep pace with a convoluted artifice and, crucially, uninterested in generating any kind of active response. By insisting on the primacy of the text, as I have already suggested, the play ends by losing the interest (and cooperation) of the audience. No wonder the The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady were met with disgust and theatrical, commercial failure.

It might be argued that in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, a similar use of a single secret has an equivalent effect. Of Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding (first printed in 1620) it might perhaps be said, that the disguise of Bellario/Euphrasia functions in a similar manner to that which I have described in the Jonson texts. Certainly there is a degree of ironic re-reading that derives from the final revelation. For example when Bellario protests strongly against Philaster placing him (her) in the service of

Arethusa, Philaster soliloquises:-

The love of boys unto their lords is strange;
I have read wonders of it; yet this boy
For my sake (if a man may judge by looks
And speech) would out-do story. I may see
A day to pay him for his loyalty.

(II.i.57-61)

Obviously there is irony here, since a 'man' may indeed not 'judge by looks/ And speech' when characters are in disguise. Clearly, the other reference to Philaster having 'read wonders of' boys' loyalty to their Lords, and to Bellario out-doing 'story', points directly to the conventional, literary nature of the disguise as a device. The 'wonders' of loyalty that Philaster recalls cover over the 'wonders' of the actual device being used which 'out-do' that bond of duty. Similarly, as a result of Megra's accusations (in II.iv.155-161), Arethusa decries Bellario. She says:-

-Oh thou dissembler, that, before, thou spak'st,
Wert in thy cradle false, send to make lies
And betray innocents!

(III.ii.133-135)

Again, the overt nomenclature coincides with the covert state of affairs: Bellario is a 'dissembler', but not one who sets out to 'betray innocents'. This might seem to work in a way that is perhaps similar to the case of Lady Frances, in The New Inn, disguising the already disguised Frank/Laetitia as her younger kinswoman (which she 'actually' is). Yet, as soon as one makes that comparison, it becomes obvious that there is a considerable difference in the degree to which the disguises, the mysteries, in

these two plays work to alter the action. The severity and the trauma, which arise from Bellario's disguise, have no counterparts in the late Jonson. Philaster's madness is bloody and almost murderous, but it derives as much from the tyrannous rule of the usurper King as it does from the disguise. Nor, significantly, are the secret and the ambiance of secrets played upon to the same extent in Beaumont and Fletcher as they are in Jonson. The two examples of irony given above are rare occasions on which irony is meaningfully derived from the secret whereas, in Jonson, there is a constant linguistic awareness and use of the play between the action, the discourse, and the secret.

In Jonson, the enigma is always close to being ironically revealed because its presence is always leaking out of the solidity of discourse, through hints or insinuations. In The Staple, Peniboy Canter's frequent asides are early indications of the 'otherness' of his status. In The New Inn, Lovel quickly points out that Goodstock's language betrays a higher social rank. In The Magnetic Lady, the oral similarity of the two names Pleasance and Placentia is clearly a deliberate confusion, the further significance of which becomes clear when one realises that the one is a Latin equivalent for the other, both meaning pleasing or satisfying. This is quietly alluded to when, in II.i., Pleasance and Keep (the nurse) discuss the assets and defects of the two suitors to Placentia. Finally Pleasance asks the bride-to-be:-

Ple: Which would you choose, mistress. Plac: Cannot tell. The copy does confound one.

(II.i.18-19)

The superficial meaning of 'copy' here is the sense of 'abundance, quantity, copious amount' (OED 1), but the textual use of this particular word must also draw attention to the duplication of the names of the maid and her mistress, for it is indeed this doubleness which lies at the heart of the difficulties over the choice of a suitor. Further, it seems likely that in Placentia, is also implied 'Placenta' - the after birth - which, in a sense, she also represents. Similar oral confusion is seen in The Staple of News, when Peniboy Canter is called the 'The Founder' until he is shown to be, in fact, 'The Father'.

The presence of a mystery or a secret is also often signalled by reference to a series of 'false enigmas' which simultaneously anticipate and offset the true mystery. For example considerable space is occupied by the mystery of Mr Practice, the lawyer and one of Placentia's suitors, being favoured by the Lady Loadstone, but then being found to have been 'ingaged before' to another woman. This is a surprise obstacle to the Lady's attempts to find a suitable spouse for her niece. Then, however, it emerges that the other person was none other than Pleasance, at which point Parson Palate insists that the company 'hide the hideous secret' (II.v.44) from Placentia. When (in II.viii) Compass confronts Pleasance with the matter outright, she replies:-

This Riddle shows
A little like a love-trick o' one face,
If I could understand it. I will study it.

(II.vii.12-14)

So the resultant humour is ironic (although not satiric). It is often accessible to the audience only from the slowly unravelled signs of a secret or from the proliferation of hints at its existence. These hints often occur with the specific use of words such as 'secret', or 'mystery', which locate the presence of the enigma precisely in the tissue of language. Unlike the middle plays, the late plays may seem to suffer from this over-ingenuous version of irony that is perhaps too dependent on a literary reading of the play. Yet, this linguistic intricacy makes an interesting elaboration of what are, otherwise, rather simplistic actions and plots.

In bringing together these two identifying qualities, the use of the fatherless family and the presence of enigma, a fuller complexity and richness in the late plays may begin to be unfolded. It becomes clear that the particular location of the enigma, the specific site from which information is strategically withheld also operates on the level of allegory, the same archetypal level on which the basic configuration of the characters and its movements produce the religious significances I mentioned earlier.

There is a kind of subtle circularity to these plays, which depends upon the two significant points of absence and presence. The first, as I have shown, is the necessary absence of the Father, and the second is the presence of

mystery. Grossvogel sees this as archetypal:-

Mystery may not mean death, but the odour of death is sensed in the absolute refractoriness of any mystery that states the limits of man. (26)

Jonson's late plays may not directly posit mysteries that, overtly, 'state the limits of man', but both absent Father and present mystery partake of a mythic code that suggests the limits of understanding as well as the social significance which includes satire as its main form. In a sense, the limits of man in his search to fathom the mysteries of God are paralleled, on a lesser scale, in the inability of the audience to follow the tricky twists of the plot. Similarly, within the terms of the plot, the lost Father and the solitary nephew (or more obscurely the niece) take part in a symbolic re-enactment of the Christian mythology of Man functioning in the world under the absent gaze of the deity. Man seeks to come near to the divine, to apprehend its mystery, assured of its existence but, at the same time, held back on this side of the mystery.

In Jonson's terms, this is not overtly articulated, although it is surely taken for granted up to a point. Instead, however, the surface is wrapped up and obscured in the complex social mechanics of the laws of inheritance and marriage. The mythic is seen in the struggle of the innocent - but flawed - youth with the usurous, covetous uncle. It is no longer the morality figure of Youth struggling against personified Vice figures, but the average seventeenth-century heir whose plight is depicted within the system of capital and property inheritance.

This is an allegorical view that matches the world of the plays, from The Devil Is An Ass (1616) onwards, but it is also a view that finds the religious allegory inextricably mixed up with its subject. The very fact that Pug, a devil, in the above-mentioned play, is seen on-stage alongside Merecraft enacts this confusion. Furthermore, the intermittent, symbolic equation of women and money, which operates on the women who occasionally take up the position of the heir in the scheme (Lady Frances, Pleasance, and perhaps Pecunia - who may be heir to her own personified fortune), leads to a familiar allegory of money as the new object of religious faith. This is obviously a well-known part of Jonson's iconography, but its presentation here is much more complex than the straightforward inversions of, for example, Volpone's opening 'prayer' to gold. The problem in the case of Lady Frances, Pleasance, and most crudely with Pecunia, is that the characters have double functions. On the allegorical level, they represent money deified, but they are also seen to be objects of human desire. The result seems to be a kind of vacuum around these characters; they become merely sounding boards for the pleas of the suitors. This indeed would seem to have been the case in actuality. Stone writes:-

Essentially, marriage was not a personal union for the satisfaction of psychological and physiological needs; it was an institutional device to ensure the perpetuation of the family and its property. (27)

On the other hand, however, the vacuity of the heir in these circumstances seems to stem, not from the social 'reality'

of the situation, but from the dramatic weakness of their presentation. This more familiarly Jonsonian allegory seems to be something that the texts slip back into in the face of the archetypal metaphor described above, so that it is not very fully developed.

Another counterpart to the absence of the Father is the emphasis on the births in the plays. The births are always related to the problematical extension of the family line, but in the scheme of archetypal allegory they are suggestive of a potential for re-incarnation. In the world of The Staple of News, the reincarnation of the Father does actually occur as it does in The New Inn. This apparent need for a renewal of the Christian subject, within the context of the mystery, is perhaps explained by Grossvogel's analysis:-

Unable to cross over or dismiss the fateful boundary that hems it in, the frustrated awareness establishes surrogates for the beyond on this side of the divide: a false boundary is posited, but one that is permeable, inviting a mock penetration of the unknown through an active participation... or a speculative one.. or as a meditation on the mystery's effect. (28)

Jonson's late texts may perhaps be seen as occupied with the construction of just such surrogate mysteries. Unable to engage in the specifically metaphysical task, the cause of 'mystery' fluctuates between the absence of the Father and the birth of the heir. This circle of absence and presence is neatly encapsulated in a paradigm at the centre of The Magnetic Lady. At the very mid-point of the play, the argument over who should win the hand of Placentia has been exacerbated by the fight between Ironside and Sir

Diaphonous. It is this fight which causes Placentia to go into labour and, thus, to reveal the falsity of the position of all the suitors. In the chorus, the boy precisely explains this to Damplay:-

The detection of her being with child should determine the quarrel, which had produced it.

(Third Chorus, 11.14-16)

The discovery of one small, inner mystery reverses the position and meaning of all the characters and their actions up to this point. Clearly, however, a birth at this point is not feasible and so the play must go on to solve its new mystery. In The New Inn, mystery surrounds the fate of the Lord Frampul, after the successive births of two girls, a fact which endangers the family lineage, whereas in The Magnetic Lady, the dead father is scarcely made reference to. It is, however, significant that Polish should say of Placentia's parents:-

They were a godly couple! Yet both died

(I.iv.34)

This is highly suggestive of the paradoxical place of the element of absence in the filial allegory. In The Magnetic Lady, the main mystery is derived from the birth of the twin girls. Similarly, in The Staple of News, birth images are a crucial factor in the initial development of the action. Both plays also take place on the birthday of the new heirs.

What is presented in the late plays of Jonson seems to be a complex allegory of the confusion in, and the need for, renewal of religious and linguistic faith, expressed in

unavoidably social and cultural terms. There seems to be a profound recognition of the linguistic source of problems in the perpetuation of a moral life and yet the desire is still there to mystify and to spiritualise it. This seems to be in line with Puritan orthodoxy. Stone observes:-

The puritan divines put forward an idealized view of the relationship of love and marriage, based on traditional Christian morality but adapted to new conditions... an examination of puritan pamphlet and sermon literature shows criticism of the marriage for money and of the double standard (in which men could be promiscuous but the bride must be virtuous and virgin) - the two basic presuppositions underlying the arranged marriage. (29)

The imposition of the archetypal Christian allegory of confusion and subsequent renewal upon what is essentially still social 'citizen comedy' is an interesting development in the late Jonson. It is one that has already been glimpsed, for example in the tripartite form of the power structure among the crooks in The Alchemist, which perhaps with deliberate blasphemy, parallels the Holy Trinity. The significant loss, however, of the elements of incoherence and the resultant functions of dislocation that operate upon the audience of those earlier successful plays - culminating in Bartholomew Fair - produces a more conservative, less dynamic dramatic form. Beck observes this too within the paradigm of the prodigal son:-

Prodigal-son comedy is conservative, not revolutionary, in its social implications... The society formed at the end of prodigal-son comedy is no 'golden age' or 'Edenic' existence; rather, it is a social order formed within the fallen world, aware of the cruel realities of life but somehow transcending them. (30)

Jonson fails, it seems to me, to find a way of achieving the kind of transcendence to which Beck refers. Instead, the

late plays seek to build increasingly self-reflexive, contained worlds whose patterns do not imply any access to an ultimate or Edenic 'truth', but are in fact various temporary substitutes for one. The dramatic rebus, or the linguistic puzzle in dramatic form, with its almost hermetic, sealed world which characterises Jonson's late plays, stands in contrast to the possibilities and potential expounded in the early work. Despite the nostalgic subtitle of Jonson's last complete play, The Humours Reconciled, the audience was really presented with the setting up of 'the rebus against all humours'; the triumph of the puzzle over the descriptive image.

The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady: Notes and References

1. Title page of the Octavo edition 1631, reproduced in H&S, VI, p.395.
2. The view of the play as ironic is pursued first by Partridge, The Broken Compass, pp.191-205, see also:
D. Duncan, 'A Guide to The New Inn,' Essays in Criticism, XX, (1970) 311-326,
Champion, Dotages, pp.76-103,
R. Levin, 'The New New Inn and the Proliferation of Good Bad Drama', Essays in Criticism, XXII, (1972) 41-47,
R.A. Foakes, 'Mr Levin and "Good Bad Drama"', Essays in Criticism, XXII, (1972) 327-329.
3. Champion, Dotages, p.103.
4. A. Barton, 'The New Inn and the Problems of Jonson's Late Style', English Literary Renaissance, 9 (1979) 395-418, p.399.
5. Barton, op. cit., p418.
6. Coghill in particular sets out to show the difference between Shakespearean and Jonsonian comedy;
N. Coghill, 'The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy: A Study in Medieval Affinities', Essays and Studies, ns.III, (1950) 1-28, p.9.
C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1959),
N. Frye, A Natural Perspective, (Columbia University Press, London, 1965),
M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, Translated by Helene Iswolsky, (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968).
7. Barton, op. cit., p.398.
8. I have already discussed this characteristic of Jonson's syntax, see Epicoene, I.i.36-8, and chapter 5.
9. W. Camden, Remaines of a Greater Worke, (London, 1605) p.146.
10. Partridge, op. cit., p.190.
11. H. Hawkins, 'The Idea of a Theatre in Jonson's The New Inn', Renaissance Drama, 9, (1966) 205-226.
12. An Appeal to the Parliament, or Sions Plea against the Prelacie, (London, 1628) The Epistle to the Reader, sig., A3v.
13. An Appeal, p.6.

14. Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Edited by Holbrook Jackson, 3 Vols., (London, 1968) I, p.397.
15. M. Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences, (Tavistock Publications, London, 1970) p.36.
16. Foucault, op. cit., p.42.
17. HS, VI, p.420n.
18. HS, VI, p.391.
19. E. Beck, 'Terence Improved: The Paradigm of the Prodigal Son in English Renaissance Comedy', Renaissance Drama, ns.6, (1973) 107-122, p.110.
20. Beck, op. cit., pp.110-111.
21. Partridge, Broken Compass, pp.206-207.
22. L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, (Wiedenfield and Nicholson, London, 1977) p.124.
23. Stone, op. cit., p.129.
24. Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy (1965), p.601.
25. On the subject of 'credibility' and with some interesting comparisons in Shakesperean comedy see;
C. Leech, 'The Incredibility of Jonsonian Comedy', in A Celebration of Ben Jonson, pp.3-25.
26. D. Grossvogel, Mystery and Its Fictions: From Oedipus to Agatha Christie, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1979) p.3.
27. Stone, Crisis, p.613.
28. Grossvogel, op. cit., pp.12-14.
29. Stone, Crisis, p.611.
30. Beck, op.cit., p.112.

Conclusions

I hope that one of things that have by now, become clear is the manner in which power, in Jonson's drama, may be seen as a product of language and that, with the power derived from language, comes an identity determined by the shapes of that language. This is the basic premise upon which all of Jonson's plays seem to operate and which I have explored in a variety of ways. Especially in the plays of the first phase of Jonson's oeuvre, the Every Man plays and Cynthia's Revels, characters seeking power must take on new identities, and invariably what they acquire is not possession of material gain or increased social standing, but possession by a difficult, embarrassing, and often unprofitable discourse. It is only if, like Brainworm, Macilente, or Amorphus, the character is able to manipulate his identity through shifts in his field of language-use, that he gains access to the possibility of power beyond that of his mere existence, although rarely is this guaranteed.

Power created in Jonson's drama is two-fold: it is the power of a character to speak, the power of one character over another, but it is also the power of the play itself. Some critics have characterised this aspect of Jonson's writing as a search to gain power in the plays over the audience, and thus to convince the spectators of a particular set of values, to make them 'understanders'. McKenzie, for example, in discussing the late plays, argues that they represent 'a final attempt to come to terms with the problem of audience implication and to insist on the

primacy of his judgement over theirs' (1). I have been arguing for perhaps a less affirmative view of Jonson's plays than that; one that depends less on Jonson's own intentions or desires and more on the actual effects of the plays on the spectators or readers. The power of the plays then, for me, lies in their ability to constitute questions to be asked of the audience.

This interrogative function is derived from several dramatic effects, primarily the presentation of conflicting viewpoints contained in differentiated dramatic modes, but also from the reduction of the process of signification to nonsense, or the proliferation of enigmatic formulations which bring together the language of the play and its action into complex but rhetorical configurations as seen in the late plays.

The presentation of conflicting points of view is brought about through the texts' increasingly sophisticated treatment of other texts. Just as Jonson's characters attempt to manipulate language in order to gain authority, so do the plays. The texts try at first to invoke self-consciously a set of intertextual relations as a source of stable, univocal, universal discourse. The classical texts of Horace, Virgil, or Tacitus are seen to have that kind of power in their own historical contexts, but the difficulty in instrumenting that authority in the new text is one of the problems confronting the second phase of Jonson's oeuvre from Poetaster, through to Volpone (and also including Catiline). In Poetaster and the tragedies, the subversions

which occur when Jonson's texts invoke the classics unmediated, lead to a kind of instability which the dramaturgy cannot control. The power of classical discourse disrupts Jonson's frames of reference; it sets up an interplay between historical periods, between moral frameworks, and between author-figures. Both the tragedies (whose interdependence I have shown to be invaluable in their full comprehension) and Poetaster, seek a statuesque, immobile centre from which moral and political truth could flow, a fixity of authority that would confer power on the new texts and define for them their neo-classical identities. The interplay of textualities invoked by the 'borrowing', however, emphasises the processes of dramatic construction - the changing qualities of a text's power - and so subverts the stability of any moral discourse. The spectator is caught in the flux of intertextuality, and what is brought to the foreground is not the indomitable power of historical truth as exemplum, but the transformations, or literally the translations, that deconstruct both discourse and speaker. At Ovid's expulsion from the court, he expresses the dilemma in a very apt metaphor:-

As in a circle, a magician then
Is safe against the spirit he excites;
But out of it, is subject to his rage,
And loseth all the virtue of his art.

(IV.viii.10-13)

If the magician is an author and the 'spirit' is discourse, the analogy exactly fits Ovid's position and that of the text. Their problem is the same: both have to confront the

fictive, historical determination of the material which they conjure. The 'virtue' of the classics only has significance fully in its Roman 'circle', while 'out of it' a kind of anarchic 'rage' is invoked, typified perhaps by Tucca or by the vaporous discourses of Bartholomew Fair, with which the text must contend. It is probably this sense of sometimes erratic movement between 'virtue' and 'rage', that make these plays so interesting but, at times, so difficult to read or watch.

Ovid and Horace move through a spectrum of identities, the movement of which is the process of the simulacrum itself. In Sejanus and Catiline, the ambitious attempts of both rebels to halt the processes of history and derive a form of power and identity from outside, come into conflict with the force of history's narratives and its manipulation, propelling the action forwards continually and without disruption. Similarly, as Caesar is seen to manipulate Sejanus, so the power of the narratives of Tacitus is seen to effect Jonson's texts, forcing them to confront the basis of their own use and study of history.

I have shown how Volpone, too, is governed by the formulations of a set of anterior texts, the Fables of Aesop. In Volpone, however, the earlier problems find some resolution through the dramatic subversion of meanings in the moral fables, and through the adaptation of the classical techniques of declamation to more ambiguous purposes. In Volpone, the sophistications of the criminal as artist are developed; transformations of identity occur

with considerably more control and focus. The wily 'creatures' and 'creators' of plots, like Brainworm and Macilente, are synthesised with the possessors and manipulators of past fictions, like Ovid or Caesar, into the identity of the Magnifico himself, the Aesopic hero or Demon, Volpone, or The Fox.

The anomaly that Catiline presents in the chronology of this 'development' indicates the fact that Jonson's oeuvre does not really develop chronologically with quite such clarity as I am suggesting here but, from the point of view of analysis, to present the relations between texts in this manner remains the clearest way and seems to me to have involved the least distortion. The movement from Jonson's early humour plays, to Poetaster, to Sejanus and on to Volpone, however, is still one of the most clearly traceable progressions to occur in Jonson's dramaturgy.

Volpone represents the stunning and much praised exposure of human vice and gullibility, at least partly, through its subtle manipulations of the archetypal situations of Aesop's Fables, as well as through the reversals of archetypal symbols, imagery and moral codes in the language of the play. That the Fables were well-known to the audience through their grammar school use serves to give their dramatisation considerable contemporary force. For Volpone is also one of Jonson's most astute revitalisations and interrogations of texts which, in the period, had lost their fictive powers to the complacencies of the morally didactic school system. Jonson's drama has

long been regarded as didactic, but the kind of view I have taken reveals something quite distinct from simple instruction, a drama that is much more demanding and much more challenging of its contemporary audiences.

To some extent Volpone may be seen as a point of disjuncture in Jonson's oeuvre. It marks a separation between the earlier search for dramatic identity, constructed out of discourses that offered the possibility of access to some ultimate truth, knowledge or power, and the later explorations of language as shifting and equivocal, whose access to power is constructed only in its own identity as discourse.

Increasingly through Epicoene, The Alchemist, and Bartholomew Fair, the use of anterior material alters, decreases and becomes more subtle, while more elusive forms of discourse such as those of puzzles, nonsense, allusion, and the covert use of earlier dramatic configurations in sub-versions, become more prominent.

With The Alchemist - the sense of mystery or enigmatically deferred meaning - as well as of chaotic noise, appears prominently for the first time. The movement of the action is as clearly and as tightly paced as in Epicoene, but the incoherence of noise, which Morose rejects and which Truewit fairly crudely manipulates, is, in The Alchemist, a crucial instrument wielded by criminals whose association with the Devil is far less equivocal than Truewit's. The submerged traces of demonic formulations, which describe Truewit and Epicoene in the earlier play, are brought to the

surface of The Alchemist. The discourse of alchemy becomes, on this level, part of the babble of the Devil within whose tormenting discourse secrets are whispered.

One of the problems, however, that I have tried to illuminate in dealing with Jonson's texts relates to the difficulty which the texts experience in constructing an identity for evil as well as for virtue. Despite the connections that I have shown between Volpone and the Devil, and those between Subtle and Satan, I have also indicated that the texts seem deliberately to make such connections indirectly or tentatively. In a way, the invocation of the Devil is only the invocation of a stereotype which gives a moral perspective on the action; it is a perspective in and out of which the texts shift. If Subtle and Volpone could, in any simple way, be equated with the Anti-Christ, then the texts would be closed and made narrow in a way which they are not at all. The stereotype of the Devil is in fact not a stereotype of identity, but one of discourse, and this becomes apparent when one contrasts the crude portrayal of poor Pug, in The Devil Is An Ass, with the great figures of the middle plays. It is not simply that 'now they are attir'd like men and women o' the time, the Vices, male and female!' (The Staple of News, II, Intermean, 11.16-17), as Gossip Mirth tries to explain, and which is also one of the more obvious points of The Devil Is An Ass. The difficulties which the texts confront are increasingly those of the functions of discourse itself. It is, perhaps, Truewit with his underlying connections with the Devil and

his surface identity as gallant, scholar and wit who ultimately encapsulates the difficulty which Jonson's texts display in this respect. In Volpone and The Alchemist, the evil in the play is relatively easily identified (although not fully defined) by making the connections between the anti-hero and the Devil, but Mosca and Face, of course, both already represent evils outside of the morality conventions of Hell. Once Jonson's texts try to avoid those conventions and the techniques that go with them, or try to approach them in a different way, as in Epicoene and more obviously in Bartholomew Fair, the problems return with even greater strength.

The discourse of vapours in Bartholomew Fair, in its conflicts with the discourses of institutionalised religion, education, and the law (each of which is a resumption of the explorations of earlier plays), demonstrates, quite graphically, the power of a liberated, anarchic use of language and the inflexibility of the discourses of the Law, the Puritan church, or of Education. What emerges from Bartholomew Fair, even though it too has its morality elements which, for example associate Ursula's stall with the burning mouth of Hell (2), is that the conflict over language-use is a social and political problem. In a sense, this has been apparent through all of Jonson's plays. Sejanus is quite clearly a play about words and politics, but in Bartholomew Fair the political perspective of the play is much wider than that of the tragedies because the Fair, with its visitors and its spies, is a microcosm

peopled very cleverly with a broad social cross-section. The problems that individual characters have are made political by their direct relation to the attempted containing actions of the institutional figures in the Fair, and by the different uses of language that specifically distinguish them. Win's most basic need, to find a privy, is inhibited by her inability to express herself; her inhibition is paralleled, dramatically, to Busy being put in the stocks. A little later, Knockem points out that Trouble-All will not even urinate without a warrant from Justice Clement, thus making the point very clear. Win's ability to speak is contained, metaphorically, in the stocks of socially defined discourse. Similarly, the manner in which the social function and status of alchemy are discussed, in the earlier play, are inhibited, forced into an esoteric discourse less by social constraints in this case, more by the political climate established by King James' published views on the matter. I have also shown how the treatment of madness is similarly affected by the condition of social and political beliefs about the insane.

Jonson's texts find themselves increasingly in the stocks of discourse. Consequently word-games, puzzles and conundrums, with their hidden meanings, become not just entertainments, but an important form of discourse in their own right. Ultimately in The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady, the discourse of the enigma comes to dominate the dramatic language of the whole. At this point, the Rebus as discourse becomes a paradigm enacting, in heightened and

abstract forms, the same paradoxical processes which occur throughout the languages of Jonson's drama.

Jonson's plays always seem to be engaged in the paradoxical struggle to liberate, and to order the power of language that proliferates meanings, and thereby unsettles identities. The absence of the father-figure, for example, in The Staple of News, The New Inn and The Magnetic Lady, brings about the crossed discourses of the action, and then inverts meaning throughout the play when, at the conclusion, the final discoveries are made. The dramas seek to order the play of significance, so that the infinity of deferred meaning (whose madness is always a threat) is focused back on the text in order to signify and to cohere, yet at the same time it may remain liberated, baffling, and active as a stimulus for the audience or reader. At its most brilliant, Jonson's drama allows a discourse to run beyond the confines of signification to a point of infinite and lunatic play, in Dol's 'fit of talking' for example, whilst retaining the germs of meaning within that apparently nonsensical babble. More often, in the plays of the middle and late phase of Jonson's oeuvre, neatly concluded plots are laid open in their closing lines to an undercutting of meaning which allows the play of significance to return problematically and forestall the moral closure of the drama.

When, in The Devil Is An Ass for example, Fitzdotterel is finally brought to repentance, he is made to see,

... how much
His modest, and too worthy wife hath suffer'd

By mis-contruction, from him,

(V.viii.159-161)

Yet Manly, the speaker of this speech, and Wittipol have throughout been suitors to the Lady and acted in the way which also brought about her suffering. Fitzdotterel's 'mis-contruction' of his wife is drawn attention to, but by implication so is the deliberate and dramaturgical 'mis-contruction' of Manly and Wittipol. Even as the action is neatly concluded, the narrative reveals its own discursive practices, and its points of profound moral disjuncture.

To this extent Jonson's drama remains, to the end, engaged with social questions, but in the later plays the treatment of the issues has become less a matter of making attempts at practical moral statement, and more a question of abstract philosophy, although a philosophy totally aware of itself as based in, and fabricated from, trouble-all language. The study of individual identity and the processes of drama become, finally, part of the same exploration whose metaphors are irrecoverably intermingled. The placenta (Placentia), which follows the birth of Pleasance, turns out to be both suggestive of that organic tissue which allows the feeding of the baby in the womb, and of the cradle-switching device which feeds the plot. Just as in The Staple of News, the birth of the play is placed in parallel to the birth of its central character, so in The Magnetic Lady, the resolution of the plot collapses the whole artifice. There is a more than a hint in The Magnetic Lady, that this is a sophisticated retelling of a fairy-tale

pursued only in order to dismantle the dramatic and social illusions which it constructs. Fairy-tales, of course, like Aesopic Fables, puppet plays, and perhaps old Morality plays are all constituent parts of the indigenous popular culture that constructs basic social and political assumptions, both in Jacobean England, and in the present day. In The Magnetic Lady and the other late plays, and in the unfinished work, The Sad Shepherd (first published in the second Folio of 1640), Jonson's plays still appear to have been pursuing the forms of analysis and progressive enquiry which inform his greatest drama and which have been the subject of my exploration in this thesis.

Notes:

1. D.F. McKenzie, 'The Staple of News and the Late Plays' in A Celebration of Ben Jonson, p.86.
2. Brian Parker, 'The Themes and Staging of Bartholomew Fair', University of Toronto Quarterly, 39, (1970) 293-309.

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