"SUBJECT TO CALUMNY": A DEFENCE OF JONSON'S THEATRICALITY

"SUBJECT TO CALUMNY": A DEFENCE OF JONSON'S THEATRICALITY

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Abstract

Traditional criticism of Ben Jonson's relationship to his audience emphasizes the animosity that Jonson feels towards spectators who are unable to perceive his intentions correctly. Even sympathetic interpretations conclude that Jonson is at odds with his audience and disenchanted with the theatre. In forming this conclusion critics assume that Jonson's personal attitudes concur with the direct address to and sniping at the on-stage and off-stage audiences in his dramas. They find further support by decontextualizing specific instances of Jonson's complaints in his poetry and prose writings as a means to interpret the entire body of his work. This "antitheatricality" has become axiomatic to the majority of Jonsonian criticism since the eighteenth century. In this project, I examine this tradition of criticism to point out the flawed assumptions on which it is based. Informed by the practises of performance theory, I reexamine both Jonson's attitude toward the stage itself as a medium of expression and the nature of his relationship to the audience. Examining *Every Man Out of His Humour, The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* as performances, I find these comedies illustrate neither an antagonism for the audience nor the antitheatricalism of which Jonson has been accused. Instead, they demonstrate a dynamic relationship between auditor and performance, a reliance upon the physical theatre as a site of interpretation and Jonson's commitment to this medium.

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Introduction

Unwarranted Assumptions: Antitheatricality, and Anti-Anti-Theatricality

> *Nay, they would offer to urge mine own writings against me, but by pieces, which was an excellent way of malice, as if any man's context might not seem dangerous and offensive if that which was knit to what went before were defrauded of his beginning, or that things by themselves uttered might not seem subject to calumny which read entire would appear most free.* -- (*Discoveries* 30)

Jonah Barish in his chapter "Jonson and the Loathed Stage" invokes the idea of Jonson as an antitheatricalist, a criticism which has become an axiomatic principle in the majority of Jonsonian dramatic criticism since the latter part of the eighteenth century. Having offered his proofs of this tendency, in the final pages of the chapter Barish turns to a consideration of Jonson's success despite his obvious animosity towards the medium: "It remains to speculate briefly as to why, despite his persistent and at times vehement antitheatricalism, Jonson was nevertheless able to create so many masterpieces for both the public stage and that of the court" (Barish 152-53). Faced with this paradoxical problem, Barish reasserts his belief in Jonson's "antitheatricalism" as the formal governing principle of Jonson's work, while positing that an oppositional "subversive" and potent theatricalism also exists. For Barish it is this alternate and enigmatic source in conjunction with the accepted "antitheatricalism" which creates the tension in Jonson and his work that made these masterpieces possible. Barish does not question his antitheatrical premise and

concludes that the paradox resides in Jonson's psyche rather than in Barish's own critical reading. Although Barish does not formally define antitheatricalism, it is clear that the term in its broadest sense has been defined as a sentiment which is opposed to one or more aspects of the theatre and its "society" (i.e. the performative component, the tendencies and or values it enforces, its immoral content or its value as a legitimate form of literature). To approach the issue of Jonson's "antitheatricalism" properly it is essential that we briefly examine the historical trends in Jonsonian criticism to locate the source and basis of the issue. To this end I will first consider the opinions of Jonson's contemporaries.

As early as 1598, Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* includes Jonson's name with those of Marlowe, Peele, Kidd, Shakespeare and others in a list of prominent dramatists, proclaiming him to be one of the leading tragedians of the day (Bradley and Adams 3). By 1599, two of his "humours" comedies, *Every Man In His Humour* and *Every Man Out of His Humour* had been found to have sufficient merit that they were accepted for performance by the Lord Chamberlain's Men -- the company to which Shakespeare was attached. These early triumphs were reinforced by the further successes of *Volpone*, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* so that when Jonson published his *Works* in 1616 his position as one of the leading literary figures of his time was secure. Donne, in his poem "Amicissimo and Meritissimo Ben: Jonson", compares Jonson's work to that of the ancients and he commends Jonson for his ability to refer to the ancients and draw on them: "Genius and toil render you equal/ To the ancients; outlive them so that/

You may ransom future men from our corruption,/ In which we surpass the past and future ages" (cited in Bradley and Adams 56). Fletcher, a contemporary dramatist, commends Jonson for the longevity he perceives in the dramas: "Thy labours shall outlive thee; and, like gold/ Stampt for continuance, shall be current where/ There is a sun, a people, or a year" (Prefixed to *Catiline*, cited in Bradley and Adams 78). John Selden describes Jonson as "that singular Poet M. Ben: Jonson, whose special Worth in Literature, accurate Judgement, and Performance, Known only to that Few which are truly able to know him, hath had from me, ever since I began to learn, an increasing admiration" (*Titles of Honor*, cited in Bradley and Adams 86). During this period, Jonson's reputation was further enhanced by his success as a masque writer for courtly occasions; it was his proficiency at creating these entertainments which earned him a hundred pound annuity from the king.

Despite these accolades, Jonson's rise in status was not a smooth process. From his earliest days he displayed a penchant for trouble which he retained throughout his career. In 1597 he was jailed for his part in the "lewd and mutinous" *Isle of Dogs*. Two years later Jonson, having killed the actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel, escaped execution by pleading "benefit of clergy". At the turn of the century Jonson found himself embroiled in another controversy, this time relating to his character as a dramatist. During the war of the theatres or Poetomachia, Jonson quarrelled publicly with fellow playwrights Marston and Dekker, by means of damning representations upon the stage. The dispute focused on the dramatists' respective reputations and abilities. Marston and Dekker focused their

attacks on Jonson's self-aggrandizing tendency (his presumption to identify himself with Horace), his egotism, his self-serving ends and the style of drama which Jonson embraced -- a style which was in contrast to and competed against the works of Marston and Dekker (Kay 54-60). D. H. Craig points out that despite the ill-will of the attacks against Jonson's reputation, the quarrel reasserts Jonson's prominence: "[Dekker's] *Satiromatrix* is itself a tribute to Jonson's success, in that it registers discomfort at the arrival of a new phenomenon" (Craig 5). Despite his prominence as a dramatist, not all of his offerings were received with equal commendation. *Eastward Ho*, his collaboration with Chapman and Marston, again brought about a jail term when the court interpreted at least two passages of the drama as containing elements of a slanderous nature against the crown and its interests. His 1605 tragedy *Sejanus* was hissed off the public stage and *Catiline* was also deemed to be flawed by the contemporary spectators[1]. Further, those plays written after Jonson's return to the stage in 1626 following a ten year absence from the medium, were unable to captivate and enchant his audience as his previous works had done. In particular the failure of *The New Inn* prompted Jonson to write his "Ode to Himself" in which he reacts against "the loathed Stage" -- a poem which has been repeatedly read as the starting point for proof of Jonson's antitheatricality.

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[1]Despite these failures in the popular theatre, each of these plays received the open support of prominent literary figures. Despite their earlier disagreements, Marston praises *Sejanus*, noting "Ye ready friends, spare your unneedful bays,/ This work despairful envy must even praise" (cited in Bradley and Adams 50). Beaumont is also quick to rescue Jonson's work from poor treatment at the hands of the audience. In an address to Jonson prefixed *to Catiline*, Beaumont faults the audience rather than the work for its poor reception: "And (I dare say) in it there lies much wit/ Lost, till the readers can grow up to it" (cited in Craig 116).

Despite this tumultuous career, Jonson at his death was considered to be one of the greatest dramatists of his day. The collection of commendatory verses written after his death and presented in *Jonsonus Virbius: Or, The Memorie of Ben: Jonson Revived by the Friends of the Muses* attest both to his popularity and craftsmanship. A brief examination of Lord Falkland's "An Eglogue on the Death of Ben Jonson, between Meliboeus and Hylas" as an example of the verses contained in the collection, reveals that Jonson's impact and influence on the stage should not be underestimated. In his verses, Falkland grieves: "Her great instructor gone, I know the Age/ No lesse laments than doth the widow'd stage." Falkland also commends the writing of Jonson as unequalled:

> Nor shall another pen his fame dissolve,
> Till we this doubtful problem can resolve,
> Which in his works we most transcendant see,
> Wit, judgement, learning, art or industry;
> Which till is never, so all jointly flow,
> And each doth to an equal torrent grow. (cited in Bradley and Adams 204-05)

By the conclusion of his career, the presumption of equating himself with Horace was no longer deemed impudent, but rather was accepted and reinforced by many of his contemporaries.

Jonson's reputation as the outstanding dramatist of his time carried through to the Restoration. With the reopening of the theatres, several of Jonson's comedies were revived and proved profitable for Restoration theatre managers. In examining Noyes' *Ben Jonson on the English Stage 1660-1776*, it is clear that *Every Man in His Humour*, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair* enjoyed a great deal of success into the later part of the eighteenth century. Noyes' records indicate that until 1776, the

end of his study, at least one Jonson drama had been performed every year from 1700-1776 (Noyes 320-33). In conjunction with the popular approval of Restoration audiences, Jonson's skills as a dramatist were applauded by critics and playwrights alike. Playwrights like Shadwell and Buckingham pointed to Jonson's style and construction as the form to emulate. In his preface to *The Sullen Lovers*, Shadwell describes Jonson as the playwright "whom I think all Dramatick [sic] Poets ought to imitate, though none are like to come near, he being the only person that appears to me to have made perfect Representations of Humane Life" (cited in Craig 263). Elsewhere, Jonson's name and reputation were held up as proof of the poverty of Restoration drama in comparison to its forefathers. Richard Flecknoe singles out Jonson, Fletcher and Shakespeare as dramatists that remain unequalled in the Restoration, and of Jonson he notes: "Yet know who e'r thou art, dost less esteem/ Of Jonson for the faults oth' Times, not him,/ Had he writ now, h'ad better writ than thee,/ Hadst thou writ then, th'adst writ far worse than he" (cited in Craig 273-74).

Even Dryden, whose words have frequently been used as support for criticism of Jonson, concedes Jonson's preeminence in comparison to Restoration drama: "as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his Discoveries, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us" (*An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* 1842). However, Dryden's position is not without a great deal of ambivalence; even in these obvious words of praise, Dryden's reaction is a telling statement of the trend that would usurp Jonson's

position. His passing dismissal of Jonson's later plays "for his last Playes were but his dotages"(1841) has remained the defining label for these later works, and it is only recently that attempts have been made to reinterpret the works and consider them as serious works worthy of study[2]. In comparing Jonson to Shakespeare, Dryden notes: "Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare" (1842). The veiled criticism of the contrived nature of Jonson's drama is brought out more clearly in Dryden's Prologue to *The Tempest* where Shakespeare is deemed to be the monarch of the English stage, he who "did first impart ... to labouring Jonson Art"(cited in Bradley and Adams 337). In the 1671 preface to *An Evening's Love, or The Mock Astrologer*, Dryden attempts to reaffirm a more positive position in relation to his criticism of Jonson. He praises Jonson as the poet who "can be tax'd with fewer failings than any English Poet" and defends his criticisms of Jonson noting that: "I know I have been accus'd as an enemy of his writings; but without any other reason than that I do not admire him blindly, without looking into his imperfections" (cited in Craig 275-80). Despite this qualification, Dryden's distinction between Jonson and Shakespeare continues throughout the eighteenth century, with Jonson's reputation suffering as Shakespeare's rises in status.

As the eighteenth century took shape, sentimentalism and a desire for a more natural, less contrived form of drama grew -- elements more easily found in Shakespeare.

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[2]Larry Champion's *Ben Jonson's 'Dotages' a reconsideration of the late plays* is a book length treatment of the subject and Martin Butler in his "Late Jonson" offers a more sympathetic treatment of the works.

In his analysis of Jonson's work, D.H. Craig concludes "Jonson had made himself the representative poet of deliberate art, of unremitting labour, of judgement; and had made those qualities supreme over their complementaries, native genius, unfettered imagination, natural fluency" (Craig 18). With the rise of sentimentalism, Jonson's works came under attack for those very components which had previously won him fame. In reconsidering his work, it was found that his art was overly contrived, intellectual, and pedantic, with far too great a reliance on classical precepts; the comedies were considered to be of base material and the satire was overly caustic; his topical allusions and character representations were too tightly associated with the Renaissance and its lifestyle, elements which did not fit into the eighteenth-century sensibility. In short, they were generally unrecoverable on the stage, inaccessible[3]. By the end of the eighteenth century, as D.H. Craig points out, both the tragedies and the comedies were relegated to the study: "it had been accepted as early as the restoration that Jonson's tragedies were better enjoyed in the study than in performance. In the eighteenth century the comedies too are spoken of as better read than seen" (Craig 25). This sentiment gains further support when one considers that the popular opinion among the actors was that Jonson's plays were particularly difficult to act. The opinion of the day was that it was the acting, not the

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[3]This general statement on the nature of Jonson does not reflect all of the opinions of the age. Jonson still has support from certain people, including Edmund Burke, who in the weekly journal *The Reformer* commends Jonson for his accomplishments in comedy and employs Jonson's treatment as an attack against the failings of his own age: "but his Writings instead of doing Honour to our Age, will always be a Proof of its Degeneracy, that could neglect such delicious feasts as his happy Muse has provided for us" (cited in Craig 418-19).

dramas, which helped to sustain the works (Craig 25)[4].

Amidst these criticisms on his professional reputation, Jonson's personal character also came under attack. D.H. Craig postulates that these personal attacks could be motivated by a pro-Shakespearean sentiment: "once the idea was established that to attack Jonson was to serve the cause of Shakespeare, commentators vied with each other to belittle Jonson's literary achievements, and to produce evidence of his malign character and his active spitefulness towards his 'rival'" (Craig 28). The personal attacks and the lack of credibility attached to them are possibly best highlighted by the letter which Charles Macklin wrote in 1748. In the letter he speaks of a pamphlet in his possession which identifies Jonson as "by nature splenetic and sour". Macklin holds the pamphlet up "as unanswerable and shaming Evidences to prove his [Jonson's] Ill-nature and Ingratitude to Shakespear"(cited in Craig 415). While the pamphlet was later discovered to be fictitious, the attacks on Jonson demonstrate the scorn showered upon Jonson.

Despite the false nature of the charges, these personal invectives which influenced the period remained in force into the nineteenth century. Their influence is witnessed by Gifford's opening section to his "Memoirs of Ben Jonson" with which he prefaces his 1816 edition of Jonson's *Works*. Gifford feels obliged to address Jonson's fallen character

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[4]This sentiment persisted into the nineteenth-century as is obvious from the opinion expressed by a reviewer for the *British Critic* in 1818:

> Of the sixteen plays which are remaining to us from the pen of Jonson, it is a singular fact, that not one retains possession of the modern stage. *The Alchymist* [sic], indeed, was indebted to a perversion of Garrick's wonderful and versatile talents, for a temporary revival; but it was the actor, not the play, which caught the public taste. (cited in Jensen 19)

and reputation:

> It was fully time to examine into the authenticity of the charges incessantly urged against this eminent man; and this has been, at least, attempted. The result has not accorded with the general persuasion concerning him. The reader, therefore, who has the courage to follow me through these pages, must be prepared to see many of his prejudices overthrown, to hear that he has been imposed upon by the grossest fabrications, and (however mortifying the discovery may prove) that many of those who have practised on his integrity and surprised his judgement are weak at once and worthless, with few pretensions to talent and none to honesty. (Gifford 7)

In Jonson's defence, Gifford exposes the nature of the slander levelled against Jonson, pointing out its baseless premise. Gifford seeks to reinvest Jonson's work and character with the integrity they deserve. While the attempts may have caused a reevaluation of the personal slanders levelled against Jonson, his dramatic reputation was not recovered. Tennyson, in his reading of Jonson found: "I can't read Ben Jonson, especially his comedies. To me he appears to move in a wide sea of glue" (cited in Jensen 20). Ejner Jensen in his summary of the nineteenth-century opinion of Jonson notes of Tennyson's remarks:

> It is a view of Jonson perfectly consonant with the majority opinion of Tennyson's century. In an age of romanticism -- an age which placed such high value on the individual, an age which worshipped beauty and mystery and questing -- in such an age Jonson's stolid classicism and the clarity of his satiric vision must necessarily have suffered neglect and even abuse. (20)

It is clear that the demise of Jonson's reputation, begun in the eighteenth century, was further emphasized by the neglect it endured during the nineteenth century. Jonson's works were deemed suitable only for the study, and for the most part were unread beyond the circles of intellectuals and historians. This appraisal of Jonson is supported by T.S.

Eliot's brief handling of Jonson which appears in *The Sacred Wood*. Eliot succinctly defines the nature of Jonson's reputation at the outset of the twentieth century:

> The reputation of Jonson has been of the most deadly kind that can be compelled upon the memory of a great poet. To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries -- this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval. For some generations the reputation of Jonson has been carried rather as a liability than as an asset in the balance-sheet of English literature. (95)

Since the time of Eliot's appraisal, the twentieth century has seen a renewed interest in Jonson's work; however, in many cases it still labours under the antitheatrical prejudice outlined at the outset of this paper. This is despite claims that critics have adopted a more "sympathetic" (Barish 132) approach to Jonson.

Returning to Barish's statement on the nature of Jonson's antitheatricality quoted at the beginning of this introduction, I would like to rephrase his statement in order to redirect the nature of the inquiry he suggests and point to the possibly flawed assumption of Barish's argument: How is it that a man who "created so many masterpieces for both the public stage and the court" has been repeatedly charged with possessing a "persistent and at times vehement antitheatricalism?" In reviewing Barish's position it is apparent that there are aspects of Jonson's career that are not accounted for in Barish's model -- aspects which, when considered in the light of this "antitheatrical" assumption, prove the inadequacy of Barish's model as a guide to approaching Jonson's work. Briefly, these omited aspects include: the fact that Jonson was frequently in debt during his life and yet he continued to produce stage offerings despite the knowledge that the stage would not

recompense him in the same way as his masques and laudatory poetry would; the fact that he invested an enormous amount of time and effort in the composition of his dramas and adhered strictly to classical principles; and that the on-stage jibing and sniping the author levels against the audience, an integral component of the argument for Jonson's antitheatricalism has classical sources in Aristophanes and is a common convention among Renaissance playwrights[5]. Interestingly, of all the Renaissance playwrights it is primarily Jonson who finds this sniping held against him as evidence of his antitheatricality.

In his discussion, Barish invokes several lines of argument to support his hypothesis of antitheatricalism. One argument is the idea that Jonson was never comfortable with the audiences he wrote for and as a result had feelings ranging from ambivalence to contempt for them. Barish then claims that Jonson's attack on the popular forms of drama of the day, including the stage mechanisms which added to the spectacle, are proof of Jonson's antitheatricalism. In this argument, Barish goes so far as to say: "somewhere in Jonson there lurks a puritanical uneasiness about pleasure itself" (135) and that Jonson's reforms aimed to "detheatricalize" the theatre, to rob it of those elements which his audiences found most appealing. Barish then turns to Jonson's practice of printing his plays as proof of Jonson's desire to find a more stable medium. Barish contends that Jonson's printing of the texts in a form that is not precisely that in which

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[5]Leo Salingar, in his 1989 Shakespeare Lecture entitled "Jacobean Playwrights and Judicious Spectators", prepared for the Proceedings of the British Academy, addresses the prevalence of this feeling on the part of several playwrights that the audience must be more attentive. In his lecture, Salingar draws from a wide range of Jacobean dramatists including Shakespeare, Dekker, Beaumont, Fletcher and Jonson.

they were performed shows a privileging of the written word and hence an animosity for the theatre. Barish finds in Jonson's poetry a source to develop the argument that Jonson possessed a bias against change, and with this, "the allegiance to silence, stasis, and immobility carry with them an implied bias against the theatre that occasionally erupts into open antagonism" (144-45). It is Barish's opinion that: "Wherever we look, then, within the plays or outside them, in structure or in moralizing comment, we find a distrust of theatricality, particularly as it manifests itself in acting, miming, or changing, and a corresponding bias in favour of the "'real' -- the undisguised, unacted, and unchanging" (152-3).

My difficulty with Barish's argument lies in the fact that in order to prove his hypothesis, he must maintain the antitheatrical assumption as an a priori view throughout the essay; he never questions the validity of his antitheatrical assumption. The arguments he uses to support the contention are unable to stand unaided -- they can only be proven with this assumption as a foundation. Further, Barish invokes a broad crosssection of Jonson's work outside the realm of his drama to prove the antitheatricality and only turns to examples from the dramas after he is satisfied that his argument has been proven. As such, the assumption that Jonson is antitheatrical is never questioned; this bias is only reinforced.

In contrast to Barish's treatment Laura Levine reconsiders antitheatricalism as it existed within the Renaissance and then examines Jonson's work to see if it participates in the antitheatricality of his own age. Taking as her starting point Barish's paradoxical

position that "alongside the well articulated anti-theatricalism, that is, there lurks a less acknowledged but nonetheless potent theatricalism" (Barish 153), Levine finds fault with the position because it "fails to take into account the strenuous critiques of anti-theatricality that emerge in Jonson's late plays-his anti-anti-theatricality" (Levine 73). The reasons for this fault lie in the canonical tendency to only treat those plays that are generally considered his "great works." Beyond this there is also the problem that: "In their responses to the moral and philosophical currents in Jonson's work, even the most intelligent analyses have ignored the ways Jonson's hostility to the stage replicates the gender anxieties that dominate popular anti-theatrical tracts" (73). In her argument, Levine addresses the schism which Barish has postulated in Jonson's consciousness between antitheatricality and theatricality -- although Levine replaces this with her own term "anti-anti-theatricality" -- and then considers both sides of the issue before coming to her conclusion. It is her intention to examine "how Jonson himself finally mediated between these two opposite positions" (73). While Levine does treat Jonson within the context and conflicts of the Renaissance, and does eventually conclude that *Epicoene* displays Jonson's anti-anti-theatricality rather than his antitheatricalism, her conclusions do little to reaffirm any sort of theatricality in Jonson. Her coining of a new term "anti-anti-theatricality" to discuss the opposite of antitheatricality displays a resistance on her part to recreate Jonson's image in a more positive sense with regards to the theatre. While displacing antitheatricality from its privileged position as the governing principle of Jonson's drama, Levine concomitantly negates the positive impulse through her wariness

in discussing Jonson's theatricality.

In my research I have frequently encountered the phenomenon wherein the critic begins an examination of Jonson with this anti-theatrical prejudice as an axiomatic foundation. The spectre of this mistreatment of Jonson's work looms large over his dramatic endeavours. In discussing this issue, it is apparent that the most obvious and yet frequently overlooked or misused/ misinterpreted sites for examination of this question of antitheatricalism are the individual dramas themselves. Rather than attempting to construct a general homogenous portrait of Jonson's genius and then applying it intact without exception to his work, I intend to begin with an examination of the dramas. It is my intention in this present work to approach three of Jonson's comedies, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady*, not simply as comedies which exist in a "collected *Works*" of Ben Jonson -- literary texts to be accessed through the written words on the page only -- but rather as performances.

Richard Schechner in his opening chapter to *Performance Theory* discusses the series of frames which surround the dramatic performance of an actress in any given scene. He notes that for analysis "One cannot discuss a single frame without referring to the others because it is only within a pattern of relationships that a specific performance takes place" (15). In his work, Schechner uses "analysis" within the context of the interactions between actress, director, playwright, and architect-designer; however, the idea of the multiple frames that impact upon the scene is equally applicable to an understanding of what composes a performance -- including those elements which exist

beyond the written text and are vital to a proper comprehension of the drama.

Marco De Marinis, developing his semiotic approach to theatrical criticism, notes a similar propensity in historical criticism of the drama to disregard anything beyond the words on the page, a trend that will lead to erroneous assumptions and misreadings because of the vast materials it silences: "I am criticising only the erroneous tendency, still present in the work of many scholars, of confusing the written text with the performance, or more precisely, of assuming that the performance is 'included' in the text, when if anything, the converse is true" (16). According to De Marinis and other critics who have helped to develop a critical mode that includes the performance in criticism, the written text cannot possibly function as the sole source for interpretation because it is of necessity incomplete. It is incapable of encompassing the larger context of the performance, the theatre, the social context and the actor/audience relationship which are essential to the production of meaning. As Andrew Gurr points out: "The minds of men opened in company, the sharing of laughter or horror, the flow and accumulation of dramatic momentum, the shared experience of live theatre are all components of the performance text" (Gurr 163)[6]. The difficulty with a Renaissance dramatist lies in the fact that the written texts exist as the only concrete "permanent" record of performance. In contrast to the "ephemeral and non-persistent" nature of the visual components, the gestures,

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[6]Within the sphere of performance criticism, there is a distinction that must be made between the written text and the performance to which it is a part. In order to register this distinction and allow critics to discuss the multitude of forces which come together in the performance to produce meaning, the term "performance text" has been designated as the sign which encompasses the diversity of forces. The use of the word text should not be understood as a privileging of the written words on the page.

audience interaction which occur only within the span of the performance, it is the most reliable record of the larger dramatic presentation. De Marinis notes "This state of things has undoubtedly favoured the 'promotion' of the dramatic text from the status of a single component that happens to be present and lasting to the status of a unique, significant component, a priorized element, totally representative of all other components" (16). Viewed from this understanding, the written text, which historically in criticism has been understood to contain the performance within it, is revealed to be riddled with "gaps", lacunae which require a consideration of the larger social context, the atmosphere and other components of drama, in order to be filled.

One of the main goals of performance criticism is to attempt to recreate these gaps, to take into account the extratextual components of the performance in order to offer a fuller understanding of the drama. In their introduction to *Staging the Renaissance*, Kastan and Stallybrass contend that "dramatic texts are sites rather than the exclusive sources of meaning, places where audience, readers, actors and writers construct and contest meaning" (2). Unfortunately the audience's and actor's roles in this construction have been marginalized. Womack, in his consideration of Jonson's work, contends that each speech on stage is composed of three speakers "the writer, the dramatis persona and the actor ... [and] each has its own orientation" (31). These orientations or "lines" as Womack also calls them are the writer to the reader, the dramatis persona with other dramatis personae onstage and finally the actor with the audience. It is the conjunction of these lines which produce/dispute meaning and offer a site for

interpretation; however, Womack also notes that the balance between these "lines" of interaction has been lost: "What happens, very roughly speaking, was that the writer -- reader line and the persona -- persona line entered into an intimate combination to marginalize the actor -- audience line" (33). The result of this subverted dynamic was "that the actor -- audience line was suppressed as the actor disappeared into his role and the audience into darkness" (34). The interpretation of the play in this new dynamic excludes the interaction of the audience with the actor. They no longer participate in the construction of meaning.

Performance criticism then takes on the responsibility of attempting to realign the balance, to reconstruct the performance in its entirety. As such the performance critic not only attempts to read the written text, but she/he attempts to create in her/his mind the site of performance. Essentially performance criticism seeks to include the larger aspects of the original performance, as it may have existed, into its interpretation. It recognizes that the performance is something far beyond the scope of the words on the page; it is the tradition within which the drama is located, the theatrical space, the physical surroundings, the audience, the intellectual milieu, the interaction between the stage space and its environment. In my own work I must recognize the paradoxical position within which this contention places me. I must affirm that the text is insufficient as a site for interpretation and that it is impossible to reconstruct the performance out of the text, and yet I must continue to use the text as the primary site of meaning, in combination with material which provides me with a sense of the period. In order to balance this limitation, I have

attempted to consider the other theatrical aspects of the period, hold in mind the conventions of the time, the site of the theatre and the dynamic between an audience I cannot know and yet for which I must account.

Before concluding I would like to return to a consideration of Barish's and other's contention that the "animosity" which Jonson demonstrates towards the audience in his dramatic texts is proof of his antitheatrical nature. Several critics have pointed to the epistles and other "post performance addresses" -- I use this term to signify any correspondences, editing of the written text and/or other commentary by Jonson after the original performance -- which Jonson appended to his dramas as the key voice in Jonson's anti-theatricality. The flaw here rests in the idea that these addresses and remarks are a part of the performance, when it is clear that they have been composed with the knowledge of how the performance was received. The addresses do not reflect the dramatist's disposition as the drama is being constructed, but focus upon the difficulties with the reception to the exclusion of a consideration of the larger context of the performance. Unfortunately, these complaints concerning poor interpretation have been read as metonymic representations of Jonson's hostility towards the stage. If they attack the audience, it is for the lack of attentive interpretation Jonson felt his plays were subject to at the hands of an audience, his feelings that the audience did not treat his works fairly and do not reflect Jonson's true feelings for the theatre. There are several other flaws in the logic of the antitheatrical argument. The first is that there is no logical connection between these reprimands to the audience and antitheatricalism. Jonson is angered by

misinterpretation and that is the source of his rebuttals. His attacks focus on those members not just guilty of misinterpretation, but who vocalize their follies as well. Jonson does not want to eliminate the possibility of creating sites of interpretation -- he depends upon them to further develop his dramas. The act of interpretation is at the heart of much of his drama and it is through the interpretation that meaning is produced between the audience and the performance of which they are a part. Further, Jonson is not alone in his attacks on audience members for their poor reception and uses of dramatic offerings; the jibes at the audience have a precedent in the Greek comedies upon which Jonson, in part, modelled his dramas. We must also understand that the audience cannot be considered as a homogenous collection of like individuals, interpreting as one. While this last point seems obvious, it is important to reaffirm that the audience is an eclectic mix of individuals. As Alice Rayner notes, the word "audience" has too often carried the connotation of "a collective consciousness that is analogous to a unified individual subject" (3), a position that disallows for the breadth of individuals that compose the audience and who receive the performance "with varying capacities, from varying positions, from differing interest, from one moment to the next" (4).

This clarification of the nature of the audience is essential because in Jonson's work he recognizes these distinctions between audience members and the fact that not all aspects of his drama can be interpreted by all of the audience. If Jonson uses physical comedy to entertain on a broad scale, he also targets the more astute, knowledgable and quick witted members of the audience who are capable of recognizing the extratextual

components of his comedy. It is the goal of this thesis to reexamine three of Jonson's comedies, *Every Man Out of His Humour, The Staple of News and The Magnetic Lady,* to see how Jonson's work is essentially theatrical, to prove that Jonson's dramas depend upon the theatre and its apparatus for a fuller interpretation of their meaning. Further, Jonson himself, far from being antitheatrical, is dedicated to the theatre, to developing the existing forms of drama, to extending the boundaries of what is acceptable, to reanimating the passive audience in an attempt to create a dynamic site of interpretation which both challenges and rewards those members of the audience willing to engage fully with the performance.

Chapter 1

Audience Participation: *Every Man Out of His Humour* as Site of Interpretation

A reconsideration of Jonson's treatment of the theatre and the theatrical components reveals that Jonson's work depends upon the medium. In creating his dramas, Jonson is consciously creating for the stage, consciously considering the site of performance, manipulating and exploiting its characteristics to increase his comedic effect and create a site for interpretation. From a theatrical perspective, Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* draws upon the general history of the stage and its periods of crisis, the more narrow history of the Globe theatre and its troupe of actors -- the Lord Chamberlain's Men -- and the physical interior of the Globe as well as its surroundings in order to create its comedy. To pursue this hypothesis I would like to begin with an examination of these instances in order to show how Jonson relies upon the stage for meaning. In all of these references, to varying degrees, Jonson predicates the comedy and/or comprehensibility of the references upon the fact that the audience is aware of the theatre and is capable of integrating their surroundings and personal knowledge into the performance and its nuances.

In 1.3 Sordido complains of the peasants who plague him for a share of his bounty, figuring these peasants in terms that have strong associations with the Vagrancy Act. He

defines his assailants as "a sort of lazy beggars,/ Licentious rogues and sturdy vagabonds" (1.3 102-03). In 1572 Elizabeth amended the Vagrancy Act -- an act which had been in existence in various forms since the Middle Ages. The 1572 act, was "An Acte for the Punishment of Vacabondes, and for Relief of the Poore and Impotent" and singled out able-bodied vagrants or "Rogues, Vacabondes, or Sturdy Beggers" (Ribton-Turner 113) for prosecution. In her amendment, Elizabeth expanded the definition of vagrant to include "All Fencers, Bracewardes, Common Players in Enterludes and Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this realme or towards any other honourable personage of greater degree" (quoted in Liesenfeld 162). Elizabeth's measures represented the first time the act had been applied to actors. Sordido's slightly varied use of this string of words to encompass a vagrant are thus an extremely topical and self-referential joke, because while the original amendment had occurred in 1572, further amendments had occurred in 1575/76 and 1597/98, thus maintaining the relevance and potency of the reference. The reference is further emphasized by the fact that Sordido addresses his accusations not to real peasants, but to actors playing peasants, thus invoking the force of the vagrancy act on two levels, for the actors are culpable both in their role as peasants and as actors upon the stage. Jonson continues his play on this reference later when Carlo, in the midst of discussing the characteristics which justify Sogliardo's designation as a gentleman, comments on the nature of Sogliardo's mind:

> ... for his other gifts of the mind or so, why, they
> are as nature lent him 'em, pure, simple, without any artificial drug
> or mixture of these two threadbare beggarly qualities, learning and
> knowledge, and therefore the more accommodate and genius. (4.8 9-12)

In describing scholarship as a beggarly quality, Carlo also draws upon the Vagrancy Act, because, in 1597 Elizabeth had further amended the act so that the definition included "all persons calling themselves Schollers going about begging." It would appear that in Sogliardo's case Carlo in part defines Sogliardo as a gentleman through his play upon Sogliardo's intelligence. Lacking those "beggarly qualities, learning and knowledge" which would make him a scholar and thus define him as a vagrant, Sogliardo can pursue his quest of becoming a gentleman. Macilente's own character and situation play upon this line of comedy, as he is an actor playing a scholar who is without the means of subsistence and is thus twice a vagrant.

Turning from the legal prosecution of actors through the vagrancy laws to other historical crises, Jonson draws upon the boys' acting troupes to influence the meaning and enhance the comedy within his work. Carlo, in discussing the loopholes by which a gentleman can avoid paying his retainers notes:

> Why, after you have kept 'em a fortnight, or so, and showed
> 'em enough to the world, you may turn 'em away, and keep no more
> but a boy, it's enough. (1.2 123-25)

While the immediate reaction is to the homosexual overtones of keeping boys for sexual pleasure, Carlo's words also point to the fate of the majority of child actors, who, as they matured, were unable to continue in the acting troupe. They were cast aside, without any further compensation. The sexual innuendo of Carlo's words noted above is carried through in other scenes of the drama as well. While the antitheatrical tracts of Gosson, Northbrooke and others attacked the degendering and/or perversion of "natural" desires at

the sight of men dressed as women, Jonson employs these contentions, creating situations which play upon the major issues raised by the attack, inserting them into the comedy, and mocking the complaints by blatantly displaying the supposed "evils" of theatre on the stage. This tendency is especially prevalent in Carlo's discussion with Fastidius as they wait for Puntarvolo to enact the wooing of his wife. When Cinedo returns with news of Puntarvolo's imminent arrival, Fastidius and Carlo exchange remarks that overtly play upon the homosexual desire of Fastidius for his servant Cinedo:

> Fas. His hounds. By Minerva, an excellent figure; a good boy.
> Car. You should give him a French crown for it: the boy would find two better figures i' that and a good figure of your bounty. (2.1 96-105)

Cinedo's name itself, which means catamite, would be sufficient to elicit a response for part of the audience, but Fastidius' comment on the figure of his serving boy, coupled with his appraising look and Carlo's subsequent punning on crown/ crowns for venereal disease and money would ensure that everyone in the theatre was aware of the implications. The larger context of the wooing of Lady Puntarvolo by her husband also adds to the comedy. Despite the fact that the dramatis personae are a heterosexual pairing, the scene is acted out by two male actors, offering yet another example of the "perversion."

Jonson also employs the character of Macilente to play upon the theme of the degendering effect of costume which the puritans and other antitheatricalists complained of in Renaissance drama. Macilente, captivated by Fallace's beauty, questions:

> What moved the heavens that they could not make
> Me such a woman? But a man, a beast,
> That hath no bliss like to others. Would to heaven,

> In wreak and misfortunes, I were turned
> To some fair water-nymph, that, set upon
> The deepest whirlpit of the ravenous seas,
> My adamantine eyes might headlong hale
> This iron world to me, and drown it all. (2.4 159-66)

Macilente's plea to heaven plays on the double meaning of the term "heavens" in the Globe theatre. While the word carries its traditional meaning, on the Globe stage it also refers to the awning above the stage proper, which was often painted with stars to reinforce its representative function. Macilente's plea is not only addressed to a heavenly "force," but it is also directed at the theatre. Ironically, the theatre is capable of effecting Macilente's desired change: the actor has only to change his costume. The double meaning is further emphasized by the audience's awareness that Fallace is being played by a man and as such it highlights and plays upon the degendering tendency on the stage against which the antitheatricalists were writing. The second part of his speech mocks the antitheatricalists because it absurdly portrays the result which they felt that the theatre would have on its audiences. The man dressed as a woman would have allured other men in the audience, inspiring homosexual fantasies and other sexually transgressive behaviour. Macilente's longed for "adamantine eyes" would bring about the ruin of the male audience members, here figured as drowning the world; thus, Macilente's desire displays the monstrous or grotesque transformation upon the male audiences which theatre was accused of effecting.

Beyond these more general references to the historical moments of crisis or contention in the theatre, Jonson also draws upon historical performances, the Greek

tradition, his predecessors, contemporaries and related forms of performance to add significance to the work. The relationship between Jonson and his Greek models has been well documented[1]. Within *Every Man Out of His Humour*, there are several instances of Jonson's cooption of Grecian concepts. The character sketches at the outset of the text have been described as imitations of the work of Theophrastus (Herford and Simpson i 374); however this link is possibly too strong. These sketches are loosely constructed on the Theophrastan models, but are in fact closer to the satiric gibes of the formal satirists Juvenal and Horace, or Martial's epigrams (personal communication with H. Ostovich Aug. 31 1996). Nonetheless, they find their birth in Grecian tradition. In the Induction to the work, Cordatus devotes a portion of his speech to clarifying the Grecian theatrical trends as they relate to the development of comedy and of the laws which Mitis invokes. Further, throughout the rest of the text, Cordatus quotes from classical sources to emphasize the propriety of the drama to which he is witness: he recites an epigram by Caelius Firmianus Symposius in 1.1 34-35. Ironically, the comedy of Cordatus's speeches stems from his misapplication or poor interpretation of his classical referents to the drama before him.

Jonson also includes references to previous performances and recognizable theatrical/ entertainment events and/or figures. In 4.8, after the group has decided to attend the court, Carlo offers them his own good wishes: "I warrant you: would I had one

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[1] Both Douglas Duncan's *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (1979) and Coburn Gum's *The Aristophanic Comedies of Ben Jonson* (1969) are book length treatments of the connection between Jonson and the Greek tradition.

of Kemp's shoes to throw after you" (4.8 127-28). While the footnote in the Herford and Simpson text points out that this "may refer to a shoe-throwing episode in a comedy in which Kemp had acted" (H & S ix 471-72), the reference also points out the fact that Kemp was no longer with the company. In the year previous to the production of this drama, Kemp had left the Lord Chamberlain's Men, thus depriving the company and any dramatist who wrote for the company of one of the finest clowns of the time. Carlo's reference to Kemp and his wish for Kemp's shoe points out Jonson's awareness that Kemp was no longer with the troupe, and thus that Jonson would be unable to construct the drama with Kemp's particular talents in mind. Jonson's inclusion of this topical reference demonstrates that he is conscious of the troupe for whom he is creating the drama. The irony of the remark is further highlighted by the fact that it is Carlo's character who makes the comment, the dramatis persona whose casting would have most suited Kemp's abilities. Carlo also draws the audience's attention to other forms of popular entertainment when he compares the attention which Puntarvolo pays to his dog to contemporary animal trainers: "'Sheart, he keeps more ado with this monster than ever Banks did with his horse, or the fellow with the elephant" (4.6 53-54). The editorial footnote to these lines clarifies that these are two more topical references: the first to the owner of a performing horse and another London performer of 1594 (Wilkes i 373). In making these passing references, Carlo reminds the audience that they are witness to a performance. Another notable instance of this inter-performance relationship comes in the balcony scene between Puntarvolo and his wife. The scene would obviously evoke the

image of Romeo and Juliet -- another performance by the same troupe -- and the parody of this romantic scene would be greatly appreciated by the audience members capable of drawing the connection. In a more general sense, the scene would also draw upon the window scenes common in the *comedia dell'arte* troupes which visited England in the 1580's and 1590's.

In terms of the physical space of the theatre, Jonson plays upon it as a space which exists both within the theatre and as a representation of the world. I have already made reference to the idea of the heavens as punning on actual "heavens" versus stage roof and the self-referentiality/ metadramatic nature which these associations would have for the audience. These types of self-referential puns occur throughout the text, as in 1.3 and 3.7 where Sordido calls upon the heavens for rain or makes oaths to the heavens. In 4.6, Fastidius offers an excuse for his tardiness which plays upon the emblem of the globe theater -- a connection that the audience members would have recognized:

> Fas. Good faith, I must crave pardon; I was invited this morning
> ere I was out of my bed, by a bevy of ladies, to a banquet: whence
> it was almost one of Hercules' labours for me to come away, but
> that the respect of my promise did so prevail with me. (4.6 1-4)

The image of Hercules shouldering the celestial globe was the emblem on the playhouse flag. For an attentive auditor, Fastidius' reference to Hercules would have reminded them of the emblem and by extension of their position in the theatre. Jonson also plays on the name of the theatre itself, employing the double meaning of the Globe as both theatre and verbal sign. In 4.1 Fallace and her brother appear alone on the stage and she laments: "Why are you not merry then? There are but two of us in all the world and if we should

not be comforts ..." (4.1 3-4). While the connection is more subtle, Fallace's reference to the world would be noted by a segment of the audience. The duality of her words would provide a comedic element to her despair that would temper her fatalistic words.

The references to the physical structure of the theatre are present from the outset of the performance. The Prologue leaves the stage without speaking his lines vowing that if he does: "let me die poisoned with some venomous hiss, and never love to look as high as the twopenny room again" (Ind 297-98). In his oath the actor draws the audience's attention to one of the spaces designated for the audience to view the performance. Shortly thereafter, Carlo draws on Cordatus's assessment of the Prologue to make a further reference to the stage. Amazed by the Prologue's lack of ability, Carlo observes:

> Car. I mar'l whose wit t'was to put a prologue in 'yond sackbut's mouth: they might well think he'd be out of tune, and yet you'd play upon him too.
> Cor. Hang him, dull block.
> Car. Oh, good words, good words, a well-timbered fellow; he would ha' made a good column and he had been thought on, when the house was a-building. (Ind 307-13)

Carlo, noting that Cordatus has already played upon the Prologue, interprets Cordatus's epithet of the Prologue as a "dull block" as a further play on the departed Prologue's nature. He then continues the jest, by developing the idea of a block as a wooden substitute for a body or part thereof. Carlo figures the Prologue's entire body as a piece of wood and finds that the Prologue would best serve as one of the timbers that compose the pillars on the stage. The jest is further amplified and focused upon the actual stage of the Globe by the fact that the Globe's stage space was distinguished by two prominent

pillars and that construction of the theatre had been only recently completed. Fungoso also draws attention to the stage and its artifices when he leads Puntarvolo and Fastidius off the stage to depart for the court: "Is this the way? Good truth, here be fine hangings" [Exit with Puntarvolo and Fastidius] (5.1 37). Fungoso's question draws attention to the hangings which are used in the theatre to cover the exits, thereby reaffirming the artifices of the stage (Hosley 184).

The most frequent of the self-referential aspects of the stage and the artifices of the stage lies in the comments of the Grex. Throughout the performance Cordatus and Mitis draw attention to the actions on-stage in such a manner that the audience is unable to efface their consciousness of the stage as construction, or passively accept the drama. The dialogue between the two focuses on issues of staging, act and scene length, and the nature of character actions in relation to the comedic conventions, all of which draw attention to the artifice of the stage. Interestingly, Cordatus and Mitis in several instances also effect a shift in the scene simply by remarking at a break in the action that it is now their duty to shift their focus to another district of London where the action will continue. In the final lines of 2.3 Mitis and Cordatus confer as to when Macilente will reappear and where the spectator must now imagine the scene to be taking place:

> Mit. So, sir: but when appears Macilente again?
> Cor. Marry, he stays but till our silence gives him leave: here he comes, and with him Signor Deliro, a merchant, at whose house he is come to sojourn. Make your observation now; only transfer your thoughts to the city, with the scene; where, suppose they speak. (2.3 275-80)

These deliberate indications of scene shifts occur throughout the text and could in fact find

their origins in the stage tradition of the Globe. In his research for his treatment of the stage history of the Globe, Richard Hosley examined all of the surviving dramas produced at the Globe prior to 1609 and discovered that three quarters of the eighteen plays researched were without act intervals. Hosley concluded from his research "that before 1609 the Globe plays were probably performed without act intervals, hence probably without interact music" (Hosley 191-92). Viewed with this insight, it is apparent that Jonson, conscious of the lack of act intervals at the Globe, enlisted his on-stage audience to help smooth the transitions between scene shifts.

Having examined several of Jonson's stage devices and theatrical techniques that demonstrate his reliance upon the stage and theatrical history to add significance to the actions, I would like to turn to Jonson's vision of the audience in the text. In *Every Man Out of His Humour* Jonson constructs parodies of the audience in the dramatis personae of the performance, he creates an on-stage audience (the Grex) and the majority of the scenes appear to place at least one character in the position of an observer of the actions. As such, Jonson does not construct a single auditor for us to examine. I would like to first consider two of Jonson's manifestations of the audience in which Jonson plays upon the stereotypical audience reactions, "holding a mirror" as it were to chastise playfully the inattentive or less understanding audience members. These instances are Fungoso's fascination with Fastidius Brisk's clothing and Sogliardo's attempt to reenact or retell a previous scene he has witnessed of Puntarvolo wooing his wife. In the midst of the balcony scene, Sordido attempts to engage Fungoso in a discussion only to find the youth

preoccupied. Fungoso, preoccupied with appearance, has allowed his gaze to wander, appraising the garments of the other dramatis personae. When his gaze turns to Fastidius, he is captivated by the other's garments: "By heaven, it's a very fine suit of clothes" (2.3 109). Mitis correctly observes that Fungoso "is enamoured of the fashion" (2.3 110) and this preoccupation with fashion does not allow him to attend to his uncle's words. The image is an obvious satire of the audience members who attend the theatre simply to see the latest fashions.

This representation of an inattentive audience member is joined by Sogliardo, whose bungling attempt to share his memories of the earlier encounter between Puntarvolo and his wife, marks Sogliardo for an "untutored" or "misguided" audience member. In the midst of Sogliardo's outbursts of laughter, which punctuate his aborted attempts to describe the scene, Carlo expresses his feeling that Sogliardo is incapable of properly retelling the events he has witnessed:

> Car. Doubtless, he apprehends more than he utters, this fellow: or else.
> Sog. List, list, they are coming from hunting: stand by, close under this terrace, and you shall see it dine, better than I can show it.
> Car. So it had need; 'twill scarce poise the observation else.
> Sog. Faith I remember all, but the manner of it is quite out of my head. (2.1 147-53)

In Sogliardo's attempt we are witness to an audience member whose spectating experience is imbalanced; the comedic component of the scene has overwhelmed the larger scope and meaning of the performance. Sogliardo is inarticulate and incapable of absorbing or interpreting the entire scene he has observed so that he may relate the

experience. He has been unable to digest the performance and then reproduce it (this inability is also due to his poor imitative skills which he displays in his attempted portrayal of a gentleman in act 5). While the performance is indeed comic, Sogliardo has missed the other components which serve to complete the performance and his laughter, which stands in for any significant explication, succinctly defines what he has gleaned from his observations -- laughter, a vital component but insufficient to encompassing the entire performance.

Despite the caustic nature of these portrayals and the possibility of offence which they might cause, it must be understood immediately that these jibes are not Jonson's final position on the nature of the audience. They are only passing jokes at the expense of a portion of the audience which offer further entertainment to those with the wit and insight to appreciate them. Granted these comedic representations do address the issue of inattention on the part of the audience; however, they are not a true indication of where Jonson locates the audience in his dramas. The audience of *Every Man Out of His Humour* occupies a much more central role in the performance. The extratextual components, the actors' self-referentiality, and the specific stage references indicate that Jonson, far from displaying animosity towards his audience, is attempting to engage them, to draw them into the performance. Those members of the audience capable of understanding the self-referential jokes feel closer to the performance. They recognize their role in the performance -- the dramatist's need for their participation in constructing the necessary site of performance for the comedy to be effective. Jonson constructs his

comedy for an audience willing to actively participate in the performance, capable of applying their knowledge to the signs presented to help create the meaning and the comedy. This style of comedy plays upon the concept of an "in crowd", an audience "in the know" which is afforded the opportunity to laugh at these references from which the "less astute" part of the audience is excluded. The spectator is offered the opportunity to share the experience with the author and actors which in turn produces a real sense of connection between those with an understanding and those on stage.

Fran Fricker in his conclusion to the study *Ben Jonson's Plays in Performance and the Jacobean Theater*, which encompasses the plays from *Volpone* to *The Staple of News*, notes "the background to Jonson's realistic and satiric comedies is Jacobean London. There was no need for the dramatist to take great pains to create it: his audience was so familiar with the London scene that a sprinkling of place names sufficed" (141). This comment is equally applicable to *Every Man Out of His Humour*. At several points in the drama, the performance gestures towards significant landmarks and features of London which locate the performance within the city. Due to its close association with the audience's own theatre experience, one of the most interesting of these is the use of the Mitre tavern for the site of the banquet. For those in attendance at the performance, their return to the city by water after the performance might include a stop at one of the Mitre taverns in London.

Jonson's creation of his dramatis personae relies on a similar ease of recognition for the audience. Frenetic action, rapid scene changes and a multitude of characters are

common aspects of Jonson's comedies which do not permit a deep, extensive examination of the characters. Characters must be instantly recognizable for the type they represent. To this end Jonson depends on the visual signs to contribute to the characterization, to act as indicators of the dramatis persona's nature. In the performance the audience is afforded little time for recognition and must rely upon their own abilities to observe and interpret. From the moment the dramatis persona walks onto the stage, their grotesque or monstrous humour manifests itself in their actions, words and physical presence. When Carlo enters the playing space, complete with "a boy and wine" tossing caustic remarks about him, his excess is immediately comprehensible. Presumably the obese Carlo's entrance immediately indicates to the audience Carlo's slavery to his palate -- his love of food, sack, and his penchant for raillery. Similarly Fastidius Brisk's flare for clothing quickly alerts the audience to Fastidius' characterization as "the fresh Frenchified courtier" (1.3 183). To this point I have focused upon a more exclusive form of comedy present in Jonson's work without having addressed the broader, more direct physical comedy which Jonson employs to offer entertainment to a larger scope of the audience. It has not been my intention to undermine this comedy an analysis of these physical aspects is simply not within the focus of this paper. In fact this physical comedy provides excellent proof of the theatrical nature of the work, often laying the foundation for the more exclusive theatrical comedy.

In his closing comment Fricker notes that Jonson is unlike Shakespeare who possesses the "ability to create 'additional scenes on the stage of the mind'[;] ... Jonsonian

City plays do not evoke imaginary atmosphere but rely on the real atmosphere of the theaters themselves" (Fricker 141) -- an atmosphere which I would contend includes the audience and by extension relies on the audience. This dependence on the audience to actively participate in the construction of atmosphere, coupled with the self-referential/metatheatrical nature of the performance disallows passivity on the part of the audience. Both explicitly and implicitly the audience is made aware that they are an integral component of the larger performance. In this performance Jonson does not enforce a static hierarchy in which the playwright preaches from the pulpit, as his counterpart in the drama Asper is wont to do; rather, he creates a dynamic relationship between the on-stage performance and the audience. The heteroglossia[2] of the dramatis personae inhibits the audience from perceiving a univocal authorial voice. The onus of the interpretation rests on the shoulders of each individual member of the audience and for this to succeed, the audience must actively participate. The stage is the site of performance, but it is also the site of contestation, where interpretations are worked out (Kastan and Stallybrass 2), not simply digested.

The proof of this contention rests within the play itself. I have already begun to gesture towards the audience's centrality in the performance in terms of the mental/intellectual perspective and this centrality is mirrored by the physical representation

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[2]Bahktin, in his work *The Dialogic Imagination* defines heteroglossia as "another's speech is another's language, serving to express authorial intentions in a refracted way ... it serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author" (324).

of the audience in the form of the Grex at the center of the drama, the multiple layers of spectators which observe each scene and the centrality of interpretation to each scene. I would like to begin this section with an examination of the heteroglossia of the pseudo-authorial characters who each offer a model of interpretation, but none of whom can be considered to possess the "correct" interpretive strategy for the performance or to be directly representative of Jonson's position.

In Jonsonian criticism there is a tradition which identifies Asper with Jonson. Herford and Simpson in their treatment are the first of several to make the connection in the twentieth century (I 388). The dramatis persona's and the playwright's mutual careers as dramatists seem to support this contention; however, the inherent flaw in this assumption rests in the tendency of these critics to refuse to recognize that Asper is a dramatic persona from this comedy of humours. Asper's rantings have been transposed into the mouth of Jonson without a consideration of the context out of which they originate.

From his opening words Asper displays the potential for a maniacal fervor which is soon realized. His attack on the "impious world" in his opening statement becomes the irrational figuring of a world on the brink of destruction, imaged as "Hell gaping under us, and o'er our heads/ Black ravenous ruin, with her sail-stretched wings" (Ind 9-10). His vision becomes a single handed crusade. He is oblivious to any moderating influence that is more reminiscent of a parodic representation of Puritanical condemnation than a playwright intent upon crafting a "delightful and instructive" drama:

Asp. But, with an armed and resolved hand,
I'll strip the ragged follies of the time
Naked as at their birth --
Cor. Be not too bold.
Asp. You trouble me -- and with a whip of steel,
Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs. (Ind 16-21)

Asper's characterization, his attacks and his arguments at times bear a strong resemblance to the antitheatrical tracts of Gosson, Northbrooke and others, especially in his discussion of the public vices he desires to correct (Ind 24-36)[3]. There is no possibility of mediation for Asper. He continues his tirade until the audience about him impacts upon his senses at which point he adopts a pleasant, but short lived demeanor to greet the audience: "Gracious and kind spectator, you are welcome" (Ind 53). Asper is compulsive in his desire for reform. With each shift in the discussion, Asper seizes upon a different element from within society which must be remedied. Mitis' use of the word "humour" to describe Asper's disposition triggers Asper's attack on the misuse of the word. Relenting from his demand that Mitis defend his speech, Asper explains the rationale behind his attack. He asks for Mitis' patience so that he will be able to proceed with his explanation of the misuse in order to educate the ignorant times:

I will not stir your patience; pardon me;
I urge it for some reasons, and the rather
to give these ignorant well-spoken days

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[3]Carlo's speech in the tavern later where he defends his practice and reasons for eating pork continue this play on the antitheatrical tracts. Justifying his appetite, Carlo notes: "'Tis an axiom in natural philosophy, 'What comes nearest the nature of that it feeds converts quicker to nourishment and dothe sooner essentiate" (5.5 54-56). The sentiment of the axiom is very similar to the one found in the second paragraph of Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*: "Therefore, as I cannot but commend his wisdom which in banqueting feedes most upon that that doth nourishe beste" (9).

Some taste of their abuse of this word humour. (Ind 77-80)

Asper's driven nature creates a "humorous" author obsessed with rectifying the abuses of humanity.

Ironically, despite Asper's "understanding" that the drama is designed for the audience to be able to "join their profit with their pleasure" (Ind 202), his speech throughout indicates that it is instruction, the didactic possibilities of the performance, which he values to scourge the time's deformities. Asper's performance is designed to unmask the humours:

> Well, I will scourge those apes;
> And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror,
> As large as is the stage whereon we act:
> Where they shall see the time's deformity
> Anatomized in every nerve and sinew,
> With constant courage and contempt of fear. (Ind 117-22)

It is not until Asper's final words that he openly recognizes the pleasurable aspect of the performance: "We hope to make the circles of your eyes/ Flow with distilled laughter" (ind 216-17). Asper's closing defense against the possibility of failure -- "Art hath an enemy called Ignorance" (Ind 219) -- is more applicable to Asper's own ignorance over the proper development of both pleasure and profit. If Jonson, in the figures of Fungoso, Sogliardo and others, mocks the audience for their stereotypical responses, then the figure of Asper is yet another "humorous" character who is constructed to satirize the unbalanced author. Jonson's willingness to satirize the poet is proven within the drama. Carlo's damning description of a poet later in the Induction is undoubtedly a self-inflicted jibe at Jonson. In fact, it is proof of Jonson's willingness to parody the author:

> an honest pure rogue, he will take you off three, four, five
> of these [Castalian liquor] one after another, and look villanously when he has
> done, like a one-headed Cerebrus (he do not hear me, I hope) and
> then, when his belly is well ballasted, and his brain rigged a little,
> he sails away withal, as though he would work wonders when he
> comes home" (Pro 322-327)

It is clear that Asper cannot be considered to be representative of Jonson on stage. There is no justification for the claim beyond the common ground of their respective careers; in attempting to define Asper's words as Jonson's own, the critic neglects to understand the characterization of Asper the dramatis persona.

In a logical extension of Herford and Simpson's contention that Asper represents Jonson, Macilente, the scholar played by Asper in the performance, is regarded as embodying Jonson. Despite his privileged position as the prime catalyst for the "dishumouring" of the majority of the characters in the drama and his ability to quickly recognize the humours of those with whom he comes into contact, Macilente is equally unfit to be a representative of Jonson or to act as a model for a complete interpretation of the performance which the audience can digest. Macilente represents a particular critical view; however, his motivation is a monstrous envy that governs all his actions. He is unable to accept that: "*Viri est fortunae caecitatem facile ferre*" (1.1 1). His corrective impulse does not stem from a superior moral position or a desire to improve the human condition but from his own envy: "I am no such pilled cynic to believe/ That beggary is the only happiness" (1.1 11-12). Macilente's envy supersedes all other governing principles so that he is willing to destroy others simply to ensure that no one else will possess more or be granted more privileges. When Macilente is given the opportunity to experience the

court and the fineries associated with it, he is distracted by his own appearance:

> What's that he said? by heaven, I marked him not:
> My thoughts and I were of another world.
> I was admiring mine own outside here,
> To think what privilege and palm it bears
> Here, in the court! (3.9 5-9)

He shows his own weakness for those effects which he earlier dismisses in others, and demonstrates the bankrupt position from which he perceives the action. This position is further weakened by Macilente's lust for Fallace. Mitis is quick to recognize the immorality of Macilente's position. In response to Cordatus's question as to his impression of the construction of Delirio's "dotage", Mitis includes Macilente in his response:

> Cor. How like you the deciphering of his dotage?
> Mit. Oh, strangely! And of the other's envy too, that labours so seriously to set debate betwixt a man and his wife. (4.2 98-100)

Despite Macilente's shrewd observations into the nature of the various individuals within the drama, he does not regard the action from the ideal critical position. In both Asper and Macilente, the interpretive function has been made grotesque. Asper's interpretation is marred by his inability to mediate between "delight and instruction", and Macilente's interpretation is governed by envy. While Macilente makes astute observations he does not distinguish between those he attacks. He goes about punishing everyone equally regardless of the severity of their "humour."

In Carlo the audience is able to find the comedic element, the love of the jest, the devotion to the pursuit of entertainment, which is lacking in Asper. Further, Carlo proves

to be an astute judge of many of the characters. He is quick witted and in the Prologue he voices the most sensible instructions in relation to the drama. Playing on the audience's possible thirst for the sack he consumes so freely before them, Carlo concludes the Prologue with the following instruction: "Marry, if any here be thirsty for it, their best way, that I know is, sit still, seal up their lips, and drink so much of the play in at their ears" (Pro 332-34). Despite this astute observation on the need for the audience to listen closely before they begin to interpret the action, Carlo is a manifestation of the comedic component of the drama. His interpretation can only be partial; he is blind to the didacticism of the performance. His jests are initiated for the sake of the comedy; he does not consciously participate in the "dishumouring" which is Macilente's purpose. Carlo's interpretive biases allow Macilente to dupe Carlo because Carlo does not consider the context or the ramifications of the actions beyond the jest. Content with their mutual desire to carry out the jest in the Mitre, Carlo does not search for a deeper purpose in Macilente's actions. As a result, he is thus blind to the sinister "dishumouring" which awaits his own character. Despite the aggressive nature of Puntarvolo's response to Carlo's jibes, the act of sealing Carlo's lips is vital to the drama's progression from delight to instruction; it allows the drama to progress beyond the comedic. Without this silencing raillery and jest would remain the governing principles and the drama would devolve into farce, unable to both "delight and instruct". The sealing is not permanent, because, unlike the other humours of the drama, the comedic is an essential element and must be reinvested with power for the next performance.

Within the dramatis personae of the drama proper, the audience is unable to locate an interpretive strategy which they can simply adopt for themselves in order to develop a clear understanding of the events. The audience must therefore turn to the on-stage audience representations, the Grex, for one model of interpretation that, while it does not supply the "true" interpretation, provides an example of proper attention. Before Asper leaves the stage he offers the following instructions to the Grex:

> I leave you two as censors, to sit here:
> Observe what I present, and liberally
> Speak your opinions, upon every scene,
> As it shall pass the view of these spectators. (Ind 153-56)

This offer seems dangerous because it places Cordatus and Mitis in a privileged position where they could dominate the performance, overwhelm the events and recast them with their own personal biases. Fortunately for the off-stage audience, Cordatus and Mitis are willing to allow the performance to progress with relatively few untimely disruptions and their comments remain focused on the events before them. In the Grex, Jonson presents two audience members actively participating in the performance, attending to the events and offering pertinent criticisms. This tendency is visible in 2.3, where Fungoso, appearing for the first time in the play, comments on the splendour of Fastidius' clothes. Cordatus and Mitis, attuned to the performance, interpret the meaning of the comment and locate Fungoso within the larger context of the drama:

> Cor. Do you observe that, signor? There's another humour has new cracked the shell.
> Mit. What? He is enamoured of the fashion, is he?
> Cor. Oh, you forestall the jest. (2.3 110-13)

Acting on the signs attributable to Fungoso's nature, Cordatus and Mitis connect Fungoso with the humour he has been constructed to designate. Despite our inital wariness over the suitability of an audience which has Asper's approval, it is clear that the Grex offers the audience the most consistent example of auditors attempting to attend to and interpret the performance. This is not to claim that they always interpret correctly or that the audience should simply accept Cordatus's and Mitis's evaluations and passively adopt their interpretations. Both of these characters interpret from their own biased positions and view the performance through their own learning and experience.

In the case of Cordatus, his interpretation relies heavily upon his classical education and at times this reliance seems to impede his enjoyment of the performance. In 1.1, Cordatus and Mitis observe the monologue of Macilente. When Macilente finishes his speech, Cordatus is quick to note a classical connection:

> Cor. This alludes well to that of the poet,
> *Invidus suspirat, gemit, incutitque dentes*
> *Sudat frigidus, intuens quod odit.*
> Mit. Oh peace, you break the scene. (33-36)

Mitis is correct in observing that Cordatus interupts the scene, and Jonson reinforces the fault by giving Macilente only a half line to speak after the interuption. Caught up in making the classical connection, Cordatus breaks the flow of the scene. Cordatus's interruption highlights a potential risk to interpretation, because he does not permit the performance to proceed as it was intended. In breaking the scene, he risks a decontextualization of the matter he addresses. During the induction, Cordatus is overzealous in his condemnation of Carlo. In his description of Carlo, Cordatus does not

allow for any recovery of Carlo's character: "He is ... an impudent common jester, a violent railer, and an incomprehensible epicure" (Ind 37-38). Cordatus's description demonstrates that he is likely to dismiss the majority of the comedic component of the performance because he is completely biased against Carlo -- the most comedic element of the performance. Regardless of these inconsistencies, Cordatus's attention to the events of the performance and his reliance upon the classical precepts to inform his interpretation displays an example of an audience member who is at least properly engaged by the text. Rather than engaging in the performance as a passive, distanced spectator, he employs his own understanding to create a fuller interpretation of the events. He does not offer the only interpretation, but he does display a possible, seriously considered interpretation.

Likewise, Mitis, despite being cast as "a person of no action and therefore we have reason to afford him no character" (101-02), possesses an interpretative perspective which he employs throughout the drama. In his comments and questions, Mitis conscientiously attempts to educate himself in matters of the drama. Unlike Cordatus who is sure of his position and is rigid in his application of it, Mitis's questions about style, matter and the composition of the work show that he is open to the new ideas he encounters in the performance. He is willing to put aside his expectations and preconceptions in order to attend to the drama. In Mitis, Jonson creates a dramatis persona who represents the attentive interpreter at an earlier stage of development. Mitis at times allows Cordatus to dictate his interpretation and he defers to Cordatus's "classical understanding"; however, his openness to new experiences, his willingness to learn and his acceptance of his role as

an active interpreter who interacts with the performance to produce meaning are attributes which Jonson's audiences must possess for a fuller appreciation of the drama. Mitis does not afford the audience a completed, ready made interpretation; instead, he displays the necessary characteristics which predicate the interpretive response.

In *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Jonson has constructed a drama which refuses to offer a clear, easy position through which to interpret the performance. Each of the "pseudo-authorial" characters offers a particular critical perspective, an interpretive model; however, none of these models possesses the absolute meaning or definitive statement that will encompass a complete understanding of the work. They are interpretations, complete with biases and incongruities, which Jonson displays in order to demonstrate a variety of possible perspectives for each scene. The audience is not allowed the luxury of a passive role where the spectacle may be absorbed at leisure from a peripheral, unambiguous space; instead, Jonson locates the spectators at the center of the drama to focus their interpretation. The proof of this statement rests in Jonson's construction of each scene in the drama. Each scene demonstrates this precept as a microcosm of the whole. As a result, in each scene there is the obvious presence of the Grex. They occupy the privileged position of the acknowledged and invited spectators of the scene and are expected to interpret the events; however, these dramatis personae are not the only members on the stage who act as observers of events. From the opening scene, in which Macilente lies down to avoid detection by Sogliardo and Carlo, an extra spectator is added within the drama. Macilente becomes the observer of Carlo's lesson to

Sogliardo on the finer points of becoming a gentleman, and in his asides, coloured by his own prejudices, he presents his perspective on the dialogue between Carlo and Sogliardo. Macilente's comments focus on Sogliardo's wealth and Fortune's blindness which would allow such an unsuitable fool to possesses these riches. After Carlo's and Sogliardo's departure, Sordido comes on stage and Macilente is again placed in the position of observer. At the end of the scene, after Sordido and Macilente have both left, the Grex offers another interpretation. Macilente's departure removes one level of interpretation; however, the Grex offers an interpretation from a different perspective and seeks to include Macilente, thus broadening and redirecting the focus:

> Cor. Now, signor, how approve you this? have the humourists expressed themselves truly or no?
> Mit. Yes, if it be well prosecuted, 'tis hitherto happy enough: but methinks, Macilente went hence too soon; he might have been made to stay, and speak somewhat in reproof of Sordido's wretchedness, now at the last. (1.3 141-46)

In this example the dramatis persona has been clearly aligned with the spectator. While these are not the only interpretations presented on stage, both are set apart from the action while they interpret. The act of interpreting pervades the performance.

In her examination of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Anne Barton claims that it is "a play devoted to the anatomization of a series of monomaniacs and zanies, *Every Man Out of His Humour* sacrifices a linear plot generating traditional audience expectations to an eddying, circular structure designed entirely for the display of eccentricity" (65). While Barton is correct in pointing to the unconventional style of the work, I contend that there is a cohesive component to the drama -- the act of interpreting. Each scene is propelled

by the interpretations and misinterpretations of the dramatis personae. The multiple spectators that inhabit each scene of the action offer a series of alternative perspectives, which to varying degrees and in accordance with the biases of the interpreter speaking offer models of interpretation.

Faced with a multitude of competing interpretive perspectives, debarred from an omniscient authorial voice that dictates the proper interpretation and the ideal character whose vision allows the audience to easily distinguish the proper interpretive path, the Jonsonian audience must engage in an active dialogue with the performance. Jonson's criticisms of his audience rest on a refusal to interpret not a wish for the audience's absence. Jonson's desire is for an audience interpretation which stems from the logical construction of events into plausible conclusions -- not a univocal "answer," but a range of interpretations from the mulitude of possibilities in the performance. In *Every Man Out of His Humour* Jonson constructs a performance that legitimates the idea that the drama possesses a multitude of perspectives through which it may be viewed. The elasticity of interpretation and the continual changes of a non-homogenous audience preclude the possibility of a single "right" interpretation. The process and the multiplicity are the point not the particular avenues offered.

Chapter Two

Theatrical Jibing: Jonson's Later Dialogue with His Audience

In 1631, Jonson published a new volume of work, which consisted of his dramas written after the publication of his 1616 *Works*. Attached to *The New Inn*, Jonson included his "Ode to Himself," a poem written in reaction to the failure of the drama. It opens:

> Come leave the loathed stage,
> And the more loathsome age,
> Where pride and impudence in faction knit,
> Usurp the chair of wit,
> Indicting and arraigning every day
> Something they call a play. (1-6)

While the poem expresses Jonson's anger and exasperation at the treatment of his stage offering, critics have extended the scope of his words far beyond the specific performance to which they were addressed. For proponents of Jonson's antitheatricalism, the poem has become a cornerstone for the foundation of proof for Jonson's antitheatricality and his deep seated animosity for the audience. In his biography of Jonson, Riggs notes that "the failure of *The New Inn* reinvigorated Jonson's strong antitheatrical prejudice" (309), citing the poem as proof and thus linking it directly to the antitheatrical prejudice. Rather than accepting the poem as an indignant response to the poor reception of an individual work, critics have expanded upon its significance and portrayed it as characteristic of Jonson's

later career. For these critics it is a fitting conclusion to a career marked by a "deep rooted antitheatricalism" and a relationship to his audience that was at best uneasy but more often became stormy and confrontational (Barish 133). The anger of the poem, combined with Dryden's own offhand classification of the later plays as "dotages" and Jonson's lessened position at the court, has led to the creation of what Martin Butler has identified as "the myth of the neglected Jonson writing dotages" (185). It invokes the image of an embittered and infirm playwright vainly attempting to revitalize a once illustrious career without the benefit of his once agile mind. If one considers Jonson's playful representation of himself in *The Staple of News*, the veracity of these ideas is immediately questionable. In the Induction Gossip Mirth describes the author she has just seen in the tiring room before the performance: "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!" (Ind 55-57). She adds that "he hath torn the book in a poetical fury, and put himself to silence in dead sack" (Ind 64-65). Despite the fact that the words are placed in the mouth of one of the Gossips (and are as telling on Mirth's character as anyone), Mirth's jibe at two well documented aspects of Jonson's character, his corpulence and his drunkenness, display Jonson's willingness to include himself in the comedy. This willingness to offer a satirized portrayal for the sake of the comedy does not conjure up images of a bitter recluse attempting to reconstruct his reputation.

In truth, none of Jonson's later plays received anything near the approbation accorded to his acknowledged masterpieces. This lack of popular success has been used

as proof that in these later works Jonson loses his ability to communicate effectively through this medium. Critics have concluded from these assumptions that at the end of his career Jonson suffered from a "decayed wit." This conclusion immediately biases their interpretations and neglects to address directly the material contained within those plays which were produced after Jonson's ten year absence from the stage. Even the more sympathetic interpretation of D.F. McKenzie questions Jonson's ability to construct a viable drama for the period. While acknowledging Jonson's active mind, socially conscious values, and adept handling of the literary traditions within which he works, McKenzie claims that Jonson is unable to adapt to the period "because he himself has no new ears for ... the new illiteracy" (87). McKenzie contends that in these later works Jonson displays an insular position with regard to the dramatic period, and is unable to appreciate the difficulty his audience may have in developing a language with which to properly approach Jonson's work:

> the late plays in particular become elaborate devices for proving the folly, irrelevant expectations, ignorant judgement and false gratification of his audience ... In deriding their attempts and shutting up his circle against them, Jonson sealed himself off from a world that was becoming uncomfortably intrusive, and in doing so he ceased to be a public poet. (107)

The difficulty with McKenzie's final contention is his treatment of the audience as a single homogenous interpreter. In the discussion of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, I demonstrate that Jonson is conscious of the multiplicity of interpretations possible for any given action, event or statement. This awareness is equally true of these later offerings. To hold up the on-stage representations of the audience as proof that Jonson in these later

plays seeks to ridicule his audience neglects to interpret these dramatis personae within the context of their performance. It neglects to approach the question of how and why Jonson has constructed these poor spectators and how the spectators of the performance are supposed to interact with and interpret these examples. McKenzie's stance assumes the purpose of these audience representations based upon the "antitheatrical tradition." Further, to return to McKenzie's idea that these later plays show Jonson's distance from the stage, I would contend that those components of Jonson's stage-craft which are singled out as proof, far from being distanced, instead show Jonson's clear attention to theatrical trends and conventions. If the dramas were poorly received, it is for their experimental nature and refusal to allow the audience to take a passive attitude towards the performance. Jonson's combination of disparate theatrical traditions, including the morality play and the masque, is one aspect of this experimentation. Its experimental nature is reinforced by the combination of the traditional themes of the prodigal and/or romance with aspects of contemporary tastes, which he subsequently transgresses, to create works which challenge an audience member's interpretive capabilities. Jonson disallows the passive reception of reworked and unimaginative conventions or simple repetitions of formulaic scenarios from which the audience already knows the conclusion.

It is not the intention of this discussion to directly engage and refute the tradition of criticism which has labeled these plays "dotages"; however, it is essential to gesture to this history for a proper understanding of why Jonson's later work has been repeatedly addressed by this negative stigma. These biases must be dismissed so that a deeper

interpretation of the performance can be initiated. In his conclusion to "Late Jonson" Martin Butler notes: "as the aesthetic achievement of these plays becomes more highly valued, so our understanding of their politics may have to be revised accordingly" (185). In this section, I examine *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* as performances with specific reference to the theatrical nature of the dramas, their reliance upon the stage for meaning, the role of the audience, the focus upon interpretation, and Jonson's construction of the performance as a site for interpretation -- both within the dramas and as they relate to *Every Man Out of His Humour*. In my treatment of this early work, I pointed to the self-referential nature of the drama, how the comedy and meaning are constructed by and dependent upon the medium of the theatre. In these two later plays, Jonson continues to create with the theatre in mind, constructing and reaffirming meaning through his employment and/or exploitation of the theatre. *Every Man Out of His Humour* included an on-stage audience who conscientiously attempted an interpretation of the performance and consequently were more directly linked to the events and actions on stage. In contrast, *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* present audiences who are engaged in lively stage antics, deliberately refusing to confront the performance and attempt an interpretation, and who are marked by their inattention and erratic dialogue. Despite the contrast, through their deficiencies these characters call attention to the drama as artifice. The critical Cordatus and Mitis have been replaced by more dynamic, topical representations of London's inhabitants; as a result, the theatricality of the performance finds itself indebted to these characters and their interaction with the performance's

audience. Jonson continues to employ his earlier, less overtly obtrusive meta-theatrical/ self-referential components; however, in *The Magnetic Lady* and *The Staple of News*, these characteristics are eclipsed in part by this new centrality of a more boisterous and obtrusive audience. With this consideration, in this chapter, before I turn to a more in depth treatment of these two "suspect" audiences, I intend to point out some of the theatrical references which depend upon the audience's understanding of the stage.

In spite of the more than a quarter of a century separation between *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady*, the crisis of the impropriety of the theatre, which antitheatricalists contend exists, continues to rage on unabated. For the puritans any act was a lie, and the transformations which were effected upon the actors, such as the degendering effects of putting on women's clothes, were immoral, perverse and unacceptably duplicitous. In these works Jonson continues to exploit the debate in order to add significance to the dramatis personae's words. An example of this is Mother Chair's words in 4.7 of *The Magnetic Lady*. In an attempt to curtail the exposition of further sins and indiscretions in the dispute between Polish and Keep, Mother Chair warns:

> Come, come, be friends: and keep these women-matters
> Smock-secrets to ourselves, in our own verge.
> We shall mar all, if once we ope the mysteries
> O' the tiring-house, and tell what's done within:
> No theaters are more cheated with appearances
> Or these shop-lights than the ages and folk in them
> That seem most curious. (4.7 40-46)

Mother Chair's attempt to quiet any further indiscretions regarding the intrigue of

Placentia, her true social position and her newborn child is obvious; however, Jonson's inclusion of theatrical allusions serves several purposes. It obviously contains a reference to the artifice of the stage as it gestures to the part of the house where the actors prepare themselves; yet, unlike many of the subtle references to the stage, Mother Chair employs the stage as a means of explicating the situation. She draws an analogy from the stage in order to clarify her meaning. On a literal level, Mother Chair's reference to the tiring-house reinforces the actions in which they have just participated. Placentia's role has been transformed from that of an expectant mother to that of a virgin suffering from "the green sickness" on the verge of marriage. The duplicity of this transformation is mirrored by the tiring-house, which is the only comparable site where this transformation can be achieved. Ironically the transformations of the stage are only temporary and this holds true for Placentia's metamorphosis. At the end of the drama, the layers of intrigue and duplicity have been stripped away and Placentia's true heritage and her motherhood are confirmed.

At the outset of *The Staple of News*, the Prologue and the Gossips also discuss the tiring house; however, in this case they are concerned with the events of the play. The Prologue, assuaging the fears of the Gossips over the torches carried by the tiremen, explains:

> Pro. Nay, start not ladies, these carry no fireworks to fright you,
> but a torch in their hands to give light to business. The truth is,
> there are a set of gamesters within, in travail of a thing called a play,
> and would fain be delivered of it: and they have entreated me to be
> their man-midwife, the Prologue; for they are like to have a hard
> labour on 't.
> Tat. Then the poet has abused himself like an ass, as he is.
> Mir. No, his actors will abuse him enough, or I am deceived. (Ind. 48-54)

In his opening description of the spectacle which startles the Gossips, the Prologue associates the tiremen's torches with fireworks, playing on the common entertainments, the bear dances and juggling spectacles attended by those with a less cultured palate. His clarification is an obvious slight against the Gossips whom he feels would be more comfortable at that sort of entertainment. He then turns to a discussion of the offering at hand, describing it as "a thing called a play." The odd phrasing highlights the possible unfamiliarity of the form to the gossips. The idea of the birthed play evokes the image of an infant that must be cared for and attended to if it will mature and grow. For the play this nurturing takes the form of close observation and careful interpretation. Along with the playwright and the actors, the audience shares an equal role in the success of the performance.

Turning to the physical space of the stage and the King's Men who occupy it, it is clear that Jonson is consciously exploiting their history and position. In 2.2 of *The Staple of News*, Broker's words on his position within Pecunia's entourage play upon the King's Men's position within the theatrical world:

> Bro. We know our places here; we mingle not
> One in another's sphere, but all move orderly,
> In our own orbs; yet we are all concentrics.
> Pie. Well, sir, I'll wait a better season. (2.2 54-57)

Broker puns on the site of performance and the fact that the King's Men are performing at the Blackfriars. The troupe shifted their performing space from the Blackfriars theatre to the Globe depending upon the season. Broker's reference to sphere and orb plays on the Globe's name and the fact that the troupe had an alternate place to perform which was

currently closed for the season. The idea that Broker and Pecunia's other attendants move together in orbit encourages the comparison of these dramatis personae to an acting troupe. As a troupe they carry out their employment together. In Piedmantle's final response to Broker's words the jest is complete as he plays again on the idea that it was possible for the audience to see the performers at other times at the Globe; however, they must wait for the season to arrive. Later, in the scene featuring the Staple, when Tom reads out the news piece concerning "Spalto's legacy to the players" which is a legacy left to the King's players, Jonson again gestures to the history of the troupe for which he is composing. According to the editor's footnote, the play being referred to was Middleton's *A Game at Chesse*, and this makes it clear that the reference would have been topical in 1626. Only two years earlier, this drama had run for a record nine days (*Revels History* IV 79).

In addition to the history of the theatre, Jonson continues his practice of making self-referential jokes about the artifice of the stage which keeps the audience from slipping into that "velvet lethargy" of passive distanced observation which is incapable of a proper interpretation. The on-stage audience representations are the most obvious instance of this, but by no means the only source. In *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* there are several references made to the author, Ben Jonson, by the on-stage audiences, the acknowledged authorial mediators (the Prologue and the Boy) and the dramatis personae within the dramas. I have already mentioned Gossip Mirth's mocking portrayal of the inebriated Jonson (cf. p51), and, in the Induction to *The Magnetic Lady*, the Boy

claims to "have dominion of the shop" (Ind 11) because the poet is not in attendance. At this point in Jonson's career he was bedridden so that the Boy's claim is valid in the larger context of the performance and would communicate this significance to many in attendance. In the opening act of *The Magnetic Lady*, Compass invokes Jonson's name in relation to the series of character sketches he offers. When Ironside asks about the origins of these sketches, Compass acknowledges Jonson as the creator:

> Iro. Who made you this epigram, you?
> Com. No a great clerk
> As any is of his bulk, Ben Jonson, made it. (1.2 33-34).

The indulgent nod to Jonson's own talents is immediately undermined by the self-inflicted jibe at his size. Later in the drama, a topical reference to Jonson's position as inheritor of the office of Master of the Revels is made. Interest, angered by Compass's interference in Interest's plans for Bias and Placentia, attempts to wound Compass by reminding him that his reversion in not equivalent to the post it represents:

> Int. You may be merry Master Compass,
> But though you have the reversion of an office
> You are not in it, sir. (1.7 47-49)

Hearing these words the "knowing" members of the audience -- those courtly members who keep abreast of all the court appointments -- would understand that Jonson had been given the Reversion of the position of the Master of Revels, and Interest's words thus highlight a double meaning because they also recognize Jonson's position in the court. The added irony of the lines stems from the fact that the office was promised to Sir John Astley before him (Riggs 271), and, as Jonson stood second in line for the office, he had

very little chance of occupying the position. To confirm the link between Compass's and Jonson's promised positions, shortly after his first remark Practice acknowledges the desirability of the office: "A fine place/ Surveyor of the projects general,/ I would I had it" (1.7 73-75). The description of "surveyor of the projects general" cements the connection between the two offices because the Master of Revels was responsible for surveying the dramatic projects.

In the Induction to *The Staple of News*, Jonson incorporates the real preparatory actions of the play into the action on-stage and the Gossips' realm of observation. When, at the prompting of the bookkeeper within, the tiring-men enter to mend the lights, their appearance, torches in hand impacts upon the Gossips:

> Boo. [Within] Mend your lights, gentlemen. (the tiremen enter to mend the lights) Master Prologue, begin.
> Tat. Ay me!
> Exp. Who's that?
> Pro. Nay, start not ladies, these carry no fireworks to fright you, but a torch i' their hands to give light to the business. (Ind 43-48)

The barrier between the artifice of the stage and the world of the spectator is immediately transgressed. Shortly thereafter, Gossip Mirth admits to being in the tiring-house prior to her entrance: "I was in the tiring-house to see the actors dressed" (Ind 55-56). Mirth makes reference to the artifice of the stage as a site where actors are transformed by costume, but also the actor speaking the role of Mirth produces a double meaning with these words, because he too has just been in the tiring house preparing for his role.

In 2.3 Lickfinger draws attention to the real running time of the performance. Penniboy Senior, upset at Lickfinger's tardiness, rants on about Lickfinger's inability to

keep his word. He concludes:

> P.Se. When did I break my word?
> Lic. Or I till now?
> And 'tis but half an hour. (2.3 7-8)

At this point the performance would have been running for about a half hour, excluding the induction and prologue; therefore, he speaks of the "real" time of performance. In these words Lickfinger plays on the ideas that he does not exist outside the performance space and as such time extends back no further than the beginning of the performance which was a half hour ago. He lives only within the performance.

Finally, there are also the direct references to the physical structures of the Blackfriars theatre which are incorporated into the stage performance and serve to remind the audience that they are part of a performance, while reminding the audience of the physical artifices of the stage. In 1.5 of *The Staple of News*, Penniboy Junior introduces his Barber Tom to Cymbal and Fitton: "And this at the West door,/ O'the side; he's my barber Tom" (1.5 123-24). In the process he indicates the stage door on the west side of the theatre. There is a similar gesture to the door in 3.4, when Penniboy Senior ousts Cymbal from his house:

> Go as you came; here's no man holds you. There
> (Bids him get out of his house)
> There lies your way; you see the door. (3.4 75-76)

Here again Penniboy Senior's gesture to the door has a double meaning because it indicates the exit for Cymbal, but it also draws the audience's eye to the stage door. Later in 5.2 Picklock recognizes that he has been overheard, and cries: "A rat behind the

hanging" (5.2 70). On one level Picklock draws the audience's attention to the fact that there is a hanging on the wall which is used to cover an entrance; however, even more important in these words is the intertextual reference to *Hamlet*. The reference depends upon the audience to make the connection between Picklock's words and Hamlet's uttered in 3.4 of *Hamlet*. Polonius, hidden behind an arras so that he may observe the exchange between Hamlet and his mother, reveals his presence with a gasp. Hamlet turns to the arras and exclaims: "How now, a rat?/ Dead for a ducat, dead! [Kills Polonius with a pass through the arras.] (3.4 23-24). Due to the disparate nature of the plays and the context of the speeches, those capable of drawing out the link would have found the situation extremely funny. Finally, in 4.1 Madrigal draws attention to one of the most important artifices of the stage, the play book. Attempting to define the word "coat-card" for Penniboy Junior, Madrigal invokes the ideas of a "manuscript" as the source for his definition:

> Mad. We call him a coat-card
> O'the last order.
> P.Ju. What's that? A knave?
> Mad. Some readings have it so, my manuscript
> Doth speak it varlet. (4.1 27-30)

Despite the rarity of this type of reference, the astute audience member, hearing these words spoken by an actor playing a dramatic role, would have recognized the link between manuscript and play book and would have appreciated the subtlety of the double meaning.

In creating *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady*, Jonson understood that he was creating for a private theatre audience at the Blackfriars which catered to a more elite

social group than were present at the public houses. G.E. Bentley, in *The Revels History of Drama* explains: "in the reign of Charles I, the Blackfriars and the Phoenix theatres were more extensively patronized by courtiers and nobility than they had been in the reign of James I" (96). Jonson's work reflects this audience composition. From the outset of both dramas the on-stage audience representations are linked to a Blackfriars performance. In *The Staple of News*, the Prologue is allowed only six words, the most perfunctory of lines, before Mirth, encouraging the other Gossips to follow her invades the stage:

> Mir. Come gossip be not ashamed. the play is 'The Staple of News' and you are the mistress and lady tattle, let's ha' your opinion of it. Do you hear, gentleman? What are you? Gentleman usher to the play? Pray you, help us to some stools here.
> Pro. Where? O' the stage, ladies?
> Mir. Yes, o' the stage; we are persons of quality, I assure you, and women of fashion; come to see and to be seen. (Ind 2-8)

Mirth's act of calling for stools on the stage is an obvious reference to the practice of stage sitting which was permitted by the Blackfriars theatre; however, more important than this reference to the theatre is Mirth's claim that these are "persons of quality... women of fashion" who are to be seated. Mirth's assumption that fashion and external displays of wealth are sufficient to merit her privileged position on the stage is a motif which runs throughout both works in a number of variations. When Damplay and Probee introduce themselves to the Boy of *The Magnetic Lady*, they define themselves in very similar terms. They are members of a well dressed audience, the "right" side of the audience in response to the Boy's contention; however, for these audience members, the

"right" is marked by external appearance:

> Pro. Not the faeces or grounds of your people, that
> sit in the oblique caves and wedges of your house, your sinful
> sixpenny mechanics ---
> Dam. But the better and braver sort of your people! Plush and
> velvet-outsides! That stick your house round like so many
> eminences ---. (Ind. 25-30)

Throughout both performances Jonson repeatedly plays on the importance of external appearances and attempts to draw out responses from his audience. In 3.4 of *The Magnetic Lady*, Diaphanous Silkworm speaks of the affront he suffered when his clothes were marred by Ironside's attack: "I take it as contumely done me/ Above the wisdom of our laws to right" (3.4 17-18). In 3.6, when Diaphanous describes how he intends to fight in his shirt rather than his doublet, Ironside mocks Diaphanous for this precaution emphasizing the foolishness of Diaphanous' reasoning:

> Oh, that's to save your doublet;
> I know it, a court trick! You had rather have
> An ulcer in your body than a pink
> More i' your clothes. (3.6 73-76)

Ironside's accusation that the ploy is only a "court trick" is uttered in a theatre which was in part populated by the very courtiers Diaphanous is parodying. As a result, it indicates Jonson's attempt to engage directly the audience, to draw out his audience, and to force a reaction from at least a portion of the spectators. This privileging of exterior appearances also underlies the thrust of the dramas. In 2.1 of *The Staple of News*, Penniboy Junior makes what to his mind seems a "logical" series of connections between external appearance and wit:

> For he that's out o' clothes is out o' fashion
> And out of fashion is out of countenance,
> And out o' countenance is out o' wit. (1.2 126-28)

Penniboy Junior's connections are extremely close to those of both on-stage audiences in the two dramas. Unlike *Every Man Out of His Humour* where this courtier predilection is assumed by Fastidius Brisk and Fungoso and only briefly handled by others, in these works, it becomes the preoccupation of the on-stage audiences. However, it is only Jonson's point of departure, not the final comment on the nature of the audience. It is a metonymic representation of the difficulty which Jonson is attempting to combat -- the excessive attention paid to superficial appearances without any concern for the performance and its place as a site of interpretation.

In *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the on-stage audience of Cordatus and Mitis are created as basically good spectators, attentive to the performance which they witness. Their reactions are not made in haste, nor are they made without considering the context of the drama. Both men represent engaged auditors intelligently reacting with positive and negative criticisms that focus on the performance. The pair are located at the center of the drama and are permitted to censure it as they see fit -- a safe concession to the pair in light of their attention to the performance. In contrast to this positive portrayal, in *The Staple of News* Jonson creates a largely inattentive audience, concerned with surfaces, the theatrical event, appearance, and reinforcing their own theatrical "tastes" and prejudices. In *The Magnetic Lady*, Jonson splits his audience between this inattentive closed minded attendant and the participant willing to experience the offerings and learn from the

experience. Both groups are still located at the center of the performance and are permitted to comment on the performance; however, neither group is permitted to invade the action of the drama with their words. The Gossips, Probee and Damplay are limited in their comments to the designated interact breaks in the performance. While Mitis's and Cordatus's comments interact with the drama and focus upon interpreting the drama presented, these later audiences are so distanced from the position of the conscientious observer that to allow them unrestricted access to the physical space of the performance would undoubtedly result in surrendering the performance to these ill informed audiences. The resulting mayhem would be reminiscent of the treatment of *The London Merchant* found in Beaumont's and Fletcher's burlesque *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

At the end of *The Staple of News*' first act, the Gossips discuss the performance so far presented and their reactions cement their characterization as an inattentive audience. All four are preoccupied with the representation of the beggar and take particular exception to his clothes:

> Tat. I cannot abide that nasty fellow, the beggar; if he had been a court beggar in good clothes, a beggar in velvet, as they say I could have endured him.
> Mir. Or a begging scholar in black, or one of these beggarly poets, gossip, that would hang upon a young heir like a horseleech.
> Ex. Or a threadbare doctor of physic, a poor quacksalver.
> Cen. Or a sea-captain, half-starved.
> Mir. Aye, these were tolerable beggars, beggars of fashion! You shall see some such anon! (first intermean 8-16)

The emphasis which the Gossips place on clothing reinforces the idea that the preoccupation with clothing is a metonymic representation of the "poor" audience's

tendencies. The Gossips' affinity for style and appearance marks their lack of understanding. The Boy's distinction between clothes and understanding which is made in the Induction to *The Magnetic Lady* is applicable here. Ironically, the beggars whom the Gossips list in their discussion are brought out in the following act of the performance as the suitors vying for Pecunia. Their failures are a testament to the poor judgement and understanding of the Gossips.

Of course these responses on the part of the Gossips should come as no surprise. From the outset of the performance, they mark themselves as "poor" audience members. Their names are the first indication of their characters: Gossips Tattle, Expectation, Censure and Mirth. In the Induction, the Prologue asks of Expectation: "that your ladyship would expect no more than you understand" (Ind 27-28); however, despite the plea, throughout the rest of the performance Expectation complains repeatedly of the fare offered her. The first act has offered her a very poor commencement to the action and the characters and situation are insufficient to her wants. After the second act she complains: "Troth I expect their office, their great office, the staple, What it will be! They have talked on't but we see't not open yet" (second intermean. 40-41). In her subsequent comments, she condemns the creator of the performance for not having met her expectations. In the fourth intermean, Expectation gives an indication of the performance she desires. She and the other Gossips are outraged by the twist which the dramatist has employed in resurrecting Penniboy Canter and allowing him a victory over the courtiers:

> Absurdity on him, for a huge overgrown playmaker! Why
> should he make him live again, when they and we all thought him

> dead? If he had left him in rags, there had been an end of him.
> (fourth intermean 7-9)

Expectation's rage is predicated on the author's refusal to offer her more of the same fare to which she has become accustomed -- conventional romance and uncritical presentations that offer no unpleasant surprises.

Gossip Tattle is no more capable of perceiving the actions of the drama before her than Expectation. As her name implies, Tattle is concerned with sharing her knowledge of personal matters, the habits and opinions she holds, and those of the cast, her family, friends and acquaintances. Finally, in her opening discussion with the Prologue, Gossip Censure -- whose name could imply a positive position, if she would attend to the drama and censure with the benefit of having interpreted the actions beyond a superficial level -- is distinguished for her preoccupation with the superficial vestments and actions of the actors:

> Oh, Curiosity! You come to see who wears the new suit to-
> day: whose clothes are best penned, whatever the part be: which
> actor has the best leg and foot: what king plays without cuffs, and
> his queen without gloves: who rides post in stockings, and dances
> in boots. (Ind 35-39)

In the third intermean of the performance, Censure adds to her characterization as she mouths one of the traditional attacks on the theatre raised by the puritans. Oblivious to the events of the stage, she takes up an attack on the poets turned school masters who "corrupted" children and wasted their time with the learning and rehearsing of plays:

> They make all their scholars
> play-boys! Is't not a fine sight, to see all our children made inter-
> luders? Do we pay our money for this? We send them to learn their

grammar, and their Terence, and they learn play-books? (third intermean 41-44) This connection is enforced by Censure's reference to Zeal-of-the-land-Busy and Rabbi Troubletruth as her ideal of schoolmasters.

It is important to recognize that these three Gossips base their opinions and comments upon the exterior appearance of the other dramatis personae. In the fourth intermean, the Gossips are impressed by the lavish show which Penniboy Junior had been able to offer and damn Penniboy Canter for having ended it. In her appraisal of the figures, Censure goes so far as to admit that "I was in love with master Fitton. He did wear all he had, from the hat band to the shoe-tie, so politically, and would stoop and leer!" (fourth intermean 27-29). This admission shows the critical eye with which the Gossips offer their judgements. Despite this damning presentation, Jonson does temper his representation through his inclusion of Gossip Mirth in the group. Despite her alliance with these women and encouragement of their misconceptions, at certain points she offers astute observations on the events of the work and is aware of the events represented on the stage. In his analysis, McKenzie goes so far as to contend that Mirth "is the dramatic theorist, literary historian and sharp reviewer, one of a panel of speakers who pointed out long before Dryden that Jonson was a 'decay'd wit'" (McKenzie 92). I agree with McKenzie's statement that Mirth is astute in her observations. It is she who points out the parallel between *The Staple of News* and the morality plays when she engages the other Gossips in a discussion of the vice characters in the drama. Mirth identifies Penniboy Senior as "Old Covetousness", Penniboy Junior as "Prodigality" and Pecunia as his

"Mistress Money," all vice characters. Throughout her comments, she seems to be the only one attempting to link the discussion back to the performance. Further, in the beggar discussion (first intermean 8-16) when she assures the other Gossips that their looked for beggars will appear, Mirth displays a knowledge of the upcoming events. However, Mirth, the dramatis persona that makes these claims, does not possess the balanced interpretive skills necessary to be the dramatic theorist McKenzie claims she is. I will grant that "mirth" has a "correct" side as a legitimate component of the performance -- to participate in the creation of delight; however, *The Staple of News*' Mirth manifests an excess which does not recognize the limits that should be placed on "mirth." Rather, like Carlo, she is obsessed with the jest and will go so far as to play upon her fellow audience members to accomplish it, and like Carlo, Mirth is only concerned with the pleasure and neglects the didacticism of the performance. Her interpretation is one-sided.

In a similar manner to the Gossips, Jonson's Damplay of *The Magnetic Lady* is cast as a "suspect" audience member; in fact, Jonson directly links Damplay to the Gossips of *The Staple of News*. The Boy, having berated Damplay for his base expectations of the actions which will unfold, continues:

> Boy. And therefore, Master Damplay, unless, like a solemn justice of wit, you will damn our play unheard or unexamined; I shall entreat your Mistress Madam Expectation. If she be among these ladies to have patience but a pissing while: giving our springs leave to open a little, by degrees! A source of ridiculous matter may break forth anon that shall steep their temples and bathe their brains in laughter, to the fomenting of stupidity itself, and the awaking any velvet lethargy in the house. (Chorus I 37-44)

This link to Expectation is well founded. After the first act, Damplay reacts against what

he feels is a lack of progression in the performance: "But there is nothing done in it, or concluded: therefore I say no act" (Chorus I 5-6). In response to his complaint the Boy upbraids Damplay for his impatience with the development; however, Damplay will have the performance progress on his own terms. When the Boy seeks to mock Damplay for his tastes, Damplay is not perturbed but reinforces the idea that the Boy's suggestions would make an excellent performance. The Boy claims:

> if a child could be born in a play, and grow up to a man i' the first scene, before he went off the stage: and then after to come forth a squire, and be made a knight: and that knight to travel between the acts, and do wonders i' the Holy Land, or elsewhere; kill paynims, wild boars, dun cows, and other monsters; beget him a reputation, and marry an emperor's daughter for his mistress; convert her father's country; and at last come home, lame, and all-to-beladen with miracles. (Chorus I 15-22)

For Damplay, this action would be admirable because it works within the romance conventions and is replete with the action and miracles that suit his palate.

The main difficulty with Damplay rests in his presumption that because he attends the performance he can interpret as he sees fit, regardless of his observations' propriety. Damplay concludes that the spectrum of possible interpretation should be limitless: "Can anything be out of purpose in a play?" (Chorus 2 52). Unfortunately Damplay's interpretation is not based on the intellectual observation of events within the performance followed by a well constructed, viable interpretation. Rather Damplay is concerned with making connections between the dramatis personae on stage and figures in his own life and society. He claims:

> I care not for marking the play: I'll damn it, talk, and do

> that I come for... I will censure, and be
> witty, and take my tobacco, and enjoy my Magna Charta of repre-
> hension, as my predecessors have done before me. (Chorus 3 18-23)

Despite Damplay's overwhelming arrogance in his assumption that he can indiscriminately interpret as he sees fit without a consideration of the context, and despite the Boy's judgement, Damplay is not absolutely unrecoverable. In the second Chorus, Damplay questions the Boy on whose position it is to teach the distinction between the right and wrong way to interpret; however, the Boy refuses to aid him and thus denies the possibility of positive development in Damplay:

> Dam. Who should teach us right or wrong at a play?
> Boy. If your own science can not do it, or the love of modesty
> and truth; all other entreaties or attempts -- are vain. You are fitter
> spectators for the bears than us, or the puppets. This is a popular
> ignorance indeed, somewhat better appareled in you than the
> people: but a hard-handed and stiff ignorance, worthy a trowel or
> a hammer-man; and not only fit to be scorned but to be
> triumphed o'er.
> Dam. By whom, boy?
> Boy. No particular, but the general neglect and silence. Good
> Master Damplay, be yourself still, without a second. Few here are
> of your opinion today, I hope; tomorrow, I am sure there will be'
> none, when they have ruminated this. (Chorus 2 60-75)

The Boy's request, "Master Damplay be yourself still without a second", indicates that Damplay will not be allowed the opportunity to improve his interpretive abilities. He is a necessary dramatis persona to the performance, acting as the counter-balance to Probee's development and more appropriate acceptance of his position in relation to the performance. The Boy thus forecloses on Damplay's attempt to develop because Damplay is needed to display his ignorant position in relation to the performance. In this

action, it is important to note the distinction between the Boy and Jonson. The Boy is not simply mouthing Jonson's words to a member of the audience, he is speaking to a dramatis persona played by an actor whose role must be maintained. The Boy is also a dramatis persona constructed to suit a purpose and his dismissal of Damplay, his foreclosure on the idea of educating Damplay, distinguish him from Jonson. In *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the drama attempts to foster the development of interpretive capabilities. Similarly *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* address the questions of education and interpretation; however, the audience model has been reconfigured.

Of course Damplay is only one half of the on-stage audience. In Probee, Damplay's partner, Jonson constructs an audience member who through the course of the drama can be seen as a participant in the performance, an audience member willing and able to learn -- even if he is somewhat ignorant at the outset of the text and aligns himself with Damplay. While Probee's comments are few compared to his boisterous and presumptuous partner, they focus on the matter of the play and contribute to a discussion of the proper approach to interpretation. His questions to the Boy are not confrontational, rather they seek to increase his understanding and distinguish him from the superficial perceptions of Damplay. By the second Chorus Probee is capable of recognizing the misinterpretations to which Damplay subjects the performance and offers him the rebuke: "It is the solemn vice of interpretation, that deforms the/ figure of many a fair scene, by drawing it awry; and indeed is the/ civil murder of most good plays" (Second Chorus 31-33). By the final chorus, Probee, having benefited from the words of the Boy and having

listened to the debate between the Boy and Damplay, is able to conclude:

> We come here to behold plays, and censure
> them, as they were made and fitted for is; not to beslaver our own
> thoughts, with censorious spittle tempering the poet's clay, as we
> were to mould every scene anew: that were a mere plastic or potter's
> ambition, most unbecoming the name of gentleman. (Fourth Chorus 11-15)

Probee has progressed from the role of Damplay's compatriot to his critic.

The stinging attack of the Boy (cf 70-71) against Damplay and his style of spectating, as well as the "negative" audience representations from the two performances, are excellent examples of the material which is repeatedly employed to support critics' contention that Jonson is filled with animosity for his audience. The representation of Probee seems to be the only solid proof against the claim. Critics who have assumed that these later plays contain Jonson's anti-audience sentiment neglect to consider that these are dramatis personae and that the representations do not constitute Jonson's own position. Throughout this discussion I have maintained that the audience is not a single homogenous interpreter. In these works, Jonson makes it clear that his representatives are not universal nor is he unilaterally damning his audiences. Far from it: despite the contrast in audience representations, in both *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady* Jonson continues to construct and contest meaning. No single interpretation is offered as the "correct" model, rather, as in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Jonson recognizes the potential for a multitude of interpretations. His constructions of the "negative" models act to temper certain presumptuous behaviors which have plagued his earlier dramas and stem from rash, unthinking, misguided interpretations; however, they are also directed against

"the velvet lethargy" of passivity and indifference. Jonson's performances depend upon the active participation of the astute, conscientious observer willing to construct intelligently viable interpretations. The most important effect of the representations of these "suspect" audiences is the creation of a bond with the theatre enthusiasts who would have appreciated and agreed with the jibes. These representations would have encouraged attentive and intelligent interpretations so that the auditors would escape the criticism of the inattentive audience member. Once the auditor had recognized the jibes for their significance they would have worked to be excluded from the classification.

As with *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the role of interpretation is central to the performance. In the Induction to *The Magnetic Lady*, the Boy likens the performance to a skein of silk:

> For I must tell you, 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, an elf-lock; which nothing but the shears or a candle will undo or separate. (Ind 116-21)

It is the audience's responsibility to take the right end of the skein, but there are no further restrictions placed upon the spectator. In the analogy the Boy assures his listeners that if the audience approaches the performance properly, the auditor is permitted to unravel or interpret "how you will", "you may wind off, at pleasure." If the spectator is willing to accept her/his active role in the interpretation then no further instructions are needed. Shortly after, when the Boy responds to Damplay's request for clarification on the roles and identities of the performers entering the stage, Jonson reinforces his claim that there is

no single interpretation:

> Dam. Stay! Who be these, I pray you?
> ...
> Boy. I have heard
> the poet affirm that to be the most unlucky scene in a play which
> needs an interpreter; especially when the auditory are awake. (Ind 124-26)

The Boy's reply makes it clear that there is no need for an external source to offer the guide to the interpretation. The interaction of the stage space and the audience is sufficient for the construction of a site of interpretation.

Earlier in the Induction, Damplay has attempted to deduce the "portal" of the comedy to be presented by means of interpreting the title of the performance. Offering a string of pseudo-Latin words as the possible etymological sources of the title, Damplay pretends to an understanding of the intended focus; however, The Boy corrects this false assumption:

> Dam. And what is the title of your play here? 'The Magnetic
> Lady'?
> Pro. A magnet, I warrant you.
> Dam. Ah, no, from magnus, magnua, magnum.
> Boy. This gentleman hath found the true magnitude ---
> Dam. Of his portal or entry to the work, according to Vitruvius.
> Boy. Sir all our work is done without a portal -- or Vitruvius.
> In foro, as a true comedy should be. And what is concealed within
> is brought out and made present by report. (Ind 62-71)

From the outset, Jonson has made it clear that there is no single necessary interpretive path that must be followed: there is no correct "portal" which must be located and then navigated in order that the auditor may appreciate the offering. It is simply a matter of attending to the performance and "judiciously" interpreting the signs.

Interestingly, the Boy's use of the silk skein image is not the first time that Jonson uses the image. In *The Staple of News*, Penniboy Junior employs the image to describe his own situation in act five and the complexity of the plot which Picklock has attempted to bring to fruition. Having been stripped of his ostentatious exterior, Penniboy Junior is finally able to address the events at hand from a proper perspective and fathom Picklock's actions. Speaking with his father and Picklock, Junior begs the ear of his father:

> Sir, your ear to me, though. (His son entreats him)
> Not that I see through his perplexed plots
> And hidden ends, nor that my parts depend
> Upon the unwinding this so knotted skein (5.2 42-44)

Unencumbered by his finery, Penniboy Junior begins to look beyond the surface and interpret. Herford and Simpson have commented on Penniboy Junior's progression in character: "after his first escapades, he develops, learns wisdom, detects and frustrates the plot to which he is expected to fall victim, and recovers in a quite natural way his father's favour and his own better self" (H&S II 178). In Penniboy's progression we see a mirror of the transformation which Jonson would like to see in his own audience. It is a matter of attending to matters beyond the merely superficial, of simply attending to the events which occur on the stage as opposed to only considering the shows of wealth which surround them.

The Prologue to *The Staple of News* claims: For your own sakes, not his, he bade me say,/ Would you were come to hear, not see a play (Pro. 1-2). A number of interpretations have taken these words and have focused them into an attack on Jonson's antitheatricality. They have been held as proof of Jonson's animosity for the stage, its

artificial constructions and the spectacle of the performance. However, as the opening line claims, it is not for the poet's benefit, but the spectators'. Jonson's unrest stems not from his own animosity for the stage, but for the potential unrest which those inattentive audience members cause as they come to observe the spectacle of the auditorium rather than the events of the performance. In *The Magnetic Lady* and *The Staple of News*, Jonson continues to construct performances which depend upon the stage for their meaning. While the audience representations have been drastically redrawn, they do not represent a similar shift in Jonson's attitude towards the medium or those "judicious" spectators willing to attend to the performance. For Jonson the stage remains the site where an active and attentive audience encounters the performance and proceeds to unravel the meaning for themselves, to interpret the events from their own unique perspective rather than attempting to construct the one single meaning which the playwright deems essential. The audience is encouraged to look beyond the superficial appearance because appearances are deceptive. Likewise Jonson's representations of "poor" audiences may appear to support an antitheatrical claim; however this appearance is a deceit. Beyond their superficial mocking of the "poor" audience, these representations are a potent device of theatricality. They encourage the development of a bond between theatre enthusiasts, who will take pleasure in their ability to participate in the recognition of the flaws of the less astute auditors who cannot participate in the spirit of the comedy, and the dramatic medium. This sense of inclusion for the experienced auditor indicates Jonson's commitment to performance, the theatre, and his audience.

Postscript

At the height of his career, Ben Jonson was considered the preeminent dramatist of his age -- a Renaissance Horace. With the reopening of the theatres in 1660, Jonson's dramas returned to the playhouse and continued to gain widespread acceptance; however, in the eighteenth century his reputation diminished. Critics began to address the "laboured and contrived" nature of his dramas. Those components which had earlier won him fame in many critics' eyes became impediments to the viability of successfully performing a Jonsonian comedy. The works were still deemed worthy of attention, but only from a literary point of view -- in the study. Jonson's dramas were assumed to be better suited for reading -- a prejudice which has remained intact into the twentieth century. The twentieth century has witnessed a renewed interest in Jonson's work; however, the "sympathetic" treatments the dramas receive are all too often accompanied by an analysis of their "antitheatrical prejudice" which disallows for a proper examination of the plays.

The goal of this project has been to reexamine the nature of this antitheatrical prejudice, to locate its sources and to demonstrate that the antitheatrical label has been unjustly attached to Jonson and his works. Informed by the example of performance criticism, I have reexamined three Jonsonian comedies, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady*, not simply as written texts, but as

performances that cannot be reduced to mere words upon a page. They have existed in a real time and space, and as such the written text is only one component of the larger performance. To aid in the interpretation, I have attempted to fill in the lacunae of the performance which a consideration of the text alone neglects to incorporate. I have paid particular attention to the issues of the production of meaning, the role of interpretation and the place of the audience within the performance. While the audience does not affect the written work, it must be considered in any interpretation of the work as a whole.

Each of these three dramas shows Jonson's dependence upon the theatrical medium to produce a site wherein interpretations and meanings are contested. All three works present an on-stage audience which to varying degrees both emulates the "proper" interpretive practice and mocks the vagaries of the "real" audience. The Jonsonian audience was expected to participate actively in the interpretation, to dynamically engage the performance rather than passively absorb someone else's interpretation. Jonson refused to predicate his offering on the expectations of that part of his audience who were unwilling to sacrifice their comfortable assumptions as to the outcome for a drama that challenged their presuppositions and contravened contemporary conventions. For the Jonsonian audience, a single "correct" interpretation does not exist. Jonson understood that a multiplicity of perspectives was available in and brought to any performance. The audience was not homogenous, but eclectic. Jonson exploited the varied makeup of the audience. The satiric representations of "poor" auditors, while highlighting the deficiencies of some and the need for intelligent and attentive participation, also created a

bond between the astute "judicious" audience and the performance. Able to share in the playwright's and actors' mockery and more subtle humour, the astute audience participated in the construction of meaning as they applied their own knowledge and experience. For such members, inclusion in Jonson's selective comedies served to reinforce the enjoyment of and involvement in the theatre. All of these points emphasize Jonson's theatricality, his commitment to the stage and his audience.

From the example of performance theory and the critical avenues it opens up for the dramas of earlier historical periods, it is evident that more work needs to be done in this area. Many of Jonson's neglected works would benefit from a new appraisal with questions of performance and the contemporary audience in mind. While the Jonsonian comedy has returned to the stage, a stigma remains that limits Jonson's appeal to both professional companies and their audiences. The success of his comedies today is met with surprise, because of the pervasiveness of the antitheatrical stigma.

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