

DISGUISE AND ROLE-PLAYING

IN BEN JONSON'S DRAMA

DISGUISE AND ROLE-PLAYING  
IN BEN JONSON'S DRAMA

By  
PETER HYLAND M.A.

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University  
June, 1973

## DESCRIPTION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1973)

McMaster University,  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Disguise and Role-Playing in Ben Jonson's Drama

AUTHOR: Peter Hyland, B.A. (Wales), M.A. (McMaster)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. D.J.McK.Duncan

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 269

## ABSTRACT

Because of their obvious value in plot-complication, disguise-devices were very popular amongst Renaissance playwrights; occasionally they were used with freshness and originality, but more often did not escape the dullness of convention. Disguise figures prominently in Jonson's comedy, and a close examination of the way in which the dramatist employs disguise demonstrates that he endows it with a particular significance that is consistent throughout his dramatic career.

Jonson's affection for Stoic doctrine is well known, and he is especially concerned with that part of the doctrine that sees it as a man's moral duty to create an identity for himself and to remain constant to it. The foolish or vicious man is characterized by his unwillingness to accept such identity, or his inability to create it, by his preference for the mask. Putting this metaphor into action, Jonson creates a satiric world of disguisers and role-players, of men who create an illusion of themselves by a change in appearance, or by verbal disguise. But there is always a moral weight attached to the use of disguise: a disguiser is criticized for that very activity.

A chronological examination of the plays demonstrates how central the disguiser, lacking real identity, is to Jonson's moral vision, and further demonstrates how little this



vision changed throughout his career. More important, an understanding of the function of the disguiser is helpful, and often crucial, for an understanding of the ethical direction of the plays. For Jonson's world is generally a world without norms, a world entirely made up of villains, where wit rather than morality seems to be triumphant. But the disguiser himself implies a norm, insofar as he implies the alternative possibility of Stoic integrity and authenticity. And although this Stoic figure rarely appears in the plays, he is prominent in Jonson's poetry.

An understanding of Jonson's attitude toward the play-actor also helps explain our uneasiness in accepting apparent norms like Truewit and Quarlous, whose triumph is one of wit rather than superior morality; for by their implication in the general role-playing they prove themselves to be, finally, as empty as those they mock.

This study substantiates the view that Jonson is always a moralist, even when there are no moral spokesmen in his plays, and that a clear understanding of his plays requires an understanding of his subtly ironic viewpoint. Indeed, it is those plays which have a moral spokesman that are his least successful. Further, it underlines the unity of his vision, not simply in individual plays, but throughout the body of his work. Finally, it helps explain the disturbing ambiguity which Jonson shows toward his chosen medium, the stage.

#### NOTE

Throughout the present study, references to Jonson are to the great Herford and Simpson edition of his works. In all cases, the original spelling has been retained; but j, u, and v have been normalized.

I should like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Douglas Duncan, not merely for his concerned and sensitive supervision, but for help and encouragement far beyond the requirements of his duty.

## CONTENTS

Description	iii
Abstract	iv
Note	vi
Introduction	1
I. Early Plays, Comical Satyres, Tragedies	38
II. <u>Volpone</u>	76
III. <u>Epicoene</u>	106 -
IV. <u>The Alchemist</u>	128 -
V. <u>Bartholomew Fair</u>	150
VI. <u>The Devil Is an Ass</u>	176
VII. Last Plays	193
Conclusion	232
Appendix	255
Bibliography	261

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Disguise

The precursor of drama is masked ritual dance. Whether imitating animals or gods, primitive man was able to lose himself in his mask; disguised as an animal, he became that animal, disguised as a god he became that god. The psychological implications of this self-surrender are obscure and complex, but undeniably "the dancer becomes one with the spirit to which he gives himself, and the god becomes a real presence in the rite."<sup>1</sup> The urge to "play a part" is basic, but becomes serious, ceases to be play, at the point where the distinction between player and part ceases to exist, where exterior becomes interior.

The drama, of course, is the most complete metaphor for this "playing a part", and disguise used within the framework of the drama tends to complicate the metaphor. In the masque the disguise of the drama and the disguise within the drama are identical, but in the play proper the disguise within the drama exists in a more complex relationship to the disguise of the drama.

Despite the remarkable frequency of use of disguise on the English stage during the Renaissance there has been

---

<sup>1</sup> A.P. Rossiter, English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Growth and Development (London, 1906), p.17.

little extensive examination by scholars of the subject. The only full-scale examination is that by Victor Freeburg, first published in 1915;<sup>2</sup> but his main concern is simply the identification, cataloguing and categorization of disguise plots. Other works have treated disguise as a part of the larger field of deception, or as part of a fuller "world-as-stage" metaphor, or have concentrated on the use of disguise in specific plays.<sup>3</sup>

In his examination of disguise conventions Freeburg discovers that there are five basic classifications, "the female page, the boy bride, the rogue in multi-disguise, the disguised spy, and the disguised lover."<sup>4</sup> These categories are of course very flexible, sometimes comically so; for instance, Freeburg includes as a "boy bride" Falstaff disguised as the Witch of Brentford. Marston's Antonio, disguised as an Amazon, falls into the two categories of "boy bride" and "disguised lover". The disguised spy category includes the disguised husband spying on his wife, and the disguised ruler

---

<sup>2</sup>  
Victor O. Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama: A Study in Stage Tradition (New York, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>  
See, for example, John V. Curry, Deceit in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955); Anne Richter, Disguise and the Idea of the Play (Harmondsworth, 1967); Marjell C. Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy (Harmondsworth, 1963).

<sup>4</sup>  
Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama, p.4.

spying on his kingdom -- two quite different things.

It will be evident from this brief outline of Freeburg's approach that he sees disguise plots in terms of conventions, and indeed, he treats all disguise as being largely plot-device or complicating factor. Disguise, he thinks, was so long popular with dramatists because it provided a wealth of intrigue; it also allowed a certain amount of verbal and dramatic irony, and, in the final unmasking, brought a logical, complete, and satisfying end to the play. While it may be true that in many plays disguise is used conventionally, and even ineptly, it is clear that in much Elizabethan drama it takes on additional meaning.

A number of traditions can be demonstrated as influencing the Elizabethan dramatist's use of disguise. Miss Bradbrook suggests two:

The Italian comedy of travesty-doubles, or quick-change artists and of clever cheating, was at the opposite extreme from the native use of disguise. In the moral play, disguise had almost always had the flavour of the supernatural; it was the special role of the Vices to disguise themselves as Virtues and to adopt their names; their unmasking ended the play.<sup>5</sup>

Allardyce Nicoll places even greater emphasis on the influence of the native morality tradition:

To a certain extent the disguise device seems to have arisen chiefly out of the morality-play pattern. The hero, or at least the central figure in a play, is approached by some evil characters who wish to get him into their clutches; if they come to him in their

own shapes he may be induced to dismiss them summarily, and so they pretend to be other than they are. This device is constantly being employed, and we may well believe that the familiarizing of sixteenth-century spectators with the convention helps to explain the popularity of the disguise element in the later Elizabethan drama. Often this disguise device is associated with the person of the Vice.

This association of the disguise device with the person of the Vice has been discussed at some length by Ann Wierum. She discusses the importance of the acting-motif in morality treatments of the psychomachia, the central allegory of evil as masquerade, and the significance of the Vice's acting abilities:

In his most effective role as tempter and psychological persuader, the Vice must excel as performing "actor". He must be able to assume a false face or "mask" of affection, grief, kindness, piety, respectability, simplicity, honesty, or "innocent merriment" as occasion demands; and he often describes his own talents in theatrical terms.<sup>7</sup>

The moral ambiguity of disguising was therefore a part of the native tradition before it reached the Elizabethan audience.

Disguise, then, as it relates to the Vice and other "evil characters", reflects the traditional idea that the Devil can take any shape he wishes when he tempts mankind; but it is possible that the Devil was originally believed to appear in false shape, not in order to deceive, but simply because his own shape was too frightful for man's eyes. We may remember the

---

<sup>6</sup>  
Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama. (New York, 1963), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup>  
Ann Wierum, "'Actors' and 'Play-Acting' in the Morality Tradition", Renaissance Drama, n.s.III (1970), 190-191.



first words of Marlowe's Faustus to Mephostophilis:

I charge thee to return and change thy shape;  
Thou art too ugly to attend on me.  
(I.iii.23-24)<sup>8</sup>

Like many of Satan's victims, Faustus has already deceived himself.

For the other main tradition one can perhaps go back beyond Miss Bradbrook's Italian comedy to Plautus: "From whatever source Plautus drew, it is evident that he was fond of disguise; he established the motive as a dramatic device, giving it strength, as it were, for a flourishing career in the comedy of the Renaissance."<sup>9</sup> Many of the most common devices are found in Plautus -- their earlier history need not concern us. Thus, in Asinaria, in Persa, and in Pseudolus, there appear slaves who use disguise to trick others for the benefit of their masters; in Captivi master and servant exchange identities; in Casina the device of the boy-bride appears; and in Amphitruo there is the device of the disguised lover. Plautus' influence appears widespread in the drama of the Renaissance, both in the basic devices, and in larger borrowings (the early Interlude, Jack Juggler, is entirely based upon the subsidiary device of Amphitruo where Mercury disguises as Sosia).

This continental tradition, along with the more contem-

---

<sup>8</sup>  
Christopher Marlowe, The Complete Plays, ed. Irving Ribner, (New York, 1963).

<sup>9</sup>  
Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama, p.36.

porary one of Italian novelle, impinged on the native ballad tradition which had made disguise a popular device of fiction long before Elizabethan dramatists took it up. "In romances and ballads, disguise is a proof and almost a badge of the lover. From Hind Horn to Fair Annie, the heroes and heroines put on mean attire, the men to test their true-love, and the women to follow theirs."<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the traditions, and whatever the reasons for the audience's interest, we can see the great appeal to dramatists of disguise conventions. In a developing art, use of disguise greatly expanded the possibilities of characterization. Writing of Shakespeare's use of the girl-page device, Miss Bradbrook says that "it enlarges the original role, and also discovers its latent possibilities."<sup>11</sup> This remark can be extended to apply to most disguise situations where a device has been used with any subtlety -- it allows the dramatist to transcend the limitations of the basic character, to expand the point of view of a single centre of consciousness, even to have the two sides of a disguised character comment, explicitly or implicitly, upon one another. "This development of character through disguise . . . is an extension of the method of contrasted plot and sub-plot. The two sides of Rosalind or

---

<sup>10</sup>  
Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, p.95.

<sup>11</sup>  
Ibid., p.97.

of Viola have a different tone, and yet each is allowed full play."<sup>12</sup>

The taking-on of disguise has two main aspects: the hiding of the attributes of the disguiser's own self, and the assumption of the attributes of the personality represented by the disguise. When a disguise-device is used to its fullest potential, our interest lies in the precise relationship between these two aspects. In relation to this point, it is useful to make a distinction about the motivation of disguise. Those plays in which characters initially disguise for purposes of concealment or self-protection can be seen as distinct from those in which a character freely chooses to put on disguise in order to observe, or to trick others. This division reflects the type of play involved -- plays in which characters initially disguise under some sort of constraint tend to be romantic, whereas plays in which characters voluntarily put on disguise tend to be satiric. Of course, the two types of motivation often overlap, just as the categories "romantic" and "satiric" are by no means always meaningful or mutually exclusive. Thus Shakespeare's Rosalind is "constrained" to put on disguise only at the very beginning of As You Like It: she could, if she wished, reveal herself without danger later in the play, but she retains her disguise to function as a satirist. And conversely, we must suppose that Marston's Malevole is forced to put on disguise,

---

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p.98.

even though the play he appears in is satiric. However, as a broad generalization the distinction is valid, and will be found useful when we approach Jonsonian disguise.

It will be useful at this point to consider a number of disguise-devices a little more closely. The survey will be far from complete, and especially in the case of examples drawn from Shakespeare only a bare outline of their significance will be attempted. Although Freeburg's division of devices into five types is useful, it tends toward rigidity, since it makes widely differing uses of a device appear conventional by emphasizing their similarities. Consequently these categories will be modified where necessary.

One of the most common devices, and certainly that most favoured by Shakespeare, is the "girl-page". In general this disguise is motivated by a need for self-concealment, often even for self-preservation. An early example, Lyly's Gallathea, has two girls, Gallathea and Phillida, disguised as boys by their fathers in order to save them from sacrificial death. Each, of course, falls in love with the other, and the device is used mainly for the pathetic ironies arising from the situation. In Greene's James IV, Dorothea disguises as a man, again to save her life, and the ironic love-situation appears again when Lady Anderson attempts to woo her. The burden placed upon Dorothea by this disguise is, however, too great -- she is too insipid, too shallowly depicted, to demonstrate any interesting effects of character.

G.Wilson Knight sees this girl-page device as having an emblematic effect. The girl-page is a sort of hermaphrodite combining the best characteristics of man and woman: "Sexual disguise is used by many dramatists to signify pictorially an ideal state."<sup>13</sup> Thus the motivation for disguise is only the dramatist's pretext for getting the girl into man's clothing. This is especially true of Shakespeare. Rosalind has to put on disguise to escape from her uncle; it is her exuberance that makes her choose man's rather than woman's attire, and that makes her retain her disguise long after the initial dangers have passed. But this retention of disguise allows her to turn satirist, besides giving her the power to resolve the conflicts of the play, to act as a figure of harmony. Very little reason at all is given for Viola's disguising in Twelfth Night; but once she is in disguise she cannot reveal herself until her brother appears to take over the role that she has created. In these plays, what counts is the use the dramatist makes of the disguise, and not the mere external uses of mistaken wooings and attacks. As Knight continues:

It is only when in male disguise that these heroines are given their best wisdom . . . . Viola and Rosalind are always feminine, and that their exquisite and authoritative realizations of womanhood come through disguise suggests that within the bisexual dimension whatever is best in sex itself is not abrogated,

---

13

G.Wilson Knight, The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama (London, 1962), p.68.

but fulfilled; or rather, it is filtered through, all that is sexually limited, or lustful, being left out.<sup>14</sup>

But even in the generally light-hearted disguising of the girl-page convention, something of an ambivalent attitude can be felt, perhaps reflecting the feelings about disguise that we have already noted in relation to the morality Vice. Thus occasional reference is made by dramatists to a "conventional morality" that would not accept such disguising simply as a pleasant prank. Thus Lyly has his Phillida object, before putting on her disguise in Gallathea: "For then I must keepe company with boyes, and commit follies unseemelie for my sexe; or keepe company with girles, and bee thought more wanton than becommeth." She accepts only "since my father will have it so" (I.iii). Similarly Julia, in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, says to Proteus:

Be thou asham'd that I have took upon me  
Such an immodest raiment -- if shame live  
In a disguise of love.  
It is the lesser blot, modesty finds,  
Women to change their shapes than men their minds.  
(V.iv.105-109)

The disguiser acknowledges at least a failure in decorum as a result of her activities. However, insofar as the act of disguising is an expression of character, it is, with most of these girl-pages, a reflection of energy.

Disguise can be used to express other aspects of cha-

---

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., pp.68,69.

racter. The "rogue in multi-disguise" is, in effect, defined by his disguising. The concept of a man putting on a disguise to dupe others dates back through Plautus to Homer's Odysseus. It is a logical move, both from the point of view of plot-construction and from the point of view of character-conception, to develop this original figure into a character who can put on as many faces as he wishes. The relationship with the Vice is obvious; disguise here is a sign of resourcefulness, although it can have a chaotic effect on the plot. So Chapman's The Blind Beggar of Alexandria requires a constant shifting of costume as the Beggar sustains four different disguises; Look About You has its central character, Skink, play six different parts beyond himself and has, furthermore, six other characters who use disguise. The device is used with rather more restraint by Marston in The Dutch Courtesan, where Cockledemoy uses multi-disguise for the systematic degradation of Mulligrub. Middleton has Shortyard and Falselight each disguise three times in Michaelmas Term; unlike the earlier plays using this device, however, Michaelmas Term lays overt moral weight on the disguise, for these rogues are punished. Middleton's Follywit in A Mad World, My Masters is also subtly punished, for he marries the Courtesan he has earlier impersonated.

If versatility and resourcefulness are demonstrated by the disguising of these rogues, the same characteristics, though on a more serious level, appear in the figure of the

machiavel. The machiavel is, almost by definition, a disguiser; yet it is surprising, considering that the whole conception of the character rests on his use of deceit, how rarely he uses literal disguise. Up to this point the examples of disguise that we have examined have entailed a change in costume or in appearance; but a disguise can be purely verbal, when a character claims to be something he is not without modifying his appearance. The machiavel is always playing a role, but does not necessarily change his appearance for the role he plays. Barabas, in The Jew of Malta, uses literal disguise only once, when he makes his attempt on the lives of Ithamore and his colleagues. Although his use of disguise is hardly surprising, and is in harmony with his constant duplicity, it is only a minor part of his general deceitfulness. Quomodo, in Michaelmas Term, also uses literal disguise as the climax of his deceits, which have previously been verbal. Consequently, we can define "disguise" as the assumption of a false personality, whether through costume change or through the creation of a verbal surface.

In the case of the disguised machiavel, and to some degree in the case of the rogue in multi-disguise, the masquerade is quite evidently morally reprehensible. In some plays, however, disguise is emblematic of guardianship, and is consequently acceptable. A character, often a ruler, dons a disguise in order to watch over his kingdom or, more rarely, to watch over a single character. Shakespeare's Measure for



Measure is the most distinguished of such plays; Duke Vincentio disguises as a Friar to learn about his kingdom, and to observe the activities of his deputy. His disguised presence acts as a commentary on the events of the play, and as a safeguard. Marston's The Malcontent has a similar situation, but the disguised ruler here has a different function -- not to guard his kingdom from vice, but to rail it back to virtue. This is what Wilson Knight means when he writes of the emblematic function of the disguises: "The Duke in friar's disguise adumbrates the as yet unachieved union of Church and State,"<sup>15</sup> the perfection of guardianship. Altofronto's persona of the bitter malcontent reflects the correspondingly more rotten atmosphere of his court.

The disguised guardian who is responsible for only a single character is often a father rather than a ruler. In 2 Honest Whore, Orlando Friscobaldo disguises first to spy on his daughter to see that she is worthy, then to save her from her husband's maltreatment. Another disguised guardian is Kent in King Lear; his doomed attempts to watch over Lear in his guise of blunt-speaking soldier give him a status almost unique, as an inferior guarding his ruler. In the same play, Edgar in his role as Poor Tom acts as guardian for his father, although this was no part of his initial intention, in taking on the disguise. Portia, in The Merchant of Venice, falls into

---

<sup>15</sup>

G.Wilson Knight, The Golden Labyrinth, p.75.

the category of girl-page, but she too acts as guardian, since she alone can save Bassanio.

All these fall into Freeburg's "disguised spy" category, but it is more useful to consider them as guardians, as against other characters who spy for more dubious motives, and often learn things mainly damaging to themselves; in effect they are punished for their irresponsible disguising. An early example of this occurs in Peele's Edward I, where the King, disguised as a friar to hear his wife's death-bed confession, learns not only that his brother was the Queen's lover before her marriage, but also that his daughter is not his own child. In 2 Henry IV, Hal and Poins disguise as drawers to play a trick on Falstaff, only to hear themselves maligned by him. In Michaelmas Term Quomodo, disguised as a beadle, meets his own son, and also hears himself maligned. In each of these cases, the disguise ironically reflects back on to the disguiser.

In these "spy" plays, we are intended to see the disguiser as being censured by the author, and there are other plays where disguise is censured in a different way. There are plays in which members of the ruling class apparently playfully take on disguise, but whose play-acting is shown to be irresponsible. Thus, in Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, Lacy goes in disguise to court Margaret on behalf of Prince Edward, whose feeling is of lust rather than of love; to the courtiers it is a game, but Margaret provides a cor-

rective to this, for to her it is much more serious:

In jest with you, but earnest unto me;  
For-why these wrongs do wring me at the heart.  
Ah, how these earls and noblemen of birth  
Flatter and feign to forge poor women's ill!  
(II.iii.113-117)

Feigning here is directly connected to destructive action; it is perhaps a significant comment that Edward himself disguises as his fool. Prince Hal's literal disguising in the two parts of Henry IV can be seen in this light -- although it is only incidental, it acts as a comment on his entire masquerade in the two plays.

Another area of meaningful disguise, where disguise is used ironically, also derives from the Vice-tradition of the moral play, and is also related to the machiavel. Here, the disguiser takes on an appearance which represents his precise opposite, as the old Vices had disguised as virtues. In Webster's The White Devil, Lodovico and Gasparo disguise as Capuchins to murder Brachiano; the garb of the holy man is a popular mask for hypocrisy. A situation almost the reverse occasionally appears: the noble Edgar in King Lear disguises as the base beggar-madman Poor Tom. A further modification of this can be seen in The Malcontent, where the witless nobleman Pietro disguises as his precise opposite, a hermit, traditionally a figure seeking solitude and wisdom, and is finally led to become what he has pretended to be, to embrace those ideals represented by the hermit.

These are some of the main areas in which disguise

is used in Elizabethan drama with a significance beyond that of plot-device. Freeburg, as we saw, is mainly concerned with the conventional use of disguise-plots. Curry too is mainly concerned with the deceiver's influence on the movement of the play: "these characters all resort to deception in their pursuit of their objectives and in so doing affect to a considerable extent the flow of the plot."<sup>16</sup> It is, of course, perfectly valid to see disguises mainly as a means of furthering the narrative, or of providing the basis of the whole structure of the play; but I have tried to show something of the use made of disguise in development of character, or in support of the moral direction, or in development of the tone or the theme of a play. Thus some disguise conventions have virtually been ignored, such as that of the boy bride, of which Freeburg says, "The conception of a man dressed as a woman is always farce . . . . It cannot easily be sustained for any great length of time."<sup>17</sup> The disguised lover too exists mainly in order to complicate the plot.

Brief as this discussion has been, it has shown that in many plays there is a strong feeling of the moral ambiguity of disguise. Further, we have seen that many dramatists use disguise to bring out important aspects of character, and in relation to this, disguise can be "verbal", when a character

---

<sup>16</sup>

Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy, p.66.

<sup>17</sup>

Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama, p.101.

claims to be something he is not, without necessarily taking on a literal disguise. In examining Jonson's use of disguise, we shall see that he consistently attaches a strong moral weight to disguise, that the role-player is at the centre of Jonson's moral vision.

## 2. Stoic Constancy and the Mask

Before proceeding to examine Jonson's use of disguise in individual plays, we must examine certain philosophical and ethical views which the device will be shown to illustrate. When in Every Man in His Humour Brainworm, disguised as a City Sergeant, says, "Well, of all my disguises, now am I most like my selfe" (IV.xi.1-2), a connection is being made between the use of disguise and knowledge of the self. A specific concept of self-knowledge underlies most of Jonson's use of disguise, and certainly his most characteristic uses of it. This concept, derived largely from Stoic and Humanist moral philosophy, sees the virtuous man as being one who remains true to himself, one who adheres to an inner truth that is indifferent to externals.

A brief introductory study has been made by C.B.Hilberry of the relationship of Jonson's ethics to Stoic and Humanistic thought. He finds that "The primary influence upon [Jonson] was unquestionably Stoic, and particularly Senecan . . . . Many of these basically Stoic ideas came to

Jonson through the medium of the early humanists."<sup>18</sup> Here we need to concern ourselves with that part of Stoic doctrine which sees virtue as "an inner quality of the mind . . . independent of outward forms such as clothes and titles."<sup>19</sup> It is a concept that arises from the central Stoic doctrine of fortitude in the face of all adversity, whether caused by man or by fortune, a fortitude which can only be acquired by the recognition that externals are unable to harm the man who places no value upon them. It lies at the centre of Seneca's essay De Constantia: "The wise man knows that all who strut about in togas and in purple, as if they were well and strong are, for all their bright colour, quite unsound, and in his eyes they differ in no way from the sick who are bereft of self-control."<sup>20</sup> Wisdom and virtue are inseparable, and belong to the man who has self-control and can recognize the futility of externals.

A necessary corollary to this conception of virtue is the idea that the good and wise man will be consistent. The man who has learned the futility of externals will seek out his true "self" and strive to remain constant to it. Marcus

---

<sup>18</sup>

C.B.Hilberry, Ben Jonson's Ethics in Relation to Stoic and Humanistic Ethical Thought, private edition (Chicago, 1933), p.2.

<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., p.10.

<sup>20</sup>

L.Annaeus Seneca, Moral Essays, tr. John W. Basore (3 vols.; London, 1928), XIII.2.

Aurelius tells us that one of the most important things he has learned is "to be the same man always."<sup>21</sup> Seneca amplifies this idea. Describing the good man he says:

He has always been the same, consistent in all his actions, not only sound in his judgment, but trained by habit to such an extent that he not only can act rightly, but cannot help acting rightly. We have formed the conception that in such a man perfect virtue exists . . . . Virtue has been manifested to us by this man's order, propriety, steadfastness, absolute harmony of action, and a greatness of soul that rises superior to everything . . . . The greatest proof of an evil mind is unsteadiness and continued wavering between pretence of virtue and love of vice . . . a man never the same, never even like himself . . . . That is how a foolish mind is most clearly demonstrated: it shows first in this shape and then in that, and is never like itself -- which is, in my opinion, the most shameful of qualities.  
(Ep.CXX, 10,11,20,21,22)<sup>22</sup>

The good man knows himself, and remains always the same; the evil man not only presents many different shapes, but worse still, does not know what his own shape is. The good man lives inwardly; the evil man sees only the externals, and cannot be consistent.

The quest for self-knowledge is, of course, basic to all Greek moral philosophy, which concerns itself with an understanding of man before an understanding of the universe; and the need to understand and be constant to the self became

---

<sup>21</sup>

Marcus Aurelius, The Meditations, tr. G.M.A.Grube (Indianapolis, 1963), p.4.

<sup>22</sup>

L.Annaeus Seneca, Ad Lucilium Epistolae Morales, tr. R.M.Gummere (3 vols.; London, 1934).

one of the commonest concerns among Elizabethan writers, many of whom had little interest in distinguishing Stoic from other teachings. Shakespeare achieved the most memorable statement of the ideal, in a context where the irony is often thought to undermine its seriousness:

This above all, to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Amongst Renaissance teachers too, self-knowledge and constancy are considered of the utmost importance. Sir Thomas Elyot's advice to the young governor is largely concerned with these values; there is a continual stress on the inner as opposed to the outer, with warnings against flatterers and against dissimulation. All knowledge, says Elyot, depends on self-knowledge, and one's ability to understand what is outside depends on one's ability to understand oneself:

Knowledge . . . declareth by what meane the sayde preceptes of reason and societie may be well understande, and thereby justice finally executed. The words be these in latine, Nosce te ipsum, whiche is in englysshe, know thy selfe . . . . Than in knowinge the condicion of his soule and body, he knoweth him selfe, and consequently in the same thinge he knoweth every other man.<sup>23</sup>

Knowing what one is, one will always appear to be that; the man who projects a false appearance is evil, for "the devill is called a lyer, and the father of leasinges. Wherefore all thinge, which in visage or apparaunce pretendeth to be

---

23

Sir Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Governour (1531), ed. Foster Watson (New York and London, 1907), pp. 202-203.



any other than verely it is, may be named a leasinge."<sup>24</sup> All fraud is a product of the devil.

Closer to Jonson, Sir Philip Sidney, who we know had a great influence on Jonson's formative years, also believed that self-knowledge was necessary to enable a man to combine right reason and right action. All knowledge, he says, is directed "to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge . . . which stands, as I think, in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing, and not of well-knowing only."<sup>25</sup> Right reason, then, depends on knowing what one is, and leads to virtuous action. "The truly rational man is also the truly virtuous man."<sup>26</sup>

The centrality of the concept in Jonson's thought can be inferred from its frequent recurrence in his writings, which also make clear that his own ideas about it are associated specifically with the Stoic tradition. Since we shall be concerned in later chapters with the evidence of the plays, we may turn now to his non-dramatic writings to illustrate how closely his concept of virtue is related to the Stoics', and particularly to Seneca's. He is everywhere preoccupied

---

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., p.207.

<sup>25</sup>

Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy, ed. Albert S. Cook (Boston, 1890), p.12.

<sup>26</sup>

Robert Hoopes, Right Reason in the English Renaissance (Cambridge Mass., 1962), p. 23.

with questions concerning the relationship between inner and outer, between the self and the appearance which is too often confused with the self. In Discoveries he writes with contempt for those who would put value on externals thus blinding themselves to real, inner values: "Some love any Strumpet (be shee never so shop-like, or meritorious) in good clothes"(317-318). Man's search should be for truth: "Truth is man's proper good; and the onely immortal thing, was given to our mortality to use"(531-532). The enemy of truth is opinion, which also is confused by appearances, while truth conforms to nature, as should man. In this, Jonson can be seen to reflect the familiar Stoic view that man must follow Nature, who herself is reasonable and consistent: "she is alwayes the same, like her selfe"(125-126). Truth is immortal, nature is constant; the man who cannot retain one face lives contrary to both: "nothing is lasting that is fain'd; it will have another face then it did, ere long"(540-542).

It is especially in his verse that Jonson considers these questions, since the purpose of so many of his poems is to present models of virtue. According to G.A.E.Parfitt, Jonson's verse reveals:

the gap between seeming and being, which underlies most of his satire. His view of Man as individual is a development of this perception: he admires constancy, honesty, and self-sufficiency, while detesting hypocrisy, fickleness, and flattery.<sup>27</sup>

---

27

G.A.E.Parfitt, "Ethical Thought and Ben Jonson's Poetry", Studies in English Literature, IX (1969), 126-127.

Thomas M. Greene makes the distinction more fully. In a paper discussing the centered self, he says of Jonson's verse: "Virtually all the heroes and heroines (the terms are not misapplied) of the verse seem to possess this quality of fixed stability," while the self which is not centered "paints, feigns, invents, gossips, alters its manner and passion as whim or necessity dictates."<sup>28</sup> In his encomiastic verse, Jonson often praises those who are not concerned for appearance, but have an idea of themselves to which they always adhere. In his poem "To Sir Henry Nevil" (Ep. CIX), for example: "Thou rather striv'st the matter to possesse,/And elements of honour, then the dresse" (ll. 9-10). The constancy of William, Earl of Pembroke is praised, he being a man "whose noblesse keeps one stature still,/And one true posture, though beseig'd with ill" (Ep. CII, ll. 13-14). This is the nature of the classic Stoic hero, and Herford and Simpson in fact trace the reference back to Seneca.

When Jonson is giving advice on moral behaviour the same note often appears. To Sir Thomas Roe he says "Be alwayes to thy gather'd selfe the same" (Ep. XCVIII, l. 9). He advises another friend "That whatsoever face thy fate puts on,/Thou shrink or start not; but be alwayes one" (The Underwood, XV, ll. 185-186). To Alphonso Ferrabosco he urges self-consistency

---

28

Thomas M. Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self", Studies in English Literature, X (1970), 330, 331.

and the need to look inward: "Then stand unto thy self, not seeke without/For fame, with breath soone kindled, soone blowne out"(Ep.CXXXI,11.13-14). The celebrated injunction of Persius, "non te quæsieris extra"(Satires,i,7), was a Stoic catch-phrase, to which Jonson alludes here and in a wide variety of different contexts.

Two longer poems, both appearing in The Forrest, exemplify more fully Jonson's Stoic preoccupations. "To the World"(IV) presents a complaint against the world; as Wesley Trimpi points out, "The structure of the poem is that of accumulated aphoristic comment, which does not develop so much as restate familiar attitudes in various commonplaces."<sup>29</sup> The "various commonplaces" relate to contempt of the world, and a resolution to turn from it and seek solace within. The world is seen in the familiar role of masked player, vainly trying to hide its emptiness: "I know too, though thou strut, and paint,/Yet art thou both shrunk up, and old"(11.13-14). But the woman speaking has rejected the play-acting world, as she has rejected her own role within it: "Hence-forth I quit thee from my thought,/My part is ended on thy stage"(11.3-4). This is interesting; although Trimpi sees this image as one of the "commonplaces" of the poem, it is not used in an altogether commonplace way. Usually such an image

---

29

Wesley Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style (Stanford,1962), p.118.

would refer to imminent death, in the withdrawal from the stage. But here the metaphor refers simply to a withdrawal into the self; the woman will no longer "act", because she has found the wiser course:

Nor for my peace will I goe farre,  
As wandrers doe, that still doe rome,  
But make my strengths, such as they are,  
Here in my bosome, and at home.  
(11.65-68)

The world can be ignored only by those who have learned to be self-sufficient.

A more complete picture of Stoic virtue appears in Forrest XIII, in the fine epistle to Katherine, Lady Aubigny. Speaking first of himself here, Jonson refers to himself as one who,

                                  though forsooke  
Of Fortune, have not alter'd yet my looke,  
Or so myself abandon'd, as because  
Men are not just, or keepe no holy lawes  
Of nature, and societie, I should faint;  
Or feare to draw true lines, 'cause others paint.  
(11.15-20)

Fortitude is difficult, but one who has remained constant to the self can embrace truth. Though Fortune changes, he will not. Turning the mirror around, he offers to let the lady hear "Your selfe but told unto your selfe":

Looke then, and see your selfe. I will not say  
Your beautie; for you see that every day:  
And so doe many more.  
(11.29-31)

The self, as defined here, is not the appearance, however beautiful, because it is not to be found in externals; it is

something that can only be truly known by its possessor; "in those outward formes, all fooles are wise." The poet presents a satiric picture of those who live with the surfaces the worlds offers, fools and vicious men:

yet must your comfort bee  
Your conscience, and not wonder, if none askes  
For truthes complexion, where they all weare maskes.  
Let who will follow fashions, and attyres,  
Maintayne their liedgers forth, for forraine wyres,  
Melt down their husbands land, to poure away  
On the close groome, and page, on new-yeeres day,  
And almost, all days after, while they live;  
(They finde it both so wittie, and safe to give.)  
Let 'hem on poulders, oyles, and paintings, spend,  
Till that no usurer, nor his bawds dare lend  
Them, or their officers: and no man know,  
Whether it be a face they weare, or no.  
(11.68-80)

Those who would ignore the world, to follow the self, and truth, are finally alone. The majority wear masks, and have no interest in truth, but only in hiding themselves more and more with their cosmetics and new fashions. The word "face" is used often in the comedies with the ambiguous suggestion that it really means "mask". Here we see why -- for those who abandon the self, the appearance becomes an empty sign, serving only to mislead others. The poem ends with an exhortation already familiar to us:

Live that one, still; and as long yeeres doe passe,  
Madame, be bold to use this truest glasse:  
Wherein, your forme, you still the same shall finde;  
Because nor it can change, nor such a minde.  
(11.121-124)

This concept of virtue, then, sets the man who knows himself against those who are confused by surfaces, both the

world's and their own. An appropriate metaphor for such a concept is obviously one derived from the stage: the vicious man is the man who plays roles, the actor who acts many parts -- perhaps none of which is himself. The virtuous man is only himself. This idea is of the utmost importance to all that is to follow. As we have seen, Jonson sets up an ideal of self-knowledge and consistency, against a world full of rogues and fools who are constantly changing surfaces -- in effect, men who play parts until they are unable to recognize the original part, confusing the mask with the face.

Turning back to the Stoic philosophers, we find this theatrical metaphor actually used to define the wise and virtuous man. In the definition of good and bad men quoted above, Seneca defined both the evil and the foolish mind as one which always wavers, constantly changing its shape, since evil is, finally, a failure of right reason, and therefore a type of folly. Immediately following this definition, he says:

Believe me, it is a great role -- to play the role of one man. But nobody can be one person except the wise man; the rest of us often shift our masks . . . . We continually change our characters and play a part contrary to that which we have discarded. You should therefore force yourself to maintain to the very end of life's drama the character which you assumed at the beginning. See to it that men be able to praise you; if not, let them at least identify you.  
(Ep.CXX, 22)

Man is an actor, and he is free, at the beginning, to choose his own part. The wise man, by force of will, maintains that role to the end. Foolish men are those who discard one role

after another, and cannot be recognized, because they always seem to be what they are not, and never the same thing for very long.

A later Stoic writer, Epictetus, uses the same metaphor with some modification:

Remember that you are an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses -- if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business -- to act well the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.<sup>30</sup>

This version differs slightly from Seneca's; Seneca thinks a man chooses his own part, Epictetus sees the part as chosen for man. But moral duty remains the same -- to act out only the assigned part. The man who fails to live his part is treated with contempt by Epictetus:

Otherwise, take notice, you will behave like children who sometimes play wrestlers, sometimes gladiators, sometimes blow a trumpet, and sometimes act a tragedy, when they happen to have seen and admired these shows. Thus you too will be at one time a wrestler, and another a gladiator: now a philosopher, now an orator; but nothing in earnest. Like an ape you mimic all you see, and one thing after another is sure to please you, but is out of favor as soon as it becomes familiar.<sup>31</sup>

The man who fails to cultivate his own part, who fails to regard his own identity, is like a child or an ape -- the em-

---

<sup>30</sup>

Epictetus, The Enchiridion, tr. Thomas W. Higginson (Indianapolis, 1955), p.22.

<sup>31</sup>

Ibid. p.27.



phasis is on play-acting as folly, since both child and ape lack reason; but lack of reason also causes a failure in right action.

That the theatrical metaphor is central to the Stoic view of the world is demonstrated by the fact that it reappears in the writings of Neostoic authors, with whom Jonson was almost certainly familiar. Justus Lipsius and Guillaume Du Vair both wrote during the later part of the sixteenth century, and the main Stoic works of both were translated in the last decade of the century. Lipsius uses example rather than statement, and employs the image in a way less strongly moral than those we have already seen; he is nonetheless concerned to demonstrate the blindness and futility of play-acting one's way through life, and to point out that it is the actor himself who is most hurt by the performance. In a conversation, Langius says to the author:

And as it is recorded in histories of Polus, a notable stage-player, that playing his part on the stage wherein it behooved him to expresse some great sorrow, he brought with him privily the bones of his dead son, and so the remembrance thereof caused him to fill the theater with true teares indeed. Even so may I say by the most part of you. You play a Comedy, and under the person of your country, you bewail with tears your private miseries. One saith The whol world is a stage-play. Trulie in this case it is so . . . . O player, put off thy vizard.<sup>32</sup>

The player is the cause of his own sorrow, because of his refusal to recognize that he is playing; his grief results from his denial of his real self.

Du Vair's statement of the metaphor echoes almost exactly the versions of Seneca and Epictetus. Like his counterpart in Epictetus, man is given one part, and must play only that part:

Let us consider that we come into the world as to a comedie, where wee may not chuse what part we will play, but onely looke that we play that parte well which is given us in charge. If the Poet bid us play a king's part, we must take care that we doe it well, and so if he charge us with the porter or clowns part, we must do it likewise: For a man may get as much credit by playing the one well, as by well acting the other: and like discredit redoundeth unto him if neither bee done well.<sup>33</sup>

Not all play-acting is wrong, since in a sense we all play one part; but the acting must be responsible -- that is, we must play only ourselves. Acting is immoral and foolish when it entails playing any other part, shifting masks or mimicking others.

Jonson uses the same metaphor to similar end in a passage in Discoveries for which Herford and Simpson have found no source:

I have considered, our whole life is like a Play, wherein every man, forgetfull of himselfe, is in travaile with expression of another. Nay, wee so insist in imitating others as we cannot (when it

is necessary) return to our selves: like Children,  
that imitate the vices of Stammerers so long, till  
at last they become such; and make the habit to  
another nature, as it is never forgotten.

(11.1093-1099)

The common elements in the views of the Stoics and in Jonson's views are apparent enough. The virtuous man is one who has self-knowledge, and who lives according to that knowledge. He lives an "authentic" life. It follows that the role-player who tries to live parts other than his own is the vicious man. The ideal man, the man constant to his own role, is the man so often described in the verse. But Jonson's plays, for the most part, as we shall see, feature the stage-world in which the actors, knaves or fools, have lost themselves in their masks.

It is important to note the quality of the moral emphasis placed upon the man-as-actor metaphor here and throughout Jonson's work, and to distinguish it from the more commonplace man-as-actor metaphor widely used in Renaissance drama. When in As You Like It Jaques says:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
(II.vii.139-142)

or when Macbeth says:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more,  
(V.v.24-26)

they are using a metaphor belonging to a wholly different

tradition. They are concerned with a philosophical generalization, a metaphoric description of what life is, not of what it should or should not be. It is ~~usually~~ an expression of cynicism or pessimistic gloom, considering the brevity and futility of life, seeing man as performing for some outside observer, with no choice in the matter. Consequently it does not bear the kind of moral weight found in the Stoic man-as-actor metaphor, where man does have choice of the part he plays, but should choose not to act more than the one role.

Within the framework of the drama, the use of disguise by a character corresponds well to the Stoics' vicious man-as-actor. We can therefore tentatively suggest that where a Jonsonian character uses disguise, that character is implicitly being criticized. Regarding disguise in drama, we need now to modify Freeburg's definition: "Dramatic disguise . . . means a change of personal appearance which leads to mistaken identity. There is a double test, change and confusion."<sup>34</sup> Certainly in Jonson disguise is a far more complex concept, for it refers to a change in personality rather than simple appearance. Disguise can be verbal; that is, a character can pretend to be something he is not without changing his appearance. Perhaps "role-playing" is a less misleading term; but we need a broader definition of disguise than Freeburg offers. In approaching Jonson we will examine situ-

---

<sup>34</sup>

Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama, p.2.

ations where there is no technical disguise -- cases of verbal disguise, that is, of pretense or mimicry, where a character misleads others as to what he is rather than who he is (an example would be Mosca, who does not change his appearance but who, through words alone, presents a different face to each of his dupes). In relation to disguise we will also consider situations where a character takes on special clothing for the same purpose (Stephen puts on the clothing of a gentleman, not to pretend that he is not Stephen, but to pretend that he is a gentleman).

Our main concern in the remainder of this thesis will be with the plays, and so this might be an appropriate place for a brief glance at the masques, to see what there is in any of them to support the present suggestions. The basis of the masque is not simply acting, as with the play proper, but is actually disguising, and it is noteworthy that, in creating and developing the antimasque, Jonson appears to be recognizing the moral suggestiveness of disguise. In The Jonsonian Masque, Stephen Orgel tells us that Jonson's ultimate goal in the masque form was "to merge the two characters to create a symbolic figure that would be an adequate representation of the courtier beneath the mask."<sup>35</sup> In other words, those who perform in the main masque, the courtiers,

---

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Orgel, The Jonsonian Masque (Cambridge, 1965), p.68.

are playing themselves; the mask is not a disguise. But, Orgel elsewhere points out, in the distinction between the dancers of the masques and the performers in the antimasques, between the courtiers and the professionals, there are "moral implications":

A masquer's disguise is a representation of the courtier beneath . . . . But a professional dancer is like an actor: he plays any part; he can assume all personalities because he has none of his own. Like the courtly masquer, he is identical with his mask, but for a different reason: his persona is not a representation of the reality beneath, but the reality itself.<sup>36</sup>

It is almost as if the Stoic distinction between virtuous and vicious is being applied to the very form of the masque. The professionals have no "selves" because their lives are spent behind masks which do not relate to them in any real way: they are what they are playing at the moment. The courtiers are the same whether in mask or not, for mask and face are identical. The actor is what he plays, the courtier plays what he is. In the Welbeck Entertainment, however, Jonson suggests a higher ideal than the courtier; the King, who took no part in the masques, is praised for wearing no mask at all: ideal king as ideal man. He:

studies not to seeme, or to show great,  
But be! Not drest for others eyes and eares  
With Visors, and false rumours.

(11.323-325)

This is, of course, a restatement of those ideals we have seen

so often in the verse.

Surprisingly, although disguise provides the basis of the masque, it is rarely its subject. Two masques, however, are worth mentioning. In Hymenaei, the second part presents a conflict between Truth who, like the Stoic virtuous man, cannot be disguised, and Opinion who, like the vicious man, is always disguised -- here, disguised as Truth. There can, of course, be no real conflict here. Truth says:

whosoe're thou be in this disguise,  
Cleare Truth, anon, shall strip thee to the heart;  
And shew how mere phantasticall thou art.  
(11.719-721)

So Opinion is stripped, and Truth appears with her heart visibly shining through her breast -- the inside can be seen from the outside, appearance and reality are the same, as with the Stoic man of virtue. So what we see here is, in one sense, an allegorical representation of the Stoic conflict.

The other place where disguise is the subject is in the antimasque of Love Restored. This masque was performed in 1612, when James I had been taking a more-than-usually austere attitude toward the lavish expenditure traditional in the production of masques. This gave Jonson an opportunity to mock the amount of money spent on what were, to him, the superficial aspects of the masque, and at the same time to mock the whole idea of disguising. Masquerado, first spokesman on behalf of the masque, enters and tells us: "Though I dare not shew my face, I can speake truth, under

a vizard"(11.5-6). From the Stoic viewpoint we have been discussing this is an impossible paradox; we have already seen in Hymenaei that Truth never goes under a vizard. Plutus, who at first seems to be presenting the Stoic moralist point of view as well as that of the Puritans, attacks Masquerado and the whole idea of disguising as "vizarded impudence": "I tell thee, I will have no more masquing; I will not buy a false, and fleeting delight so deare: The merry madnesse of one hower shall not cost me the repentance of an age"(11.3<sup>1</sup>4-36). This is the language of the Puritan attack on Mammon, but it is directed against the falseness, the inauthenticity of the masque. But Plutus himself is in fact disguised as Cupid, so implicitly undermining his own arguments.

Robin Goodfellow successfully reveals Plutus' identity, and defends the masque against him. But Robin is hardly a compelling spokesman for disguising since, ironically, he has tried to enter the hall in various shapes, and been repulsed until "I eene went backe, and stuck to this shape you see me in, of mine owne . . . At which . . . they thought it fit, way should be made for me"(11.137-143). Neither side of the argument can be said to win; the whole idea of masquing is being mocked, both its criticisms and its defence. In line with the satiric intent of this antimasque, charges of disguising as evidencing a lack of self-knowledge are made general: "Do's any bodie know themselves here, thinke you?"(11.45-46), and Robin Goodfellow's later suggestion refers not merely to the



actors, but also to the audience: "We are all masquers sometimes"(1.103).

There is here ample evidence to show that Stoic views of virtue and vice, of constancy and inauthenticity, are central to Jonson's beliefs. He is always a moralist, and these views are apparent throughout his work. We have also seen that the metaphor of the disguise or mask is an appropriate means of embodying these views. We shall now go on to examine in detail Jonson's use of disguise-devices in his plays with in mind the belief that he uses them with a moral weight, and that their moral suggestiveness relates them to these Stoic ideas. This approach will clarify a number of particular problems in the plays, and will also be found helpful in a general survey of Jonsonian drama.

# I

## EARLY PLAYS, COMICALL SATYRES, TRAGEDIES

Jonson's earliest extant comedy is The Case is Altered (1598), and it is also his first experiment with the device of disguise. The material of the play is Plautine, but taken from Plautus at his most romantic, using as it does elements of Captivi and Aulularia.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with this, the disguise here is essentially a romantic plot-device, although it does seem also to have some further significance, for each instance of its use suggests a comment on the relationship between a character's surface and his "reality". It is not the same use as is made in later plays, however. Whereas in Jonson's more characteristic plays disguise is used to make moral comment on or criticism of the character disguised, in this play the suggestion is that nothing can be hidden by disguise.

Only one character, Jaques, voluntarily takes on a disguise in the literal sense, but Rachel and Camillo are both "disguised" to the eyes of others and to themselves, since

---

<sup>1</sup> For an opposing view, that the play is not a romantic comedy but a humours-play, see John J. Enck, "The Case is Altered: Initial Comedy of Humours", Studies in Philology, 1 (1953), 195-214.

neither is aware of his or her real identity. They suggest that true nobility and virtue are not related to surfaces, but will shine through the poorest appearance; that a change of appearance and fortune cannot cause a change in what is essential. Rachel and Camillo are both nobly-born, but they believe themselves to be, and are believed to be, less than they are. Thus the use of disguise in these cases illustrates an idea first articulated by Paulo Fernceze:

Didst thou neare read in difference of good,  
Tis more to shine in vertue then in bloud?  
(I.x.37-38)

In fact the play suggests, in true romantic manner, that virtue and "bloud" are generally closely related. Jaques, in telling the audience of his past history, says "Here have I chang'd my forme, my name and hers"(II.i.48), but in this play changed form hides nothing. Rachel's nobility is always apparent, as is Jaques' meanness. Thus even the Count, on seeing Rachel for the first time, says:

And if I did not see in her sweet face  
Gentry and noblenesse, nere trust me more.  
(II.vi.38-39)

So it is with Camillo. Chamont can see through his apparent surface: "Sure thou art nobly borne,/How ever fortune hath obscured thy birth"(IV.iv.20-21). The exchange of identities between Camillo and Chamont can successfully deceive only because Camillo is indeed of noble birth; in effect he is playing himself. It is only the Count, generally blind in these matters, who can believe him to be an "ill-bred

slave". It is he, not Camillo, who is at fault, for when all real identities have been revealed, Paulo says:

I see that honours flames cannot be hid,  
No more than lightening in the blackest cloud.  
(V.xii.103-104)

This is hardly a very unconventional use of the device of disguise, although even here Jonson emphasizes those aspects of it which are suggestive to a consideration of the idea of the essential "self".

Rachel and Camillo do not choose their initial false appearances, and neither can be blamed for them, for each remains constant to the self in spite of the disguises. Jaques, on the other hand, takes on his disguise voluntarily, and is criticized for it. Because of his initial disguise, he is forced constantly to dissemble. Angelo, when he is attempting to trick Christophero, describes Jaques in a way that is ironically appropriate:

Why he is more inconstant than the sea,  
His thoughts, Cameleon-like, change every minute.  
(V.i.16-17)

But as a disguiser Jaques is inept; whenever confronted by anyone, his performance is jeopardized by his fear that his gold has been discovered. He has none of the cool assurance of Brainworm or Volpone. Nevertheless, even in this rudimentary study we can see in the employment of disguise some of Jonson's later preoccupations with inconsistency and inauthenticity.

This attitude toward inauthenticity is evident also

in the scenes featuring Juniper and Onion. Forerunners of Stephen and Fungoso in their belief that they can change their own worth by putting on the trappings of courtiers or gentlemen, they too are mocked for their own presumption. Echoing Tamburlaine, at his first appearance Juniper takes off his cobbler's clothing and puts on a serving coat saying "Lye there the weedes that I disdaine to weare"(I.i.22). The familiar words point up the ridiculous pretensions of this gross parody of the over-reacher; the words also refer ironically forward to the later "sweet metamorphosis" of Juniper and of Onion. But the metamorphosis is hardly a real one; no one is taken in by it, and the effect is purely farcical. Even Juniper's attitude toward his own fantastical language parallels his delusion about the transforming power of clothing. When asked about the meaning of a word he has used his response is: "Meane? Gods so, ist not a good word man? what? stand upon meaning with your friends?"(I.iv.9-10) To him, as to Jaques and Angelo, value lies only in the surface; real meanings are lost to them. Juniper and Onion have rudimentary elements of the later shams who have no self, who have no existence except in their surfaces.

Although in The Case is Altered there are elements of the kind of use Jonson will later make of disguise and related devices as a means of criticism of character and of exploring an ethical view of authenticity and self-knowledge, there is no very serious or extensive exploration of the pos-

sibilities that the use of disguise allows. As in many other aspects, the play seems to be an experiment with a form that Jonson decided to reject. The romantic as opposed to the satiric use of disguise offered little to Jonson, and it is perhaps significant that the play was excluded from the Folio of 1616; whereas the earliest play to appear in that collection, Every Man in His Humour, begins the exploration of the possibilities of a meaningful use of disguise devices which, though largely abandoned in the "comicall satyres", was to be used more fully in the later plays.

In Every Man in His Humour (1598),<sup>2</sup> the only character who takes on disguise in the literal sense is Brainworm. This presents us with many difficulties if we take Brainworm, as many critics do, to be a marginal character, a mechanical figure put into the play only to keep the plot going. Freeburg, considering Brainworm as one of his "rogues in multi-disguise", sees his disguising as being mainly a part of the play's plot-structure: "In the structure of this play the main comedy is dependent on the 'humours' of the persons, while the movement from one situation to another is to a great extent brought about by the disguises and intriguing

---

2

Although this play is treated as Jonson's second, the more familiar revision of 1616, rather than the version of 1598, is used, since for the purposes of this discussion the revisions make very little difference.

of Brainworm."<sup>3</sup> But if we accept this view, that Brainworm's disguises exist only as a means of joining together the various episodes concerning humour-characters, we are faced with the problem that some of his disguises appear to be redundant. Hazlitt saw the problem and did not like it. He wrote in a review in The Examiner of June, 1816: "Brainworm is a particularly dry and abstruse character. We neither know his business nor his motives; his plots are as intricate as they are useless, and as the ignorance of those he imposes upon is wonderful."<sup>4</sup> John V. Curry, in his brief consideration of disguise plots, is also puzzled by the uselessness of some of Brainworm's activities:

For the greater part of the play his deceptions and disguises do not seem to lead to anything practical or helpful. What, for instance, is the point of his passing himself off on young Knowell and Stephen as a soldier when he first meets them? His professed object in assuming the disguise was to help the young fellow. He could have informed Knowell at that first meeting in Moorfields of his father's sallying forth to spy on him.<sup>5</sup>

But this problem of the apparent uselessness of some of Brainworm's disguising only arises if we see it solely as a plot

---

<sup>3</sup>

Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama, p.13<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>

Quoted in W.J. Lawrence, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p.296.

<sup>5</sup>

Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy, p.37.

device; if it can be shown that Jonson had other intentions, there is no longer a difficulty.

It seems clear that Jonson intended Brainworm to be a character of interest in his own right, not merely a manipulator of the plot. Delight in his own virtuosity is a traditional part of the disguiser's character, putting Brainworm in a line that culminates with Volpone and Mosca, and Subtle and Face. This is what Curry fails to see, and it explains why some of Brainworm's activities are not "practical or helpful" when seen only for their value in holding together the plot.

We can reach a better understanding of Brainworm's significance by noting the importance of self-knowledge as a theme in Every Man in His Humour. Humour characters lack self-knowledge, and in the midst of such characters Brainworm appears as a figure who knows himself, although he can change his identity when he wishes. His function in the plot may be to keep the action going by manipulating characters; but his thematic function is rather an emblematic one -- he illustrates in a different way, contrasting with the humour-characters, the themes of self-knowledge and self-deception.

Robert E. Knoll has considered the use of disguise in Every Man in His Humour in something of this light:

In Every Man in His Humour there are two kinds of disguisings. On the one hand, some characters like Bobadill and Matthew pretend to be more than they are. In contrast Brainworm pretends to be less than he is: a broken down soldier, a hireling servant, a



police sergeant. Unlike Bobadill and Matthew, he recognizes the ludicrousness of his pretenses. He has a purpose and when it is achieved he returns to himself. Bobadill has no reasonable end in view. His counterfeiting, unlike Brainworm's, is conducted for its own sake, because he must live in a flamboyant world. He invents as he goes along, improvising on the theme of himself. Rather like Falstaff after the flight from Gadshill, reality and Bobadill's construction of it are confused. Brainworm, in contrast, understands himself. Brainworm from the beginning has what Bobadill strives to avoid: self-knowledge. The technique of disguise points up a central fact of Jonson's philosophy. We know what we are, our duties and our limitations, only by taking stock of ourselves. The man without self-knowledge, the man who aspires beyond his abilities, is a fool. Knowing himself, a man can trust in the benevolent Lord who calls him to his station. Ambition beyond one's place, which is folly, can be avoided by the exercise of reason.<sup>6</sup>

Knoll is substantially correct here; he sees self-knowledge as dependent on the use of reason, and sees the fools as disguising because of a lack of self-knowledge, a failure of reason. He also sees Brainworm's use of disguise as demonstrating the use of reason by a character who knows himself. This, of course, is a departure from the Stoic treatment of inconsistency and masking outlined earlier, and it differs also from Jonson's more characteristic employment of disguise in later plays, where disguised characters are almost invariably criticized. Nevertheless, while agreeing that Brainworm is more leniently treated than later characters, we must perceive that he does not go wholly uncondemned.

It has already been said that the humour theory is related to the question of self-knowledge; so before going on to examine the role of Brainworm more closely we must look

---

6

Robert E. Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction (Lincoln, 1964), pp. 39-40.

briefly at this relationship. In the Induction to Every Man out of His Humour Jonson gives his definition of the term "humour" as he applies it to character. His definition encompasses characters who are "real" humours, obsessed by a single passion; but he also refers to affected or "sham" humours:

As when some one peculiar quality  
Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw  
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,  
In their confluxions, all to runne one way,  
This may be truly said to be a Humour.  
But that a rooke, in wearing a pyed feather,  
The cable hat-band, or the three-pild ruffe,  
A yard of shooetye, or the Switzers knot  
On his French garters, should affect a Humour!  
O, 'tis more then most ridiculous.<sup>7</sup>

By his own definition, most of the characters with whom Jonson deals are affected rather than true humours; in Every Man in His Humour, only Kitely, and perhaps Downright, are true humour-characters; Matthew, Bobadill and Stephen are affected humour-characters.

To deal first with the affected humour-characters, Matthew, Stephen and Bobadill, it is clear that, although they do not disguise in the literal sense, as does Brainworm, they nevertheless do disguise. The whole basis of this type of character is that he fabricates the image he wishes to project -- this is his humour. His concern is not to deceive

---

<sup>7</sup>  
Every Man out of His Humour, Induction 11.105-114.  
For a full discussion see Henry L. Snuggs, "The Comic Humours: A New Interpretation", PMLA, LXII (1947), 114-122.

about who he is, but about what he is. We can go further than Knoll, I think, and say that these characters are not merely lacking self-knowledge -- they actually lack a self. In the brief discussion of masques it was suggested that in a sense the professionals who acted in an antimasque had no selves, being only the masks they wore. These shams are similar, for there is nothing beneath the trappings, and they are only what they are on the outside. Bobadill and Matthew are nothing more than the "signe o'the Souldier, and picture o'the Poet"(V.v.49-50). The first time we meet Stephen he is wishing to learn about hawking and hunting because these are activities all gentlemen involve themselves in. From this point on, whether buying a rapier or putting on Downright's cloak, his only concern is to acquire more and more of the trappings of the picture he has of himself. So it is with all three shams. We see none of them except through the images they present, and although we, like the other characters in the play, know they are shams, we never see what they really are. Once they are publicly stripped by Justice Clement, once the disguise is removed, there is nothing more for them to say, as there is nothing more for them to be.

These are the "shams", or affected humours of the play. An affectation is the product of voluntary choice, so that the loss of self that accompanies it is evil, a moral failing rather than a psychological disease. In an examination of humour theory, James D.Redwine has argued that the

"real" humour characters too are moral failures, that humour theory is an ethical rather than a psychological analysis of behaviour:

Jonson's humour characters are conceived as responsible free agents, not somapsychotic automatons . . . . To call Jonson's theory of humours a "psychology" is to risk serious misunderstanding . . . . And to liken "humour" to "neurosis" . . . is to compound the danger, since it is precisely because he misuses his reason and free will that a man gets himself into this or that darkling humour and that he is considered by Jonson to be morally responsible for his sad predicament.<sup>8</sup>

In this light we must examine the figure of Kitemare who, although he does not take on disguise, is central to Jonson's consideration of the moral implications of a lack of self-knowledge, and to the questions illustrated by the use of disguise.

To understand Kitemare in this respect one must examine his major speech of self-analysis, or rather of attempted self-analysis, where he considers the causes and implications of his jealous humour:

A new disease? I know not, new, or old,  
But it may well be call'd poore mortalls plague:  
For, like a pestilence, it doth infect  
The houses of the braine. First, it begins  
Solely to worke upon the phantasie,  
Filling her seat with such pestiferous aire,  
As soone corrupts the judgement; and from thence  
Sends like contagion to the memorie:  
Still each to other giving the infection.  
Which, as a subtle vapor, spreads it selfe,

Confusedly, through every sensitive part,  
 Till not a thought, or motion, in the mind,  
 Be free from the blacke poyson of suspect.  
 Ah, but what miserie 'is it, to know this,  
 Or, knowing it, to want the mindes erection,  
 In such extremes? Well, I will once more strive,  
 (In spite of this black cloud) my selfe to be,  
 And shake the feaver off, that thus shakes me.  
 (II.iii.57-74)

This passage must not be taken out of context; it must be remembered that the analysis is Kitely's, not Jonson's. So Kitely is, essentially, absolving himself of moral responsibility when he describes his jealousy as if it were a psychological disease. He sees his passion as having taken control of all his faculties, and as having obscured his reason. But a more rigorous ethical view than his would see that a man who knows truth cannot point to a lack of "the mindes erection" as a reason for failing to attain it. To know truth is to embrace it; reason is both the means and the end. So Kitely does not have self-knowledge, although he does at least know that he does not. His resolution to struggle "my selfe to be" suggests that he has a concept of self, an idea of a Kitely without jealousy, and that it is one that can only be attained by re-elevation of the corrupted judgment. But he has allowed reason to abdicate, and passion to take over; a return to reason would be a return to the self, but of course Kitely never makes that return of his own accord.

Brainworm, in contrast to Kitely and the shams, does have self-knowledge. It is no accidental juxtaposition that follows Kitely's words "Well, I will once more strive . . . my

selfe to be" with Brainworm's first appearance in disguise; and the point is underlined by Brainworm's own words: "S'lid, I cannot choose but laugh, to see my selfe translated thus, from a poore creature to a creator"(II.iv.1-2). He is fully aware of what he is doing when he disguises, and there is no sense of a loss of identity in his action. Kately talks of struggling to be himself, while Brainworm can laugh at the changes he makes, for he is fully aware of the difference between inner and outer values: "O sir, it holds for good politie ever, to have that outwardly in vilest estimation, that inwardly is most deare to us"(II.iv.5-7). His disguising of the self in no way implies a departure from it. At the end of this passage, where he sees Edward Knowell and Stephen approaching him, he swears an oath in Bobadill's style, and it is perhaps significant that the oath first appears in the text of the later version of the play. The oath comments on the paradox of his own disguise, but in its echo of Bobadill it also implies a comment on that mock-soldier's disguise: "as I am true counterfeit man of warre, and no souldier!" (II.iv.22-23).

Because Brainworm has such control over his self, his disguises are successful. The shams deceive themselves and each other, but no one else is deceived by them. But Brainworm deceives everyone (except, in the end, Justice Clement). Edward Knowell describes Brainworm's disguise as a begging soldier:

Into the likenesse of one of these Reformado's had he moulded himself so perfectly, observing every tricke of their action, as varying the accent, swearing with an emphasis, indeed all, with so speciall and exquisite a grace, that (hadst thou seen him) thou would'st have sworne, he might have beene Serjeant-Major, if not Lieutenant Coronell to the regiment.

(III.v.17-23)

When he disguises as a Serjeant, Brainworm again shows that he knows exactly what he is doing, when he jests about the relation between the disguised self and the real self:

Well, of all my disguises, now am I most like my selfe: being in this Serjeant's gowne. A man of my present profession never counterfeits, till he layes hold upon a debtor, and sayes, he rests him, for then he brings him to all manner of unrest.

(IV.xi.1-5)

The point lies in the main pun, of course, but there is a second pun in the word "profession" which has the main meaning of "line of work", and the subsidiary meaning of one who professes to be something he is not.

The idea of self-knowledge and identity embodied here in Brainworm spills over to areas of the play other than the main humours plot. Old Knowell, asked in the first scene of the play by a servant if he is Edward Knowell, says "I should forget my selfe else, sir"(I.i.45), and proceeds to do exactly that by pretending to be the Edward Knowell he is not. It is, perhaps, punishment for this imposture when he himself is later mistaken by Kitely for a "horie-headed letcher".

Even the young men of the play, in one sense the

heroes or norms, are involved in the implications of the themes of self-knowledge and self-consistency. A description of Wellbred contrasts his previous steadfastness with his present erratic behaviour; and although the words are spoken by Kately, they can be taken seriously:

When he came first to lodge here in my house,  
 Ne're trust me, if I were not proud of him:  
 Me thought he bare himselfe in such a fashion,  
 So full of man, and sweetnesse in his carriage,  
 And (what was chiefe) it shew'd not borrowed in him,  
 But all he did, became him as his owne,  
 And seem'd as perfect, proper, and possest  
 As breath, with life, or colour, with the bloud.  
 But, now, his course is so irregular,  
 So loose, affected, and depriv'd of grace,  
 And he himselfe withall so farre faine off  
 From that first place, as scarce no note remaines,  
 To tell mens judgements where he lately stood.  
 (II.i.45-57)

His greatest virtue was that everything about him "became him as his owne": all his qualities related to a consistent self. Now his behaviour is the precise contrary of this, "affected", like one of the shams.

In later plays, the mere taking-on of disguise will be an object for condemnation, a criticism of the character disguising. Here, the shams are condemned. But Brainworm too is criticized, as is made clear by an examination of the way in which he is forgiven by Justice Clement, and of the relationship between Clement and Brainworm. Brainworm sets much of the action in motion; Clement resolves it. He alone sees through Brainworm's plots; it is he who publicly exposes the shams. At the first revelation of Brainworm's trickery



he condemns him for seeming to be what he is not, for not doing what he says he must do -- in short, for the gap in him between appearance and reality. But whereas in Bobadill and Matthew and Stephen this gap cannot be forgiven, Clement is willing to forgive Brainworm on hearing the full extent of his ruses, because of Brainworm's wit: "Here is my mistress. BRAYNE-WORME! to whom all my addresses of courtship shall have their reference"(V.v.86-88).

But Justice Clement himself is an ambiguous figure. According to Lawrence L. Levin, Clement is "a law figure approaching his creator's conception of the ideal,"<sup>9</sup> in the line of Asper-Macilente, Crites, and Horace. He represents "the three virtues which Jonson finds most essential in the making of a good prince and the ideal man -- education, religion, and justice."<sup>10</sup> But surely he must be interpreted otherwise. The "onely mad, merrie, old fellow in Europe!"(III.v.54-55) he will dispense arbitrary justice on a whim, whether there be a crime or not, "if it come in the way of his humour" (III.v.63-64). A lover of jests and of wit, he exposes the shams because they are lacking in wit, not because they are vicious. Correspondingly, he forgives Brainworm because of the wit of his devices. Brainworm has at one point masqueraded

---

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence L. Levin, "Clement Justice in Every Man in His Humour", Studies in English Literature, XII (1972), 293.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.301.

as Clement's clerk, almost symbolically infiltrating the camp of justice. So when Clement forgives Brainworm, saying "Thou hast done, or assisted to nothing, in my judgement, but deserves to bee pardon'd for the wit o'the offence"(V.iii.112-4), we must see that his judgement, as a statement of moral justice, is undercut, since Clement, although apparently a figure of morality, shows himself to be hardly valid as a moral arbiter. He is in the line of Lovewit, dispensing a sort of dramatic justice, where wit, rather than morality, is the object as well as the apparent standard. But it is a justice which the audience should not be too willing to accept as the definitive vision of the play. Wit may be triumphant, but it is not necessarily right, and Justice Clement dramatizes the distinction.

It is possible to argue that, early as it is, Every Man in His Humour is in form, style, and content closely related to Jonson's most characteristic works, the great comedies from Volpone onward. The plays which follow Every Man in His Humour are a departure from this type, and show Jonson experimenting with another form of satire. The three "comical satyres", Every Man out of His Humour, Cynthia's Revels, and Poetaster, because of their different nature, do not need the use of disguise, either as motif, or in the form of a disguised intriguer exposing the follies of others. Instead each incorporates a satirist-figure, representing in some way a

Jonsonian point of view (although not representing Jonson himself), who exposes affectation as the use of disguise exposes it in other plays. In one sense, of course, this satirist-figure is the dramatist himself in disguise; as Alvin Kernan writes, "the character of the satirist is a mask which an author assumes for the purpose of making some lasting impression on the world he is attacking."<sup>11</sup>

Although there is little real disguise used in these plays, we are still concerned with role-playing. We are concerned with characters who are not self-consistent, who in a metaphorical sense wear masks and confuse the mask for the self. This is suggested by Asper's vow to "strip the ragged follies of the time / Naked, as at their birth"(Ind.17-18), or to "unmaske a publicke vice"(22). So there are minor aspects of these plays which will bear examination in the light of the main theme of this discussion.

Every Man out of His Humour (1599) is largely concerned with exposing the pretensions of those who aspire above their social level and believe that the way to rise is by putting on the trappings of their betters. Fastidious Briske and Fungoso are counterparts of Stephen and Matthew in Every Man is His Humour. Jonson, in his character of Briske at the beginning of the play, describes him as "one that weares

---

11

Alvin E. Kernan, The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance (New Haven, 1959), p.137.

clothes well, and in fashion," because he is constantly changing his clothing. Herford and Simpson quote Burton, who calls Briske "a meere outside"; he has no genuine gentility. Fungoso is characterized as a man who "followes the fashion a farre off"; he is not essentially different from his idol Briske, and when the satirist Macilente asks of him, "That painted jay, with such a deale of outside?/What is his inside trow?"(II.v.42-43) the question is merely rhetorical, for Fungoso too is "a meere outside". So Macilente, who must lose his humour of envy in order to achieve perfect Stoic self-sufficiency, can rail against those who have much given to them, in material terms, but who have no ethical worth:

O, that there should be fortune  
To clothe these men, so naked in desert!  
(V.vi.136-137)

It is significant that the play proper opens with Macilente's statement of the Stoic ideal, which he then rejects as being impossible in the real world:

Viri est, fortunae caecitatem facile ferre.  
Tis true; but, Stoique, where (in the vast world)  
Doth that man breathe, that can so much command  
His bloud, and his affection?  
(I.i.1-4)

Having lost his envy by the end of the play, Macilente can attain Stoic composure; and this ethical ideal dominates the play.

As we saw in our discussion of The Case is Altered, Camillo and Chamont exchange roles, and their masquerade is successful only because Camillo, playing the part of a noble

man, is in fact nobly born. Thus he is not playing a part that denies his being true to the self. In Every Man out of His Humour a similar situation arises when Sogliardo masquerades as a gentleman before Saviolina. His masquerade is successful not because he is actually of gentle birth, but because Saviolina is foolish. Thus there is no criticism implied against Camillo and Chamont's role-playing; but Sogliardo's performance invites criticism both of himself and of Saviolina.

In contrast to Every Man out of His Humour, Cynthia's Revels (1600) does contain literal disguising. Mercury and Cupid both disguise; but whereas the mischievous Cupid is banished for his disguise, Mercury's imposture is akin to Asper's masquerade as Macilente -- he takes on the role of presenter. Cupid, after disguising as a page, takes on the shape of his own opposite, "Anti-Cupid, the love of Vertue", consequently aligning himself with the vicious courtiers who pose as their neighbouring virtues; this is the basis of his banishment from Cynthia's court.

The criticism implied in Cupid's use of disguise is related to the significance of the masque at the end of Cynthia's Revels. In fact, the play's title refers to this masque, and all that comes before it is largely concerned to demonstrate the folly of the shams of the play, who will be formally unmasked at the revels. Like Every Man out of His Humour, this play deals with pretenders, with those who are so intoxicated with self-love that they believe themselves

to be what they are not -- in fact, in this context, self-love precludes self-knowledge. Self-love is closely related to the lie of flattery; in distinguishing between the vices and the virtues of this play, E.M.Thron writes:

If praise is the reflection of virtue, flattery is the reflection of one's self. . . . Presumption, flattery, and self love form the vices of the play; praise, fame, and good judgment form the virtues.<sup>12</sup>

So the shams, as in the earlier play, are obsessed with surfaces, with appearance and clothing. Amorphus' advice to Asotus on how to succeed as a courtier includes a denial of "that paradox, or rather pseudodox, of those, which hold the face to be the index of the mind"(II.iii.13-14). He goes on to demonstrate how, in fact, the face is to be used as a disguise of the mind by "any politique creature". In contrast to such affected humours stands Crites, Jonson's fullest study of the Senecan man, the virtuous Stoic who "strives rather to bee that which men call judicious, then to bee thought so: and is so truly learned that he affects not to shew it"(II.iii.131-134). Crites himself defines the flattering courtier in terms similar to those used by Seneca of the foolish or vicious man:

some subtle PROTEUS, one  
Can change, and varie with all formes he sees;  
Be any thing but honest.

(III.iv.42-44)

---

<sup>12</sup>

E.M.Thron, "Jonson's Cynthia's Revels: Multiplicity and Unity", Studies in English Literature, XI (1971), 243.

He condemns what Amorphus praises. Crites is described by Arete as "like a circle, bounded in it selfe"(V.viii.19), that is, as being self-contained and self-consistent, containing all virtues -- in effect, an absolute. And finally, when Cynthia elevates him to her presence she sees his completed perfection in terms of a yet more fully consistent self: "Henceforth be ours, the more thy selfe to be"(V.viii.35).

In the light of this ideal of Stoic self-hood, the final masquing must be judged. Just as Cupid is disguised as his opposite Anteros, so are the vice-characters disguised as their corresponding virtues. Allan H. Gilbert, in an excellent study of these masques, has pointed out the political and courtly significance traditional in such use of disguise, referring to plays by Skelton and Lindesay; the idea derives originally from Plutarch's essay How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend. "This device of representing vices masked as virtues had for the early seventeenth century a political suggestion,"<sup>13</sup> he says, and he goes on to define the play from this point of view: "Cynthia's Revels as a satire has for its main purpose the reformation of the manners of the courtiers."<sup>14</sup> This is no doubt true; but it must be noted that a revelation of those who would be what they are not, who cannot be

---

<sup>13</sup>

Allan H. Gilbert, "The Function of the Masques in Cynthia's Revels", Philological Quarterly, XXII (1943), 224.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p.229.

self-consistent, is basic to all Jonsonian comedy. So there is a more fundamental ethical weight to these masques than Gilbert suggests. This is indicated by Crites' words to the unmasked Vices, who must be purged in order to "become / Such as you fain would seeme"(V.xi.155-156), to achieve true self-hood.

In Poetaster (1601), there is no literal disguise, although this play too is concerned with pretenders. There is, however, the central scene in the Ovid-plot, where Ovid and his friends masquerade as the gods. Although there is no intention to deceive involved, this masquerade bears an ethical weight similar to that borne by the employment of disguise in other plays. Ovid, because he is a poet, is generally sympathetically treated by Jonson; the dramatist nevertheless recognizes that Ovid is following the wrong ideals, and lacks the moral soundness of the greater poets Horace and Virgil. Ovid is associated with the comic and affected characters of the play -- Chloe and Albius, Tucca and Crispinus all take part in this masquerade. Oscar J. Campbell, in his description of this "aphrodisiac masquerade", sums up the moral criticism implicit in the treatment of the performance:

The scene in which Ovid and his friends, associated with all the pretenders, sacrilegiously imitate a council of the gods, particularly their scandalous freedom to pursue amorous adventures, serves as an effective revelation of the dangerously immoral foundation upon which the seductive graces of their



society are based.<sup>15</sup>

Their imitation of the gods is akin to the masque of vices pretending to be virtues in Cynthia's revels. Ovid himself tells us why Jonson, however sympathetic he might be, cannot accept the love-poet. Ovid has given himself up to an empty ideal in embracing the sensual rather than the moral:

O, in no labyrinth, can I safelier erre,  
Then when I lose my selfe in praysing her.  
(I.iii.47-48)

The loss of integrity, of moral strength, implied in this, is exactly analogous to the loss of identity and of the self suggested by the use of disguise in other plays.

An interesting extension of this is demonstrated in the apparent inability of the pretenders Albius and Chloe to distinguish, when confronted by Augustus Caesar, between what they are and what they play:

CAESA. Say, sir, what are you?  
ALBI. I play VULCAN, sir.  
CAESA. But what are you, sir?  
ALBI. Your citizen, and jeweller, sir.  
CAESA. And what are you, dame?  
CHLO. I play VENUS, forsooth.  
CAESA. I aske not, what you play? but what you are?  
CHLO. Your citizen, and jeweller's wife, sir.  
(IV.vi.20-27)

And in a sense, there is nothing more real in the Albius-identity than in the Vulcan-identity. Jonas A. Barish sums up the satire of Every Man out of His Humour in a comment that could

---

15

Oscar J. Campbell, Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" (San Marino, 1965), p.114.

very well apply to all three of these plays:

Carlo's malevolent eye finds the absurdity in appearances. Macilente finds the emptiness underneath. He rarely speaks of externals, and when he does, it is to distinguish the splendid exterior from the rotten interior. . . . But surfaces reflect the truth in this play. Many of the characters have no reality at all apart from their appearances; the elaborateness of their wardrobes is matched by their inner aridity.<sup>16</sup>

In effect, the surface is the reality, because that is all there is. The trappings of the fop, the claims of the sham, serve only to mask the essential emptiness.

These plays have been treated lightly; because of their particular experimental form they can be treated together, but also because of that form they do not fit into the central stream of Jonson's work. They are an attempt, if we accept Campbell's definition, to recreate for the stage the elements of formal verse satire. As such, they make unnecessary the device of disguise to reveal pretension and affectation. Even so, it is apparent that many of the main concerns of Jonson's disguise-plays, so much involved with themes of self-knowledge and self-consistency, are evident in these plays too. Jonson, of course, was an experimenter throughout his career, and he spent a great deal of energy on these plays. But in method, as in most other aspects, the comical satyres appear to be

---

16

Jonas A. Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p.107.

a by-road which Jonson explored before returning to his more characteristic form and method, the method of Volpone.

Although we are mainly concerned with Jonsonian comedy, a brief glance at his two tragedies will not be out of place here. In Sejanus (1603), the earlier of the two, we are confronted with Jonson's first use of the Machiavellian manipulator. The Machiavel is traditionally associated, in his duplicity, with disguise; in Sejanus there is no literal disguise; nevertheless role-playing is central to the play, and particularly associated with the figure of Tiberius.

In an excellent essay entitled "The Self-Reflexive Art of Ben Jonson's Sejanus", Arthur F. Marotti has examined at some length the significance of role-playing. He points out that acting a part is the province of the evil characters of the play, the ruthless politicians; those who represent the good, the Germanicans, are in this as in other aspects of political manoeuvring unskilled:

Subtle artistry -- in this case, play acting, but really the arts of rhetoric and playmaking as well -- is consistently associated with the villains, and the members of the Germanicus party, with the possible exception of Cordus, are relatively artless by comparison.<sup>17</sup>

Marotti does not go on to draw the ethical conclusion from this that play-acting in itself is immoral -- is a part of

the general immorality of the Machiavellian. As in the case of literal disguise in the comedies, the role-player is being criticized for that very activity; it is not that the Germanicans are inept at play-acting, but that their honesty and constancy to the self are part of their virtue. It is no accident that the virtuous characters in *Sejanus* are associated with Stoic philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

In the figures of Tiberius, Sejanus, and Macro, we can see in action Machiavelli's description of the successful ruler:

A prince, therefore, need not necessarily have all the good qualities I mentioned above, but he should certainly appear to have them. I would even go so far as to say that if he has these qualities and always behaves accordingly he will find them ruinous; if he only appears to have them they will render him service. He should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, guileless, and devout. And indeed he should be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how. . . . And so he should have a flexible disposition, varying as fortune and circumstances dictate.<sup>19</sup>

Jonson's Machiavels are cynical and arrogant; while pretending these good qualities, they are sufficiently strong not to have to care about the reaction of their audience. Never-

---

18

For a discussion of the Stoic refusal of the Germanicans to be controlled by Fortune, see Gary D. Hamilton, "Irony and Fortune in *Sejanus*", Studies in English Literature, XI (1971), 265-281.

19

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince, tr. George Bull (Harmondsworth, 1961), pp.100-101.

theless they accept the basic premise that the politician must dissemble, that there must be a great distance between surface and reality. Arruntius, in commenting on one of Tiberius' performances, makes this clear:

If this were true now! but the space, the space  
Between the brest, and lips -- TIBERIUS heart  
Lyes a thought farder, then another mans.  
(III.96-98)

Jonson presumably accepted Machiavelli's definition as descriptive rather than normative; the amoral politician's philosophy is the exact antithesis of the Stoic thesis of constancy.

The representatives of moral order in the play make clear the attitude toward role-playing that we are supposed to accept. In the first scene two of the Germanicans, Sabinus and Silius, attack the duplicity of flatterers, who are associated with Sejanus and Tiberius. "We have no shift of faces, no cleft tongues"(I.7), says Sabinus satirically. In response Silius, describing Sejanus' followers, tells how they "change every moode,/Habit and garbe, as often as he varies"(I.34-35) The present, dominated by such chameleons, is set against the near-ideal past by reference to the Stoic Cato, and the "constant Brutus", and the dead Germanicans whose suggested presence dominates the virtuous elements of the play. Of Germanicus, Silius says, "SABINUS, and my selfe/ Had meanes to know'him within"(I.121-122), a knowledge which contrasts with the impossibility of "knowing within" the

monster of duplicity Tiberius.

A tone is set from the beginning, then, with Stoic constancy placed against the role-playing of the villains. The tone is heightened by the recurrent references to the use of cosmetics, to painting-on faces. The use of imagery related to cosmetics is, of course, common in Renaissance verse; it is generally seen as a criticism of the image created by God, and as a sign of Pride.<sup>20</sup> But Jonson makes more use of it than do most other dramatists, and it is particularly appropriate to his themes of role-playing and disguising. Sejanus is especially interested in the disguising power of cosmetics, as he shows in his satiric description of court ladies:

Which lady sleepes with her owne face, a nights?  
Which puts her teeth off, with her clothes, in court?  
Or, which her hayre? which her complexion?  
(I.307-309)

Livia's later ritual of putting on a cosmetic face for her meeting with Sejanus consequently takes on an emblematic suggestion, acting as a comment on the kind of relationship, the self-denying distancing that exists for the villains.

The greatest actor in the play is Tiberius. He always appears in "disguise", always wears the verbal mask he has created for himself. At his first appearance he admonishes one who kneels to him:

---

20

See John Peter, Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford, 1956), pp.99-103.

Wee not endure these flatteries, let him stand;  
 Our empire, ensignes, axes, roddees, and state  
 Take not away our humane nature from us:  
 (I.375-377)

Such admirable democratic modesty is only apparent in him,  
 as is made clear by the commentary of the Germanicans. Arruntius points out that:

his grace is meerely but lip-good,  
 And, that no longer, then he aires himselfe  
 Abroad in publique,  
 (I.410-412)

Marotti comments that "the virtuous characters help to define the theme of play acting for the theatre audience with their running commentary on much of the action."<sup>21</sup> It should be added that this commentary has an additional function of helping the audience understand the motives of the role-players by penetrating at least some way beneath the verbal surface. Tiberius always wears a mask. His public mask is not the same as that he wears for Sejanus or for Macro, but we can never see far beyond his words. The Germanicans' commentary helps, but we are finally left with Arruntius' feeling of exasperation: "By JOVE, I am not OEDIPUS inough / To understand this SPHYNX"(III.64-65).

Tiberius' exquisite art as an actor is best demonstrated in his confrontation with Sejanus in Act II. Apparently weak and fearful, Tiberius leads Sejanus into suggesting exactly those actions that he himself wants, and res-

---

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p.208.

pords to these suggestions with a mockingly ironic admission of his own duplicity:

We can no longer  
 Keepe on our masque to thee, our deare SEJANUS;  
 Thy thoughts are ours, in all,  
 (II.278-280)

He retains control over the inferior actor Sejanus, for after removing his mask he reveals only another mask. Confirmed in his power he goes on "Acting his tragedies with a comick face"(IV.379).

Tiberius' skill as an actor extends to his role as puppet-master, the manipulator of the action from off-stage. He is absent from the scene during the final two acts of the play, yet his presence is overwhelmingly felt. His letters to the Senate in Act IV extend the implications of his performance; because no one is allowed to know what to expect of him, all are made impotent. Laco says of one of the Emperor's letters:

These forked tricks, I understand 'hem not,  
 Would he would tell us whom he loves, or hates,  
 That we might follow, without feare, or doubt.  
 (IV.423-425)

Even the inferior villains need to play roles; they cannot, like the Germanicans, remain constant to themselves, but they cannot either, like the greater actors, choose the roles they will play. Tiberius' undermining of the roles of the lesser actors here leads to his brilliant performance in Act V, where he directs the downfall of Sejanus. His letter, a series of inversions, strips Sejanus naked, and also reveals the



Senators as representatives of absolute inconstancy, for they too are forced to abandon their chosen roles.

The role here of Tiberius (and to a far lesser extent of Sejanus) as stage-director, or "playmaker", marks an interesting and important transition in Jonson's approach. They relate to the playmakers of earlier plays -- to Macilente, to Mercury, and to Horace -- and to Volpone and Mosca and Subtle and Face of later plays. The playmaker characters of the three comically satyres that immediately precede Sejanus are also the satirists in their plays and, in some sense, the heroes. The major playmakers in the later plays are satirists and villains, and consequently included in the circle of the satire. In Sejanus, in some sense a "tragicall satire", there is a separation between playmaker and satirist. The actors, or disguisers, are not here the satirists; that function is left to the "good-dull-noble lookers on"(III.16), the impotent Germanicans, and particularly to Arruntius. But because the satirist here does not have histrionic power he fails against those who do, and becomes comic.

Nevertheless, although ineffectual, the Germanicans do provide a moral solution to the problem of living with the amoral politicians. Silius embraces Stoic suicide, Cordus praises the Stoic heroes of the past, and Lepidus, when asked by Arruntius what arts he uses to survive amongst the politicians, replies with a statement of Stoic fortitude and constancy:

None, but the plaine, and passive fortitude,  
 To suffer, and be silent; never stretch  
 These armes, against the torrent, live at home,  
 With my owne thoughts, and innocence about me,  
 Not tempting the wolves jawes: these are my artes.  
 (IV.294-298)

But even this Stoic pose can be appropriated by the actor, for Sejanus himself plays the role of the Stoic. When Drusus strikes him Sejanus praises the patient attitude, not because patience is a virtue, but because through it his revenge will be the more unexpected:

He that, with such wrong mov'd, can beare it through  
 With patience, and an even mind, knowes how  
 To turne it backe. Wrath, cover'd, carryes fate:  
 Revenge is lost, if I professe my hate.  
 (I.576-579)

This is a statement of the disguiser's ultimate irony -- the absolute actor playing the part of the absolutely constant man.

Jonson's two tragedies can best be approached in relation to each other, so we shall deal here with Catiline(1611) out of chronological order. Much of what has been said about Sejanus finds a parallel here.

Gabriele Bernhard Jackson has pointed out the key importance of the word "visor" in this play: "Catiline is the Play of Masks: those who don them reveal themselves."<sup>22</sup> This is perhaps saying a little too much about the use of masks; essentially they tell us as much as does the role-

playing of the villains in Sejanus. Such dissembling, or putting-on of verbal disguise is, for Jonson, an inevitable part of the villain. How naturally the language of the role-player comes to Catiline is shown in his early conversation with Aurelia:

We must not spare  
Or cost, or modestie. It can but shew  
Like one of JUNO'S, or of JOVE'S disguises,  
In either thee, or mee: and will as soone,  
When things succeed, be throwne by, or let fall,  
As is a vaile put off, a visor chang'd,  
Or the scene shifted, in our theaters --  
(I.179-185)

We can see here the ease with which the political intriguer can consider the throwing-off of the self; there is also something in the idea of change of appearance as being god-like that echoes Volpone's consideration of the same idea in his wooing of Celia.

The idea of disguising is again brought out in the use of cosmetics, as it was in Sejanus. Here Galla and Fulvia discuss Sempronia:

GAL. Shee has beene a fine lady.  
And, yet, shee dresses her selfe (except you, madame)  
One o'the best in Rome: and paints, and hides  
Her decayes very well. FUL. They say, it is  
Rather a visor, then a face shee weares.  
(II.59-63)

The metaphorical association between the idea of disguise and the use of cosmetics as a means of hiding corruption is even more strongly suggestive here than in the earlier play.

The idea of masking and unmasking, of hiding or revealing the self, is strongly felt throughout the play. Of

Aurelia, Galla says:

You shall have her all  
Jewels, and gold sometimes, so that her selfe  
Appeares the least part of her selfe."  
(II.73-75)

Any real meaning that the word "self" has somehow gets lost here. A little later in the same scene Curius enters and says to Fulvia:

Where are you, faire one, that conceale your selfe,  
And keepe your beautie, within locks, and barres, here,  
Like a fooles treasure?  
(II.216-218)

Later still Curius, who has failed in all previous attempts to woo Fulvia, suddenly finds himself unexpectedly successful: "Why, now my FULVIA lookes, like her bright name!/And is her selfe!"(II.348-349), which is ironic, since she is putting on a performance in order to learn from him about Catiline's plot. Political intrigue is somehow reduced to a trivial level when it is seen in this light.

In the trial in the Senate in Act IV, Catiline uses similar terms. When he sees that the mood of the virtuous Senators is against him he asks: "What face is this, the Senate here puts on,/Against me, Fathers!"(IV.145-146). When he finds that his plots are all discovered, he asks in anger, "False to our selves?"(IV.538); and shortly after, in trying to encourage his men, he exhorts them: "Friends, be your selves"(IV.543). Oddly, although they use the language of the role-player, these villains are less concerned with conscious hypocrisy than are the machiavels of Sejanus. They

are finally too arrogant not to allow their conspiracy to be transparent and this, perhaps, is their downfall, set as they are against Cicero, who is prepared to use the methods of the machiavel. It is quite apparent that it is Caesar's subtlety as a performer that keeps him in power. According to Angela Dorenkamp:

If Cicero and Caesar are both Machiavellian, what is Catiline? He is certainly not of the same order: he is satanic and politically inept, characteristics which can be found in the kind of hero which emerged from "Machiavellianism misunderstood".<sup>23</sup>

The great actor in this play is Caesar who, even more secretly than Tiberius, manipulates from the background. He is the successful dissembler, whose performance protects him absolutely from Cicero, and who remains as a threat at the end of the play. He and Catiline are parallel to Tiberius and Sejanus; but the moral pattern of this later play is rather more ambiguous than that of Sejanus. There the Machiavellian villains are counterbalanced by a group of virtuous men, well-meaning but doomed to fail in the amoral political world, because they are unwilling to play roles. In Catiline, the virtuous men, especially Cicero, use the methods of the machiavels to defeat evil. When Caesar calls Cicero "cunning artificer"(IV.91), he is using a term more generally appli-

cable to the Jonsonian villain. Some critics stress the moral ambiguity here; Robert Ornstein says:

the very methods Cicero employs to purge the state limit the scope of his action. His Machiavellian means of intelligencing and bribery qualify his moral ends; and . . . the preservation of the state against unlawful conspiracy is tainted by moral compromise.<sup>24</sup>

C.G.Thayer acknowledges the same point: "Many modern readers, no doubt, have thought Cicero far too devious and subtle to be a really virtuous political leader."<sup>25</sup> But the point is, as can be seen from a comparison of the two plays, that a "really virtuous political leader" will inevitably fail in the corrupt political arena of the role-players. Cato's uncompromising honesty is insufficient without Cicero's cunning; Sejanus shows us men of virtue who are defeated because of lack of cunning.

The device of masking, or role-playing, relates these plays to the main theme of the present discussion. Political tragedy is hardly the form where literal disguise would be most in place; but the metaphorical possibilities of an analysis of role-playing are very suggestive. Jonson is dealing with an area where virtue in itself is insufficient to tri-

---

24

Robert Ornstein, "The Moral Vision of Ben Jonson's Tragedy", in Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism (New York, 1961), p.204.

25

C.G.Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays (Norman, 1963), p.126.

umph; where "disguising" is an integral part of villainy, and where those who can best sustain the roles they have chosen to play, however evil, succeed.

## II

### VOLPONE

Throughout his career as dramatist, Jonson remained an experimenter, and his early drama includes a remarkable variety of innovation. But although in Catiline Jonson was to turn once again to tragedy, it is clear that the three comicall satyres and the early tragedy Sejanus are experiments in forms which Jonson, probably rightly, found it necessary to reject. For in Volpone (1607) he returns to the form which he first handled in Every Man in His Humour, the form which is to become his most characteristic; and with Volpone he begins his series of comic masterpieces.

It is of interest to note that, in spite of the fact that the subtitle of Volpone is The Fox, relatively little has been made by critics of the analogy between the arch-Protean and the fox. One critic notes that "under his rich robes and more gorgeous language Volpone remains a cunning animal, the fox;" another tells us that "fox invariably symbolized stealth, cunning, and covetousness."<sup>1</sup> Neither of them

---

<sup>1</sup> Alvin B. Kernan (ed.), Volpone (New Haven and London, 1962), p.5; E.B. Partridge, The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson (London, 1958), p.84.



elaborates upon the precise nature of the fox's cunning. Yet it is apparent from the use of the beast-fable that is the basis of the play that Jonson is drawing on traditional fox-lore in his use of the fox as the symbol for Volpone. And traditionally the fox's method of duping his victim is by role-playing, both on the level of mere feigning, and on that of actual disguising.

One brief paper on Jonson's use of traditional fox-lore, by D.A.Scheve, considers the "attributed ability of that animal to catch birds by feigning death."<sup>2</sup> The fox plays dead in order to trap the birds of prey which come to feed on its body -- this is exactly the basic pattern of Volpone. Scheve quotes the lines of Volpone's actual reference to this fable:

vulture, kite,  
Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey,  
That thinke me turning carcasse, now they come:  
(I.ii.88-90)

Scheve does not deal with the reference, a few lines later, to the fable of The Fox and the Crow, where the fox dupes the crow by flattery:

Good! and not a foxe  
Stretch'd on the earth, with fine delusive sleights,  
Mocking a gaping crow?  
(I.ii.94-96)

Any dictionary of folk-lore demonstrates that the fox is noted for such performances. The creature is associated with

---

2

D.A.Scheve, "Jonson's Volpone and Traditional Fox Lore", Review of English Studies, n.s. I (1950), 242.

disguise and pretense in many languages and cultures, and its shape-shifting power is generally believed to be used for immoral ends.

Kenneth Varty in his book Reynard the Fox considers aspects of the disguised fox tradition which would be quite familiar to Jonson. In a general study of the fox as depicted in Medieval English art, particularly that to be found in churches, he shows how frequently the fox dons religious garb to dupe his prey -- he is seen as bishop, priest, monk, pilgrim or friar. This element of religious perversion can perhaps be related to the opening scene of Volpone, where the Fox sees himself as high-priest of a money-religion.

In a moralizing tradition, the fox became a very potent symbol: "Renard became the personification of hypocrisy, a symbol of sin, the Devil in disguise."<sup>3</sup> For Jonson, the fox was probably as close to the traditional Vice as to the Devil. Alan C. Dessen has related Volpone-Mosca to the morality Vice,<sup>4</sup> and we must not ignore the comic aspects of the fox's ability to disguise; further, although the present discussion is concerned primarily with the serious moral implications of Volpone's disguising, it must not be forgotten that he, like the

---

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Varty, Reynard the Fox: A Study of the Fox in Medieval English Art (Leicester, 1967), p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Alan C. Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy (Evanston, 1971), p.75.

fox and like the Vice, is a comic figure, resourceful, witty, and in many ways attractive, in spite of his evil.

In a recent paper on Volpone, Charles A. Hallett has discussed other examples of the impostor-fox.<sup>5</sup> He quotes from The Bestiary a comparison of the Devil's behaviour with that of the fox:

The Devil has the nature of this same. With all those who are living according to the flesh, he feigns himself to be dead until he gets them in his gullet and punishes them. But for spiritual men of faith he is truly dead and reduced to nothing.<sup>6</sup>

In this, the Devil-fox takes on the role of punisher of sins. Hallett goes on to refer to The Nun's Priest's Tale and to the "May Eclogue" of The Shepheardes Calender as literary works where the fox appears as satanic impostor. We can add to this list Nashe's story in Pierce Penniless of the fox disguised as a sheep-dog, and his definition of the devil:

so under the person of this old gnathonical companion, called the devil, we shroud all subtlety masking under the name of simplicity, all painted holiness devouring widows' houses, all grey-headed foxes clad in sheep's garments;<sup>7</sup>

So although it might be going too far to suggest that Jonson is using specific legends in his creation of the shape-shifting

5

Charles A. Hallett, "The Satanic Nature of Volpone", Philological Quarterly, XLIX (1970), 41-55.

6

T.H. White (tr.), The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts of the Twelfth Century (New York, 1954), p. 54.

7

Thomas Nashe, The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works, ed. J.B. Steane (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 120.

Fox, it is certain that he was acquainted with a tradition that saw the fox as a role-playing predator. Other Renaissance playwrights relate the image of the fox to the use of disguise. In Bale's King Johan, Dissimulation says: "Thowgh I seme a shepe I can play the suttile foxe"(I.714). Dekker, in The Whore of Babylon, makes the disguised Third King consider his disguise in terms of a fox-skin put on:

To flea off this hypocrisie tis time,  
 Least worne too longe, the Foxes skinne be knowne:  
 In our dissembling now we must be brave.  
 (II.ii.155-157)

The same image is used by Middleton and Rowley in The Changeling, when Lollio penetrates Antonio's disguise: "Alas, I saw through your fox-skin before now"(IV.iii.144). Shakespeare suggests some moral implication in All's Well That Ends Well, when the First Lord says of the hypocrite Parolles: "We'll make you some sport with the fox ere we case him. He was first smok'd by the old Lord Lafeu. When his disguise and he is parted, tell me what a sprat you shall find him"(III.vi.92-95). Finally, we should not forget Machiavelli's famous prescription for those who would be successful politicians, that they should take on the attributes of the lion and the fox, for the attributes of the fox to which he refers are those related to the idea of fox as role-player:

So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he should learn from the fox and the lion . . . those who have known best how to imitate the fox have come off best. But one must know how to colour one's

actions and be a great liar and deceiver.<sup>8</sup>

Jonson has already explored the possibilities of this advice in Sejanus.

If we examine Jonson's own use of the term "fox" we come upon an interesting fact. Partridge suggests that at the end of the play *Volpone* becomes a wolf rather than a fox:

Mosca, after he has been condemned to the galleys, cries to Volpone, "Bane to thy woolvish nature." This shift from the fox to the wolf marks the shift in Volpone's own nature from the craft and cunning of the fox to the rapacity and destructiveness of the wolf. Had he remained a fox, he would not have brought himself and his servant to this trap.<sup>9</sup>

This is surely wrong. The words, after all, are Mosca's, spoken in anger after the revelation of his own duplicity. Volpone is forced into a corner where his alternatives are to act, or to suffer alone. If he remains a fox he will still suffer; consequently he reveals that he is a fox, which is not quite the same as becoming a wolf. The point is that Jonson emphasises Volpone's fox-like nature only in the last act. Apart from the one use of the term "fox" already referred to in relation to the seal on Voltore's plate in Act I, the term is not used at all until Act V, where it is used seven times. Most of these references are in a context of hunting terminology, laying emphasis on the fact that Volpone is in

---

<sup>8</sup>

Machiavelli, The Prince, pp.99-100.

<sup>9</sup>

Partridge, The Broken Compass. p.103.

a trap; but a number of the references demonstrate also that the trapped fox is wearing a disguise. Mosca, announcing his plot against Volpone, says:

My FOXE  
Is out on his hole, and, ere he shall re-enter,  
I'll make him languish, in his borrow'd case,  
(V.v.6-8)

Volpone uses the same metaphor when he removes his commentatore's disguise: "The FOXE shall, here, uncase"(V.xii.85). He has earlier, while yet in disguise, and tormenting Corvino, referred to the fable of the fox and the crow, where the fox-actor tricks the crow into giving up that which is its most precious possession:

Yet you, that are so traded i' the world,  
A witty merchant, the fine bird, CORVINO,  
That have such morall emblems on your name,  
Should not have sung your shame; and dropt your cheese:  
To let the FOXE laugh at your emptinesse.  
(V.viii.10-14)

This fable emphasises not simply the stupid vanity of the crow, but also the self-seeking trickery of the fox which, however comic, is essentially immoral. It is clear that Jonson is using traditional fox-lore, and that the fox is being used in an emblematic sense to emphasise the same elements in Volpone. To call Volpone a fox is to make a moral judgement upon him. The fox acts immorally insofar as he acts in disguise, for this escape from the self always includes some further destructive action.

The obvious importance of the theme of disguising or of play-acting has been commented upon by many critics of

Volpone.<sup>10</sup> The play is about metamorphosis, the actual, or desired, changing of shape; this theme is explored on many levels, both in metaphor and in action. Volpone and Mosca are the most important actors, but most characters act at some point, and even in the sub-plot this is true.

One of the most interesting explorations of this theme is Thomas M. Greene's. Greene takes as his starting point Jonson's impresa of the broken compass and its suggestion of circle and centre:

Center and circle become symbols, not only of harmony and completeness but of stability, repose, fixation, duration, and the incompleting circle, uncentered and misshapen, comes to symbolize a flux or a mobility, grotesquely or dazzlingly fluid.<sup>11</sup>

The relation of this to our earlier discussion of Stoic self-consistency is apparent. In his consideration of Volpone, Greene applies these suggestions about the integrity of the circle to the characters' compulsive need to disguise:

Volpone asks us to consider the infinite, exhilarating, and vicious freedom to alter the self at will once the ideal of moral constancy has been abandoned. If you do not choose to be, then, by an irresistible logic, you choose to change, and in view of the world we are called upon to inhabit, perhaps the more frequently one changes, the better.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>

See, e.g., Kernan's Introduction to his edition of Volpone; Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self"; Alexander Leggatt, "The Suicide of Volpone", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIX (1969), 19-32.

<sup>11</sup>

Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self", p.326.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p.337.

Greene goes on to discuss the will to multiply the self -- which, he says, is to reduce the self -- in moral terms; so Celia and, to a lesser degree, Bonario, become the principle of constancy in this play.

The master of disguise in the play is, of course, Volpone, since Mosca's play-acting, like that of Tiberius, is purely verbal. Volpone's entire public life is spent in playing one role or another. Sometimes he plays different versions of himself -- as sick man, as lover, as dead man; at other times he pretends to be someone else. Even when he is playing what appears to be his real part, in his scenes with Mosca, he is generally still acting, for the whole relationship between Volpone and Mosca is a game. Volpone is totally involved in his own performance, and is finally blind to Mosca's reality. Mosca, also an actor, is nevertheless more objective about his role, and if we judge from the ironic tone that he brings to the relationship, he is more aware of the "real" Volpone than Volpone is of himself or of Mosca.

Another discussion that suggests that role-playing, for Jonson, is an immoral and foolish activity is that by Alexander Leggatt:

Jonson, I think, suggests that in some ways to act at all is to play the fool. Kernan is right to point out that Mosca and Volpone think they are extending their powers by acting but it should also be stressed that Jonson shows they are wrong. In this play acting is not (as it often is in Shakespeare) a means of enlarging a character's nature, but a means of dimi-



nishing it.<sup>13</sup>

Leggatt echoes Greene's suggestion that to attempt to multiply the self is to reduce it. But what is the precise nature of the actor's folly or immorality?

That Volpone's performances constitute a degeneration is thematically underlined by Mosca's entertainment for Volpone. Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone, each a sick parody of a man, describe the transmigration of the soul of Pythagoras, its metamorphosis into ever more ludicrous shapes until it becomes Androgyno. The whole scene constitutes a satiric condemnation of shape-changing when applied to the larger action of the play.

The real Volpone -- whatever he is -- is most apparent in his scenes with Mosca and in the scene where he attempts to seduce Celia. But even here there is so strong a suggestion of self-dramatization that we are never sure of what we are seeing. In the opening scene of the play Volpone's boasting about the way in which he carries on his "vocation" reaches a level of self-consciousness which suggests that here, as in public, Volpone is only striking a pose:

I use no trade, no venter;  
I wound no earth with plow-shares; fat no beasts  
To feede the shambles; have no mills for yron,  
Oyle, corne, or men, to grinde 'hem into poulder;  
I blow no subtill glasse; expose no ships  
To threatenings of the furrow-faced sea;

I turne no moneys, in the publicke banke;  
Nor usure private --

(I.i.33-40)

His pride in not soiling his hands with mundane business is highly ironic in light of the manner in which he does make his money. The tone of his speech, and even more so the tone of Mosca's response, suggests that this is merely a game that the two play, keeping always at a distance from each other:

your sweet nature doth abhorre these courses;  
You lothe, the widdowes, or the orphans teares  
Should wash your pavements; or their pittious cryes  
Ring in your roofes; and beate the aire, for vengeance.  
(I.i.48-51)

Both are aware of the cynicism behind their words; even here they are playing their own parts, Volpone the part of patron, Mosca the part of flattering parasite. It is because of their continuous sparring that each fails sufficiently to know the other, so that each is finally able to misjudge the other to a degree that brings about their downfall.

When he takes on actual disguise Volpone becomes the person he pretends to be more fully than he knows. When he pretends to be sick, his sickness becomes a physical emblem of his own moral nature. And when he disguises as someone else, he takes on that character completely. His first disguise is as the mountebank Scoto of Mantua, and it is significant that he should choose to play the role of one who is himself playing a role; as Peregrine says, "I have heard they are most lewd impostors;/Made all of termes, and shreds" (II.ii.14-15). During this scene there is no reference what-

ever to the fact that Volpone is Volpone; his identification with his role is complete.<sup>14</sup> A similar suggestion is made later in the play; when in the final act Volpone disguises as a commendatore and asks Mosca how well he fits the part, Mosca replies "O sir, you are he"(V.v.1). Having rejected his self, the play-actor can only exist through a false identity.

In connection with this question of Volpone's absolute submersion in his roles, we can consider Jonson's remarkably infrequent use of the "aside" for comic purposes, especially during the sickbed scenes. This would obviously be a very successful satiric device, allowing Volpone to comment upon the folly and greed of the gulls, yet it is very rarely used. Volpone makes only one aside in the early scenes (I.iv.18); Mosca has rather more asides, especially with Corbaccio. This suggests something of the degree to which the actors are involved in their performances. Later in the play, when confronted by Lady Would-be (III.iv), Volpone makes greater use of asides; but his inability to cope with Lady Would-be has forced him into a greater awareness of his role-playing -- as he says: "Before I fayn'd diseases, now I have one"(III.iv.62).

Volpone himself enjoys the immorality of his role-playing. The central scene of the play, where he attempts to

---

14

Leggatt's view coincides with mine on this point: "Volpone's impersonation of Scoto is so dazzlingly complete that he seems, during that scene, to have surrendered his own identity"("The Suicide of Volpone", p.23). Perhaps one should add the suggestion that Volpone's identity is lost from the beginning.

seduce Celia, demonstrates this, for the idea of his shape-shifting becomes part of an erotic fantasy which has affinities with the charades of Sir Puntarvolo and his wife in Every Man out of His Humour, and with the activities of the degenerate Stufles of The New Inn, in spite of its more poetic nature:

Whil'st we, in changed shapes, act OVIDS tales,  
 Thou, like EUROPA now, and I like JOVE,  
 Then I like MARS, and thou like ERYCINE,  
 So, of the rest, till we have quite run through  
 And weary'd all the fables of the gods.  
 Then will I have thee in more moderne formes,  
 Attired like some sprightly dame of France,  
 Brave Tuscan lady, or proud Spanish beauty;  
 Sometimes, unto the Persian Scythies wife;  
 Or the grand-Signiors mistress; and, for change,  
 To one of our most art-full courtizans,  
 Or some quick Negro, or cold Russian;  
 And I will meet thee, in as many shapes:  
 (III.vii.221-233)

Volpone cannot enjoy even the highest of pleasures without the continuous flux of shape that is a compulsion with him. He has already boasted to Celia of his own play-acting genius; seeing himself as god-like in his acting abilities, he can even go beyond Proteus, master of shape-shifting:

I, before  
 I would have left my practice, for thy love,  
 In varying figures, I would have contended  
 With the blue PROTEUS, or the horned floud.  
 (III.vii.150-153)

But what Volpone is defining as his genius ought, of course, to be recognized as the devil's capacity to assume whatever shape he pleases.

The fact that Volpone's compulsive desire to play a

part suggests a loss of identity, of the self, loads several of his lines with ambiguity. Brainworm's "now am I most like myself" has a basic truth to it because Brainworm knows himself. With Volpone, however, there is always confusion about his references to the self. At the end of Act I, when Volpone has decided to see Celia, this exchange takes place:

VOLP. I will goe see her, though but at her windore.  
 MOS. In some disguise, then. VOLP. That is true. I must  
 Maintayne mine owne shape, still, the same: wee'll thinke.  
 (I.v.127-129)

Volpone cannot here mean what he says. Presumably he means that for his public audience he must remain a sick man; but the implication of "mine owne shape" is highly ambiguous, since what he intends to maintain is not his own shape exactly, but an impersonation of himself as a sick man -- a feigned shape, in fact. The suggestion is that Volpone is rather uncertain about what his own shape really is. The same ambiguity attends his words to Mosca after his successful appearance in court:

I was  
 A little in a mist; but not dejected;  
 Never, but still my selfe.  
 (V.ii.39-41)

Again he is referring to his feigned identity as if it were a true one. This being so, Volpone's words at his final unmasking, "I am Volpone", also take on a certain complexity of suggestion. Leggatt sees the words and gesture as a flourish of defiance, which is clearly, at least in part, what Volpone intends them to be. But there is an implication there

that he would not understand, for in revealing himself he is revealing nothing. There are many Volpones and there is no Volpone. E.B.Partridge, in a paper entitled "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", says:

We rarely see Volpone as he really is -- if he really is any one thing. Perhaps, like Face in The Alchemist, he has no real nature except as he disguises himself . . . . His disguises, then, reveal his perverted nature throughout the play.<sup>15</sup>

Not merely do his disguises reveal his perversion; they are his perversion. His essential immorality lies in his inability or unwillingness to discover his self.

Yet it seems that Volpone wishes to retain an illusion of constancy himself. Phrases like "still the same", and "still, my selfe", are almost Jonsonian stock phrases for constancy. The fact that Volpone uses them so insistently suggests that Jonson is presenting a perversion of Stoic constancy, in light of Volpone's compulsion toward play-acting. His crucial failure is a failure of self-examination. In his soliloquy, after his appearance before the Avocatori, it seems that he is about to analyse himself having, for the first time, felt some dissatisfaction with his disguise. But he does not look far, turning instead to wine, and he is immediately ready for another disguise. He is absolutely superficial.

---

15

Edward B.Partridge, "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", JEGP, LVI (1957), 396.

This rejection of identity is reflected in Volpone's attitude toward the external world. In this too he desires and expects continual change, We have already seen how, in his attempted seduction of Celia, he creates a fantasy in which Celia changes shape along with him. After Mosca's Victory over the suitors, who believe Volpone to be dead, the Fox's glee is expressed in a desire to transform the external world -- in this case, Mosca: "O that I could now / Transforme thee to a Venus"(V.iii.103-104). Just as he sees his greatest power as being his ability to change his identity, so his greatest love is for those things which have the power to transform. So he worships gold, "the dumbe god, that giv'st all men tongues"(I.i.22). This idea is given even clearer expression by Mosca, who is actually articulating Volpone's own views:

It transformes  
The most deformed, and restores 'hem lovely,  
As't were the strange poeticall girdle. JOVE  
Could not invent, t'himselfe, a shroud more subtile,  
To passe ACRISIUS guardes. It is the thing  
Makes all the world her grace, her youth, her beauty.  
(V.ii.100-105)

The reference to Jove's seduction of Danae echoes what we have already seen, the erotic element in Volpone's transformations. The powder which, as Scoto of Mantua, Volpone gives to Celia, is priceless because of its transforming power; it is "the poulder, that made VENUS a godesse . . . that kept her perpetually yong, clear'd her wrincles, firm'd her gummes, fill'd her skin, colour'd her haire"(II.ii.234-237). His own obses-

sion is apparent here; as in his later attempted seduction, he sees the promise of an ability to transform as being the thing most likely to win Celia. He believes, of course, that his obsession is a universal one; when disguised as the com-mendatore in order to mock the gulls, he says to Corbaccio: "Thus doe all gam'sters, at all games, dissemble"(V.vi.26). The metaphor is typical; he and Mosca see the world as a stage, with themselves as both actors and play-makers. In this they are playing a game throughout the drama, for to them all life is a game. Volpone suggests that the evasion of self is a condition of success in a world where those who take up fixed positions allow themselves to be outmanoeuvred.

Volpone's punishment is particularly appropriate, as he is to be forced to maintain an identity which he has previously only acted out:

since the most was gotten by imposture,  
By faining lane, gout, palsey, and such diseases,  
Thou art to lie in prison, crampt with irons,  
Till thou bee'st sicke, and lame indeed.  
(V.xii.121-124)

The man whose whole life has been based upon the assumption of the freedom to change at will is to have both freedom and will removed, to be forced into one shape, a shape that is, for him, the worst possible. To misuse the will is to relinquish it; Volpone wilfully made the wrong choice and in consequence lost his will to the disease of compulsion.

Volpone and Mosca both see themselves as artists in their acting, and as such they continually analyse and criti-



cise their performances. But for Volpone disguising, because it is a compulsion, is also a disease. With Mosca role-playing is a means to an end; with Volpone it is itself the end. He is not really much concerned with the material gains derived from his performances, and although as spectator he enjoys the discomfiture of his patrons, this is usually brought about by Mosca's performances. His real love is the acting itself. After his appearance in court he realizes that he has gone as far as he can go:

I ne're was in dislike with my disguise,  
Till this fled moment; here, 'twas good, in private,  
But, in your publike, Cave, whil'st I breathe.  
(V.i.2-4)

Nevertheless, he cannot resist a further disguise, thereby putting himself completely into Mosca's hands, and bringing about his own downfall.

Mosca is an artist on a level different from that of Volpone; because there are ulterior motives behind his role-playing, he has much firmer control over his performances than does Volpone. Disguise is not a disease with him. Nevertheless, like Volpone, he takes great delight in the technical perfection of an impersonation. His own disguising is limited to verbal imposture in the Machiavellian tradition, similar to that of Tiberius. He never pretends to be someone else, as does Volpone, but he presents a different version of himself to everyone. We have already seen that he is playing a role even with Volpone; so it is also with the suitors. Fore-

shadowing the tricksters of The Alchemist, he is whatever the clients wish him to be. This is best seen in the law-court scenes. "Is the lie/Safely convoid amongst us?"(IV.iv.3-4) he asks, and the irony is that "the lie" is different for each of them, yet each thinks he alone knows the truth. Mosca works here like a skilled juggler, effortlessly keeping control.

It is this effortlessess that Mosca sees as the greater part of his genius. Volpone sees his dramatic skill as god-like; Mosca sees his own abilities as being in some way spiritual or super-human. In his soliloquy of self-praise he examines his sublimity:

O! Your Parasite  
Is a most precious thing, dropt from above,  
Not bred 'mongst clods, and clot-poules, here on earth.  
(III.i.7-9)

He goes on to define the skill of the "fine elegant" parasite, in terms of his ability to change instantly, to assume and discard roles without effort. The superior parasite, of which Mosca is his own supreme example, can

rise,  
And stoope (almost together) like an arrow;  
Shoot through the aire, as nimbly as a starre;  
Turne short, as doth a swallow; and be here,  
And there, and here, and yonder, all at once;  
Present to any humour, all occasion;  
And change a visor, swifter than a thought!  
(III.i.23-29)

His skill is not the virtuosity of Volpone, who can take on and maintain a role indefinitely; rather, it is the lightning-quick multiplication of roles, the ability to appear an infinite number of things almost simultaneously. Immediately

after his description of his skill, he is able to put it into action, when he convinces Bonario that he is not a flatterer, but a poor man forced to degrade himself to make a living. Skilled in making lies appear the truth, he can also make the truth appear a lie.

Mosca's soliloquy parallels Volpone's later speech of self-analysis. By definition, a parasite lacks self-sufficiency, the Stoic good, yet at the same time puts on a mask of Stoic self-sufficiency, if he is like Mosca. Just as Volpone sees consummate role-playing as the condition of success in a world of role-players, so Mosca sees the world as wholly made up of "parasites and sub-parasites". Both see the world in their own image; this makes unnecessary any serious self-examination. All men are more-or-less successful role-players who can exist in the world only by deceiving others; as Mosca sees it,

Hood an asse, with reverend purple,  
So you can hide his two ambitious eares,  
And, he shall passe for a cathedrall Doctor.  
(I.ii.111-113)

There is a certain contempt in this, for such role-playing is based on the dazzling effect of riches, rather than on innate skill comparable to Mosca's; the ass is still an ass. On a level for which he can find more admiration, the aspect of the lawyer's craft which most fascinates Mosca is that which is most like his own parasite-skill, the ability to

speake  
To every cause, and things mere contraries,

Till they were hoarse againe, yet all be law;  
 That, with most quick agilitie, could turne,  
 And re-turne; make knots, and undoe them;  
 Give forked counsell; take provoking gold  
 On either hand, and put it up.  
 (I.iii.53-59)

He has a world-picture of people who succeed or fail by their dissembling skill. When Corvino shows a shred of pity for the apparently dying Volpone, Mosca's reponse is to advise him, "The weeping of an heire should still be laughter, / Under a visor"(I.v.22-23). All nobler instincts can be rationalized only in terms of their being an act.

Volpone and Mosca create a world of illusions for others, but because the world they create is a reflection of their own lack of centre, their own lack of integrity, they too are subject to their own illusions. Volpone pretends his own death because, failing to see through the illusion Mosca has created for him, he trusts too far. Mosca, dressed as a Clarissimo, presents the illusion of Volpone's death to the clients, then tries to turn the illusion into reality by preventing Volpone from coming back to life, and in the process attempts to transform his role of Clarissimo into reality. Again, tricked by his illusion, he fails to foresee Volpone's possible reaction and his own consequent downfall.

Like Volpone's punishment, Mosca's is ironically appropriate, for he becomes, to the Avocatori, the ass robed in reverend purple. Rich implies learned, he has said, with contempt for those without real abilities. Now his own abi-

lities are being ignored, and he is condemned for putting on the appearance of a rich man; he has, says the judge,

abus'd the court,  
And habit of a gentleman of Venice,  
Being a fellow of no birth, or bloud:  
(V.xii.110-112)

Volpone and Mosca want a world of illusions and, in fact, the world we see in the play is one of illusions, where most people play roles, where lies are taken for truth and truth goes unrecognized. Each of Volpone's clients discards his own role: Corvino as husband, Corbaccio as father, Voltore as upholder of the law. Voltore, because of his skill, is most like Volpone and Mosca, and in the court scene he becomes their spokesman, living up to Mosca's earlier description of him. We have already seen how Mosca is able to turn the truth into a lie, in his confrontation with Bonario; in this scene, although unwittingly, Voltore also turns the truth into a lie. He describes Volpone quite accurately, but in the sarcastic tone of one who is actually denying the truth of what he is saying:

See here, grave fathers, here's the ravisher,  
The rider on men's wives, the great impostor,  
The grand voluptuary! do you not think,  
These limbs should affect venery, or these eyes  
Covet a concubine?'pray you, marke these hands,  
Are they not fit to stroake a ladies breasts?  
Perhaps, he doth dissemble?

(IV.vi.23-29)

So entirely lost in the illusion is he, that he becomes its presenter.

One of the major ironies of the play is that, in the

earlier court-scenes in Act IV, the Scrutinco, whose function is to establish truth, becomes the means of extending Volpone's illusions. Voltore, we have seen, turns truth into falsehood here; and amidst the lies of Mosca and Volpone's clients, the only representatives of truth in the play are accused of duplicity. Of Bonario, Voltore says:

So much more full of danger is his vice,  
That can beguile so, under shade of vertue.  
(IV.v.61-62)

When Bonario defends himself the first Avvocato says "You do forget your selfe" -- ironically, since Bonario and Celia are the only characters in the play who show any constancy. Celia too is accused of playing a role:

This lewd woman  
(That wants no artificiall lookes, or teares,  
To helpe the visor, she has now put on)  
(IV.v.34-36)

The inversion of illusion and reality is complete, so that when Celia faints it is inevitable that the Avvocato should think this yet another performance on her part: "This woman, has too many moodes"(IV.v.142).

Volpone and Mosca represent a disease; the society in which they function reflects this disease; consequently, because of their implication in the general falsehood, the Avvocato are unable to see truth, unless by accident:

As a result of the forces operating from the society and within themselves, these justicers perceive a distorted world of false appearances; but they consistently act incorrectly and unjustly because they

want to believe the lies they are told.<sup>16</sup>

The play is about illusion, transformation, loss of identity through man's wilful neglect of his duty to establish the self on a moral basis, and Jonson makes it clear that the role-playing this involves is wrong. We have seen how the whole idea of metamorphosis of the self is satirized in the entertainment given by the freaks; it is further mocked through Nano, who puts the idea of impersonation into its proper perspective. The dwarf, he says, is not grotesque, but a pretty little ape:

And, why a pritty ape? but for pleasing imitation  
Of greater mens action, in a ridiculous fashion.  
(III.iii.13-14)

The absurdity of all role-playing, its foolish immorality, is made quite plain here.

The examination of role-playing and transformation, of the folly of those who discard the integrated self, that is the concern of the main plot, is echoed in the sub-plot. Sir Politic Would-be purports to be a man of the world. He affects to know all current news, and to be an expert in understanding plots and intrigues, yet he is easily taken in by the claims of the mountebank. Jonas Barish has written perceptively on the subject: "Sir Politic and Lady Would-be function to a large extent precisely as mimics. They imitate

---

16

Lawrence L. Levin, "Justice and Society in Sejanus and Volpone", Discourse, XIII (1970), 321.

their environment, and without knowing it they travesty the actions of the main characters."<sup>17</sup> In a less self-conscious manner they have a function similar to that of the grotesques who entertain Volpone. Sir Politic plays a role from his first appearance, his wife has come to Venice to learn more about the role she wants to play. She has come

for intelligence  
Of tyres, and fashions, and behaviour,  
Among the curtizans.

(II.i.27-29)

The confusion of the Would-bes about illusion and reality is as great as the confusion of the characters of the main plot, but it is demonstrated on a much more literal and obvious level. Lady Would-be, led to believe that her husband is associating with a courtesan, makes the absurd mistake of convincing herself that Peregrine is a woman disguised as a man, "a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice, / A female devill, in a male out-side"(IV.ii.55-56). This ridiculous confusion foreshadows the rather more serious confusion of truth and illusion that is to take place in the Scrutineo.

Lady Would-be is associated with the theme of disguise and the creation of illusion through her use of cosmetics, which parallels Volpone's use of disguise as an evasion of identity. Concerned always with her appearance,

---

17

Jonas A. Barish, "The Double Plot in Volpone", in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), p.94.



and the success of her "fucus", she reminds us that it was a cosmetic powder that Volpone, as Scoto, offered to Celia. Volpone desires the part of Celia that is closest to illusion, her appearance; he wants only externals, and rejects Celia's "identity", which is represented by her purity and her constancy to the ideal of marital fidelity. Seeing this, Celia offers to destroy the illusory surface if this will allow her to retain her self:

punish that unhappy crime of nature,  
Which you miscall my beauty: flay my face,  
Or poison it, with oylments, for seducing  
Your bloud to this rebellion.

(III.vii.251-254)

Appearance is only the illusion of beauty; true beauty consists in integrity and a refusal to discard identity. So Lady Would-be, who thinks she can create beauty on the outside, and has no identity, becomes polar-opposite and foil to Celia.

Peregrine believes that Lady Would-be's mistake about his identity is part of a plot by Sir Politic to prostitute his wife. In revenge he literally gives up his identity by disguising as a merchant to punish Sir Politic. He too is tricked by an illusion and consequently becomes, like Volpone, a creator of illusion. He causes Sir Politic to make a visual transformation into a tortoise -- the cold, slow-moving, lowly creature that Sir Pol really is. Sir Politic then becomes an emblem for all the transformations of the play, for all transformation is, in Jonson's world, degradation.

It is difficult to assess Peregrine's role here. According to Dorothy Litt, he provides a direct parallel for Volpone:

Volpone, in disguise as a court officer, humiliates his victims, while Peregrine, in disguise as a merchant, parallels Volpone by making the Knight crawl literally. Finally, both protagonists show by example that deception need not lead to self-deception, for each strips himself of his own disguise.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly we cannot accept this conclusion, since when Volpone strips himself of his disguise he does not show that he is free of self-deception, as we have seen. Conversely, it is not totally apparent that Peregrine is implicated by the general attack on self-deception. He has some affinities with Brainworm, some with Truewit, but he does not really seem to fit in with the moral scheme of the play. In the end we cannot be sure whether or not he too is being satirized.

The animal imagery prevalent in the play also contributes to the general criticism of role-playing that Jonson is making. There are references to many animals that mimic other creatures, or that can actually change their appearance. Baboon, parrot and hyaena are all mimics, the crocodile traps its prey by playing a part, and the chameleon can change its appearance to suit its environment. Lady Would-be, the inverted reflection of Celia, accuses her of duplicity using such

---

18

Dorothy E. Litt, "Unity of Theme in *Volpone*", *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* LXIII (1969), 223-224.

animal comparisons: "Out, thou chameleon harlot; now, thine eyes / Vie teares with the hyaena"(IV.vi.2-3). In spite of her mistake about the hyaena's tears, the words are a far more appropriate description of Lady Would-be herself.

Barish succinctly sums us the suggestions of such images, and their wider relevance to the concerns of the play in general:

The juxtaposition of the hyena and the chameleon reminds one that there is a point at which the idea of metamorphosis and mimicry coalesce. The chameleon, shifting its colors to blend itself with its environment, indulges in a highly developed form of protective mimicry. Volpone carries the principle a step further. He goes through his restless series of transformations not as a shield but in order to prey on his own kind, to satisfy something in his unnatural nature which demands incessant change of shape and form. But knavery and credulity, mimicry and metamorphosis, alike reflect aspects of one basic folly: the folly of becoming, or trying to become, what one is not, the cardinal sin of losing one's nature. Only Bonario and Celia, of all the creatures in the play, never ape others, never change their shapes, never act contrary to their essential natures. And in the unnatural state of Venice it is chiefly they, the unchanging ones, who are attacked as hyenas and chameleons.<sup>19</sup>

Barish here underlines many of the points made in the present discussion -- Volpone's diseased need to change his shape, the ideas of mimicry and metamorphosis (combined, one might add, in the idea of disguise), the crime of the loss of one's nature, and the hunting, by a diseased society where most have lost their identities, of those who remain constant to the self.

---

<sup>19</sup>

Barish, "The Double Plot in Volpone", p.102.

Volpone is Jonson's most central disguise-play, and his most serious and sustained attack on inauthentic behaviour. In Every Man in His Humour, as we saw, the shams who played roles and affected humours were attacked, but the disguiser-Brainworm was treated with genial tolerance because the wit of his plots was essentially undestructive -- although he did not go uncriticized. In Sejanus we witnessed an examination of the destructive power of those who wilfully take on roles, and in Volpone this examination is continued. Volpone and Mosca, having discarded their own identities, attempt to create a world of illusion, a world without identity, for themselves and for others. But because they have lost their own identities they too become enmeshed, the dupes of their own illusion. Those who people the world of Volpone are not merely foolish, but are in fact actively vicious, for they too have wilfully discarded the integrity of the self. So the entire world of the play becomes an expanded metaphor for the disguising of Volpone, a world of false surfaces and inverted values. Even the theme of materialism in the play, embodied in the blasphemous religious elevation of gold, contributes to this metaphor, since wealth becomes only a means of putting a rich and attractive surface on an ugly reality -- another means, that is, of transformation.

The implications of the use of disguise, consequently, are spread through all levels of the play. The two constant

characters, Celia and Bonario, are finally vindicated, but this is largely by accident, because even the ministers of justice are caught up in the illusion. So although Celia and Bonario are adequate norms, their virtue is shown to be passive and impotent, and no explicit celebration of their constancy is voiced in the final judgements. Nor is there a presenter or commentator to make judgements for us, as there was in the Comickall Satyres, and even in Sejanus. But the clues to judgement are there, in the network of commentary-parodies of the main action, and in the action itself. Once we realize that for Jonson all role-playing is evil, and can only create evil, we can see that the central target of his satire is not materialism, nor even the abuse of other people, but is rather the discarding of the self, the wearing of masks that for Seneca characterized the foolish and immoral man, that leads to all other evils.

### III

#### EPICOENE

Jonson's next play, Epicoene, or The Silent Woman, appeared in 1609. It shows a marked difference in tone to Volpone; one critic describes it as "altogether lighter, wittier and more relaxed" than the earlier play.<sup>1</sup> In many ways it more closely resembles Every Man in his Humour. Writing now for a court rather than a popular audience, Jonson was able to assume a higher level of sophistication and delight in "immoral" wit, and to write a farce that is, at least on the surface, frothy as compared to the preceding comedy. Nevertheless, as we shall see, many of the play's concerns and its final moral direction are similar to those of Volpone.

A major concern of most critics of Epicoene has been to demonstrate the play's unity. Dryden first voiced the concern with a statement of what he takes to be unquestionable fact: "The action of the play is entirely one; the end or aim of which is the settling of Morose's estate on Dauphine."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>

J.B.Bamborough, Ben Jonson (London, 1970), p.91.

<sup>2</sup>

John Dryden, Literary Criticism of John Dryden, ed. A.C.Kirsch (Lincoln, 1966), p.50.

Modern critics have been less disposed to find the play's unity in its plot, and have sought it elsewhere. E.B.Partridge finds it in the allusiveness of language and imagery which, he shows, demonstrates the epicene nature of most of the characters; Ray L.Heffner, following Eliot's view of the play's "unity of inspiration", finds a thematic unity, discovering four thematically related intrigues.<sup>3</sup> A more recent critic, Mark A.Anderson, returns to a consideration of the unity of the play's plot, seeing the two metamorphoses of Epicoene, from silent to garrulous woman, and from woman to boy, as revealing the unity of action.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand Jonas A.Barish, finding in Epicoene's tone an attempted fusion of the Ovidian and the Juvenalian, considers the play to be incompletely integrated.<sup>5</sup>

A related problem with which most of these critics have attempted to deal concerns the position of the three intriguers, Dauphine, Truewit and Clerimont. They clearly form a group separate from the other characters of the play, yet

---

<sup>3</sup> Partridge, The Broken Compass, pp.161-177; Ray L. Heffner, "Unifying Symbols in the Comedy of Ben Jonson", in Barish, Ben Jonson, pp.133-146.

<sup>4</sup> Mark A.Anderson, "The Successful Unity of Epicoene: A Defense of Ben Jonson", Studies in English Literature, X (1970), 349-366.

<sup>5</sup> Jonas A.Barish, "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman", PMLA, LXXI (1956), 213-224.

partake of the general immorality of their society. Barish thinks that Truewit is the play's hero and its moral norm; Charles A. Carpenter finds Dauphine to be the hero, consistently triumphing over Truewit.<sup>6</sup> Heffner thinks that Truewit and Dauphine share the honours, that Jonson favours a balance between noisy prankster and practical schemer. Most find Clerimont to be a less fully developed character, associated mainly by implication in the triumphs of the other two.

The problem concerning these characters arises because, although clearly superior in wit and intelligence to the other characters of the play, they are hardly much less vicious. Thus critics have tended to grant them hero-status on grounds of superior wit without coming to terms with the moral implications of this. But Jonson is here, as everywhere, a moralist, and we shall examine a reading of the play which sees none of the schemers as hero, but includes them too in the circle of the irony.

Epicoene is generally seen as an attack on social pretension and hypocrisy. Partridge, for instance, considers that "the play is fundamentally concerned with deviations from a norm" and that it "explores the question of decorum -- here the decorum of the sexes and the decorum of society."<sup>7</sup>

---

6

Charles A. Carpenter, "Epicoene Minus Its Secret: Surprise as Expectation", Xavier University Studies, VII (1968), 15-22.

7

Partridge, The Broken Compass, pp.170,171.



But we must be aware of Jonson's perennial concern with role-players; those who wear masks are not merely social monsters, and the satire has wider implications than this. For once again Jonson is concerned with a more universal ethical context in examining the play-acting of those who have, wilfully or otherwise, lost contact with the self.

The most apparent fools in the play are Daw and La Foole, gulls in the tradition of Matthew and Stephen, and perhaps more richly comic than they. Everything about them is false; being themselves empty, they must give an appearance of learning or fashion, an appearance that is pathetically futile. Daw is "a fellow that pretends onely to learning, buyes titles, and nothing else of bookes in him"(I.ii.75-77). La Foole, similarly concerned only with surfaces, pretends to all the trappings of social position, and is actually nothing more than a "precious manikin".<sup>8</sup> They are able to fool themselves and each other, and they deceive the Collegiate women (who are also self-deceived) for a time.

But even the roles they play are not of their own creation. As Dauphine says of them:

Tut, flatter 'hem both (as TRUE-WIT sayes) and you

---

8

L.A.Beaurline, in his edition of the play (Lincoln, 1966), has a note to this word (I.iii.24; p.19). He quotes Kittredge's comment on the word in Twelfth Night, III.ii.57, "a little man, less than a man, to be played with like a puppet." The definition suggests something of the mindlessness of the play-acting of Daw and La Foole -- actors in a motion, rather than a play.

may take their understandings in a purse-net. They'll beleeve themselves to be just such men as we make 'hem, neither more nor lesse. They have nothing, not the use of their senses, but by tradition.

(III.iii.95-99)

So totally lacking in identity are they that they cannot even create appearance for themselves, but think themselves to be whatever others say they are. So it is appropriate that their exposure to the Ladies Collegiate is the result of an illusion, created by Truewit and Dauphine, in which each is presented to the other as being skilled in arms and ferocious of temper. The reality is shown in Truewit's delightfully funny comment on Daw's offer to allow La Foole six kicks instead of five: "What's sixe kicks to a man, that reads SENECA?"(IV.v.293-294). Truewit's mocking reference is to the Stoic ideal of fortitude and constancy, which is the precise opposite of what Daw shows. Daw, in fact, has earlier referred to Seneca as a "grave ass"; yet he does not see the mockery. Daw, that "fellow so utterly nothing, as he knowes not what he would be"(II.iv.154-155), is as willing to take on the role of Senecan man as he is to take on the role of poet or lover.

Truewit's ruse allows Daw and La Foole to maintain their roles, at least for themselves, so that their empty reality can be shown once again in relation to the final unmasking of Epicoene. Here, again made to "beleeve themselves to be just such men as we make 'hem," they are tricked by Clerimont into claiming that Epicoene has been their

mistress. So a further and final role is imposed upon them from the outside, in order that their reality can be exposed in public and to themselves.

Daw and La Foole are the most transparent of the role-players presented in Epicoene. More foolish than vicious, they have not the intellectual control to play their parts convincingly; yet lacking all identity, they are forced to act. More vicious, though equally foolish and comic, are the Ladies Collegiates, whose rejection of identity in favour of role-playing is a more wilful one.

Affectation and pretense, the unwillingness or inability to be constant to the self, are particularly associated with the women in Epicoene. Truewit's apparent defense of the use of cosmetics, and Morose's attacks on court women, are essentially concerned with the same thing, and this concern is embodied in the Collegiate women. The first reference to them, by Truewit, is to their "most masculine, or rather hermaphroditicall authority"(I.i.79-80). They are wilfully usurping a role opposite to their rightful one. Clerimont's subsequent description of Lady Haughty, leader of the Collegiates, is spoken out of envy, because he has been denied audience with her; nevertheless the tone leaves us in no doubt about the dramatist's own attitude toward her: "A poxe of her autumnall face, her peec'd beautie: there's no man can be admitted till she be ready, now adaies, till she has painted, and perfum'd, and wash'd, and scour'd"(I.i.85-88).

The song "Still to be neat" which immediately follows this underlines the tone, setting up a contrast between natural, unadorned beauty, and that supplied by cosmetics. We have seen in earlier plays the relevance of the use of cosmetics to role-playing. Here the beautician's art is, as always, suspect:

Though arts hid causes are not found,  
All is not sweet, all is not sound.  
(I.i.95-96)

In response to this, Truewit defends the art of women -- but this raises the question of how seriously we are to take his words. Anderson says: "Truewit accepts the reality of society and the artifice within it. The deceit of cosmetics is not socially harmful when admitted, but in fact can work aesthetic improvement in society."<sup>9</sup> But surely the tone of Truewit's lines on whether cosmetics should be applied in public or in private is satiric, rather than a genuine condoning of artifice: "Is it for us to see their perrukes put on, their false teeth, their complexion, their eye-browes, their nailles?" (I.i.117-119). Truewit is certainly playing devil's advocate here. If he means what he says, then his lines are a reflection on himself as much as a serious justification of the use of cosmetics. We shall have more to say of this.

Morose too, the unbalanced satirist, attacks the role-

---

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, "The Successful Unity of Epicoene", p.354.

playing of the court women who "affect, and toile for, to seeme learn'd, to seeme judicious, to seeme sharpe, and conceited"(II.v.56-58). But his satire does not go far enough, for while attacking the artifice of the Collegiates he urges the use of art upon Epicoene, whom he wishes to be first in fashion, "and then come foorth, varied like Nature, or other than she, and better, by the helpe of Art, her aemulous servant"(II.v.73-75). In spite of his attack on woman's art, he is nonetheless susceptible to it.

Already before they appear, then, the Ladies Collegiates have been set up as representatives of deception, as play-actors. Not only are they playing roles as women, in using cosmetics to mask their physical reality; they also, in their "masculine, or rather hermaphroditicall" way, attempt to play the role belonging to men. They are as lacking in identity as Daw and La Foole, and are described in terms very similar to those in which Dauphine has earlier described the two gulls. Truewit says:

Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause; they know not why they doe anything: but as they are inform'd, beleeve, judge, praise, condemne, love, hate, and in aemulation one of another, doe all these things alike.

(IV.vi.64-69)

Unable to be constant to a self, being entirely made up of externals, they are unable to be constant to one another either, and are quite willing to malign each other to gain their own ends, despite their "aemulation one of another".

Further, they are easily deceived by the surfaces of others. They alone are misled by Daw and La Foole, and their allegiance is easily switched from the gulls to Dauphine, though not on account of any real superiority in the latter: "He is a very worthy gentleman, in his exteriors"(IV.vi.24).

Mrs. Otter, though only a pretender to the status of Collegiate, is the most fully developed of these masculine women. She has achieved complete dominance over her husband, who is now her vassal. Loudly and comically vulgar, she exists as an apt comment on those she wishes to join, in her own inverted relationship with her husband. While she plays the masculine role, the amphibious Otter plays a number of parts, most of them imposed upon him from the outside, as with the gulls and the Collegiates. He plays the part of emasculated husband for his wife, and pretends rebellion behind her back for his masculine audience. Even his reputation is a part of a performance: "these things I am knowne to the courtiers by. It is reported to them for my humor, and they receive it so, and doe expect it. TOM OTTERS bull, beare, and horse is knowne all over England, in rerum natura" (III.i.11-15). His is an affected humour akin to those we have seen in earlier plays, a performance put on to cloak his essential emptiness.

The kind of role-playing in Epicoene we have considered to this point takes the same form, with varying degrees of wilfulness. The actors, empty of all identity, take on what-

ever attributes their audience dictates; they are mere reflectors of opinion. With Captain Otter, we come to Jonson's employment of literal disguise in the play, but this extends the same attitude toward role-playing.

Cutbeard's affectation of Latin tags is as representative of his actual emptiness as is Otter's affected humour of his. The two men are perfect for the purposes of the schemers Truewit and Dauphine, who can impose whatever externals they wish upon them:

Clap but a civill gowne with a welt, o'the one; and  
a canonical cloake with sleeves, o'the other: and  
give 'hem a few termes i'their mouthes, if there  
come not forth as able a Doctor, and compleat a  
Parson, for this turne, as may be wish'd, trust not  
my election.

(IV.vii.43-45)

Truewit is not here praising the acting talent of Cutbeard and Otter, but is referring to the ease with which those who have no identity can take on a false one. For although the role-playing here of Otter and Cutbeard is more "theatrical" than that we have already examined, it is just as essentially a demonstration of a lack of identity. So, when they take on their disguises Truewit notes of them: "the knaves doe not know themselves, they are so exalted, and alter'd. Preferment changes any man"(V.iii.3-5). We are reminded of Mosca's comment on the effect of "reverend purple" on an ass. Barish's comment is appropriate: in their performance they "virtually cease to be Otter and Cutbeard, and become merely a pair of

dummies wired for sound."<sup>10</sup>

All the characters we have examined up to this point, however differently treated, have been used to show the folly of those who, lacking all real identity, take on only that identity that is imposed on them from outside, either by society in general or, more usually, by schemers wishing to exploit them. The plots in which these characters appear show their essential emptiness, their lack of self. But these are mainly minor characters; it remains to examine the positions of Morose, of Epicoene, and of the three plotters.

Morose seems, if anything, to be too strongly aware of his essential self -- so aware, that he wishes to reject all the external world and turn inward to himself entirely. In a speech late in the play, in an attempt unusual in Jonson to explain the source of a man's humour in his education, Morose describes how his father taught him a philosophy close to the doctrine of Stoic inwardness:

My father, in my education, was wont to advise mee,  
that I should alwayes collect, and contayne my mind,  
not suffering it to flow loosely; that I should looke  
to what things were necessary to the carriage of my  
life, and what not: embracing the one, and eschewing  
the other. In short, that I should endeare my selfe  
to rest, and avoid turmoile: which now is growne to  
be another nature to me.

(V.iii.48-54)

But perhaps he misunderstood his education; perhaps his failure as a satirist in the way that Macilente and Horace

---

<sup>10</sup>

Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.173.



are satirists, his lapse into the grotesque, is caused by an inadequate view of himself. His attempts to be self-sufficient are thwarted over and over -- by Truewit, and by Dauphine's plots with Otter and Cutbeard and with Epicoene. Stoic self-sufficiency is impossible without a Stoic self.

We have already seen something of Morose's attitude toward role-playing in his comments on the relationship of nature and art in women. It is the view of the satirist, yet it is not clear-sighted, but rather the manifestation of a personal disease, as is shown by the ease with which Morose can be duped. That this is the result of a lack of real identity is not shown overtly, but rather is the subject of much ironic commentary. His first response to Truewit suggests something of the role he is playing: "O men! o manners!" The Ciceronian tag suggests that Morose sees himself as Stoic observer, the man sufficiently strong in himself to be able to reveal the deficiencies of others. But the essential intelligence is lacking. His words "A manifest woman", on discovering that Epicoene is not silent, contain a deep irony. He thinks he has seen a truth, and that he is stating another universal truth, whereas in reality it is the exact opposite of his statement of it.

In the scenes with Truewit which follow this revelation a fuller comment on Morose's attempts to be constant to his idea of a self is provided. First Truewit refers mockingly to his own earlier attempt to dissuade Morose from mar-

riage:

I commend your resolution, that (notwithstanding all the dangers I laid afore you, in the voice of a night-crow) would yet goe on, and bee your selfe. It shewes you are a man constant to your own ends, and upright to your purposes.

(III.v.15-19)

The implication of Stoic virtue, in the light of what Morose really is, is clearly comic. Shortly afterward, when Daw has brought in the Ladies Collegiates, and the musicians have arrived, Truewit again mocks Morose by urging on his Stoic fortitude: "Take courage, put on a martyr's resolution. Mocke downe all their attemptings, with patience. 'Tis but a day, and I would suffer heroically. Should an asse exceed me in fortitude?"(III.vii.11-14). Stoic constancy is here presented as an implied contrast to the "constancy" by which Morose has attempted to live, since constancy only has meaning as a way of facing the world, not of hiding from it, as Morose has attempted to do.

What we have in Morose is a parody of Stoicism (something of this, as we have seen, is true also of Volpone). His play of constancy is as much a disguise as is the posturing of the gulls and the College ladies for he, like them, is essentially empty; but unlike them he has tried to create an identity for himself rather than accepting one imposed from outside. That this identity is insufficient is quite apparent, however, which is why Morose suffers so much. Barish, approaching the character from a different direction, from an examination of the verbal surface of Morose's speech, reaches a

similar conclusion. Discussing Morose's confrontation with Truewit, he says:

The discovery of this deeper level turns the outer layer of stylistic affectation into a kind of vocal disguise, but in the case of Morose, at least, it is a disguise over which he has little control. . . . Morose is very much at the mercy of his own disguise. For the moment, the disguise cracks because Morose is alone and caught up in an exultation of gratified revenge. But the disguise has begun to slip in public too, and well before the play ends it has been cast aside entirely.<sup>11</sup>

Morose's apparent Stoicism, his attempted constancy to a view of his self, is only a pose. He cannot maintain it, because it is not real. He too is essentially a hollow man, and all his failures can be blamed on this. He is, in the end, only another disguiser.

Epicoene herself is, of course, the key to the play's meaning. Partridge has written at length about the way in which the allusions and suggestions of the name permeate the play, echoed in words that suggest the ambiguous or monstrous nature of characters other than Epicoene. Centaur, hermaphrodite, animal amphibium -- these are the characters of the play. Partridge points out the meaning that amphibion had for Jonson's audience: "The adjective amphibion (or amphibious) meant having two modes of existence or being of doubtful nature."<sup>12</sup> We can perhaps alter the emphasis of this; all

---

<sup>11</sup> Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.163.

<sup>12</sup> Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.168.

these words suggest creatures that have no essential self, no identity. From the more obvious point of view of plot-resolution, Epicoene's final revelation ties together all the strands, releasing Morose from his torment, giving Dauphine what he has sought throughout the play, and revealing the folly of Daw and La Foole, and of the Collegiate women.

The performance of Epicoene involves both literal disguise and role-playing. The boy disguises as a woman, and in that disguise plays the role of silent woman. Thus there are two revelations to be made, and two levels of comment on the general role-playing of the play's society; for in his pretense at being a silent woman the boy offers a comment on the superficiality of those whose roles are concerned with social forms, and his act as woman offers a more basic comment on those who have no real identity at all. More than this, Epicoene as emblem stands as an embodiment of one who, for the purposes of the play, has no identity. He maintains his role as woman up to the final point of Dauphine's revelation, and does not speak after that moment. He is just a boy, any boy, who only exists in his unreal performance. So the emptiness of all who play roles is crystalized in this figure. Further, although many of the ironies of the play can only be apparent to those who are aware of Epicoene's disguise, it is appropriate that Jonson should wish to make this a surprise to his audience, for the sudden shock of this revelation makes an emphatic concluding comment on the irresponsibility of role-

playing that has been more obliquely shown throughout the play.

We are left now with the problem of the position of the intriguers Dauphine, Truewit and Clerimont. Most critics attempt to see one, two, or all of them as the play's heroes, yet most critics also feel somewhat uneasy about doing so. Because Clerimont is the least developed of the three, and shows a marked superficiality, the general tendency is to set him aside and concentrate on the other two. My own suggestion is that, despite their apparent superiority of wit, they too are criticized on moral grounds and their criticism is related to their own involvement in the general role-playing.

Barish considers Truewit to be the hero of the play, the figure in whom Jonson tries to create a norm: "Truewit inhabits the same social and intellectual sphere as his fellows, and even formulates their own attitudes for them, while suggesting at the same time the possibility of other attitudes."<sup>13</sup> But perhaps there is a warning in Truewit's name, with its affinities to "Lovewit", for perhaps wit is not enough. As chief schemer, most of the time he seems to be in control of the situation and of himself; yet many critics feel uneasy about his peculiar stubbornness in refusing to admit his fault in his attempts to dissuade Morose from marriage.

---

<sup>13</sup> Barish, Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.148.

After boasting that he has turned Morose against the idea of marriage, he cannot believe that he has done wrong. In face of the accusations of Clerimont and Dauphine his first reaction, as a dissembler himself, is to assume that his friends are dissembling: "Gent: come to your selves again . . . . My masters, doe not put on this strange face to pay my courtesie: off with this visor"(II.iv.29-35). When Cutbeard announces that Truewit's persuasions of Morose have only made the old man's resolution firmer, Truewit insists that this was always his intention: "Fortune had not a finger in't. I saw it must necessarily in nature fall out so: my genius is never false to me in these things"(II.iv.74-76). In effect he is doing just what he has accused his friends of doing; he has rejected his self, to put on a strange face, or a visor. This is the more ironic, as Truewit is the champion of Stoicism both in the opening scene of the play, and in his mocking encouragement of Morose at the latter's marriage. But Truewit is, of course, the man who argues for the sake of the argument, whose wit can be applied to defending the indefensible as well as to praising virtue. We can be delighted by him without accepting that he himself embodies those virtues he so often defends. In him is implied the basic question suggested by the play itself: whether wit and Stoic virtue can be allied at all. No answer is stated, but the implication is that they cannot.

If we examine also Truewit's statements about cosmetics, we find that his tendency is to emphasize the ugliness

hidden, and the unnatural means used to hide it, rather than the resulting beauty. Yet he continually praises social artifice. Truewit's tone is always ambiguous, and Barish finds this ambiguity somewhat disturbing:

If it is satire not only by Truewit against society but satire against Truewit himself, the situation becomes even more peculiar, since it places Truewit exactly in the position of Amorphus in Cynthia's Revels, where Jonson ridicules at one and the same time the social customs being described and the imbecile who is describing and approving them. And if this is the case, the differences between Truewit the Stoic moralizer, Truewit the fashionable gallant, and Truewit the dupe of fashion become impossible to reconcile. One is forced to conclude that Truewit is really too many things at once and not an adequate fusion of them, that the irresolutions of tone in his speeches reflect irresolution in the play itself.<sup>14</sup>

But it seems to me that Barish is using the right evidence to draw the wrong conclusions. Because he wants to see Truewit as hero he cannot reconcile the different roles the gallant plays; but surely the fact that they cannot be reconciled is precisely the point. Truewit is not an imbecile, but he is finally immoral because he is inauthentic, a play-actor with too many roles. His advice on courtship in IV.i. shows how a man must play a part in order to seduce a woman. He is not merely an observer of social duplicity; he is deeply involved in it. His "irresolutions of tone" are not indicative of ir-

---

<sup>14</sup>

Barish, "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman", pp.218-219. For a more extensive rebuttal of Barish, see John Ferns, "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman: A Reconsideration", Modern Language Review, LXV (1970), 248-253.

resolution in the play; rather they involve him in Jonson's general criticism of the play-acting of society. In many ways he is more to blame than the gulls and Collegiate women, because his duplicity is a wilful misuse of a superior intelligence.

There is also a strong case against accepting Dauphine as hero. His peculiar coldness, his willingness to cut off Daw's left arm, his cruel dismissal of his uncle have often been commented upon. Nevertheless to many critics, because the play is directed toward his social and financial triumph, Dauphine is the hero. Yet to see him as such necessitates the justification of much that is unjustifiable. Despite his acknowledgement of their shallowness, Anderson sees merit in Dauphine's winning of the affections of the Ladies Collegiates. More generally, the real triumph is "in the increased esteem held by the members of society for Dauphine."<sup>15</sup> But the esteem of a superficial society is hardly of much value, and the mere fact that Dauphine wants the affections of the Collegiates suggests a corresponding emptiness in himself.

John J. Enck, who also sees Dauphine as hero, also attempts to justify the unjustifiable. He says "before Epiccoene, any disguise has been censured, but Dauphine, the nominal hero, himself hires the actor to be the silent bride,

---

<sup>15</sup>

Anderson, "The Successful Unity of Epiccoene", p.361.



and this deception redeems the whole situation."<sup>16</sup> He does not attempt to explain Jonson's unaccountable change in attitude toward disguise. In fact, Dauphine sustains his deception, in effect plays a role, throughout the play. I should prefer to reverse the emphasis of Anderson's and Enck's arguments: the acceptance by hero-Dauphine of his hollow society, and his involvement with disguise-deception do not raise the value of these things. Rather, they undermine his credibility as hero.

The attempt by critics to find heroes or norms in the play seems to stem from a fallacy upheld also by Aurelia Henry. In the introduction to her edition of the play she says: "Jonson judges humanity first according to an intellectual and social standard, and last by a moral one."<sup>17</sup> Anderson echoes this fallacy: "Success determines the victors, and their merit lies in their success, not in their moral quality."<sup>18</sup> But Jonson is always a moralist, and his denunciation of society is rather more integrated than Miss Henry suggests. For Jonson immorality is a kind of folly. It may be that in terms

---

<sup>16</sup> John J. Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth (Madison, 1957), p.144.

<sup>17</sup> Epicoene, ed. Aurelia Henry (New York, 1906), p. lxvii.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, "The Successful Unity of Epicoene", p.364.

of the society of the play Truewit and Dauphine do triumph, are the norms. But we are intended to see the play in a wider moral context than its society offers. Already in Volpone we have seen that the man who willingly takes part in the deceiving of society becomes himself a victim of that deception. As much as the less "witty" characters of the play, Truewit and Dauphine are self-deceived. L.A.Beaurline, from a different approach, arrives at a similar conclusion:

the audience is encouraged throughout the final scenes to adopt a superior, detached point of view and to laugh at the wits as well as at the dupes . . . . Ultimately we laugh at Truewit, Clerimont, and Dauphine because they have cared to play such a game in the first place.<sup>19</sup>

Epicoene marks a further stage in Jonson's withdrawal of "norms" from his plays. In Volpone Celia and Bonario represented valid but impotent norms. Truewit and Morose contain many of the elements of the satirist-figures of the comicall satyres but, as is quite obvious in Morose, less apparent in Truewit, they themselves are also being satirized, because they lack the consistency of self necessary in the moral man, the real "norm". The next stage in this development is, of course, Surly in The Alchemist. The total picture becomes more and more subtle, so that we can accept the judgements of such as Truewit without necessarily accepting

---

<sup>19</sup>

L.A.Beaurline, "Ben Jonson and the Illusion of Completeness", PMLA, LXXXIV (1969), 59.

that those who make the judgements totally embrace the positives they seem to be demanding. This surely is why Jonson is making more and more demands upon the "Understander", who will be able to see through the apparent contradictions of his dramatic world.

#### IV

#### THE ALCHEMIST

The Alchemist (1610) is generally considered, along with Volpone, to be Jonson's greatest achievement and, as has often been pointed out, shows many similarities to the earlier play. It is, however, much more of a "vernacular" play; the tricksters have humbler clients, more closely identifiable with types of contemporary London citizens, and their language is more often in the low style. Furthermore, whereas the gulls of Volpone had already abandoned their own identities in favour of the roles given to them by Volpone, and were concerned only with the acquisition of wealth, and not what they would do with it, in The Alchemist we are presented with characters at the very point where they are trying to take on new roles. Dapper, Druggier and Mammon all aspire to be what they are not, and The Alchemist provides an examination of the very moment of attempted transmutation.

Transmutation, in fact, lies at the centre of the play, and the larger metaphor of alchemy represents this. As a magical art, it suggested the possibilities of spiritual as well as material transformation:

Alchemy too was called an art . . . by its masters, and, with its image of the transmutation of base metals into the noble metals gold and silver, serves as a highly evocative symbol of the inward process referred to. In fact, alchemy may be called the art of the transmutations of the soul.<sup>1</sup>

Each of Subtle's dupes seeks to transform himself into his own dream, but the transmutations inevitably fail. Just as Subtle cannot really transform base metal into gold, so the gulls cannot really transform themselves, and all succeed finally in showing only their own emptiness.

A good deal of interest has recently been shown in the relationship of The Alchemist to the morality play.<sup>2</sup> William Blissett relates Subtle to the morality Devil through various metaphors taken from the play. There is one aspect of the Devil to which he refers, but which he does not develop, that is important to the present discussion:

The Devil is subtle: he is devious, and he is prince of the powers of the air. Caxton (1471) says, "He chaunged himself in guyse of a serpent this is to understand in subtyllesse and in malice,"<sup>3</sup>

Blissett's main concern is to relate Subtle to the Devil through mediaeval and Renaissance usage of the word "subtle".

<sup>1</sup> Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul (Baltimore, 1971), p.23.

<sup>2</sup> See Alan C. Dessen, "The Alchemist: Jonson's 'Estates' Play", Renaissance Drama, VII (1964), 35-54; William Blissett, "The Venter Tripartite in The Alchemist", Studies in English Literature, VIII (1968), 323-354.

<sup>3</sup> Blissett, "The Venter Tripartite in The Alchemist", p.327.

But it is surely significant that the man who purports to be the agent of change in the play should be, as Volpone is in many ways, an image of the archetypal master of change and disguise. If we follow the implications of the play's relationship to morality drama, we can see also traces of the morality tradition wherein Vice masquerades as Virtue. On this level alone we are given strong clues as to the interpretation of the play, which reflect Jonson's general attitude toward the use of disguise.

There is implicit in the idea of transformation the idea also of creation. A man who can change the self, it is suggested, can also create the self. Thus Subtle may actually be representative of the Devil but (in the tradition of Vice masquerading as Virtue) he plays God. This idea of transformer also being creator is made quite clear in the opening scene of The Alchemist, for much of the dialogue is concerned with the question of identity. The alliance of Subtle, Face and Dol is a much more uneasy one than that of Volpone and Mosca, much more apparently fragile, since those involved are more fully aware of the real basis of their relationship, and less blinded by self-love. They know that their alliance is purely pragmatic, and the opening struggle for supremacy between Subtle and Face is conceived in terms of the possibility of each destroying the "self" (which is, as we shall see, in this case the "role") of the other. Each realizes that the other can be negated by stripping away the surface. This

surface is first seen simply as clothing, the most obvious symbol of superficiality of identity. Face's opening threat to Subtle is that he will "strip" the alchemist. Subtle's response is a threat to "marre/All that the taylor has made"(I.i.9-10). Each is fully aware of the precarious nature of the other's claim to identity, and sees that the destruction of appearance is the destruction of all. This is immediately made quite explicit by Subtle, who actually defines the self, as he sees it in Face, in terms of something manufactured:

FAC. Why! who  
Am I, my mungrill? Who am I? SUB. I'll tell you,  
Since you know not your selfe --

(I.i.12-14)

Volpone and Mosca are willing to accept at face value the definitions of identity that they present to each other because of their own self-involvement; but Subtle leaves no doubt in these lines that he is trying to reach a definition of the self -- a definition he makes in terms of clothing. He tells us that Face was once a "livery-three-pound-thrum"(I.i.16), that he was, in fact, only what he wore. Now he is "translated suburb-Captayne"(I.i.19) but, whatever Subtle would have us believe, the identity is no more real. Face counters with a description of Subtle as he was at the time they met, and this too is largely presented in terms of clothing, as if that were a means of definition:

When you went pinn'd up, in the severall rags,

Yo'had raked, and pick'd from dung-hills, before day,  
 Your feet in mouldie slippers, for your kibes,  
 A felt of rugg, and a thin thredde cloake,  
 That scarce would cover your no-buttocks --  
 (I.1.33-37)

Each can describe the other only in terms of what he wore.

Subtle responds with a definition, in alchemical terms,  
 of the Face he has created:

FAC. The place has made you valiant. SUB. No, your clothes.  
 Thou vermine, have I tane thee, out of dung,  
 So poore, so wretched, when no living thing  
 Would keepe thee companie, but a spider, or worse?  
 Rais'd thee from broomes, and dust, and watring pots?  
Sublin'd thee, and exalted thee, and fix'd thee  
I'the third region, call'd our state of grace?  
 Wrought thee to spirit, to quintessence, with paines  
 Would twise have won the philosophers worke?  
 Put thee in words, and fashion? made thee fit  
 For more than ordinarie fellowships?  
 Giv'n thee thy othes, thy quarrelling dimensions?  
 Thy rules, to cheat at horse-race, cock-pit, cardes,  
 Dice, or what ever gallant tincture, else?  
 Made thee a second, in mine owne great art?  
 And have I this for thanke? Doe you rebell?  
 (I.1.63-78)

Here the symbolism of clothing is underlined -- it is the knowledge that Face is no more than his clothing that gives Subtle his strength. His main means of controlling Face is his awareness of the reality of the situation, although it is an awareness that ignores his own involvement in performance. Beyond this, the themes of alchemy and of the definition of self are united. What you are, says Subtle, is what I have made you with my alchemy. As a true definition of identity Subtle's is, of course, wrong, as we are aware from our own knowledge of Jonson's abiding interest in the value of Stoic self-consistency. Subtle is not a real alchemist; by analogy



he is not a real representative of self-knowledge. But Subtle's definition provides not only the impetus for, but also the means of judging, the remainder of the play, for we will now be presented with a group of characters who are all seeking a new self. The identity Subtle will offer each will of necessity be, in the light of his own definition of "self", a meaningless one; but we are now in a position to judge the essential moral direction of the play, because we know the terms and can reject them. Disguise and role-playing, the attitude that a man can be what he wishes to be simply by changing his external or material circumstances, are at the real centre of the play.

In fact, in his employment of alchemy as the unifying image of this play, Jonson has discovered a metaphor that can be applied to all of his plays. Of this metaphor Alvin Kernan says:

In a very real sense, life in all of Jonson's plays is viewed as a process of alchemy, the transmutation of base matter into gold; and each of the characters is an alchemist attempting to transform himself by means of his particular "philosopher's stone" into some form higher up on the scale of being than the point at which he began.<sup>4</sup>

The character wishing to make this transformation is always either foolish or vicious, a moral imbecile who sees improvement only in materialistic terms, never as a spiritual gain. The philosopher's stone is a sham; such changes cannot be

---

<sup>4</sup>  
Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p.173.

made, and a man's duty is to remain constant to his true self. But those who seek the change are always essentially empty, having no real identity to which they can remain constant. Kernan again says: "in Jonson's satiric plays the assumption of a mask usually has an ironic function: it serves to reveal the character for what he truly is."<sup>5</sup> I would rather say that the assumption of a mask reveals that a character truly is nothing. Real virtue is suggested by Surly's definition of the kind of man who traditionally would have the power to make the philosopher's stone:

he must be homo frugi,  
A pious, holy, and religious man,  
One free from mortall sinne, a very virgin.  
(II.ii.97-99)

This, of course, is ironic if we infer its application to Subtle; on the other hand, it does suggest a moral order beyond the play, in its implication of Christian or neo-Stoic temperance and withdrawal from the accidents of the material world, and above all the desirability of retaining constantly one's spiritual identity.

The masquerades of the three tricksters contain in themselves implications of moral criticism. Mosca's role-playing was more complex, since for the most part he played different versions of himself. Volpone, involved with the artistry of his performances, could assume any role, though his

---

<sup>5</sup>  
Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p.165.

roles were mainly beneath his real social position. Subtle and Dol play roles more obviously in the tradition of Vice assuming the mask of Virtue. Only Face's role-playing suggests any real virtuosity in the style of Volpone and Mosca.

Nevertheless, we must be careful not to underestimate the importance of these disguises. Paul Goodman does this, I think, when he says that disguise has no really serious implication within a comic plot, but is mainly a device to begin intrigue:

Spectacular disguises . . . imply a comic intrigue, accidental connections. In serious plays the disguises are for the most part natural, deep-going traits . . . . And in general, the ability to assume different disguises is a comic talent; it sets intrigues in motion.<sup>6</sup>

This begs many questions. The tenor of Goodman's argument is to show that The Alchemist is not a "serious play" (a term he seems to be reserving for tragedies). But it is, I think, unacceptable to suggest that a comedy cannot be serious, especially when discussing Jonson. Further, Jonson uses disguise, in comedy, as a "natural, deep-going trait", as an integral part of character, and as a device for moral criticism.

Knoll, too, over-simplifies when he sees the disguises as having little more than a mechanical function in helping

---

6

Paul Goodman, The Structure of Literature (Chicago, 1954), pp.95-96.

us to clarify a rather complex plot:

Interestingly enough, Subtle, Face, and Dol change costume for each of the six intrigues . . . . These costumes separate the intrigues from one another and help the audience keep them straight.<sup>7</sup>

The suggestion here is that the change in costume does not really announce a change in role; but this is rather hard to accept in the light of Jonson's usual attitude toward change in outward appearance. In fact, a great deal is demanded of these tricksters. Subtle's basic disguise as learned scientist remains constant throughout his dealings with his clients and, indeed, in his dealings with Face and Dol. Until the final scene he maintains his imposture even with them. It is not made entirely clear in the play how far he is taken in by his own performance. But within that one disguise many different modifications of tone are required to lead on each of the dupes. He must be saintly for Mammon, irascible for the Puritans. As Enck points out, Subtle, Face and Dol "improvise disguise and become whatever their clients yield to most susceptibly."<sup>8</sup> They rely less on the planned control of Volpone and Mosca, more on an ability to change immediately as their clients change. This is virtuosity of a different order, demanding a very fine awareness of the different nature

---

<sup>7</sup> Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays, p.123.

<sup>8</sup> Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p.160.

of each client. Volpone's performance as dying man may have been brilliant, but it did not have to be different for each client; Subtle's is necessarily so. The essential difference seems to be that whereas Volpone and Mosca were acting largely for the delight of themselves and each other, Subtle and Face are acting solely for the benefit of their clients -- they are professionals where Volpone and, to a lesser degree, Mosca were amateurs.

There is no need to examine at length the exquisite brilliance of Subtle's performance. It is somewhat like Volpone's impersonation of Scoto of Mantua in that both Volpone and Subtle are playing the parts of men who were essentially charlatans -- this in itself implies criticism of the hollow motives of the actors. The alchemist was occasionally a fraud who knew the emptiness of his pseudo-science; more often he believed in what he was doing, in which case he was self-deceiving. Either way, Subtle the deceiver is playing the part of a deceiver; a man who has lost his own identity is playing the part of a man who, in the same terms, has lost his identity. According to J.B.Steane, "part of the comedy of Subtle's impersonation is in the very fact that he does it so well. The authenticity of the charlatan in itself ridicules the practice."<sup>9</sup> This is undeniable, but we should

---

<sup>9</sup>  
p.6. The Alchemist, ed. J.B.Steane (Cambridge, 1967),

add that it ridicules also the impersonator. We can admire the astonishing comic eloquence of Subtle as alchemist while at the same time seeing that part of the comedy lies in the fact that Subtle is, in one sense, only a more brilliant version of the Bobadils and Daws of earlier plays, a man made out of words. He may be more aware than they of the fact that his appearance is not reality; nevertheless his own essential lack of self parallels theirs.

Dol Common is, in spite of her verbal vigour, the least developed of the three tricksters, and is largely a tool of Subtle and Face, a counter in their bargaining, the butt of their sexual jokes, and a carnal magnet for the dupes. Her "mad-scene" with Mammon provides the absolute dislocation of word and identity, an epitome of the meaninglessness of all the activities in Subtle's laboratory. Since she is nothing, she can be made into anything, a quean who can appear a Queen. Like Subtle, she is not punished, because of her vitality and wit; but we are left in no doubt about the judgement required of us.

The third of the tricksters, Face, presents a much more complicated case. The fact that he finally triumphs over the others suggests that he is, in some way, a "norm", yet this is quite clearly not the case. In fact it is an ironic triumph, since he is the most accomplished actor of the three, and his triumph is a result of the astuteness of his performance. For, as we shall see in our examination of

Lovewit, a triumph of wit is in no way to be taken as a moral triumph.

Goodman says of the relationship of Subtle and Face, and of Face's final superiority:

In the beginning, Face and Subtle seemed almost formally identical; but, as the intrigue progresses, we find Face infinitely various, while Subtle is handled more and more as an expert in one line; therefore Subtle is deflatable. But Face is not . . . . Face is a wit; he can operate in normalcy, where normalcy belongs to a Lovewit, not a Surly who has the vice of honesty.<sup>10</sup>

The final comment on Surly suggests Goodman's view of this upside down world -- that vice does indeed triumph over virtue, as wit triumphs over honesty. But Surly's fault is not that he is honest, but that he lacks wit; not that he represents morality, but that he represents it poorly. The fact that Face's wit can triumph in the world of Lovewit's "normalcy" is surely a moral comment on that normal world.

What Face represents is suggested by his name. The OED defines "face" as, amongst other things, "command of countenance, especially with reference to freedom from shame; a bold front; impudence, effrontery, 'cheek'." But as Jonson uses the term, there is more than the suggestion of an ability to brazen out an embarrassing situation (although Face, confronted by Lovewit, obviously has this ability). In Epicoene Truewit says to Dauphine and Clerimont, who are angered by

---

<sup>10</sup>

Goodman, The Structure of Literature, p.94.

his interference in Dauphine's plot against Morose, "doe not put on this strange face to pay my courtesie: off with this visor"(II.ii.34-35), which equates "face" and "visor", and suggests that "putting on a face" means a much more conscious, planned effort to deceive. More to the point is Jonson's use of the word (as a proper noun) in his epistle to Lady Wroth that prefaces The Alchemist. In stressing the sincerity of his letter, he says that he does not wish it to "talke, like one of the ambitious Faces of the time: who the more they paint, are the lesse themselves"(16-18). The implications here are wide-ranging: that all who are ambitious, dissatisfied with what they are, are Faces, and that the more they struggle toward the creation of an appearance the more inauthentic they become, and further from a real identity. So Partridge's comment on Face is a very valuable one: "In one sense Face alone remains what he was -- that is, nothing in himself, but living only in the disguises or "faces" which he assumes."<sup>11</sup> This, of course, is precisely the wrong sort of constancy, since it presupposes a void as replacing identity. A man who has more than one identity has no identity.

Whether as Captain Face, Ulen Spiegel, or Jeremy the Butler, he is no more real. To the "normal" world he is Jeremy the Butler yet, as Subtle tells us, that role has no great reality, since even then he is only "livery three-

---

<sup>11</sup>

Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.118.



pound-thrum", only the clothes he is wearing. His unending metamorphosis is a comment on Subtle's alchemy, just as alchemy is a comment on his inconsistency. This accounts for our acute uneasiness in applauding Face's success in his final address to the audience:

And though I am cleane  
Got off, from SUBTLE, SURLY, MAMMON, DOL,  
Hot ANANIAS, DAPPER, DRUGGER, all  
With whom I traded; yet I put my selfe  
On you, that are my countrey: and this pelfe,  
Which I have got, if you doe quit me, rests  
To feast you often, and invite new ghests.  
(V.v.159-165)

The normal world is Face's "countrey": that is, he is saying that Lovewit's world is the world of the audience. Yet that world of wit precludes moral judgement, so Face is mocking us. For in asking us to applaud -- to "quit", that is to acquit him -- he is asking us to say that he is right. We are his judges and he is asking for a verdict of "Not guilty". The self he is offering to put upon us is essentially nothing, since he has no self. We are making what is essentially a moral judgement upon a world from which moral concerns have been assiduously excluded, and in applauding Face we are applauding what is evidently wrong. This is why Jonson's comedy is finally so serious, for so often it forces us into an ambiguous position by directing us, through the vigour of its comic "heroes" into applauding what is immoral.

Moving from those who purport to have the transforming power of the philosopher's stone, we must examine the base

metal that would be turned to gold. All the alchemist's clients are pathetically empty, and all are punished by being made to remain the blanks they are, doomed never to have real identity. The most pathetic of these gulls are Dapper and Drugger. They have the most limited vision; they seek an easy way to material success, a success they think can be bought from Subtle with material payment, and which will make them into greater social beings. Drugger's dream is modest:

This summer,  
He will be of the clothing of his companie:  
And, next spring, call'd to the scarlet.  
(I.iii.35-37)

This is all that self-betterment can mean to men who have no real conception of selfhood. Kastril, beginning from a better material and social position than these two, also sees self-improvement in terms of outward social appearance -- he wants to be one of the "angrie Boyes", an even more limited ambition than that of Dapper and Drugger. His sister, Dame Pliant is, as her name suggests, a more insipid version of the sexual object that Dol also represents -- a woman who can be turned into anything the tricksters wish. Surly or Lovewit -- it is irrelevant which one wins her, and her emptiness implies a criticism of both.

The Puritans, Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome, are slightly different in that they are not simply seeking new roles; they are already playing roles. They too seek material benefits, but they are hypocrites, and can only come to terms

with what they are doing by fabricating an appearance of righteousness. They are differentiated, since Ananias, hot and quick-tempered, at least believes in his own hypocrisies, whereas Tribulation Wholesome is willing to bend the rules, to rationalize his way around obstacles, however false this may make him to his professed beliefs -- he is the more consciously hypocritical of the two. But the difference is one of quantity rather than of quality. They are closer to Subtle than to the other gulls, for they, like him, fall into the tradition of Vice masquerading as its opposite, corrupt men playing at being men of God.

The most fully drawn of the clients, and the one with the most magnificent vision is, of course, Sir Epicure Mammon, and a closer examination of him will show the general attitude toward all the gulls. According to Surly, Mammon was, before coming to Subtle, "a grave sir, a rich, that has no need,/A wise sir, too, at other times"(II.iii.279-280). But if this was his original identity, it is lost to us, for we see little of it in the play. To be sure, at first, he shows an admirable altruism:

This is the day, wherein, to all my friends,  
I will pronounce the happy word, be rich.  
(II.i.6-7)

But he seems to be doing little more than paying lip-service to the demands of charity; the wonders he will work for others disappear -- they only existed as a part of his own image of himself as benefactor, and are swamped by his more materialistic

and selfish desires. As we see him, he shows neither gravity nor wisdom, the virtues of the constant man. Drawn by the vision of the possibility of unlimited material power, he lives in a dream world of physical pleasure and opulence. So most of his speeches are in the future tense, for he has lost touch with the reality of the present. He expects, through art, to gain control over nature, and this is at the centre of the criticism of him, and of all who think that reality can be changed by changing surfaces. Subtle shows that he sees this when he mocks Mammon's aspirations:

He will make  
Nature asham'd, of her long sleepe: when art,  
Who's but a step-dame, shall doe more then shee,  
In her best love to man-kind, ever could.  
If his dreame last, hee'll turne the age, to gold.  
(I.iv.25-29)

The mockery here turns back also on Subtle, since he plays such a large part in the creation of Mammon's dream.

Mammon himself later echoes Subtle's words in his promises to Dol:

And thou shalt ha' thy wardrobe,  
Richer than Natures, still, to change thy selfe,  
And vary ofter, for thy pride, then shee:  
Or Art, her wise, and almost-equall servant.  
(IV.i.166-169)

This hint of Protean power reminds us of the promises made to Celia by Volpone, who also thought to conquer nature through his art. In his preface "To the Reader", Jonson suggests that art must come to terms with nature, not avoid or conquer it: "to runne away from Nature, and be afraid of

her is the onely point of art that tickles the Spectators"(6-7). The man who can retain his identity will not lose sight of reality, will not substitute art for nature, and this is the error of Mammon, and all the dupes who cannot see through surfaces.

This brings us to Surly, the one visitor to the tricksters who apparently can see through surfaces. It seems at first that he is to be the play's "norm", the satirist-figure who will finally expose the follies of all; yet he is defeated and is himself satirized. From the beginning, however, we know that he is not necessarily an honest man himself. He is a gamester; Volpone, mocking Corbaccio, said "Thus doe all gam'sters, at all games, dissemble"(V.vi.26), which suggests that all gamblers are role-players. Surly himself defines Subtle's activities in terms of the illusions created by his own:

I'll beleeeve,  
That Alchemie is a pretty kind of game,  
Somewhat like tricks o'the cards, to cheat a man  
With charming.

(II.iii.179-182)

An accurate description of both, but the speaker shows no awareness that he is also condemning himself. He is, of course, sceptical of Subtle's alchemy, determined not to be taken in by anything:

Faith, I have a humor,  
I would not willingly be gull'd. Your stone  
Cannot transmute me.

(II.i.77-79)

It is consequently ironic that he is the only visitor to Subtle's laboratory who actually does change his appearance, who is visually "transmuted", and taking on disguise brings about his downfall, since by using deception against the deceivers he underlines the fact that he is really like them -- he gives up his identity. He is made immediately ludicrous in his disguise as a Spaniard, and is forced to listen to the comic or obscene insults of Subtle and Face. This, of course, undermines all his credibility with the audience:

SUB. He lookes in that deepe ruffe, like a head in a  
 Serv'd in by a short cloake upon two tressils!  
 FAC. Or, what doe you say to a collar of brawne, cut  
 Beneath the souse, and wriggled with a knife?  
 (I.V.iii.24-27)

Who could possibly take his revelations seriously after this? Because he gives up his identity by disguising, he loses control of the situation and is easily hounded out in the superb farce of Kastril's and Ananias' attacks, directed by Face. In this world of wit, the witless moralist is out of place, especially when he has undermined his own identity, and is as unconvincing as Surly.

The other potential "norm" in the play is Lovewit, who also involves himself with disguise. It is his judgement that allows Face his victory, and which we are applauding at the end of the play, since Face is asking us to agree with it. But it is made quite clear, by his name, and by his pro-

fession -- "I love a teeming wit, as I love my nourishment"(V.i.16) -- that his judgement is in no way a moral one. In fact he himself must be judged by the audience if it is to understand the play -- he is like Justice Clement of Every Man in His Humour, a judge whose decision, though perhaps dramatically satisfying, must be examined in relation to larger moral concerns. He can criticize the neighbours, who are ready to agree with anything said and who are manipulated by Face, as "changelings", yet he allows himself to be manipulated just as easily.

The fact that Lovewit wears the same disguise as Surly implies that he has no greater authority as judge, for although he is not described as looking absurd in this disguise we will inevitably remember the absurdity of Surly in the same disguise. So there is surely a hint of mockery in Face's words to Lovewit after his marriage, if not by Face himself, then by Jonson: "Off with your ruffe, and cloake then, be your selfe, sir"(V.v.8). For Lovewit is another of those without an authentic self. He admits this himself, and at the same time makes explicit to us that his judgement of Face is not a moral one, but dictated by his love of wit and, more to the point, his self-interest:

That master  
That had receiv'd such happinesse by a servant,  
In such a widdow, and with so much wealth,  
Were very ungratefull, if he would not be  
A little indulgent to that servants wit,  
And helpe his fortune, though with some small straine  
Of his owne candor.

(V.v.146-152)

His confession that he is straining his "candor" shows that he knows his judgement is not really a valid one. That he rather than Face is the one to give out the punishments to the gulls reinforces this, since he is allowing himself to be Face's instrument -- a reversal of the master-servant roles, and a conscious abdication of the power of judgement to the master-criminal. That he finally wins Dame Pliant is appropriate, for we have to admit that she is just about what he deserves.

The final pattern of the play is now clear. The witty rogues reveal the emptiness, the essential lack of identity of their clients, but at the same time they themselves are implicated in this emptiness and they live in a world where even the judges are implicated in it, setting as they do wit over morality. But there are clues for the audience, and when we see The Alchemist in the context of Jonson's other plays we know how to judge these role-players. Thomas M. Greene, approaching similar questions from a different direction, admirably sums up Jonson's attitude toward role-playing when, in comparing Jonson with Shakespeare, he writes:

Jonson's drama, more truly conservative, reflects . . . the horror of a self too often shifted, a self which risks the loss of an inner poise. It reflects this horror even as it portrays, more brilliantly than Shakespeare, the whirlwind virtuosos of such multiplication.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>

Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self", p.344.



One would, perhaps, wish to make the case rather more strongly; the loss of the self is exactly what Jonson's plays are about. For in change, the self is inevitably lost, an addition that is really a subtraction. Jonson's world is inhabited by characters who negate themselves by trying to be what they are not, and who lose what they are. Their very vitality confuses us, for it is this that attracts us to them. Nonetheless, in The Alchemist, as in Volpone, we must see through the comic vitality to the essential hollowness, and regret the loss of such misdirected energy.

V

BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

After The Alchemist Jonson did not write another comedy for four years, though in between he produced the stage-disaster Catiline. This second tragedy concerned the nature of the good judge and governor; and Bartholomew Fair, which appeared in 1614, also has as one of its main concerns an examination of the claims of those who pretend to the judgement of others.

In fact the question of judgement is central to the play; as well as the judgements made by the play's authority-figures, we are concerned with the judgements to be made by the audience, as is suggested by the Induction. One of the major critical questions concerning the play centres on the judgements Jonson himself is making, and consequently on the tone of the play. Is Jonson abandoning his characteristic moralist's stance in favour of a more genial response to folly and crime? Maurice Hussey finds him "unusually tolerant", claiming that "the didactic temper for which he is rightly important is less sternly engaged."<sup>1</sup> E.B.Partridge stresses

---

<sup>1</sup>  
p.x. Bartholomew Fair, ed. Maurice Hussey (London, 1964),

the "good humour" of the play, while Barish thinks that the play "views the excesses of the season unsentimentally, but indulgently, as a product of irredeemable human weakness."<sup>2</sup>

Alan C. Dessen, on the other hand, rejects the suggestion that moral issues are extraneous to the play, claiming that "Jonson has succeeded in fusing together morality structure and technique with comic tone and surface in order to provide an image of his times."<sup>3</sup>

My own view approaches that of Dessen. The stress of the present thesis is on the consistency of Jonson's moral standpoint; he has never before treated human weakness as totally "irredeemable", and the general "good humour" of the play's surface should not blind us to its underlying moral pattern. The fact that none of the characters is seriously punished for his follies does not subtract from the ruthlessness with which those follies are exposed. As we have seen in the plays from Volpone onward, the absence of authoritative judge-figures does not mean that judgement cannot be made.

Bartholomew Fair holds an unusual, if not unique position in its time, in that it was presented, on consecutive

---

<sup>2</sup>  
Bartholomew Fair, ed. E.B. Partridge (Lincoln, 1964), p.xv; Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.222.

<sup>3</sup>  
 Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy, pp. 148-149, p.220.

days, to a public audience at the Hope Theatre, and to a Court Audience that included the King. Jonson's apparent indulgence and tolerance of human weakness might seem to reflect his determination to write a popular success, and are intimately related to those elements of the play that give it its general reputation for "realism". But it is clear from the Epilogue addressed to James I, and presumably spoken only at the Court presentation, that Jonson is seeking a sterner judgement:

you can tell  
 If we have us'd that leave you gave us, well:  
 Or whether wee to rage, or licence breake,  
 Or be prophane, or make prophane men speake?  
 This is your power to judge (great Sir)  
 (5-9)

Obviously Jonson's intention is for us to understand that he is not being profane, but is making profane men speak. He is creating a distance between himself and his characters; far from being indulgent toward these profane men, he is demanding judgement against them.

The symbol of the Fair is a very suggestive one. It allows the visitors to demonstrate their immorality through the baseness of their activities. In festive manner, it turns the world upside-down, allowing misrule to triumph over authority. It examines the varying influences of appetite, law and art. And it tests various moral attitudes, setting supposed representatives of the examined, consciously moral life against those who unthinkingly engage in natural enjoyment of appetite.

The present argument, by now familiar, is that at the moral centre of Jonson's plays lies an ideal of self-knowledge, and of constancy to that self. Folly and crime arise from a lack of self-knowledge, from rejection or loss of identity, usually manifested through play-acting or actual disguise. A character who puts on a disguise in order to control his environment demonstrates his own instability by that action. In The Alchemist, Jonson used the pseudo-science as a symbolic testing-ground for the authenticity of his characters: both dupes and tricksters were shown to be lacking real identity, through the medium of this central symbol. In Bartholomew Fair he has found another great symbol to test the consistency of his characters; and other aspects of the Fair-symbol are enriched in relation to the theme of self-recognition.

We shall begin by examining a passage from Discoveries often cited in discussions of Bartholomew Fair:

What petty things they are, wee wonder at? like children, that esteeme every trifle; and preferre a Fairing before their Fathers: what difference is between us, and them? but that we are dearer Fooles, Cockscombes, at a higher rate. They are pleas'd with Cockleshells, Whistles, Hobby-horses, and such like: wee with Statues, marble Pillars, Pictures, gilded Roofes, where under-neath is Lath, and Lyme; perhaps Lome. Yet, wee take pleasure in the lye, and are glad, wee can cousen our selves.

(Disc. 11.1437-1445)

In his discussion of this passage, Dessen emphasizes "the analogy between a child's concern for trifles at a Fair and man's pursuit of possessions and false ideals."<sup>4</sup> Barish

quotes the passage in relation to his discussion of Cokes, and omits the final sentence -- yet it is there, I think, where the meaning of the passage lies.<sup>5</sup> This world of illusions and false surfaces, of images and guilt hiding only barrenness, invites us to deception and self-deception.

The use of the image of the Fair in this way perhaps accounts for the relative leniency with which its denizens are treated. They are the Fair; they present all the false surfaces, putting on an act to attract customers, and are thus, by definition, deceivers. They are wiser than those they trick, and necessarily appear vital and attractive in order to make their deceptions convincing. But vice is made attractive only as part of an illusion to test the visitors to the Fair. The play-acting of the tricksters is less serious than the hypocrisy and self-deception of the others, but Jonson appears indulgent towards it only because it is necessary for his primary aim. In fact, the Fair-people are all Faces; like him, they suffer no real punishment. But, as with Face, this is not to be taken as an indication that their activities are not morally censured by Jonson.

The one real exception to this is Ursula, who alone is always very much herself. She is unimproved Nature, the self without any capacity for self-examination. In her physical and moral grossness she looms as a central symbol of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, pp.219-220.

Fair's meaning -- pure appetite, what all the self-deceivers come to indulge. She offers not merely roast pig, but ale and tobacco, chamber-pots and whores. In her roaring vitality she is as ambiguous as so many of Jonson's earlier villains. As Joel H.Kaplan has written:

like the fair around her Ursula creates her own holiday dispensation that makes stone-faced censure almost as foolish and irrelevant as hearty approval. Neither response can adequately come to terms with the complex experience of Smithfield, where vitality is made synonymous with obscenity and corruption.<sup>6</sup>

Appetite lies at the root of loss of self-control and instability; it is the cause of all the "disguisings" in the play.

The present reading of Bartholomew Fair obviously demands that a sharp distinction be drawn between those who inhabit the Fair and those who visit it. Eugene M.Waith makes a generalization about the role-playing that goes on which suggests that he does not entirely see this distinction: "Playing a part, usually with a view to practicing some deception, is an almost universal activity in Bartholomew Fair, sometimes a diversion, sometimes more nearly a profession."<sup>7</sup> It is a universal activity, but Jonson, for the purposes of

---

<sup>6</sup>  
Joel H.Kaplan, "Dramatic and Moral Energy in Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair", Renaissance Drama, n.s.III (1970), 145.

<sup>7</sup>  
Bartholomew Fair, ed. Eugene M.Waith (New Haven and London, 1963), p.10.

his central symbol, makes it allowable for the professionals, the more fully-conscious role-players, in order to show up the more culpable posturing of the rest.

Calvin Thayer draws the distinction more fully. He sees the relationship of the Fair to the world outside, as represented by the Littlewits' house, as "analogous to that between the real world and the theatre, with the Fair serving as a kind of theatrum mundi."<sup>8</sup> While not wishing to push the analogy as far as does Thayer, I should agree with him that, for the purposes of the play, Jonson allows the Fair special license, so that it can test the identity of those who visit it.

The central symbol of the Fair, itself a great illusion presented by characters with no reality beyond their deceptive surfaces, is complicated by the further illusions it displays in the game of vapours and the puppet-show. Of the term "vapours", Vincent F. Petronella writes: "Two specific meanings of the word are what is meant by 'humour' and a kind of meaningless desire to contradict, to revolt, to be different."<sup>9</sup> Somewhat fusing these two suggested meanings, James E. Robinson defines vapours as "characters whose humours are in heat, anxious to feed the fires of their vanities and so

---

<sup>8</sup>

Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays, p.131.

<sup>9</sup>

Vincent F. Petronella, "Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Study in Baroque Style", Discourse, XIII (1970), 327.



becloud their brains even more."<sup>10</sup> Vapours increase self-delusion, as they increase the eccentricity of outward appearance. Jonson's own stage-direction referring to the game of vapours emphasizes its emptiness: "Here they continue their game of vapours, which is non sense. Every man to oppose the last man that spoke: whether it concern'd him or no"(IV.iv.). Vapours empties all speech of meaning, since it demands that words refer only to the words that precede them, and to no opinion actually held by the speaker.

The puppet-play has a similar function. It parodies the play itself, and the whole world-as-stage tradition. It is the climax of the play, for here all deceptions are revealed:

it is in the puppet booth that order of the limited kind possible in the fair is finally re-established, confusions are unravelled, wives and husbands shamefacedly reunited, and false authority silenced.<sup>11</sup>

But the motion does more than this; it takes the presentation of illusion to its most absurd extreme and shows, through the reactions of Cokes and Busy, that even then there are those who cannot see through the illusion. So the Fair, through the role-playing of its denizens, its vapours, and the puppet-

---

<sup>10</sup>

James E. Robinson, "Bartholomew Fair: Comedy of Vapours", Studies in English Literature, I (1961), 70.

<sup>11</sup>

R.B. Parker, "The Themes and Staging of Bartholomew Fair", University Of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIX (1970), 295.

play, presents a complete and very complex system of false surfaces against which the identity of its visitors can be tested.

Bartholomew Cokes is the character most fully identified with the Fair that bears his name. "He has a head full of bees!" (I.iv.81) says his tutor Wasp; totally lacking any centre, he moves in many directions simultaneously, as the false surfaces attract him. In response to Cokes' request to be allowed to visit the Fair Wasp replies:

Would the Fayre and all the Drums, and Rattles in't  
were i'your belly for mee: they are already i'your  
braine: he that had the meanes to travell your head,  
now, should meet finer sights than any are i'the  
Fayre; and make a finer voyage on't; to see it all  
hung with cockleshells, pebbles, fine wheat-strawes,  
and here and there a chicken's feather, and a cob-web.  
(I.v.91-97)

The illusions of the Fair are inside him as well as around him; his only view of the world is of the false images and trifles it presents. Throughout the play, he never sees beyond the surface of anything. He is, says Barish, "the human counterpart of the gingerbread images sold by Joan Trash," himself a mockery of reality.<sup>12</sup> A natural gull, he is the descendant of all those "meere outsides" from Stephen onward; yet, ironically, he cannot even play a part, so naïve is he, so confused by surfaces -- he cannot disguise himself. "Did you ever see a fellowes face more accuse him for an

---

<sup>12</sup> Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.220.

Asse?"(I.v.50) asks Winwife, using the word "face" in a manner very rare in Jonson -- to suggest complete openness, complete demonstration of the inner vacuum.

So there is something symbolic in his being stripped of his clothing, and his pathetic plea for help from the madman Trouble-all has two levels of meaning:

Friend, doe you know who I am? or where I lye? I  
doe not my selfe, I'll be sworne. Doe but carry me  
home, and I'll please thee, I ha' money enough  
there, I ha' lost my selfe, and my cloake and my  
hat.

(IV.ii.78-82)

He has indeed lost himself; he has never known himself, and does not learn to do so. The closest he comes to the discovery of an identity is in his confrontation with the puppets, when he reduces himself to the level of the toys by conversing with them, presenting them with gifts, and inviting them to Overdo's feast. Theirs is the only world where he can be comfortable, for here at last he has found his equals.

Cokes, then, in his journey through the Fair, is a kind of Everyman-figure when seen in terms of the passage from Discoveries quoted above, taking pleasure in the lie, and gladly cozening himself. His odyssey is parallel to those of the other characters of the play, with the difference that, however ludicrous, he is at least innocent. The others are all guilty of the wilful creation of a false self.

The figure most closely related to Cokes is, oddly enough, his governor Waspe. Supposedly an exemplary figure,

a figure of authority, he is shown to possess almost exactly the same faults as his charge. He too lacks any self-consistency: he is volatile, easily driven along tangents, as willing as Cokes to embrace contradictory possibilities:

I know? I know nothing, I, what tell you mee of knowing? (now I am in hast) Sir, I doe not know, and I will not know, and I scorne to know, and yet, (now I think on't) I will, and do know, as well as another.

(I.iv.19-22)

His words are almost completely devoid of any meaning; they attach to no underlying "self". Even the otherwise imperceptive Mrs. Overdo sees his lack of self-control, his inability to govern his passions (I.v.23). He falls prey to exactly those things for which he reproaches Cokes: he is robbed, and Edgeworth suggests that "you may strip him of his cloathes, if you will"(IV.iii.117-118), as Cokes has already been stripped.

Just as the puppet-play allows Cokes to demonstrate that he is little more than a puppet himself, so the game of vapours is peculiarly well-adapted to revealing Waspe. It gives him reason to be self-contradictory, yet allows him to say exactly the same things as he says when he is not playing a game -- or perhaps to demonstrate that he is always playing a game:

I have no reason, nor will I heare of no reason, nor I will looke for no reason, and he is an Asse, that either knowes any, or lookes for't from me . . . I'll have nothing confest, that concernes mee. I am not i'the right, nor never was i'the right, nor never will

be i'the right, while I am in my right minde.  
(IV.iv.42-44, 72-74)

It is, of course, almost impossible to analyse such gibberish; one can only say that the surface incoherence reflects a real incoherence at the base of the character. "Vapours" allows him more freely to demonstrate the self-contradiction that he is. It is only when totally deflated that he is able to achieve something approximating reason; and his comment applies to all those characters in the play who represent authority: "He that will correct another, must want fault in himselfe"(V.iv.99-100).

Another near-imbecile, John Littlewit scorns "pretenders to wit"(I.i.33), but continually demonstrates that he is only a pretender himself. He and his wife are overwhelmed by the will of the Puritans, and have to resort to an act to achieve their own will -- their pretense that Win is pregnant and has a craving to eat roast pig in the Fair: "Play the Hypocrite, sweet Win"(I.v.i59). Throughout the play the word "Hypocrite" is used almost as if it were interchangeable with "Puritan". The root-meaning of the term is "stage-actor"; and in Bartholomew Fair a basic assumption is that those who profess Puritanism are forced to act in order to get what they want -- that is, that Puritanism and self-consistency are mutually exclusive. Win is easily convinced that she wants to be a prostitute, ~~and~~ that a wife can acceptably be a prostitute if she goes in disguise. The moral

confusion is total.

A more developed picture of Puritan as stage-actor is presented in Dame Purecraft, Win's mother. According to her son-in-law, she is "a most elect Hypocrite, and has maintain'd us all this seven yeere with it"(I.v.163-164). The implications of this are later demonstrated by Purecraft herself. John's words are a tribute to the sublimity of her art, and to its success; her own are a little more revealing. Her art has been used all for gain, but she is quite willing to renounce it for the same motives. She has to unmask, to reveal her self, to win Quarlous who is at this stage only an illusion himself: "I must uncover my selfe unto him, or I shall never enjoy him . . . . These seven yeeres, I have beene a wilfull holy widdow, onely to draw feasts, and gifts from my intangled suitors"(V.ii.48-49,53-55). One critic has called her a "female Volpone";<sup>13</sup> we can understand the implications of this comparison, and see that her unmasking reveals no more reality than does Volpone's. How involved and self-contradictory the Puritan's situation can become is more fully revealed in the figure of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy.

In the figure of the arch-hypocrite Busy, Jonson takes the idea of the Puritan as "stage-actor" to its furthest extreme, examining the nature of the act, and demonstrating its implications. It is in relation to Busy that

---

<sup>13</sup>

Partridge, in his edition of the play, p.xiii.

the concept of "face" as an illusory surface is most commonly used; even before he is introduced to the audience Quarlous says of him: "A notable hypocriticall vermine it is; I know him. One that stands upon his face, more than his faith, at all times"(I.iii.135-137). He is more concerned with appearances than with the core of belief that he supposedly represents; his disguise is one of words, and he can always manipulate the terms of his "faith" to comply with his desires, as in the case of the problem of eating pig in the Fair. In his attempt to demonstrate that this activity can be lawful Busy himself uses the "face" metaphor:

Surely, it may be otherwise, but it is subject, to  
construction, subject, and hath a face of offence,  
with the weake, a great face, a foule face, but  
that face may have a vaile put over it, and be  
shaddowed, as it were.

(I.vi.67-70)

He then proceeds to put a mask upon the mask, demonstrating that only surfaces matter, because they can so easily be modified; and in justifying Win's appetite for pig, he is also indulging his own.

But in attempting to impose his view on others Busy succeeds also in deluding himself. As with all those who make of themselves an illusion, he himself is taken in by appearances. Cokes identifies with the puppets; Busy too fails to comprehend the nature of the illusion that faces him, and is reduced to debating with a puppet in a case where he cannot possibly triumph, for he attempts to uphold an argument that

assumes that the puppets are real people, and in so doing falls victim to his own rhetoric. For in raising the question of the puppet's sex he finds that his disguise of words fails him. Deflated, stripped of his rhetoric, there is nothing left of him; after his admission of defeat he does not speak again. Barish says of this:

With Busy one feels that every syllable is ersatz, maliciously manufactured out of alien matter to produce an impenetrable mask . . . . Busy has worn his mask so long that when he comes to remove it, there can be nothing beneath but a replica of the mask, now the authentic face -- or voice -- itself.<sup>14</sup>

More than this, in fact -- Busy cannot even fall back on his mask-voice, which accounts for his collapse into silence. Just as the puppet, by lifting up its dress -- its stage-disguise -- demonstrates that there is nothing underneath, so Busy, when he loses his own disguise through the puppet's action, shows that he too is a void underneath his "face". In effect the puppet becomes at this point a mirror for Busy, both cause and parody of his unmasking. The equation is pointed up by Quarlous: "I know no fitter match than a Puppet to commit with an Hypocrite!"(V.v.50-51)

Busy brings to the Fair one frame of reference for its judgement, for implicit in his debasement of Biblical terminology is the possibility that a rigorous moral code offers when properly applied. A somewhat more well-meaning,

---

<sup>14</sup>  
Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, p.20<sup>14</sup>.



though also more deluded representative of another such moral code is Adam Overdo. Overdo's moral code is the familiar Stoic one; but as we shall see, he is hardly an ideal representative of the ethic. He fits into a line of magistrates, both real and fictional, who disguised themselves to spy out evil, for the purification of the state: "I am the man . . . though thus disguis'd (as the carefull Magistrate ought) for the good of the Republique, in the Fayre, and the weeding out of enormity"(V.ii.91-94). But from what we know of Jonson's previous use of disguise, we must be aware that Overdo cannot possibly succeed; just as his appearance is false, so his Stoicism and pride in his ability as magistrate are part of a pose, and he finally achieves only his own repeated public humiliation.

His first disguise is as Mad Arthur of Bradley: "They may have seene many a foole in the habite of a Justice; but never till now, a Justice in the habit of a foole"(II.i.7-9). His disguise reveals as much as it hides, for he will demonstrate that he is a fool. His own spies, he says, delude him, so he must seek out enormity for himself; but he is unable to penetrate surfaces, and succeeds only in deluding himself. He takes literally the bantering insults of the Fair-people, the argument between Leatherhead and Trash, or Ursula's charge that Jordan is a cutpurse, then congratulates himself on seeing through such insults: "Here might I ha'beene deceiv'd now: and ha'put a fooles blot upon my selfe, if I had not

play'd an after game o'discretion"(II.iii.40-42). But of course he is still deceived, and immediately afterwards is taken in yet again, by the illusion created by Edgworth: "A proper penman, I see't in his countenance"(II.iv.32). He is deluded by his own misplaced pride in his ability to read appearances. And he is deluded by Nightingale's ballad, which "doth discover enormity"(III.v.112) but which is, in fact, intended to attract victims for the cutpurse Edgworth.

Since he is deluded by others largely because he deludes himself, it is apparent that when the time comes to rip the mask away from the Fair's enormities, he will also be unmasking himself. Such self-delusion is the more culpable because it affects his performance as judge. While in the stocks he hears Eristle and Haggis discuss him: " I, and hee will be angry too, when him list, that's more: and when hee is angry, be it right or wrong; hee has the Law on's side, ever"(IV.1.79-81). In other words, he is noted for administering justice largely through whim; he allows his lack of self-control to interfere so that he cannot distinguish right from wrong. But he even misunderstands what he hears, for instead of deciding that in future he will control himself in order to recognize right, that he will, in fact, administer justice, he decides that he will temper his judgements with compassion. Under normal circumstances, there would be nothing wrong with this; but from Overdo's point of view compassion is wrong, so that he is planning to set right one fault with

what is, to him, another fault: "I will be more tender hereafter. I see compassion may become a Justice, though it be a weaknesse, I confesse; and neerer a vice, then a vertue"(IV.i.82-84). Some measure of his confusion can be gathered from this.

Even his Stoicism is no more than a pose; his fortitude under adversity, when he is in the stocks, is somewhat undermined by the fact that it is fortitude practiced not for its own sake, but for the sake of reputation:

The world will have a pretty tast by this, how I can beare adversity: and it will beget a kind of reverence, toward me, hereafter, even from mine enemies, when they shall see I carry my calamity nobly, and that it doth neither breake mee, nor bend mee.

(IV.i.29-33)

He is not a hypocrite like Busy, however; his pose really only deludes himself.

Because of this self-delusion, Overdo's disguise as a madman results in a number of ironies. He considers the madman Trouble-all to be "out of his wits! where there is no roome left for dissembling"(IV.i.65), without, apparently, considering the application of his words to his own situation, a dissembler pretending to be a madman, one who, by his own definition, cannot dissemble. Later, in a different disguise, he sets out to reveal the enormities he has discovered. One thing that shocks him is the discovery that the apparent madman Trouble-all is in fact Quarlous in disguise: "Then this is the true mad-man, and you are the enormity!"(V.vi.61) The ironies

of this, from one who has himself been for most of the play a false madman are obvious; he is condemning himself as an "enormity". It is appropriate that the discovery of Overdo to himself should begin with the revelation of his wife masked like a prostitute. Quarlous' admonition to him, "remember you are but Adam, Flesh, and blood! you have your frailty"(V.vi.96-97), suggesting as it does that a man should know and embrace what he is, is a valid statement to apply to all the role-players of Bartholomew Fair.

This failure of identity in the authority-figures is related to the themes of topsyturvydom common in festive comedy. Busy, Overdo and Waspe all in various ways represent the mote-and-beam type of censor and are all defeated because of the holiday licence given to the tricksters of the Fair. The conscious moral disapproval focused through these three is discredited because of their failure, but this does not, of course, mean that we are to give our approval to the unthinking natural enjoyment offered by the Fair. Judgement is not, however, a simple matter. Looking for a more reasonable figure of authority within the play, critics have turned to the group of Quarlous, Winwife, and Grace Wellborn, a group which quite apparently stands apart from the other characters of the play. Quarlous especially is commonly considered to present the final judgements of the play; but this view is often accompanied by a feeling of uneasiness at a certain ambiguity in the three. According to E.A.Horsman Quarlous is

"representative of the reasonable man."<sup>15</sup> Hussey sees Quarlous and Winwife as choric commentators, stage mechanisms who, though not attractive, are to be believed.<sup>16</sup> Waith sees the group as having "a normative function", and thinks that in Grace "we come closer to the point of view of the author than in any other character."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Jackson Cope thinks that Quarlous inherits hell, and that the concord of Winwife and Grace alone transcends the chaos of the Fair.<sup>18</sup> Parker suggests that Quarlous "has the ambiguous nature of the traditional satirist figure who himself suffers from the things he criticizes," and Kaplan agrees upon this ambiguity, feeling that, nevertheless, Quarlous retains a special position of authority.<sup>19</sup>

My own by now predictable suggestion is that although Quarlous appears to be creating order at the end of the play, his comments reflect as much upon himself as upon those he unmasks. He is another of those figures in Jonson made

---

<sup>15</sup> Bartholomew Fair, ed. E.A. Horsman (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p.xix.

<sup>16</sup> Bartholomew Fair, ed. Hussey, pp.xiv-xv.

<sup>17</sup> Bartholomew Fair, ed. Waith, p.18.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson I. Cope, "Bartholomew Fair as Blasphemy", Renaissance Drama, VIII (1955) 149.

<sup>19</sup> Parker, "The Themes and Staging of Bartholomew Fair", p.304; Kaplan, "Dramatic and Moral Energy in Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair", pp.147-148.

attractive by a characteristic vigour and cynical wit, but not intended to go unjudged. In his first appearance he attacks Winwife for being changeable; "I feare this family will turne you reformed too, pray you come about againe"(I.iii.56-59) is a warning to Winwife to remain himself, not to join with the hypocrites. He follows this with an attack on Winwife's practice of wooing old women; his horrendous satirical description of the results of this has its effect, and it is the more ironic, therefore that merely for personal gain, and totally against his original position, he embraces at the end of the play all that he here attacks. His "reform" is far more culpable than the one for which he attacks Winwife, since it involves self-contradiction.

It is Quarlous who describes for the audience Busy's self-seeking role-playing, so that his own disguising becomes the more ambiguous. He feels superior to the Fair-people, but is not above using them for his own ends while admitting his complicity: "Facinus cuos inquinat, aequat"(IV.vi.30). He is even prepared to malign his friend Winwife if anything can be gained by so doing: "Hee'll go neare to forme to her what a debauch'd Rascall I am and fright her out of all good conceipt of me: I should doe so by him, I am sure, if I had the opportunity"(IV.vi.36-38). He too is guilty of the duplicity, the posing and the play-acting that he attacks.

When Quarlous first appears in disguise as a madman, Overdo appears in his new disguise, having abandoned his

madman-role; thus the two are implicitly related. But Quarlous is aware of the superficiality suggested by his disguising: "I have made my selfe as like him, as his gowne and cap will give me leave"(V.ii.14-15). He echoes this idea when he finally reveals his identity: "I am mad, but from the gowne outward"(V.vi.63). His disguise acts as a catalyst to reveal the posturing of others -- as we have seen, it causes Dame Purecraft to "uncover" her self. But in spite of this effect, his disguise reflects the emptiness and lack of identity common to all time-serving opportunists. His words to Overdo at the end reflect back upon himself for he too, beneath his poses, is only Adam flesh and blood, tainted by the corruptions and artificiality of the Fair, and a hollow justicer -- although he at least recognizes this. In the conjunction of Quarlous and Overdo we are reminded of the alliance of Brainworm and that other whimsical lawgiver Justice Clement, though the balance of power is reversed, and Quarlous is not so disinterested as is Brainworm.

As for Winwife and Grace, they share in the corruption of common humanity by their very presence in the Fair. Both are, in different ways, "self-assured" and thus aloof from the Fair; yet they are in it. "Our very being here makes us fit to be demanded, as well as others"(II.v.17-18), Quarlous reminds Winwife. The superior self cannot remain secure without recognizing what it is, without acknowledging its share of common humanity. Grace leaves the choice of a hus-

band to fortune or, as it turns out, to the whims of a madman. In this complete abandoning of reason she hardly demonstrates that she is close to the Jonsonian point of view.

If any character implies the possibility of judgement from within the play itself, it is Trouble-all, though only in an oblique way. He is described by Brian Gibbons as a "fundamental didactic emblem", functioning as an implied comment upon Overdo, Busy, and Waspe, the representatives of discipline and authority.<sup>20</sup> Heffner has a similar view: "Troubleall's main function is, as his name suggests, to trouble everybody as he darts suddenly on and off the stage with his embarrassing question, 'Have you a warrant for what you do?'"<sup>21</sup> The idea of the madman seems to have a special place in the Fair; his visible insanity comments upon the general but unacknowledged madness, and it is no accident that the Justice first dresses as a madman. In fact it is specifically stated by Overdo that Trouble-all is "out of his wits! where there is no roome left for dissembling"(IV.i.65), and Dame Purecraft says of him: "the world is mad in error, but hee is mad in truth"(IV.vi.169-170). This is why the madman-disguise is so popular; it provides the dissembler with the cover of one who cannot dissemble. It is ironic that the one

---

20

Brian Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston, and Middleton (London, 1968), p.186.

21

Heffner, "Unifying Symbols in the Comedy of Ben Jonson", p.143.



character who is, in Stoic fashion, always what he seems to be, is so not by rational choice. But in his obsession with having warrant for action, he constantly questions reason and motivation in others, keeping us aware of their inadequacy. It is not that Trouble-all really knows more than others, but almost by accident what he says contains truth. Almost his final words, when he enters the scene of judgement, are: "By your leave, stand by my Masters, be uncover'd"(V.vi.49), as if he knew of the masking and unmasking generally taking place. His function is to show, totally unconsciously, the widespread play-acting.

That Bartholomew Fair has virtually no internal norm of judgement does not mean, as I have tried to demonstrate, that its characters cannot be judged in the light of what we know to be Jonson's abiding concerns. The harsh light of his morality is somewhat tempered; but we must not be misled into thinking that he is no longer concerned with moral judgement. In fact, in the Induction we find the author genially discussing the question of judgement, and both demanding and mocking constancy. In the Articles drawn up between Author and Spectators, he considers the question at some length:

It is also agreed, that every man heere, exercise his owne Judgement, and not censure by Contagion, or upon trust, from another voice, or face, that sits by him, be he never so first, in the Commission of Wit: As also, that hee bee fixt and settled in his censure, that what hee approves to day, hee will doe the same to morrow, and if to morrow, the next day, and so the next weeke (if neede be:) and not

to be brought about by any that sits on the Bench with him, though they indite, and arraign Playes daily. Hee that will sweare, Jerónimo, or Andronicus are the best playes, yet, shall passe unexcepted at, heere, as a man whose Judgement shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these five and twentie, or thirtie yeeres. Though it be an Ignorance, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to truth, a confirm'd error does well; such a one, the Author knowes where to finde him.

(97-112)

Jonson is, of course, facing in two opposed directions here. He begins in familiar vein, concerned that a man's judgement should be his own, not affected by his neighbour's. We are back with such gulls as Stephen and Matthew, or Jack Daw, people who disguise themselves in received opinion, having none of their own. He goes on to ask that, once such a reasoned judgement has been made, it be maintained, that the critic remain constant to it. This, of course, is Jonson's usual view, but he goes on to mock it by drawing it to its logical conclusion, that men may form foolish opinions and stick to them for thirty years, unwilling to revise them in the light of fresh evidence; but constancy, even in error, is a virtue. Jonson is, of course, treating the whole question ironically here; he is quite able to mock his own beliefs.

The Induction is in keeping with the sardonic tone of the play. The Fair, like the play, invites criticism and judgement. But both Fair and play mock judgement, because those who judge are implicated in the faults of what they are judging. To make judgements, we must be on very firm ground; judgement made from confirmed error must be mocked. The

audience, whether made up of Busys, or of men who have been praising the same plays for thirty years, has to be made to examine its own criteria. The fact that Jonson mocks all authority in Bartholomew Fair should not make us think that he no longer believes in authority. Judgement demands the rigorous use of reason, and undermines its own validity when based on short-sighted prejudice or self-delusion. For a true understanding of the world, self-knowledge is still the primary requisite.

## VI

### THE DEVIL IS AN ASS

The Devil Is an Ass (1616) occupies a peculiar position amongst Jonson's plays. Most critics see it as the beginning of a decline in the powers of the dramatist; even though it appeared only two years after Bartholomew Fair, and ten years before his next play, The Staple of News, it is generally classed along with his remaining plays as a "dotage". Some critics, to be sure, assign it more value than this; L.C. Knights makes it central to his discussion of Jonson, and Brian Gibbons calls it Jonson's "last great play".<sup>1</sup> But outside studies of the entire body of Jonson's work, and Kittredge's attempt, in 1911, to find in contemporary events sources for elements of the play, it has aroused little real interest.<sup>2</sup>

It is, I think, quite apparent that Jonson is moving in a new direction here, in taking a popular form, the morality

---

<sup>1</sup> L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (Harmondsworth, 1962); Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy, p.192.

<sup>2</sup> G.L. Kittredge, "King James I and The Devil Is an Ass", Modern Philology, IX (1911), 195-204.

play, and modifying it to apply to contemporary topics. The didactic nature of the form he is modifying urges the dramatist toward more overt didacticism than he has been accustomed to in the plays of his great period, and he is moved to introduce characters who make explicit moral judgements without themselves being exposed as was Quarlous. Nevertheless, he makes use of disguise and role-playing in this play, as he has done before, to demonstrate the emptiness, the failure of identity, of those he satirizes.

The structure is much changed. The Devil Is an Ass has its brilliant creator of illusions, Meercraft, who is a not unworthy successor to Volpone and Subtle; but he is no longer at the centre of the stage, for much of the play's emphasis falls upon the failures of the naïve devil, Pug. In effect, the disguised Vice is paralleled by a disguised devil, who provides an apt motif for the play, for in Jonson disguise or playing a part other than one's own can never be good. As we know, play-acting inevitably suggests a failure to accept the self, a foolish ambition, or a criminal urge to be someone else.

The opening scene in hell demonstrates this idea at various levels. Satan's words to the ambitious Pug could well apply to all those poseurs in Jonson who, in attempting to be what they are not, succeed only in being nothing:

Foolish feind,  
Stay i'your place, know your owne strengths, and put not  
Beyond the spheare of your activity.

(I.i.23-25)

It is mildly ironic that this sentiment, central as it is to Jonson's philosophy, should be expressed by the Devil himself. Pug's response is a demonstration of his own lack of self-knowledge, for after a fairly accurate description by Satan of what he is, he says "You doe not know, deare Chiefe, what there is in mee"(I.i.35). As the play will demonstrate, neither does Pug. This devil, supposedly the final creator of all illusions, will, as we shall see, fall victim to all the illusions that earth can present to him, without himself ever being able to convince anyone of anything (not even of the truth; Fitzdottrel, who passionately wishes to see a devil, will not believe that Pug is one).

Satan goes on to tell Pug why he will fail. The Vice Iniquity, whom Pug wishes to take along with him, is outmoded in a world where conventional moral standards are disregarded; more subtle Vices are called for. Satan's description of moral anarchy in the world of 1616 is conceived in terms of role-playing:

They have their Vices, there, most like to Vertues;  
 You cannot know 'hem, apart, by any difference:  
 They weare the same clothes, eate o'the same meate,  
 Sleepe i'the selfe-same beds, ride i'those coaches,  
 Or very like, four horses in a coach,  
 As the best men and women.

(I.i.121-126)

Vice has become so adept at play-acting that it cannot be distinguished from its role. All surfaces are suspect, and the appearance of the best has become the reality of the worst:

Tissue gownes,  
 Garters and roses, fourescore pound a paire,  
 Embroydred stockings, cut-worke smocks, and shirts,  
 More certaine marks of lechery, now, and pride,  
 Than ere they were of true nobility!  
 (I.i.126-130)

As always in Jonson, it is the least noble who are most concerned to show a noble surface.

As if to demonstrate this, we are immediately presented with the hollow man Fitzdottrel, one of whose characteristics is an obsession with fine clothing, which he needs when he goes to plays. This is so important to him that he allows Wittipol to woo his wife in order to get an ornate cloak for his next visit to the theatre. The implications of this are clear enough: he is a play actor going to see play-actors; one thing is a comment on the other. This relates to the significance that the practice always has for Jonson of paying extra to sit on the stage. Spectators want to identify with the actors, much as Cokes does with the puppets. Wittipol actually refers to the cloak as Fitzdottrel's "Stage-garment", as if he were a player.

Fitzdottrel is so unsure of himself, so devoid of reality, that he only feels that he exists from the outside, that is, when he is seen. I seem, therefore I am. He describes this feeling at some length:

Heere is a cloake cost fifty pound, wife,  
 Which I can sell for thirty, when I ha' seene  
 All London in't, and London has seene mee.  
 To day, I goe to the Black-fryers Play-house,  
 Sit i'the view, salute all my acquaintance,  
 Rise up between the Acts, let fall my cloake,

Publish a handsome man, and a rich suite  
 (As that's a speciall end, why we goe thither,  
 All that pretend, to stand for't o'the Stage)  
 The Ladies aske who's that?

(I.vi.28-37)

Who's that indeed? We are familiar with this type of playgoer from many sources in Jonson, but he has never been so central to the play, nor has his need to prove a false existence been so fully shown. It is an appropriate comment upon him that he should be accompanied by a disguised devil; further, it is typical of those who are themselves illusions to be unable to see through the illusions of others. So Fitzdottrel is an ideal gull.

He is inevitably a victim of Meercraft. It is this very false appearance that Meercraft uses as a pretext for involving Fitzdottrel in his schemes:

Sir,  
 You are a Gentleman of a good presence,  
 A handsome man

(II.1.22-24)

As a manufacturer of illusions himself, Meercraft is quite happy to support the illusions of others, to turn Fitzdottrel into the nobleman he thinks himself to be -- although this too, of course, will be only an illusion. the gull will "put on his Lords face"(II.vii.13), and we know the derogatory suggestions of "face". Meercraft's plot against Fitzdottrel involves yet another illusion, the Spanish widow, who is, of course, Wittipol in disguise. The Spanish widow is also an expert on another form of disguising, for she knows all



there is to know about cosmetics (II.viii.34-36) and is "a Mistresse of behaviour"(II.viii.37).

After the revelation that the Spanish widow is Wittipol, Fitzdottrel resolves to take himself out of the hands of all others, including Meercraft:

I will not think; nor act;  
Nor yet recover; do not talke to me!  
I'll runne out o'my witts, rather then heare;  
I will be what I am, Fabian Fitz-Dottrel,  
Though all the world say nay to't.  
(IV.vii.90-94)

An admirable moral, Stoic resolution, except that being what he is entails the rejection of both thought and action -- in fact, entails making himself nothing. It is by no means a coming to self-awareness, nor is it very long-lasting, for the next time we see him he is being taught by Meercraft to play at being possessed by the devil. There is an emblematic truth in this, for all play-acting in Jonson amounts to possession by a devil. The surface is pierced by Wittipol: "How now, what play ha've we here?"(V.viii.39) filling out the implications of Fitzdottrel's relation to the stage that have been made throughout the play. It is a performance that deceives blind justice, even though Sir Paul unwittingly points out that it is a performance:

GUI. How the Divel can act!  
POU. He is the Master of Players!  
(V.viii.77-78)

The implications should be clear to the audience, even if they are not to the Justice. Even Fitzdottrel's final con-

fession of his "counterfeiting" is brought about not by a change of heart, but by the realization that he has lost the chance of real possession offered to him by Pug, through his inability to see the truth; the very word he uses takes us back to that situation: "Out you Rogue! You most infernall counterfeit wretch!"(V.v.28-29) A man who refuses to know himself cannot know another.

The projector Meercraft is, as we have said, in the line of Volpone and Subtle. Like them he is a creator of illusions, offering to make Fitzdottrel a Duke and Plutarchus a gentleman. As in The Alchemist, the idea of "making" someone into something else is prevalent throughout the play. In handing over his wife to the disguised Wittipol, Fitzdottrel says:

Do with her what you will!  
Melt, cast, and forme her as you shall thinke good!  
Set any stamp on!

(IV.iv.253-255)

In spite of his brilliance, however, Meercraft is not so firmly in control as his earlier counterparts, and is constantly on the brink of disaster. In keeping with the more blatantly didactic nature of the play, he is more completely exposed than Subtle and Face, or the Fair-people. He is totally silenced by Fitzdottrel's final revelation of his duplicity in front of a Justice who will now "make honorable amends to truth"(V.viii.147).

Because this play-maker, or illusion-creator, has

less control than his earlier counterparts he is not, as they were, at the centre of the play. Furthermore, whereas Volpone had his Mosca, and Subtle his Face to share in the play-making, Meercraft has Everill, who is less a partner than a constant burden and threat. Everill affects to be a gentleman, and is almost as concerned about his appearance as is Fitzdottrel with his. He wastes a disproportionate share of what Meercraft gains; he is a boor, with no subtlety, and adds very little to Meercraft's schemes.

Volpone and Subtle both fell victim to their own illusions. Meercraft does not. He moves in the more pragmatic world of business enterprise. Perhaps the materialism of his schemes is less compelling than the visionary promise of Volpone and Subtle; he does not believe in them in the way that the earlier tricksters believed in theirs. He is much more detached. Consequently, his schemes are easily turned against him by Wittipol, and we are less concerned with the trickster than with the tricked.

Amongst Meercraft's dupes are the ladies of fashion, Lady Tailbush and Lady Eitherside; and through them Jonson launches a now-familiar attack on another aspect of play-acting, the use of cosmetics. We know from Sejanus and Epicoene how the fucus is a form of disguise; but here we have one of the fullest considerations of the idea. That Lady Tailbush should want the monopoly to sell cosmetics is in itself a warning to us. She wishes to be the leader of

fashion: "I'll every day/Bring up some new device"(IV.ii.16). The desire for constant novelty for its own sake is a frequent characteristic of empty role-players; Satan pointed this out in the play's first scene: "Unlesse it be a Vice of quality,/ Or fashion, now, they take none from us"(I.i.111-112). The mask of social politeness worn by these ladies is only a means of making acceptable their hypocrisy:

Pr'y thee, let's observe her,  
What faults she has, that wee may laugh at 'hem,  
When she is gone.

(IV.ii.68-70)

They expect to see the Spanish widow speak in praise of cosmetics, but instead are mocked by the disguised Wittipol. There is obvious irony in the disguised gallant's attack on a much more prevalent form of disguise: "They say, that painting quite destroyes the face"(IV.iii.28). Since "face" generally refers in Jonson to a false appearance, we have a wry acknowledgement of disguise upon disguise. Wittipol stresses the ugliness of painting, rather than the imagined fair face. A lady of sixty who appears to be sixteen is still a lady of sixty.

These ladies are, of course, closely related to the Ladies Collegiates of Epicoene, and some measure of the more overtly didactic nature of the present play can be seen from the way they are treated. In the earlier play Dauphine implicated himself in the emptiness of the Ladies by insisting on embracing them even after that emptiness had been fully

demonstrated. Manly shows a similar interest in the present ladies at first, but when their emptiness is demonstrated to him, he leaves in disgust. We shall see later the effect this has on our attitude toward Manly, and on the overall direction of the play. What these ladies have to offer is a model for duplicity. As Fitzdottrel tells his wife:

yo'are come into the Schole, wife,  
Where you may learne, I do perceive it, any thing!  
How to be fine, or faire, or great, or proud,  
Or what you will, indeed, wife;  
(IV.iv.110-113)

To be any thing, in fact, except your self. This is closely related to the idea, outlined earlier, that people can be made into something else -- here, they can make themselves into something else.

Meercraft is pushed from the centre of the stage by the minor devil Pug. Pug is a presenter-figure, but one who has absolutely no control over what he is presenting. He is comic because he is totally confused and bewildered by everything on earth. He functions as a permanent comment upon the world he views, having on one level, like Epicoene, an emblematic function. According to Larry S.Champion:

Pug's appearance, if considered closely, becomes a remarkable symbol of the deceptiveness of vice in that, basically a devil, Pug is enclosed in a handsomely shaped and apparently virtuous body, in reality that of a cutpurse.<sup>3</sup>

But, as Vice disguised as Virtue, his existence is ironic, since he is a disguised devil outmatched by the disguised devils of seventeenth-century society. "Satan himselfe, has tane a shape to 'abuse me"(III.vi.32), he says after being deprived of the ring by the disguised Traines, and his remark is not totally inappropriate in a world where all take false shapes to abuse others. In fact, by the end of the play he is learning to disguise or dissemble like the rest of the world; when Ambler taxes him about the theft of the clothes he becomes an actor himself. But even in this he finally fails; as Satan points out, all he has met have proved to be more devilish than he. Thus we have the ironic inversion of the devil being carried out on the shoulders of the Vice:

The Divell was wont to carry away the evill;  
But, now, the Evill out-carries the Divell.  
(V.vi.76-77)

The Devil is an Ass has its short-sighted justice who, like so many others in Jonson, is unable to see through the tricks of the villains. According to Kittredge:

We should note, by the way, that Sir Paul Eitherside is not treated contumeliously by Jonson. When Fitzdottrel confesses, and Manly says to the justice, "Are you not asham'd now of your solemn, serious vanity?" Sir Paul answers, like a dignified and conscientious gentleman, "I will make honorable amends to truth."<sup>4</sup>

I think that Kittredge is rather kinder to Sir Paul than is Jonson. His very name suggests his ambiguity, with its im-

---

<sup>4</sup>  
Kittredge, "King James I and The Devil is an Ass",  
p.202.

plications of an arbitrary taking of sides, in spite of his claim that he is discharging his conscience. He is pompously serious, and totally taken in by Fitzdottrel's ludicrous performance, against all common sense. He believes the charges of the tricksters, and refuses to give a hearing to Wittipol and Manly, at the same time believing that he is acting "To the Meridian of Justice". He has in him elements of Clement and Overdo, but also of the Avocatori of Volpone. Like them he is beguiled by a stage-act and, like them, finally gives justice almost by accident, when he is forced to see the truth.

In fact, the judgements of the play, judgements not only of superior wit, but also of morality, are made by the gallants, Wittipol and Manly. It is the roles of these two that define the difference between The Devil Is an Ass and the earlier masterpieces. Quarlous, as we have seen, is a somewhat ambiguous figure; so are the gallants of Epicoene. But Wittipol, ambiguous at the start, undergoes a change during the play, and Manly has an overtly didactic role from the beginning. Of Manly, Gibbons writes that his role is "wholly and plainly didactic, his comments are to be relied on and it is he who delivers the judgement and the moral homily which is to be learned from the exemplum provided by the play."<sup>5</sup> His moral comment is applied to all, including

---

<sup>5</sup>  
Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy, pp.198-199.

his friend Wittipol. This friendship exists in contrast to the somewhat self-seeking friendship of Quarlous and Winwife; as Manly says, "ill mens friendship, / Is as unfaithfull, as themselves"(IV.ii.34-35). Faithfulness, integrity of the self -- these are the qualities that Manly represents. This explains his disgust when he discovers the superficiality of the ladies, and his attitude, totally different from that of Dauphine Eugenie in a similar situation.

Wittipol is a rather more complicated figure. He starts out with the ambiguity of a Quarlous, a witty but immoral figure, and a dissembler. In spite of his claims to the contrary, his interest in Mrs.Fitzdottrel is adulterous, and the piety of his line to Fitzdottrel, "Who covets unfit things, denies himselfe"(I.iv.91) is palpably false. In fact, the line is more suitable for Manly. Wittipol's courtly approach to the lady, complete with denial that he is interested in the externals of appearance, is an exercise in polite irony. Mrs.Fitzdottrel's attitude is not totally clear, but she is obviously open to persuasion. Consequently, when Wittipol takes on disguise, we know what to expect. He tells Manly that his disguise has a revelatory function, "To shew you what they are, you so pursue"(IV.iv.4), when he is, in fact, using it as a means of reaching Mrs.Fitzdottrel. But in his disguise he changes his mind, under the pleas of the lady and the persuasions of Manly. In effect, the use of disguise is inverted here; instead of demonstrating an inner emptiness,



a loss of identity, it becomes the sign of a change back to integrity, to being oneself. As Thayer puts it: "The process by which Wittipol's adulterous love gives way to virtuous friendship is Platonic, although still symbolized by a basic comic device, the disguise."<sup>6</sup> But it is not very convincing. Jonson starts out by using the Spanish widow disguise in the manner to which we are by now accustomed, as a means of criticizing Wittipol, then abandons this function, for the sake of more apparent didacticism. In fact, we get the feeling that it is not so much Wittipol as Jonson who changes his mind. It is certainly a move in the wrong direction, away from irony and subtlety of presentation of the moral point. As Douglas Duncan puts it, in a different context:

When Wittipol in the fourth act . . . is converted from a dangerously ambiguous figure into a simple champion of virtue, a play whose devil-plot has promised to be a brilliant application of Lucianic irony descends into explicit moralizing and the sequence of Jonson's comic masterpieces comes to an end.<sup>7</sup>

It is a pity that Jonson's urge to experiment should have made him change from a manner which had previously brought him such great success.

But his concerns remain the same. The world of his stage is filled with men whose lives are merely acted parts,

---

<sup>6</sup>

Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays, p.166.

<sup>7</sup>

Douglas Duncan, "Ben Jonson's Lucianic Vision", Ariel, I (1970), 53.

with men who, in their performances for their social audience, have lost all grip on reality and identity. Some act in order to dupe their neighbours, others merely for the satisfaction of a false reputation; but the excesses of all these are rooted in a refusal to learn the truth about the self. The world is only their theatre, and they are no more than their audience thinks them to be:

Come but to one act, and I did not care --  
 But to be seene to rise, and goe away,  
 To vex the Players, and to punish their Poet --  
 Keepe him in awe!

(III.v.42-45)

Action comes from the outside, not from the inside. It is not dictated by a self, but by the effect to be achieved. Only a social mask remains, an appearance that has no bearing on an identity. In the plays prior to The Devil Is an Ass, the metaphor of the play-actor, the disguised man, extended throughout the play, involving even those who from a dramatic or intellectual point of view triumphed, implying an ethical judgement, if not one of wit, upon them too. But in this play the more overt didacticism leaves open the possibility of the man who can remain himself (Manly) or the man who can recover himself (Wittipol). Unfortunately, neither is very convincing, and they remain moral ciphers rather than real characters, even in the Jonsonian sense. Thus The Devil Is an Ass is inferior to the earlier plays, where inauthenticity demonstrated itself ironically and obliquely. However, if we set aside this more blatant moralizing, there remains much

in the play that is equal to the best of Jonson. Much is demonstrated by implication in the play-acting of the majority of the characters; we are still in a world of hypocrisy, of concealment that leads to loss of self.

In fact, the device of allowing disguised characters or role-players to demonstrate their own lack of identity through the very activity of play-acting carries its own moral weight, and does not require moral spokesmen to point it out. In "An Epistle to Master Arth: Squib" (Under-wood XLV) Jonson speaks of the difficulty involved in trying to discover what other men really are, when so many wear disguises; but he goes on to say that these disguises will, of themselves, eventually become apparent:

there are many slips, and Counterfeits.  
Deceit is fruitfull. Men have Masques and nets,  
But these with wearing will themselves unfold:  
They cannot last. No lie grew ever old.  
(11.17-20)

We know what the performances of Fitzdottrel, or Lady Tailbush, or Meercraft mean. Manly may represent truth in his insistence on faithfulness, in his revulsion at the superficiality of the ladies of fashion, and in his warnings to Wittipol not to be a hypocrite. But he is not necessary for the pattern of the play. Pug, the deceiver constantly deceived, opens up far more fruitful possibilities. Jonson is always a moralist, and it is wrong, I am sure, to say as so many critics do, that he begins to mellow with Bartholomew Fair. In his four great plays he is able to create a complete and

satisfying moral pattern without resorting to the use of characters whose sole function it is to be good and to say moral things. Here the artist begins to lose control, to give way to the moralist, and that control is never again to be regained.

## VII

### LAST PLAYS

Not until 1626, ten years after The Devil Is an Ass, did Jonson's next play, The Staple of News, appear. Here, the morality-structure is even more evident than in the earlier play; Penniboy Junior is a Prodigality-figure who is tested and finally cured of his vice. The play also presents overt allegory in the scenes concerning Pecunia and her train, and scenes which many critics consider "realistic" concerning the news-staple itself.

It must be apparent from this that the major problem for critics is the unity of the play. Traditional criticism concerns itself with the lack of structural unity; more recent criticism seeks unity rather in theme.<sup>1</sup> But even here there are difficulties. Because of the obvious implications of the Pecunia sequences, and the education of both Penniboy Junior and Penniboy Richer in the right use of wealth, there is a temptation to see abuse of money as the unifying factor. But where does the news-staple fit into this? J.B. Bamborough

---

<sup>1</sup> Devra Rowland Kifer, "The Staple of News: Jonson's Festive Comedy", Studies in English Literature, XI (1972), 329-344.

suggests one answer:

Thematically . . . the links are strong. Greed for novelties, marvels and "inside information" is easily related to greed for money, and the prodigal's glorying in the outward trappings of wealth and the public's credulous reception of the wonders offered to them, are both species of Opinion.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Bamborough is forcing the correspondence a little, as regards the money-theme. Richard Levin directs the emphasis away from the money-theme, pointing out that the Staple has little to do with money. He finds in the triadic relationship of the Staple, the society of Jeerers, and the Canters' College a unity both structural and thematic; the use of overlapping characters and their placing in the development of the play suggest unity of structure, while a thematic unity is provided by the satire directed, in all three establishments, against abuse of language. Further, Levin contends that the three structures are allegorical in nature, translating the phenomena of real life into fantastic "imagin'd structures" -- this in sharp contrast to the usual view of the "real" nature of these sequences.<sup>3</sup> The most recent study of the play sees it as a festive comedy, "a holiday celebration appropriate to the pre-Lenten season."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>

Bamborough, Ben Jonson, p.127.

<sup>3</sup>

Richard Levin, "The Staple of News, the Society of Jeerers, and Canters' College", Philological Quarterly, XLIV (1965), 445-453.

<sup>4</sup>

Kifer, "The Staple of News: Jonson's Festive Comedy", p.330.

We should here take note of the effect that the new stress upon morality-elements has upon the play's structure, as compared with earlier plays. Jonson's major comedies are built around a centre, whose function it is to create illusions to beguile the world. Whether this centre is an individual like Volpone, or a complex symbol like Bartholomew Fair, it is of supreme importance to the shape and meaning of the play. But we saw, in examining The Devil Is an Ass, how the source of illusion, Meercraft, was no longer at the centre; in this latest play the news-staple is the source of illusion, but it holds a very marginal position in the shape of the play, driven to the side by the morality-elements, and only uneasily related to them.

From the point of view of the present study, Levin provides, in his comments on the play's satire on the abuse of language, a good starting point. It has been my contention throughout this thesis that Jonsonian characters often use language as a disguise; it is the case with so many of Jonson's creations that there is nothing whatever beneath the verbal surface -- they create themselves through words. Having no identity, they hide beneath the facade, they become what they say. Levin identifies the specific abuse of language associated with each of the establishments:

The Staple is in business to collect and sell gossip; the jeerers make a game of trading insults, and savoring them; and the College will treat as an academic discipline the investigation and dissemination

of the various obscurantist jargons comprehended under "canting".<sup>5</sup>

What these abuses have in common is that they deprive language of its meaning; each provides a mask, a surface with nothing underneath. The Staple transmits rumour or illusion, and its patrons buy news without concern for its truth: "Though it be ne're so false, it runnes Newes still"(I.v.50). Its imposture, like that of Volpone, or of Subtle, depends on the beguiling power of words, though the words have no substance. News is the new fashion, created for those empty people whose existence is defined by what is fashionable. Thus, during the Third Intermean, Gossip Tattle says of rumour:

But whether it were true, or no, we Gossips are bound to beleeve it, an't be once out, and a foot: how should wee entertaine the time else, or finde our selves in fashionable discourse, for all companies, if we do not credit all, and make more of it, in the reporting?

(11.37-41)

This kind of fashion is a game, depending upon a willingness in those who are involved to be deceived and to be self-deceived, and to propagate the deception. The language with which the end of the Staple is described is fully appropriate; it dissolves, it is blown up; as Tom says:

Our Emissaries, Register, Examiner,  
Flew into vapor: our grave Governour  
Into a subt'ler ayre;

(V.1.45-47)

---

<sup>5</sup> Levin, "The Staple of News, the Society of Jeerers, and Canters' College", p.447.



These images of complete disappearance suggest the lack of substance, the lack of reality, of the Staple.

The jeerers are closely involved with the Staple, for those guilty of one abuse of language will be guilty of another. Jeering is an activity closely related to the Vapours of Bartholomew Fair, and as defined by Penniboy Canter it is a form of role-playing:

as confident as sounding brasse,  
Their tinckling Cantaine, Cymbal, and the rest,  
Dare put on any visor, to deride  
The wretched:

(V.vi.8-10)

The Biblical reference suggests empty noise, sound without meaning, which is linked by the moralist to the idea of disguise, put on to exploit others, thus expanding an image condemning the play-actor, but also defining a specific linguistic abuse.

Canting is close to jeering in that it uses words as a visor. Words make up a private language the point of which is that it cannot be understood by others but is ornate enough to impress them, thus creating a false image of the speaker. When Pyed-Mantle describes Pecunia's coat of arms, Penniboy Canter asks his son "Is not this canting? doe you understand him?", to which his son replies "Not I, but it sounds well"(IV.iv.27,28). Penniboy Canter's own language is described as "no language", something that "no honest Christian/Can understand"(IV.i.51,52-53). Canting "affects the sense, it has not"(IV.iv.75). The canter is a sham, bringing

disgrace to the profession he pretends to serve; but canting is a universal activity -- as Penniboy Canter says, "All the whole world are Canters"(IV.i.56). The satire is against those who pretend to be what they are not because they do not know what they are.

This moralistic attitude toward the abuse of language is related to Jonson's view of "the impossibility of any man's being the good poet without first being a good man."<sup>6</sup> Proper use of language is a moral question, unless we underestimate the power of language to create illusion; and the right use of language involves honesty and self-knowledge. Otherwise it becomes only a mask.

Another way in which those who are lacking in identity disguise themselves, which has been a constant preoccupation with Jonson, is by creating a mask through dress. E.B.Partridge has demonstrated the increasing interest in clothing-symbolism in the late plays, and it is certainly very important in the present play.<sup>7</sup> Penniboy Junior illustrates the absurdity of the belief that "the tailor makes the man", a belief which he, at least for the major part of the play, firmly embraces. As the play opens, he is throwing off the gown of his student days, to put on instead the trappings of

---

<sup>6</sup>

Volpone, Dedicatory Epistle, 11.20-21.

<sup>7</sup>

E.B.Partridge, "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", JEGP, LVI (1957), 396-409.

a gentleman. To him, the act of throwing off his gown is not merely symbolic -- he believes that an actual change is taking place, that with his new clothing he will become a better man. Thomas the Barber describes the "creative" function of the tailor:

Mr Fashioner  
Has hit your measures, Sir, h'has moulded you,  
And made you, as they say.  
(I.ii.92-94)

This new Penniboy has liberty and a greater wit, or so he believes, given to him by his new suit. Partridge explains this belief:

The tailor makes the man because man is the clothes he wears. His intelligence (that is, his "wit") is his reputation for intelligence, and reputations are based on sight, not reason. Thus, a stain on the suit is a stain on the soul.<sup>8</sup>

Penniboy is yet another in Jonson's gallery of fools who confuse the reputation for the reality, who confront the world in disguise. The difference between him and earlier fools is that, in keeping with the explicit moral pattern of the play, he reforms, and begins to develop a real self.

In implicit contrast to Penniboy Junior is his disguised father, Penniboy Canter. We shall examine the implications of his disguise later; but here we must note the emblematic force of the moralizing beggar. Penniboy Senior

suggests that his nephew must love the beggar "For some concealed virtue, that he hides/Under those rags"(II.v.36-37); but in fact Penniboy Junior loves the Canter largely because it was he who brought the news of the death of Penniboy Junior's father and the young man's consequent wealth. The Canter is virtue in rags, but no one else recognizes this, and that is the point. Penniboy Senior's suggestion is only a guess -- he does not recognize any concealed virtue himself. The on-stage audience even sees the Canter as the villain of the piece -- not because he is a beggar, but because of his rags: "I cannot abide that nasty fellow, the Begger; if hee had beene a Court-Begger in good clothes, a Begger in velvet, as they say, I could have endur'd him" (First Intermean, 12-14). "Beggars of fashion" are acceptable, because they are of acceptable appearance; virtue is irrelevant.

When Penniboy Canter reveals himself to chastise the excesses of his son, the metaphor of the beggar is expanded. To demonstrate the moral beggary of Penniboy Junior, he gives him his own beggar's dress:

Farewell my Begger in velvet, for to day,  
To morrow you may put on that grave Robe,  
(IV.iv.176-177)

On the Canter, the beggar's cloak suggested, not that the virtuous man will always go in rags, but that to the virtuous man outward appearance is irrelevant. On his son, the beggar's cloak at last unites appearance and reality:

Nay, they are fit, as they had been made for me,  
 And I am now a thing, worth looking at!  
 (V.i.1-2)

Penniboy Junior's ironic acknowledgement of the identification in this dress of inner and outer reality marks the beginning of his reformation. When he saves his father's wealth from Picklock's plot, he and the Canter are reconciled, and the old man suggests that his son has now a different reality, a self that can be demonstrated by more opulent clothing: "Put off your ragges, and be your selfe againe"(V.iii.22). Penniboy Junior has learned the golden mean, and can now use Pecunia rightly.

We can now see that Jonson's main butt is not greed, but rather those who would hide their own emptiness by an imposture, whether a verbal one, or one created through physical appearance. But here it is not only the impostor who is satirized, but also those who are imposed upon. We can sympathize, to a degree, with the dupes of a Volpone or a Subtle, since these are very plausible villains. But to be duped by the posturings of such as Penniboy Junior, one must wish to be duped. Thus a whole society is criticized, because it holds out values which encourage the creation of false appearances. The audience of Gossips provides a reaction to the events on the stage that implicates also the real-life audience. They cannot help but believe rumours, however false or absurd. They want to believe in Penniboy Junior, and their moral obtuseness makes them reject the virtue that the Canter

represents in favour of the gentlemanly appearance of his son and the latter's grandiose plans for a Canters' College. They obstinately misunderstand the moral tone of the play and protest against the right in favour of those who are mere facades. They come only "to see, and to be seene"(Introduction, 9-10), like Fitzdottrel. Partridge describes the treatment of the Gossips as an attack on "spectators who come to see only the externals of a play -- the actor's figure and dress -- or, even worse, those who use the play simply as an excuse for being seen by other fashionable people."<sup>9</sup> The disease is not simply with the canters and the empty costumes.

The relationship of the money-theme to this demonstration of false appearance is articulated by Penniboy Junior. When asked by his uncle who has made him noble, he replies:

Why, my most noble money hath, or shall;  
My Princesse, here. She that had you but kept,  
And treated kindly, would have made you noble,  
And wise, too:

(IV.iii.23-26)

The transforming power of money is seen by the prodigal in exactly the same terms as he sees the transforming power of clothing, able to give nobility and wit. The corrective to this is given by Penniboy Canter; first in his disguise he

---

<sup>9</sup> Partridge, "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", p.397.

speaks with satiric contempt of those who think in terms of the appearance they are giving:

Why, that's the end of wealth! thrust riches outward,  
 And remaine beggers within: contemplate nothing  
 But the vile sordid things of time, place, money,  
 And let the noble, and the precious goe,  
 Vertue and honesty; hang 'hem; poore thinne membranes  
 Of honour; who respects them? O, the Fates!  
 How hath all just, true reputation fall'n  
 Since money, this base money 'gan to have any!  
 (III.ii.241-248)

Money is responsible, to a large degree, for the decline of true values. Virtues, equated with "true reputation", are lost, in favour of false reputation, a deceptive appearance created by money and dress. Later, out of his disguise, the Canter again stresses the basic opposition between the appearances created by money, and real virtue: money can give "place, and ranke, but it can give no Vertue" (IV.iv.158). Money, in fact, is neither good nor bad; it is neutral, and how it will be used depends on the user. It cannot give virtue, but it cannot corrupt the truly virtuous man.

This brings us to the problem of Penniboy Senior. He has in him elements of the satirist, being able to out-jeer the jeerers, and expose the pretensions of the prodigal. But his position is not one of moral rectitude; it is rather the product of a temperamental opposition to prodigality. As Partridge points out, his "possession of a contempt for one extreme does not validate his own extreme."<sup>10</sup> We have seen

---

<sup>10</sup>

Partridge, "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", p.399.

how the beggar-image is used to suggest moral deficiency; the Canter implicates his brother in this by suggesting that he shares in the moral beggary:

For you are neere as wretched as my selfe,  
You dare not use your money, and I have none.  
(II.i.18-19)

In a way different from his nephew, Penniboy Senior has given up inner values for the externals of money. Thus, he is a hypocrite who will lie for money; when Cymbal comes to talk with him, he pretends to be deaf, until he discovers that there is money to be made. Then, he lays claim to absolute moral rectitude:

I am loth to seeke out doubtfull courses,  
Runne any hazardous paths, I love streight waies,  
A just, and upright man!  
(III.iv.31-33)

He attacks those who covet more than they need, advocating the way of Nature, and of moderation:

Say, that you were the Emperour of pleasures,  
The great Dictator of fashions, for all Europe,  
And had the pompe of all the Courts, and Kingdomes,  
Laid forth unto the shew? to make your selfe  
Gaz'd, and admir'd at? You must goe to bed,  
And take your naturall rest: then, all this vanisheth.  
Your bravery was but shoven; 'twas not possest:  
While it did boast it selfe, it was then perishing.  
(III.iv.57-64)

All this is admirable, even moving, in its attack on those who mistake the trappings of reality for reality itself; but it rings somewhat hollow when we take into consideration the monstrous covetousness of the speaker who can recognize one manifestation of the disease without recognizing his own.



So it is that at the end of the play he demonstrates his reformation by giving up all his possessions as being the only way for him to reach an authentic self.

The Staple of News deals with ways in which those who are lacking in identity try to create the appearance of identity through various metaphorical types of disguise, creating false selves through words or dress. There is only one literal disguise in the play, worn by Penniboy Canter, and it must be apparent that here Jonson is using disguise in a manner different from his earlier plays. Penniboy Canter, the Stoic moralist, is clearly meant to be a spokesman for the author, the voice of truth that deflates the jeerers and exposes the pretensions of all. On one level, as virtue in rags, he provides an emblematic comment upon the nature of those of more splendid appearance. Certainly, it does not appear that he is being criticized for the mere act of disguising, as were characters in earlier plays.

Yet there is something ambiguous in Penniboy Canter. His relationship with the hypocrite Picklock has echoes of the master-parasite relationship of Volpone. Penniboy Canter uses the lawyer precisely because of what Picklock claims to be:

Tut, I am Vertumnus,  
On every change, or chance, upon occasion,  
A true Chamaelion, I can colour for't.  
I move upon my axell, like a turne-pike,  
Fit my face to the parties, and become,  
Streight, one of them.

(III.1.34-39)

It is these very qualities that the Canter eventually denounces in calling him "gowned Vulture"(V.ii.93); we are reminded of Voltore, useful for precisely these qualities. As Larry S.Champion describes him, Picklock is:

an invisible form which assumes no single physical shape, hypocrisy . . . cloaked beneath surface dignity and honest appearance. This [is] the most powerful form of evil because there is no defense against it . . . .<sup>11</sup>

But it is the Canter who initiates the deception that takes on more serious implications when Picklock gains control. The abandoning of identity suggested by his disguise puts him in the hands of the villain; and even though he is rescued by his son, his moment of danger can be seen as a punishment for his action. By taking as accomplice the arch-deceiver and perjurer, he somewhat undermines his own credibility as one who can always demonstrate truth; and when, to his relief, his son saves him from the trickster, the morality of his reaction is a little dubious: "To cheat the Cheater, was no cheat, but justice"(V.iii.21). So Penniboy Canter is not entirely free of the vices of the society he castigates, however Jonson intended him.

This study has treated the realistic level of The Staple of News. The sequences of the Staple and the Penniboy sequences are connected by the more overtly allegorical

---

<sup>11</sup>

Champion, Ben Jonson's Dotages, p.69.

Pecunia sequences; but the fusion of allegory and realism is at best uneasy. The realistic treatment of the Penniboys does not make more acceptable their participation in a lesson about the Golden Mean. It is the allegorical nature of the play that causes the moralizing to be so insistent. No longer is Jonson writing plays which present a fallen world, but without explicit comment. Here he points the moral, as he did in his earliest plays and, as a result, loses the ironic subtlety and complexity of his greatest work.

The audience of The New Inn prevented its complete performance in 1629, and so Jonson turned to the Reader in the hope of a better reception. Most readers of the play have been as unhappy with it as was that first audience. The use of disguise in The New Inn is more widespread and basic than in any other of Jonson's plays, yet it seems to be both arbitrary and irresponsible. Gregory Smith refers to "the forced device of disguise" in the play; Symonds finds the confusion "almost too bewildering to disentangle".<sup>12</sup> Freda L. Townsend, in her attempt to defend the use of disguise here, becomes rather lame:

The establishment of the identity of the four Fram-puls is not very significant in itself, and is not the end of the comedy, but is used as the means of

---

12

G. Gregory Smith, Ben Jonson (London, 1919), p.123; John Addington Symonds, Ben Jonson (London, 1888), p.176.

resolving the dilemmas, as the unmasking of Epi-  
coene served to untie the knots in The Silent  
Woman.<sup>13</sup>

If the disguising is only a plot-device, as this suggests,  
it is indeed somewhat arbitrary.

On the whole, the play has been given a more sym-  
pathetic reading by more recent critics. E.B.Partridge, R.E.  
Knoll and Harriet Hawkins have found much to praise here.<sup>14</sup>  
The New Inn is seen to be essentially parodic, full of  
"hilarious comments on the absurd situations of romance."<sup>15</sup>  
When the play is viewed as being ironic, the reversals and  
revelations of its ending become "a challenge to the audience  
to swallow a camel if it will and weep tears of joy at the  
achievement."<sup>16</sup> But even such attempts to justify the play  
have come under fire from Richard Levin, who sees them as

---

13

Freda L.Townsend, Apologie for "Bartholomew Fayre":  
The Art of Jonson's Comedies (New York, 1947), p.87.

14

Partridge, The Broken Compass and "The Symbolism of  
Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays"; Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays:  
An Introduction; Harriet Hawkins, "The Idea of a Theater in  
Jonson's The New Inn", Renaissance Drama, IX (1966), 205-226.

15

Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.190. For a similar  
view, see Larry S.Champion, "The Comic Intent of Jonson's The  
New Inn", Western Humanities Review, XVIII (1964), 66-74.

16

Douglas Duncan, "A Guide to The New Inn", Essays in  
Criticism, XX (1970), 324.

trying to turn a bad play into a good parody, and returns The New Inn to the pile marked "dotages".<sup>17</sup>

The revelations of the final act of the play do indeed tax our credulity, especially if we take them seriously, or assume that Jonson did. But Jonson's tendency in these later plays has always been away from credibility. In The New Inn, he is more explicitly concerned with the nature of the illusion created by play-acting than in any other play, and seems to be demonstrating its implications on a number of levels. In the body of the play he dramatizes in various ways, through the charade of the love-court, the posturing of such fools as Tipto, and the obscenity of the Stuffles, a world totally given over to false identities. It is a world which needs no comment, yet the playwright cannot resist comment, so that the final act has the function almost of a dumb-show. Its exemplary unmaskings demonstrate the nature of the less mechanical disguises of the body of the play, while at the same time suggesting that illusion can never be fully penetrated, that there is always another level to be uncovered. The revelations of the final act need be taken no more seriously than the tricks of Pug, or the existence of Pecunia. It is clearly not Jonson's intention to sustain dramatic illusion at all, but rather to force his audience to examine

---

17

Richard Levin, "The New New Inn and the Proliferation of Good Bad Drama", Essays in Criticism, XXII (1972), 41-47.

the implications of dramatic illusion, which he does through the apparently outrageous unmaskings.

There can be little doubt that the play is concerned to examine the nature of theatrical illusion. Thayer sees the Inn as representing the comic stage, with the Host as the play-maker.<sup>18</sup> Harriet Hawkins follows this lead also seeing the Host as "Jonson's spokesman".<sup>19</sup> This suggestion, of course, is based upon the lines spoken by the Host about the world-as-stage. But these lines should not be removed from their context in an argument about what a man is, and the freedom he has to choose his role. The Host at first likens life to a game of cards:

Nor can we, as the Songster sayes, come all  
To be wrapt soft and warme in fortunes smock:  
When she is pleas'd to trick, or trompe mankinde:  
Some may be Cotes, as in the cards; but, then  
Some must be knaves, some varlets, baudes, and ostlers,  
As aces, duizes, cards o'ten, to face it  
Out, i'the game, which all the world is.  
(I.iii.101-107)

According to Duncan, "Fatalistic metaphors of life as a game or play invariably imply criticism in Jonson,"<sup>20</sup> but it should be pointed out here that the Host is not describing people as having an active role, as players in a game, but as Fortune's

---

<sup>18</sup> Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays, pp.202-232.

<sup>19</sup> Hawkins, "The Idea of a Theater in Jonson's The New Inn", p.206,n.3.

<sup>20</sup> Duncan, "A Guide to The New Inn", p.314.

"cards", each with a fixed value, having to remain what he is. It is Lovel who first raises the idea that man is an actor:

But,  
It being i' your free-will (as 'twas) to choose  
What parts you would sustaine, me thinkes, a man  
Of your sagacity, and cleare nostrill, should  
Have made, another choise, then of a place  
So sordid, as the keeping of an Inne:  
(I.iii.107-112)

A man can choose his parts, but according to Stoic doctrine, should remain firmly in the legitimate part he first chooses. Freedom in Jonson implies acting with integrity, it implies discipline and order. The change suggested by Lovel is an irresponsible one, as the Host immediately points out, for his objection to the Host's choice of role has a social rather than a moral basis. If he deceives no one, the Host replies, if only he suffers from his choice, why should anyone begrudge him his position?

If I be honest, and that all the cheat  
Be, of my selfe, in keeping this Light Heart,  
Where, I imagine all the world's a Play;  
The state, and mens affaires, all passages  
Of life, to spring new scenes, come in, goe out,  
And shift, and vanish; and if I have got  
A seat, to sit at ease here, i'mine Inne,  
To see the Comedy; and laugh, and chuck  
At the variety, and throng of humors,  
And dispositions, that come justling in,  
And out still, as they one drove hence another:  
Why, will you envy me my happinesse?  
(I.iii.126-137)

One is obviously attracted by the viewpoint, which leads up to the Host himself becoming a play-maker, with Lovel taking one of the starring roles; but one must recognize the ambi-

guity of the Host's position, since he will finally be shown to be a role-player himself, not really sustaining the detached position he here claims.

Within the play of the Court of Love, the main opponents are Lovel and Lady Frampul. They are involved in a game that at some point becomes reality. Lovel has to play a part that he wishes could be real, while Lady Frampul becomes more and more the role she plays. But she constantly plays a part of sorts, so that in her case there arises the question of how to distinguish between actor and role, reality and appearance. Lovel has to create two definitions -- of love, and of valour. For his first hour he describes love, expounding the familiar Platonic definition. Love must be "fixed, constant, pure, immutable"(III.ii.124). Inner reality is contrasted with outward appearance, demonstrating that constancy is an aspect of the inward:

The bodyes love is fraile, subject to change,  
And alters still, with it: The mindes is firme,  
One, and the same.

(III.ii.159-161)

This, of course, is another aspect of the immutability needed for integrity of the self. Lovel's noble definition is counterpointed, and somewhat undermined, by Beaufort's comments relating to a rather more carnal version of love. Further, we are constantly aware that Lovel is only playing a part, and that the woman to whom his comments are directed is totally incapable of appreciating them.



That Lovel is playing a role is made even more evident during the second hour of the love-court, when he discourses on the nature of valour. What he defines is, in effect, Stoic constancy. "It springs out of reason,/And tends to perfect honesty"(IV.iv.44-45). It "Renders a man himselfe"(IV.iv.125). It cannot be injured by others, since it cares nothing for reputation, nor can it be harmed by Fortune. It is not confused by appearances, not "made afraid with visors"(IV.iv.165). The valour of a wise man cannot be harmed by anything outside himself:

A wise man never goes the peoples way,  
 But as the Planets still move contrary  
 To the worlds motion; so doth he, to opinion:  
 He will examine, if those accidents  
 (Which common fame calls injuries) happen to him  
 Deservedly, or no? come they deservedly,  
 They are no wrongs then, but his punishments:  
 If undeservedly, and he not guilty,  
 The doer of them, first, should blush, not he.  
 (IV.iv.213-221)

As a statement of Stoic fortitude, this is impeccable. But as a definition of how Lovel himself behaves, it is immediately belied, for at the dissolution of the Court of Love, he shows that he is indeed susceptible to injuries done to him by those outside him:

From what a happinesse hath that one word  
 Throwne me, into the gulfe of misery?  
 To what a bottomlesse despaire? how like  
 A Court remooving, or an ended Play  
 Shewes my abrupt precipitate estate.  
 (IV.iv.249-253)

The tone of this is somewhat ambiguous, and has been a point of contention amongst critics. Do we, with Thayer and Par-

tridge, see this as a criticism of Lovel, who is preaching ideals he cannot put into practice; or do we accept Duncan's viewpoint, that Lovel has reluctantly taken part in a game that is traditionally well-defined in its rules and is not too seriously to be blamed for not living up to a code that he does not genuinely claim to approach? Or, finally, do we accept the view of Harriet Hawkins, that the code of behaviour here defended is "almost inhumanly abstract and severe"?<sup>21</sup>

We may see Lovel in relation to Morose, or Justice Overdo, who also failed to live up to a Stoic code of sorts. Duncan is right, Lovel is outlining a view which is by no means a personal statement; but I do not think that we can go as far as Miss Hawkins and say that its severity is reason enough for us to forgive Lovel for not living up to it. The juxtaposition of the ideal with the extremity of Lovel's plunge into "bottomlesse despaire" in itself implies comment; faced with the loss of Lady Frampul he becomes self-indulgently hopeless. He has already, in response to the Host's question about the significance of his name, demonstrated a lack of self-knowledge, an inability to understand his own motivations:

Host. But is your name Love-ill, Sir, or Love-Well?  
 I would know that. Lov. I doe not know't my selfe,  
 Whether it is.

(I.vi.95-97)

---

<sup>21</sup> Hawkins, "The Idea of a Theater in Jonson's The New Inn", p.223.

Although superior to the other participants in the game, he is nonetheless a figure lacking a certain control. Yet his very participation in the game allows him finally to see it in perspective, as an "ended Play"(IV.iv.252), and gives him the resolution not to involve himself again with such a game:

Farewell the craft of crocodiles, womens piety,  
And practise of it, in this art of flattering,  
And fooling men. I ha' not lost my reason,  
Though I have lent my selfe out, for two howres.  
(IV.iv.273-276)

The implication of this is that Lovel has at last regained his self.

His opponent in the Court of Love, Lady Frampul, is also very much involved with play-acting; but with her it is not merely for the duration of the game, but is the basis of her existence. She is irresponsible in her attitude toward her lovers, leading them on as a matter of course. As Pru describes her to Lovel, however, the appearance she shows to her servant is quite often the opposite of her reality:

O master Lovel, you must not give credit  
To all that Ladies publicquely professe,  
Or talke, o'th'vollee, unto their servants.  
(I.vi.60-62)

Lady Frampul herself, when she is dressing up her chambermaid Pru, tells her that "all are Players, and but serve the Scene"(II.i.39). This is so largely because she makes it so; we know the implications for Jonson that this idea has -- it

is not merely a metaphorical commonplace, because of the moral weight he makes it bear. Her willingness to maintain life at the level of play is demonstrably dangerous; the transition from play to reality becomes very difficult. Thus she becomes indignant when Pru suggests that others might condemn her behaviour:

as if I liv'd  
To any other scale, than what's my owne?  
Or sought my selfe, without my selfe, from home?  
(II.i.58-60)

The words remind us of the fine Jonsonian Stoicism of "To the World", where the lady resolves to consolidate her strengths "Here in my bosome, and at home". But Lady Frampul really only pays lip-service to the idea.

One who so easily wears a mask, and makes the world aware of it, cannot complain if the world cannot tell when the mask is off. Part of the game of the Court of Love is for Lady Frampul to act as if convinced by Lovel's arguments; at some point, possibly from the very beginning, she actually is convinced. But it is impossible for her audience, either on or off stage, to know that this is the case. Pru's remarks on her reactions form a commentary on this: "Well fain'd, my Lady: now her parts begin!"(III.ii.179); "Excellent actor! how she hits this passion!"(210). Lovel too is totally unaware that her mask is down: "Tut, she dissembles! All is personated,/And counterfeit comes from her!"(259-260). After the game is over she is unaware that her reactions have been

totally misinterpreted:

Lad. I was somewhat froward  
I must confesse, but frowardnesse sometime  
Becomes a beauty, being but a visor  
Put on. You'll let a Lady weare her masque, Pru.  
Pru. But how do I know, when her Ladiship is pleas'd  
To leave it off, except she tell me so?  
(IV.iv.292-297)

And even when the Lady says that her visor is off, it is not easy to see that this is not a part of the act: "I sweare, I thought you had dissembled, Madam,/And doubt, you do so yet"(IV.iv.310-311). Pru's perfectly justifiable doubt is met by intemperate anger on the part of Lady Frampul, who even here does not fully understand the implications of her masking. This is perhaps the most overt application of the play-acting metaphor as criticism that we have as yet seen in Jonson.

This major statement of the theme is echoed and paralleled throughout the play. The most apparent commentary on play-acting comes in the episode of the Stuffes. Pinnacia wears the fine clothing that her husband makes for the gentry, and the couple act out sexual fantasies; she thinks that the clothing is sufficient to transform her: "why doe you make me a Lady,/If I may not doe like a Lady, in fine clothes?"(IV.ii.86-87) But of course, she is not made any finer by her clothing; it rather highlights her essential depravity. At the same time, the behaviour of the Stuffes implies comment upon the nobles themselves, who also believe in the transforming power of clothing -- hence the violence

of their revulsion against the Stuffles. Partridge sums this up:

Clothes have the faculty of conveying reality: the Stuffles think Pinnacia is a fashionable lady because she wears fashionable clothes. The extent to which this pretense is accepted even by the fine company is apparent in their reaction to this presumption on the part of a mere tailor.<sup>22</sup>

This belief in the magical transforming power of clothing is to be expected of those who are anyway constantly involved in play-acting.

An even more ludicrous expression of the belief that clothing has such power comes in the figure of Sir Glorious Tipto. He is a creature long familiar to readers of Jonson -- a cowardly soldier whose bravery is all in his mouth, and a fop who believes he is as glorious as he appears -- in effect, a combination of Bobadill and Stephen. He berates the Host for appearing in Cuerpo, and goes on to describe how he would dress if he were Host:

I would put on  
The Savoy chaine about my neck; the ruffe;  
The cuffes of Flanders; then the Naples hat;  
With the Rome hatband; and the Florentine Agate;  
The Millan sword; the cloake of Genoa; set  
With Brabant buttons; all my given pieces:  
Except my gloves, the natives of Madrid.  
(II.v.61-67)

But his real place, despite his fantastic image, is below stairs with the servants, the half-beasts and Centaurs, finally to be put to flight by Lovel.

The corrective to all this is provided by Pru. She is in control of the game, and performs with good sense. She sees the irresponsibility of Lady Frampul's play-acting, as we have already seen. When she is finally fitted out in the clothing originally made for her, but soiled by Pinnacia Stufe, she is told by Lady Frampul:

thou becom'st 'hem!  
So they doe thee! rich garments only fit  
The partyes they are made for! they shame others.  
(V.ii.2-4)

There is an element of truth in this, although not exactly as Lady Frampul means it. She still thinks that it is the clothing that gives the nobility, although there is a suggestion that at last internal and external coincide. But it is hardly a causal relationship, as Pru points out:

I had rather dye in a ditch, with Mistresse Shore,  
Without a smock, as the pitifull matter has it,  
Than owe my wit to cloathes, or ha'it beholden.  
(V.ii.24-26)

In Pru, good sense and strong awareness of the integrity of self are united.

So Jonson has written a play about the folly and irresponsibility of play-acting which, up to this point, is complete in itself. Yet he added the astonishing revelations of the final scene. What we think we have seen proves to be yet another deception which includes the play-maker Host. Of course, we cannot believe in these revelations, and Jonson does not intend us to do so. It is almost as if he had unmasked his characters to show the players beneath (Harriet Hawkins

points out how often during the play Jonson refers to the actors and the nature of the illusion created on stage). Another level of deception is added to those already exposed. All the world is indeed a stage, and we can never be sure that what we see is not mere illusion. If the Host is really a persona for Jonson, then the playwright too is involved in the deception and, by implication, the audience. In a way, character, the self, ceases to mean anything for the role-player. We see this particularly in the figure of Frank-Laetitia. When first introduced to Lovel, and to the audience, it is suggested that Frank is a blank, an empty form that can be made into anything. The Host says, early in the play, of his son's education:

By degrees,  
And with a funnell, I make shift to fill  
The narrow vessell, he is but yet, a bottell.  
(I.iii.17-19)

Frank at first speaks only in Latin, and only what he is told by the Host to say. He is later transformed into a girl, and finally revealed to be a boy, and then again, to be a girl; but all along we are aware that the part is played by a boy. Thus there is nothing that is definable as Frank -- what he is at any given moment is what he is dressed as.

In his Prologue to the play, Jonson is as arrogant toward his audience as ever. If any do not like this latest concoction, the cook tells them, "'Tis not the meat, there,



but the mouth's displaced"(8). Those who fail to see the meaning of this play, with its exposure of role-playing and its analysis of the lack of identity of those who are too much involved with mere outsides are not Understanders; and, of course, those who are not Understanders are, as always, implicated in the folly depicted on stage:

Beware to bring such appetites to the stage,  
 They doe confesse a weake, sick, queasie age,  
 And a shrew'd grudging too of ignorance,  
 When clothes and faces 'bove the men advance.  
 (Prologue, 17-20)

This last line sums up much of Jonson's thinking. Those who do not understand are probably men who set appearance above reality, who do not know the meaning of the self.

Of course, the audience proved not to be made up of Understanders; rather, they were "fastidious impertinents" who, not without reason, thought that Jonson was insulting them. In the two plays prior to this one, Jonson actually brought his audience on to the stage in order to ridicule it -- in the person of Fitzdottrel of The Devil is an Ass, and in the Gossips of The Staple of News. That he saw the whole of his audience, and not merely one delinquent section of it, in these terms is apparent from his Dedication to the Reader. The audience which drove The New Inn from the stage becomes a vast crowd of Fitzdottrels:

What did they come for, then? thou wilt aske me. I will as punctually answer: To see, and to bee seene. To make a generall muster of themselves in their clothes of credit, and possesse the Stage, against the Play. To dislike all, but marke nothing. And by

their confidence of rising between the Actes, in oblique lines, make affadavit to the whole house, of their not understanding one Scene. Arm'd, with this praejudice, as the Stage-furniture, or Arras-clothes, they were there, as Spectators, away. For the faces in the hangings, and they beheld alike.  
(Dedication, 7-16)

The attack on those who come to see and be seen is by now quite familiar; but the extraordinary twist of the final lines is something new. Suddenly the audience is whisked on to the stage, and set into the hangings. The distinction between the play and the audience is totally broken down as the audience is equated with the emptiest part of the stage-illusion. Loathed stage and loathed audience are at last united.

The Magnetic Lady (1632), Jonson's last play,<sup>22</sup> is generally considered to mark the low point in Jonson's decline; so much so that few critics have chosen to write of it in any detail. The mechanics of the play are a little too obvious, according to Partridge; Joe Lee Davis agrees, saying of the play's over-involved metaphor that it is "an extended comic 'metaphysical' conceit that fails to come off."<sup>23</sup> L.C. Knights thinks that "The only parts of the play that are of any interest are those that deal with money and business

---

<sup>22</sup>

For a discussion of The Tale of a Tub and The Sad Shepherd, see Appendix.

<sup>23</sup>

Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.206; Joe Lee Davis, The Sons Of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England (Detroit, 1967), p.86.

methods."<sup>24</sup> He therefore confines his discussion to Sir Moth Interest. Only Swinburne holds the somewhat eccentric view that the play provides "one brilliant flash of parting splendour."<sup>25</sup>

The majority of critics object to the apparent "tiredness" of the writer in presenting his latest play. The Center Attractive, Lady Loadstone and her niece, and the manipulator Compass are totally lacking in vitality, and are surrounded by a familiar collection of Jonsonian types who themselves can generate little real interest. But there is something to be said for the view that the play is a retrospective exemplum of Jonson's comic theory and themes, written for an audience that had forgotten him. This theory can account for the formal strength of the play, which is apparent in spite of its theatrical lifelessness. The amount of formal analysis in the Chorus-sections suggests that Jonson was indeed attempting a theoretical presentation of some sort. This does not, of course, mean that The Magnetic Lady is a good play, a "brilliant flash of parting splendour"; merely that it deserves better than the contempt with which it has too often been treated.

We can, therefore, expect some repetition of familiar

---

<sup>24</sup>

Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.188.

<sup>25</sup>

A.C.Swinburne, A Study of Ben Jonson (Lincoln, 1969), p.81.

themes; and even though there is no literal disguising in the play it does offer several points of interest to the present study. Sir Diaphanous Silkworm is perhaps the most extreme version in Jonson of that type of fop who equates clothing with the self. As characterized by Compass, he is a figure of constant flux:

Sir Diaphanous Silke-worme!  
A Courtier extraordinary; who by diet  
Of meates, and drinke; his temperate exercise;  
Choyse musick; frequent bathes; his horary shifts  
Of Shirts and Wast-coats; means to immortalize  
Mortality it selfe. . . .

(I.vi.3-8)

Silkworm does not see the irony of this "Encomiastick", in that it ascribes immortality to a creature who almost has no existence at all, who has no reality. Later, when Ironside attacks him, he sees the only insult done to him as that done to his clothing. Compass's comment is perceptive enough:

Shrewd maimes! your Clothes are wounded desperately,  
And that (I thinke) troubles a Courtier more,  
An exact Courtier, then a gash in his flesh.

(III.iv.11-13)

Silkworm is almost the paradigm of the whole series of "mere outsides", the final transformation of man into clothing.

The corrective to this is provided in the first scene of the play, by Ironside, who draws a distinction between an attack upon himself, and an attack upon the external part of him. His stance is close to the Stoic position:

For I doe never feele my selfe perturb'd  
With any generall words 'gainst my profession,  
Unlesse by some smart stroke upon my selfe  
They doe awake, and stirre me: Else, to wise

And well-experienc'd men, words doe not signifie;  
They have no power. . . .

(I.i.76-81)

The emphasis on the power of the word to betray those who cannot distinguish between word and thing is important. So many of the characters in this play (as in all Jonsonian satire) cannot see the difference between profession and self, between what they are, and what they appear to be. Thus Bias admits that, as a grave courtier, he is merely a collection of mannerisms:

But wee  
(That tread the path of publicke businesses)  
Know what a tacit shrug is, or a shrink;  
The wearing the Callott; the politique hood:  
And twenty other parerga, o'the by,  
You Seculars understand not. . . .

(I.vii.65-70)

Interest thinks that he is praising the man when he describes him as "cut from the Quar/Of Macchiavel"(I.vii.30-31), but the audience would hardly miss the real implication of the reference. The major difference between a Bias and a Silkworm is that the former is more consciously a play-actor than the latter.

In fact, the character more effectively "cut from the quar of Machiavel" than Bias is Mrs.Polish. This "shee-Parasite" is, as her name suggests, a politic surface, made up of words with no reality beneath them. She is indeed a great torrent of words without meaning:

Rut. Death, she cannot speake reason.  
Com. Nor sense, if we be Masters of our senses!

(I.v.26-27)

A flatterer who, for much of the time, is in control of the play's action, she has much in common with earlier Jonsonian parasites. She sees herself as a creator of others; she says of Placentia:

I moulded her,  
And fashion'd her, and form'd her; she had the sweat  
Both of my browes and braines. . . .  
(I.iv.40-42)

Those Jonsonian characters who lack an identity themselves, we have seen, often think of identity in terms of something to be imposed from the outside, through clothing, as with Silkworm, or through words, as with Polish; the more subtle of them believe that they can create identity for other people.

It has already been suggested that The Magnetic Lady is less interesting as a play than it is as a blueprint for the understanding of Jonson's attitude toward what a play should be. Between acts, the Chorus describes the structure of the play; and the play itself provides a number of suggestions about Jonson's moral view, and about his conception of dramatic character. During the Chorus following Act I, Jonson himself is brought up in implicit contrast to those role-players within his plays who believe that clothing makes the man. Probee asks the Boy why Jonson dresses so poorly, and the Boy replies that the Poet would dress better if the King would take note of him, but that he retains the integrity of self no matter how he dresses:

But his clothes shall never be the best thing about  
him, though; hee will have somewhat beside, either

of humane letters, or severe honesty, shall speak  
him a man though he went naked.

(Chorus II.54-57)

The poet provides a contrast both with the masked characters of his plays, and the "Plush and Velvet outsides" of the audience.

The poet's integrity is further suggested by Jonson's central character Compass. In keeping with the magnetic imagery of the play, his name suggests one who always points out the right direction. But there are also implications in the name of the centred self, the fixed point within a circle. The word has a vast number of meanings, suggestive of order and measure, or of artifice and ingenuity -- all applicable to the task of the poet. At the same time, we need to take account of the significance that "compass" had for Jonson himself. The idea of the broken compass suggested by his impresa is that the poet fails to achieve perfection. The poet-as-entertainer Compass needs the poet-as-moralist Ironside; it is the latter who is instrumental in starting the train of events that leads to the discovery of truth and reconciliation of humours.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps there is not the creative energy in the play to fulfil all the implications of the name; as Enck says, "The idea of the circle, of completeness, operates everywhere in this play and nowhere

---

26

For a fuller discussion of The Magnetic Lady as an allegory of the theatre, with an examination of the functions of Compass as poet-entertainer and Ironside as poet-moralist, see Champion's discussion of the play in Ben Jonson's Dotages.

to the advantage of the action."<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, we know what is being suggested, as it underlines Jonson's lifelong concerns. The poet is the creative, harmonizing figure, but he is incomplete without the moralist. Early in his career, Jonson examined and discarded the non-moralist poet in the Ovid of Poetaster.

In fact, the moral framework of The Magnetic Lady is rather too much in evidence. Appearance and reality are no longer treated with the irony of the earlier plays. The real Placentia, even though she has been brought up by the corrupt Gossip Polish, is quite evidently intended to demonstrate her nobility through her humble appearance, whilst Polish's real daughter shows herself to be corrupt. Heredity triumphs over environment. As it happens, the noble Pleasance turns out to be totally insipid; but her union with Compass is inevitable given the framework of the play, even though Jonson's failing pen does not make it very convincing.

The Magnetic Lady contains a number of images which describe the Jonsonian character. The most obvious one makes allusions to the idea of the role-player's concern with the external, to the exclusion of inner values. When Sir Moth Interest decides to erect a statue of the lady he believes to be leading him to a fortune, he says he will have it brightly painted. Dr. Rut replies:

---

<sup>27</sup>

Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, pp.222-223.



That's right! all Citie statues must be painted:  
 Else, they be worth nought i'their subtile Judgements.  
 (V.vii.92-93)

The image is transparent enough in what it suggests about the values of those who believe in the importance of the external.

Earlier in the play an image is used that criticizes the duplicity of manipulators by comparing it with the duplicity of the theatre. Chaire, who has just thought up a plan to conceal the birth of Placentia's baby, says:

Wee shall marre all, if once we ope the mysteries  
 O'the Tying-house, and tell what's done within:  
 No Theaters are more cheated with appearances,  
 Or these shop-lights, then th'Ages, and folke in them,  
 That seeme most curious.

(IV.vii.42-46)

The cynical attitude toward deception shown here by Mother Chaire becomes in effect an indictment of the theatre itself; the use of the word "cheated", with its moral loading, suggests something of Jonson's feeling about the stage, which has become more and more apparent throughout his latest plays. So many of Jonson's characters are actors within the metaphor of the stage, involved with such cheating with appearances; and here both sides of the metaphor are involved in the moral criticism.

A clue to why so many of Jonson's deceivers are what they are is provided by Compass. Silkworm is about to write a challenge to Ironside, who has attacked him; and he says he feels confident of victory because, having imagined Ironside

in the most fearsome way possible, he does not feel afraid.

Compass replies:

Well, yet take heed. These fights imaginary,  
Are lesse then skirmishes; the fight of shadowes:  
For shadowes have their figure, motion,  
And their umbratile action from the reall  
Posture, and motion of the bodies act:  
Whereas (imaginarily) many times,  
Those men may fight, dare scarce eye one another,  
And much lesse meet.

(III.iv.116-123)

For such as Silkworm not only the self, but the whole external world, is really only a product of the imagination. Failing to grasp the reality of the self, they also fail to understand the nature of the outside world. Compass demonstrates that the world as Silkworm sees it is less than a world of shadows, since shadows have a greater relation to reality than do Silkworm's imaginings. And he himself, in the fantastical dress he has created for himself, is only one of these less-than-shadows, as he deprives himself of reality.

There is summed up here one aspect of Jonson's world that appears throughout his work. The whole race of gulls, from Matthew, Stephen and Bobadill through to Silkworm live in worlds of their own imagining. A man who has no identity will imagine one for himself, but will be no more real for his imagining. Such characters are always misled by surfaces, always take the appearance for the reality, and so can be fooled by each other, but cannot fool anyone else. They are the people who need to have the statue painted. They are foolish rather than vicious, but because of their preoccupation

with surfaces, they are easy prey for the more vicious role-players. Such characters as Polish, and of course greater earlier figures like Volpone and Mosca, and Subtle and Face, are the ones involved in the theatrical metaphor. They are more conscious of the illusion that they are creating; the gulls do not understand the concept of illusion. The manipulators are more intelligent than the gulls; but in the end, because they too are so much involved with illusion, they too lose contact with the self. Tricksters and gulls alike lose hold on identity, and it is the lack of identity that is the major target of Jonson's satire, since it is the source of so many follies and crimes. The theatrical metaphor becomes more and more overtly an instrument of condemnation, at the same time as Jonson's distrust of the stage deepens.

## CONCLUSION

The effect of the foregoing chapters has been to show that Jonson's use of disguise elements in his plays is not merely conventional, relating only to the mechanical needs of plot; rather, it is part of a consistent and unified ethical vision. In all his plays, a majority of characters are either disguisers or role-players, caught up in irresponsible play-acting. To understand Jonson's attitude to such characters as it appears throughout his plays helps us to understand the final ethical direction of the plays themselves. Especially in the middle comedies, there is no adequate norm or stated ideal to set against the almost universal corruption, so that the right way for men to behave can only be discovered through an understanding of the precise manner in which their actual behaviour is wrong. We can also better understand Jonson's attitude toward attractive but ambiguous figures like Truewit or Quarlous, and toward those who appear to be figures of judgement, like Surly and Lovewit.

Jonson's play-actors embody in metaphor the vicious or foolish man described by the Stoic philosophers, losing sight and control of their real selves because of their need to put on masks for the rest of the world. The man who is

constantly wearing a mask eventually ceases to have any subjective existence, any self, that is, because reality becomes a question of objective definition by others. On the simplest and most obvious level, gulls like Matthew and Jack Daw exist only as they have reputation; being nothing, they believe they are what other people say they are. But on a more subtle and complex level, this is also true of the master Protean Volpone. For him too the mask becomes the face, and what at first seems to be a way of controlling the world is finally seen to be the cause of loss of control. An act of the will degenerates into disease.

The man who wears a mask has failed to understand the world, and an understanding of the world is dependent upon an understanding of the self, since both require the right use of reason. A man who does not understand relies upon Opinion, and so carries with him a false picture of the world. As we saw in our discussion of The Magnetic Lady, so many of Jonson's characters live in a world created by the imagination. According to the Neostoic Guillaume Du Vair, all pain is caused by a false understanding of the world, and "it is an imagination and opinion that vexeth and tormenteth us more than the things themselves."<sup>1</sup> But we need not suffer so, for wisdom "removes all false opinions out of our heads which trouble our brains."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Du Vair, The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks, p.95.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.61.

Jonson himself records a similar idea in the Discoveries:

Opinion is a light, vaine, crude, and imperfect thing,  
settled in the Imagination; but never arriving at the  
understanding, there to obtaine the tincture of Reason.  
Wee labour with it more than Truth.  
(Disc. 11.43-46)

So imagination is seen to be a dangerous faculty, eager to accept "Opinion" as "Truth", and too often opposed to reason. The fool accepts unthinkingly, the criminal wilfully, that the world is as he imagines it to be. Both then, by putting on masks, define themselves in terms of that imagined world, and lose the reality of the self.

The right use of reason, then, means an understanding of the relationship between the self and the world. Being constant to the self means knowing what one is, one's place and one's limitations. The typical hero of Jonson's non-dramatic poetry is always one thing, honest and consistent, unswayed by opinion. But characters in his plays are affected or ambitious, or are outright impostors; in effect, the ideal for the plays is presented in the poetry. It must be stressed that constancy to the self does not suggest an aggressive individualism, of the sort that we find in so many humour-characters; neither does it imply retirement from the world, as Morose would understand it to mean. As one scholar defines it: "It is by no means self-love, amour-propre, but is love of self, amour de soi."<sup>3</sup> It cannot be defined as mere selfishness or

---

<sup>3</sup>  
Ludwig Edelstein, The Meaning of Stoicism (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p.35.

looking after one's own interests; quite the contrary, only by understanding one's true relation to the self can one know one's true relation to the world: "Duty to oneself becomes duty to all others, and love of self becomes love of all men."<sup>4</sup> In the world of Jonson's plays, all are finally isolated from each other, each behind his own mask inhabiting a world created in his imagination, each acting in his own play.

J.B.Bamborough, in his account of Jonson, writes of the difficulty the dramatist's defenders have had in finding "some vice, other than mere affectation, which Jonson can be said to attack consistently in all his plays."<sup>5</sup> Bamborough's own answer to the problem is that Jonson's main attack is on those who yield to Opinion, who take a false image of reality for the truth. Helena Watts Baum sees Jonson's central concern as "false social and intellectual standards."<sup>6</sup> Edward Partridge, in his examination of Jonson's use of clothing symbolism, sees it as the basis of a satire on presumption.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>

Ibid., p.92.

<sup>5</sup>

Bamborough, Ben Jonson, p.106.

<sup>6</sup>

Helena Watts Baum, The Satiric and the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy (New York, 1947), p.144.

<sup>7</sup>

Partridge, "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", p.408.

But false standards, affectation and presumption, are only a part of what Jonson is satirizing, symptoms or results of what he considers to be the real sin. Bamborough is closer to the truth in some remarks on Opinion:

The flaw common to all of Jonson's comic characters is their failure to appreciate the true nature of the people and the circumstances with which they come into contact. . . . Any yielding to Opinion is at once an intellectual and a moral failing, since it springs from a defect of reason, and can lead only to irrational, and therefore immoral, action.<sup>8</sup>

But this is only part of the answer too, for it makes the failure passive rather than active, as if all Jonson's characters were victims rather than impostors. If they fail to appreciate the true nature of the world around them, it is because they have also failed to understand their own nature. Those who yield to Opinion also contribute to it, and in deceiving others, they deceive themselves. In fact, even the feeblest of Jonson's dupes participates in his own deception; Mammon's dream exists without any help from Subtle and Face, and Dapper, Druggier, Kastril, all create their own versions of reality before Subtle and Face enter into them.

Those who are duped by impostors are themselves impostors in their own way. They try to use others and they are used by those whom they thought to use. Dupe and deceiver -- and which is which? -- are seen to be partners in the same enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>

Bamborough, Ben Jonson, p.110.

<sup>9</sup>

Lionel Gossman, Men and Masks: A Study of Molière (Baltimore, 1965), p.101.



These words were written about Molière's Tartuffe, but they could very easily be applied to almost any of Jonson's comedies, where the victim of an impostor is rarely innocent. The mask worn to deceive others is always a sign of self-deception.

Once this is understood, it becomes possible to see how judgement is to be applied to Jonson's plays. His comic world is one which is made up entirely of play-actors; all are implicated in the illusion. Few characters are able to take part in the illusion without losing themselves in it: Brainworm and Pru, perhaps; few others. As moralist, Surly fails because he attempts to use illusion to demonstrate truth; characters who do represent some sort of moral positive, as perhaps do Celia and Bonario, are shown to be totally powerless; and figures of Justice, like the Avocatori, or Overdo and Eitherside, are also deceived and self-deceived, and dispense justice largely by accident. Because of this marked absence of moral norm-figures, some critics have suggested that Jonson is not asking us to make moral judgements, but is giving his approval to those characters who are superior in wit -- to Truewit and Dauphine, to Lovewit and Quarlous. But we have seen that these figures are undermined by the ironic treatment of their involvement in self-delusion. In fact, Jonson's comic vision is much more integrated than this; superior wit is insufficient in itself to be worthy of approval, and these characters too are subject

to Jonson's moral judgement. The uneasiness that critics have felt in designating these characters "heroes" is seen to be justified, for they too are inauthentic. By taking part in the general performance, they show themselves to be irresponsible, and as deserving of censure as the gulls they have mocked.

Perhaps this can be better understood by reference to Erasmus' use of the metaphor of the world as stage-play in The Praise of Folly. All human life, says Folly, is a play:

If someone should unmask the actors in the middle of a scene on the stage and show their real faces to the audience, would he not spoil the whole play? And would not everyone think he deserved to be driven out of the theater with brickbats as a crazy man? For at once a new order of things would suddenly arise. He who played the woman is now seen to be a man; the juvenile is revealed to be old; he who a little before was a king is suddenly a slave; and he who was a god now appears as a little man. Truly, to destroy the illusion is to upset the whole play. The masks and costumes are precisely what hold the eyes of the spectators. Now what else is our whole life but a kind of stage play through which men pass in various disguises, each one going on to play his part until he is led off by the director? And often the same actor is ordered back in a different costume, so that he who played the king in purple, now acts the slave in rags. Thus everything is pretense; yet this play is performed in no other way.<sup>10</sup>

Folly argues plausibly; things are as they are, and can be no other way. The man who, thinking himself wise, wishes to

unmask the folly of others, is himself a fool, for "Just as nothing is more foolish than unseasonable wisdom, so nothing is more imprudent than bull-headed prudence."<sup>11</sup> Leave things as they are, says Folly; let the play go on. But we should not miss the irony imparted to all this by the fact that it is Folly who is speaking, for we are not bound to agree with her, or to accept her view that by disagreeing we show ourselves to be fools. She is inviting our complicity in the stage-play of the world, just as Face invites our complicity in his actions, in the final lines of The Alchemist. That things are as they are is not sufficient reason uncritically to accept them. It is not enough merely to accept the surface of things.

In one sense, all of Jonson's drama is an elaboration of Erasmus' metaphor. The unexamined life is that of the play-actor, and it is inadequate. The majority live the unexamined life, and will always be hostile to those who refuse to go along with them. In a passage in the Discoveries, Jonson equates the good man with the man who despises the great stage of fools:

Good men are the Stars, the Planets of the Ages wherein they live, and illustrate the times. God did never let them be wanting to the world: As Abel, for an example, of Innocency; Enoch of Purity, Noah of Trust in Gods mercies, Abraham of Faith, and so of the rest. These, sensuall men thought mad, because they would not be partakers, or practisers of their

---

<sup>11</sup>

Ibid., p.382.

madnesse. But they, plac'd high on the top of all vertue, look'd downe on the Stage of the world, and contemned the Play of Fortune. For though the most be Players, some must be Spectators.

(Disc. 11.1100-1109)

The good man will inevitably be isolated, not through voluntary withdrawal, but because of the blindness of the rest. Nevertheless, he must refuse to go along with the crowd, if he is to know truth. The examined life is superior to the unexamined life because the man who knows himself also knows the world. This is shown in a later passage of the Discoveries, where Jonson writes about those who are too concerned with their own outward appearance. The examined life is the life of the understanding, the unexamined life the life of the senses:

if wee will looke with our understanding, and not our senses, wee may behold vertue, and beauty, (though cover'd with rags) in their brightnesse; and vice, and deformity so much the fowler, in having all the splendor of riches to guild them, or the false light of honour and power to helpe them. Yet this is that, wherewith the world is taken, and runs mad to gaze on: Clothes and Titles, the Birdlime of Fools.

(Disc. 11.1429-1436)

The man who wears a mask is the man who lives by the senses, and, because he deceives the world, he also allows the world to deceive him. But the man who lives according to the understanding, who knows what he is and refuses to take part in the play, cannot be taken in by appearances:

Imposture is a specious thing; yet never worse, then when it faines to be best, and to none discover'd sooner, then the simplest. For Truth and Goodnesse are plaine, and open: but Imposture is ever asham'd of the light.

(Disc. 11.236-239)

But where all are impostors, there is no light; it is only the good man who, by the light of his understanding, can discover imposture.

This, perhaps, accounts for the frequency of Jonson's attacks upon his audience. Too many of them are not Understanders, and are not able to unmask imposture. As far as the ironic comedies are concerned, light has to be shed from the outside. The characters may fail to see through each other, or themselves, but the audience should not. Over and over, Jonson accuses his audience of being deceived by Opinion, of judging by the judgements of others, of being pretenders. In effect, they demonstrate the very sin he is attacking, for their failure to understand his play springs from a failure to live the examined life. Like his knaves and fools, they live on the surface, and consequently cannot see Truth.

Jonson's belief in the accuracy of this metaphor is clearly related to the hostility to his chosen medium that the dramatist so often shows. If play-acting in life is reprehensible, so must play-acting on stage be. After the failure of The New Inn, one of his most complex examinations of the play-acting metaphor, Jonson took leave of the stage in the second "Ode to Himself":

Come leave the loathed Stage,  
And the more loathsome Age. . . .  
(11.1-2)

The conjunction of stage and age is not merely for the rhyme;

Jonson is embittered by the moral limitations of both. Precisely because the stage is the most appropriate medium for Jonson's concerns, it is also one of his central targets; hence the contempt for players, other playwrights, and the stage itself that Jonson cannot always hide. Hence too his hostility to the merely spectacular, to that which is meant simply to divert, and his insistence on the moral and didactic obligations of the dramatist, even in comedy. Anne Righter is, I think, rather unfair to Jonson in her remarks on this point:

Jonson's plays are filled with carping remarks about the theatre. Yet they reflect an attitude of distaste quite different from the one characteristic of Shakespeare after 1600. Jonson's numerous attacks upon the stage are almost invariably specific and topical. He lashes out not, like Shakespeare, at the whole concept of imitation, the idea of the play, but merely at the particular circumstances under which he is forced to write. . . . It is not the theatre itself which he rejects, but only its immediate conditions, conditions which he despairs of altering.<sup>12</sup>

There is no need to answer this somewhat partisan criticism at any length; the present discussion of Jonson has demonstrated that he does indeed attack "the whole concept of imitation, the idea of the play." He justified his persistence with the medium by using it to expound the very philosophy which underlay his distrust of it, and which enabled him to return to it after each defeat and withdrawal.

Jonson's ethical views remained constant throughout

---

12

Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, pp.152-153.

his career; he was certain that he was right in his earliest plays, and never lost faith in this conviction. But, fortunately for us, he was never a moralist merely. The peculiar form of Stoicism that he made his own was very demanding, asking that a man be a Crites; but we know that, although Crites might be Jonson, Jonson was by no means Crites. Even if we do not take too seriously the opinions of the humourless Drummond of Hawthornden, we have to take into account the Jonson of history -- chameleon in religion, flatterer of royalty, drinker, even killer; often, in his own way, a parasite. Hardly a man approximating his own ideal. But we have to recognize that Ben's concept of the poet freed him from his human imperfections. He wrote as poet, not as man, though he could often make poetry out of the conflicts which he saw between his poetic and his actual self. On a less abstract level, we have to remember that the Stoic ethic is an ideal, and it is quite possible for a man to believe in it without approaching it in his life; this does not make him a hypocrite. Jonson's humanist view of the didactic purpose of literature allows him to present this ideal without demanding that he himself be infallible. "We are all masquers sometimes." But this very vigour with which he lived his life translated itself into the comic vitality with which even his worst knaves and fools are filled. It accounts for the sympathy we feel for a Volpone or a Mammon, even as we are censuring them.

Granted this, however, we are bound to acknowledge the centrality of his ethical views to Jonson's work. We must recognize the coherence of his beliefs and their consistency throughout his dramatic career. Of course, similar ideas were by no means uncommon in his time; as Alvin Kernan has pointed out, Neostoicism is typically the philosophy of the Renaissance satirist.<sup>13</sup> But no other artist made these views so totally his own, or found so appropriate a metaphor for their expression. His attempts to find the significance of disguise lead him through the experiments of the Comicall Satyres to his more characteristic forms. At the same time, he learns how to deal with the figure of the satirist. The obvious difficulty with presenting a persona for the satirist on stage is that the Stoic ethic is hardly consonant with the railing tone required of him. A Macilente is too ambiguous a figure to embody a norm, and even though we sympathize with his actions, his motives, controlled as they are by envy, are hardly admirable. When Jonson tried to smooth out this figure, however, by toning down the railing and increasing the elements of Stoic fortitude, in Crites, he was left with a somewhat ineffectual satirist. Horace suffers from the same failing, if not to the same degree.

The function of the satirist is to unmask hypocrisy; he is always concerned with the distance between what is and

---

<sup>13</sup>

Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p.118.



what appears to be. By manipulation of the mask, Jonson was able to create precisely the right world for his satiric vision. In Volpone, the figure of the presenter is as much the target for satire as are the figures he unmasks. Volpone's dupes deserve the punishment they get; but ironically Volpone embodies their hypocrisies even more profoundly than they do. The whole world is masked, and there are no norms. We judge from outside, from the point of view of reasonable men who believe in the consistency that comes from self-knowledge, as against the Protean transformations of this world of role-players. It is this that allows us to know how Truewit or Lovewit, or Surly and Quarlous are to be judged. The irresponsibility of those who treat life as a play is reprehensible even when they are superior in wit. The one part we are allowed to act is that which we initially create by a moral ordering of the materials we are given, and that is a serious business. It is a moral imperative for a man to identify his self, using reason to counteract the "infected will", and for him to remain constant to that. So however outrageously comic a situation may be, however absurd a disguise, Jonson's underlying purpose is always serious.

According to one critic of Jonson, "His basis for judging life was intellectual; ignorance and stupidity were the cardinal sins."<sup>14</sup> This, of course, leads to the viewpoint

---

<sup>14</sup> Baum, The Satiric and the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy, p.33.

that the wits are the norm-figures in the Jonsonian universe. But Jonson's vision is much more integrated than this. Reason, for him, is the faculty which leads to Truth, and Truth is a moral concept. If it were true that ignorance and stupidity are the cardinal sins, then we would have to say that Volpone and Mosca are less guilty than their gulls, since they are neither ignorant nor stupid. But it is possible for intelligence, and what Jonson calls "Reason", to diverge. Volpone is no doubt a man of high intellect, but he is not reasonable, in a Jonsonian sense, since his powers lead him away from Truth. Indeed, for Jonson, the idea of ignorance had a very special meaning, as he writes in Discoveries: "I know no disease of the Soule, but Ignorance; not of the Arts, and Sciences, but of its selfe" (Disc. 11.801-802). So it is quite possible for a man of wit to be ignorant in this, the most important sense. But a truly wise man will also be a man of virtue. A man who knows himself has no need to deceive the world.

In Jonsonian comedy, however, everyone attempts to deceive the world. More accurately, each character is in a sense a solipsist, trying to impose his own imaginary shape on to a world he does not really know. The most obvious way to create a false appearance for the world is through disguise; but an equally potent way is through language. Again, in Discoveries, there is much about this:

Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans forme, or likeness, so true as his speech.

(Disc. 11.2031-2035)

A wise man will consequently see through verbal hypocrisy; conversely, a foolish or vicious man will be involved with his own attempts to deceive the world and will be unable to pierce the verbal surface. This is why the victims of Jonson's eloquent knaves are never good men, and why a Stephen is so anxious to emulate the verbal excesses of a Matthew and a Bobadill. It is the reason why so many of Jonson's characters speak a jargon that amounts almost to a private language. Canting is exposed in The Staple of News, but there are canters in all Jonson's plays. The audience, says A.H. Sackton, "is required to recognize the rhetorical character of language when some of the stage persons fail to do so."<sup>15</sup> Words are being used to suggest a reality that is not there; that is, they provide a disguise. But any excess of language is suspect, if we are wise.

Jonson is concerned, then, with those who take the word for the thing, the appearance for the reality; with those who mistake the disguise for the self. For these characters also believe that their own disguises are the self: not, I am what I am, but I am what I say I am. A false view

---

<sup>15</sup>

Alexander H. Sackton, Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson (New York, 1967), p.45.

of the self leads to a false view of the world. We have already seen the potentially dangerous effect of Imagination.

It must be stressed that Jonson's concept of the mask is not the same as the modern psycho-sociological view of role-playing which sees the mask as an inevitable part of social existence, and as morally neutral. And it is, surely, directly opposed to the concepts of that great modern theorist of the mask, W.B.Yeats: "I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself."<sup>16</sup> Jonson would consider this a negation of Reason, and an abuse of Imagination. If any other writer can be compared to Jonson in his use of the mask, it is, as has already been suggested, Molière. As W.G.Moore has shown, Molière's villains are those who are deluded about themselves and about the world, and whose delusion creates a mask for them -- we are reminded of Jonson's humour-characters; or they are those who are hypocrites, assuming a mask of piety. But the world of Molière's plays is different; for his villains the mask is not entirely the man, and Moore shows that his interest lies in the point where the mask slips, and is abandoned for the natural beneath. Furthermore, there are healthy characters in Molière, who provide a norm. These are

---

16

William Butler Yeats, Dramatis Personae (New York, 1936), p.130.

characters who are capable of love: "Is not love a symbol for what is not the mask but the man, for nature as opposed to art?"<sup>17</sup> Moore goes on to demonstrate an opposition in those who do not play roles and those who do, between instinct and intelligence. The power of will and wit is checked by the power of instinct and sense. The comparison with Ben Jonson is suggestive. There is no love in Jonson's plays, so there are no characters really capable of destroying the mask. Further, as we have seen, it is those who live by the senses whom Jonson sees as the failures, for they have not examined themselves in the light of intelligence. In effect, the opposition in Jonson's comedies is the reverse of that in Molière's.

All constituent elements in Jonson's dramas support the idea that a concern with self-knowledge and consistency of identity is at the centre of his ethical vision, and is crucial to an understanding of how judgement is to be made. Disguise elements of the plot, whether they be literal disguisings like those of Volpone, or play-acting without disguise like those of Mosca, are used in almost all of the comedies. The language, as we have seen, is related to the theme of disguising, whether it be the self-conscious jargon of a gull or a canter, or the more urbanely elaborate hypo-

---

<sup>17</sup>  
 - W.G. Moore, Molière, A New Criticism (Oxford, 1964),  
 p. 51.

crisy of Mosca or Subtle. Imagery too, with its recurrent motifs of cosmetics, of mask and visor, of "face", and of monstrous creatures combining the natures of more than one animal, supports this theme. All unite to produce a concept of character as mask, created by those who do not know themselves, existing in a world of illusory surfaces. In his most characteristic plays, all are involved in the ironic dance. All, even wits and justicers, are implicated, and final judgement is left to the spectator who, if he be an Understander, will know what to say. Seen on its own terms, it is a world without much hope, but hope lies in the constant heroes of Jonson's poetry, and in the elaborate harmonies of the masques.

The consistency with which this approach appears in Jonson's plays would appear to refute Eliot's view of the dramatist:

Jonson's drama is only incidentally satire, because it is only incidentally a criticism upon the actual world. It is not satire in the way in which the work of Swift or the work of Molière may be called satire: that is, it does not find its source in any precise emotional attitude or precise intellectual criticism of the actual world.<sup>18</sup>

The world of Jonson's plays may be a world of fantasy, but its direct application to the actual world, its "precise intellectual criticism" of the real world, is undeniable.

---

<sup>18</sup>  
T.S.Eliot, Elizabethan Dramatists (London, 1968), p.72.

It is by now a truism to say that Jonson wrote at a time of general and radical change. In Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, L.C.Knights outlined the view of society that still had a hold in Jonson's time:

the common analogy for the state was the human body: the various parts were members one of another, but each member had his place and his particular function -- and on the whole a man's expectations in life were determined by the position in society in which he happened to be born.<sup>19</sup>

But of course things were no longer like that; people were becoming aware of the possibility of social mobility, and to the conservative Jonson, notwithstanding his own ambitions as poet, the upstart and his aspirations were an easy target. According to Kernan:

no satiric author before Ben Jonson perceived and took advantage of the fact that the stock targets which he worked and reworked -- the fop, the usurer, the projector, and the insatiable lecher -- were but various manifestations of a boundless desire for self-gratification that escaped the restraints hitherto placed on it by tradition and common sense.<sup>20</sup>

These figures are also, of course, all lacking in control, all essentially hypocrites, all attempting to achieve their ambitions through presentation of a false appearance. Jonson's Stoic views coincided very well with the traditional view that every man should remain in his place. A man who,

---

<sup>19</sup>  
Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.27.

<sup>20</sup>  
Kernan, The Cankered Muse, p.87.

to gain his objectives, has to pretend to be something that he is not, is turning away from Truth, for "All acting involves, to a greater or lesser extent, a surrender of personal identity."<sup>21</sup> Jonson is finally hostile to mutability, and is seeking something in man that corresponds to what he finds in Nature: "She is alwayes the same, like her selfe" (Disc. 11.125-126). So there is a legitimate ambition, if it seeks final constancy and immutability:

If divers men seeke Fame, or Honour, by divers wayes;  
so both bee honest, neither is to be blam'd: But they  
that seeke Immortality, are not onely worthy of leave,  
but of praise.

(Disc. 11.175-178)

The poet, who is not taken in by the World, can achieve this state when a virtuous appearance coincides with a virtuous reality, when outer and inner worlds join, for permanence comes from within. When we know what we are, and are content to be that, when we have reasonably played the one role we have chosen, then we can attain to virtue. When we refuse to do this, we become a fit subject of Jonson's comedy, as of his censure:

Would you not laugh, to meet a great Counsellor of  
state in a flat cap, with his trunck hose, and a  
hobby-horse Cloake, his Gloves under his girdle,  
and yond Haberdasher in a velvet Gowne, furr'd with  
sables?

(Disc. 11.2056-2060)

---

21

Ian Donaldson, The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding (Oxford, 1970), p.68.



And so it is. What makes us laugh in Jonson is exactly this -- the sight of a man appearing to be that which he is not. This imposture can derive from a number of sources: from pride, which makes us deny what we are through shame, as in the case of those who use cosmetics, or who dress to hide an ulcer; from ambition, as in the case of those who, being empty themselves, take on the outer trappings of those they believe to be better than they -- these are the shams; from hypocrisy, as in the case of those who use a righteous appearance to judge others; from villainy, as with those who put on a false appearance to deceive and manipulate others. Whatever the immediate cause of the disguise, it is always related to a failure of identity, to a lack of self-knowledge; and knowing this, we judge as we laugh. We see that imposture is finally ridiculous because it arises from a false understanding of the world at the same time as it contributes to the very confusion which caused it. So it is at one and the same time an intellectual and a moral failure. It is caused by misuse of Reason, which leads to a wilful misuse of freedom of choice. As we saw at the beginning, a man does play a part, but it is up to him to build that part upon a moral base, to make the best of himself, and to play it well. If he falls into error, he may mistake the nature of his part, and attempt to play others; but the more roles he plays, the farther he strays from Truth. Thus what appears to be an act of freedom is in fact a step away from it. We are free only

when we have examined our lives, when we know what we are,  
what are our possibilities and our limitations, and when we  
are content to be ourselves.

## APPENDIX

The remainder of Jonson's dramatic work presents peculiar problems. The Tale of a Tub was first performed in 1633, but it is generally agreed to be a reworking of a play first written in 1597; The Sad Shepherd is only a fragment of a play. We need here consider them only briefly.

It seems likely that the final version of The Tale of a Tub retains the plot of the original play; and it relies more upon its plot to generate interest than does any other of Jonson's plays. We are by now familiar with the way in which Jonson uses disguise: although disguise may often be the motivating factor in a turn of a plot, it always contains more significance than this. Jonson is interested in disguise as a metaphor for certain manifestations of character, and is quite consistent in this. Disguise may be the means whereby a character takes control of the world around him, thereby controlling the plot of the play; but this effect upon the plot is essentially a secondary interest -- we are mainly concerned with the meaning of disguise in relation to the disguiser, in the analysis of role-playing and its significance to the problems of identity. But in The Tale of a Tub the function of the disguises is almost entirely related to the complication of the plot. Canon Hugh and Basket Hilt

disguise, not because they are compulsive play-actors, but in order to complicate, and then resolve the plot. So this play presents Jonson's only "conventional" use of disguise.

The "ridiculous Play" exists, indeed, mainly on its plot, since Jonson does not seem to be very interested in any of his characters. It shows few of Jonson's characteristic concerns; it is not even a satire, unless one calls the genial contempt with which Jonson treats his rustics satiric. It is his only play divorced entirely from an urban setting. All its characters are ridiculous in some way, but there is no unifying concern with fools or villains as lacking in self-knowledge.

If any of Jonson's usual concerns with the self appear, it is in the presentation of questions of social place. To know oneself means, in part, to know one's place. In the contrast of Tub and Clay, and their various pressures on Awdrey, something of this is dramatized. Lady Tub, in her velvet gown, represents one level, a level to which Awdrey, for all her presumption, should not aspire:

But for me,  
I know my selfe too meane for his high thoughts  
To stoop at, more then asking a light question,  
To make him merry, or to passe his time.  
(III.viii.12-15)

Nonetheless, there is a very familiar idea behind Canon Hugh's words, as he describes the disguised Awdrey's marriage to Pol-marten:

But she was so disguis'd, so Lady-like;

I thinke she did not know her selfe the while!  
(V.iv.23-24)

But nothing has changed; she is lady-like for one day only, and it is of significance that, although pursued by Tub and Preamble, both above her rank, she finally, almost by accident, marries Pol-Marten, who is much more her equal -- at the end, she remains in her place. But in this play, these are very marginal concerns.

Jonson's final work, his fragment of pastoral The Sad Shepherd (1637?), belongs essentially with his masques. Yet even in this play, different as it is from any of the others, there appear the familiar themes of identity, self-consistency, and the iniquity of false appearance; but play-acting is not here embodied in a whole gallery of figures, but rather in one character alone, who through magic threatens an ideal world.

The play opens in a harmonious world, a world of love and honesty, and of consistency. But the harmony is disrupted by the witch Maudlin, "the last incarnation of the Protean figure."<sup>1</sup> For Jonson, it is her very Protean ability that gives her the power to destroy harmony. In Jonson's more characteristic satirical comedies the Protean figure changed either through literal disguise or by presenting a false verbal surface; Maudlin has the power to change shape by

---

<sup>1</sup> Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self", p.347.

magic. In what we have of the play we see her as a raven and as Marian, but she tells her daughter, "yee may meet mee/In mony shapes tu day"(II.iii.36-37).

There is a certain ambiguity about Maudlin's power to change, however. Although she can appear like Marian, the change does not go very deep, because she can only speak like herself, so that, being deformed, she seems a deformed Marian. She boasts to her daughter that she has presented an exact likeness of Marian:

So like, Douce,  
As had shee seen me her sel', her sel' had doubted  
Whether had been the liker off the twa!  
(II.1.18-20)

This is a somewhat hyperbolical boast, for in this world evil cannot pass for good as it so often did in the blacker world of the satires. Robin Hood and his men are unwilling to believe in this Marian, thinking rather that it is they who are transformed: "Are wee not all chang'd,/Transformed from our selves?"(I.vii.35-36) Consequently, Maudlin's deception cannot last for long. When the real Marian appears again, the truth is soon guessed, and Maudlin fails in her subsequent appearance as Marian. So, in her boast to her daughter, she is largely deluding herself. As the wise Alken says, "Shee may deceive the Sense, but really/Shee cannot change her selfe"(II.vi.124-125).

Maudlin is self-deluded in more than one way, for even her power to change is not her own, but comes from the

Devil, Puck-hairy. Further, Puck-hairy suggests that the ability to transform is not a great power:

This Dame of mine here, Maud. growes high in evill,  
And thinkes shee doe's all, when 'tis I, her Divell,  
That both delude her, and must yet protect her:  
Shee's confident in mischeife, and presumes  
The changing of her shape will still secure her.  
But that may faile. . . .

(III.i.6-11)

One can easily project the outcome: Puck-hairy will be defeated and Maudlin's power to change shape, to deceive with appearances, will be taken away from her, so that harmony can be restored to the world.

Jonson is here working with a convention vastly different from that with which we are familiar from his other plays; his Stoic attitude toward constancy of the self is consequently modified for the new convention. The symbols are changed. We no longer have a world populated by role-players, a world that can never really be cured of its ills. Instead we begin with an ideal world, but one that is threatened from outside by the Protean, whose activities are now not so damaging, because they are essentially external to the world of the play, and no longer basic to it, as they were in the satires. The actor's power of metamorphosis is here associated directly with evil, a power coming from the devil, and having nothing even remotely noble or appealing in it. Furthermore, the power is shown to be largely illusory, since it can easily be penetrated by the knowing man. It is a power that can change only the appearance, and not the self; those

who use it are those who have no identity, or who are dissatisfied with what they are, but who are deluded when they believe that they can change. So we see that even here, Jonson's main concerns remain unchanged -- he has simply found a new language in which to talk of them.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### a) Jonson

Ben Jonson. Ed. C.H.Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson. 11 vols.  
Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925-52.

Volpone. Ed. Alvin B.Kernan. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962.

Epicoene. Ed. Aurelia Henry. New York: Henry Holt and Co.,  
1906.

Epicoene. Ed. L.A.Beaurline. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

The Alchemist. Ed. J.B.Steane. Cambridge: The University Press,  
1967.

Bartholomew Fair. Ed. E.A.Horsman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Bartholomew Fair. Ed. Eugene M.Waith. New Haven and London:  
Yale University Press, 1963.

Bartholomew Fair. Ed. Maurice Hussey. London: Ernest Benn Ltd.,  
1964.

Bartholomew Fair. Ed. E.B.Partridge. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.

#### b) Other

Aurelius, Marcus. The Meditations. Tr. G.M.A.Grube. Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1963.

Du Vair, Guillaume. The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks. Tr. Thomas James; ed. Rudolf Kirk. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1951.

- Elyot, Sir Thomas. The Boke Named the Governour. Ed. Foster Watson. London and New York: Dent, Dutton, 1907.
- Epictetus. The Enchiridion. Tr. Thomas W. Higginson. Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1955.
- Erasmus, Desiderius. Essential Works. Ed. W.T.H. Jackson. New York: Bantam Books, 1965.
- Lipsius, Justus. Two Books of Constancie. Tr. Sir John Stradling; ed. Rudolf Kirk. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1939.
- Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince. Tr. George Bull. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Marlowe, Christopher. Complete Plays. Ed. Irving Ribner. New York: The Odyssey Press, 1963.
- Nashe, Thomas. The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works. Ed. J.B. Steane. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Seneca, L. Annaeus. Moral Essays. Tr. John W. Basore. 3 vols. London: William Heineman Ltd., 1928.
- , Ad Lucilium Epistolae Morales. Tr. R.M. Gummere. 3 vols. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1934.
- Shakespeare, William. The Complete Works. Ed. Peter Alexander. London and Glasgow: Collins, 1959.
- Sidney, Sir Philip. The Defense of Poetry. Ed. Albert S. Cook. Boston, 1890.
- Yeats, W.B. Dramatis Personae. New York: MacMillan, 1936.

### Secondary Materials

#### a) Books and pamphlets

- Bamborough, J.B. Ben Jonson. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970.
- Barish, Jonas A. Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- , ed. Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

- Baskerville, Charles Read. English Elements in Jonson's Early Comedy. New York: The Gordian Press, 1967.
- Baum, Helena Watts. The Satiric and the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy. New York: Russell and Russell, 1947.
- Boughner, Daniel C. The Devil's Disciple: Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1968.
- Bradbrook, M.C. The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963.
- Burckhardt, Titus. Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul. Tr. William Stoddart. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Campbell, Oscar James. Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. San Marino, California, 1965.
- Champion, Larry S. Ben Jonson's Dotages: A Reconsideration of the Late Plays. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967.
- Chute, Marchette. Ben Jonson of Westminster. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1965.
- Coleridge, S.T. Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century. Ed. R.F. Brinkley. Duke University Press, 1955.
- Curry, John V. Deception in Elizabethan Comedy. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1955.
- Davis, Joe Lee. The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967.
- Dessen, Alan C. Jonson's Moral Comedy. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1971.
- Donaldson, Ian. The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970.
- Dryden, John. Literary Criticism of John Dryden. Ed. A.C. Kirsch. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Edelstein, Ludwig. The Meaning of Stoicism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Eliot, T.S. Elizabethan Dramatists. London: Faber, 1968.
- Enck, John J. Jonson and the Comic Truth. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957.

- Freeburg, Victor O. Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama: A Study in Stage Tradition. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965.
- Gibbons, Brian. Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston, and Middleton. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968.
- Goodman, Paul. The Structure of Literature. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954.
- Gossman, Lionel. Men and Masks: A Study of Molière. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.
- Hilberry, C.B. Ben Jonson's Ethics in Relation to Stoic and Humanistic Ethical Thought. Private edition, distributed by University of Chicago Libraries, 1933.
- Hoopes, Robert. Right Reason in the English Renaissance. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Jackson, Gabriele Bernhard. Vision and Judgement in Ben Jonson's Drama. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Kernan, Alvin B. The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Knight, G.Wilson. The Golden Labyrinth: A Study of British Drama. London: Phoenix House Ltd., 1962.
- Knights, L.C. Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962.
- Knoll, Robert E. Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964.
- Moore, W.G. Molière, A New Criticism. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Nicoll, A. British Drama. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.
- Orgel, Stephen. The Jonsonian Masque. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Palmer, John. Ben Jonson. London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1934.
- Partridge, E.B. The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson. London: Chatto and Windus, 1958.

- Peter, John. Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956.
- Righter, Anne. Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.
- Rossiter, A.P. English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966.
- Sackton, Alexander H. Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson. New York: Octagon Books, 1967.
- Smith, G.Gregory. Ben Jonson. London: MacMillan, 1919.
- Swinburne, A.C. A Study of Ben Jonson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969.
- Symonds, J.A. Ben Jonson. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888.
- Thayer, C.G. Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963.
- Townsend, Freda L. Apologie for Bartholomew Fayre: The Art of Jonson's Comedies. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1947.
- Trimpi, Wesley. Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style.
- Varty, Kenneth. Reynard the Fox: A Study of the Fox in Medieval English Art. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1967.

#### b) Articles and Parts of Books

- Anderson, Mark A. "The Successful Unity of Epicoene: A Defense of Ben Jonson", Studies in English Literature, X (1970), 349-366.
- Arnold, Judd. "Lovewit's Triumph and Jonsonian Morality: A Reading of The Alchemist", Criticism XI (1969), 151-166.
- Bacon, Wallace A. "The Magnetic Field: The Structure of Jonson's Comedies", Huntington Library Quarterly, XIX (1956), 121-153.
- Barish, Jonas A. "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXXI (1956), 213-224.

Beaurline, L.A. "Ben Jonson and the Illusion of Completeness", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXXXIV (1969), 51-59.

Blissett, William. "The Venter Tripartite in The Alchemist", Studies in English Literature, VIII (1968), 323-334.

Carpenter, Charles A. "Epicoene Minus Its Secret: Surprise As Expectation", Xavier University Studies, VII (1968), 15-22.

Champion, L.S. "The Comic Intent of Jonson's The New Inn", Western Humanities Review, XVIII (1964), 66-74.

Cope, Jackson I. "Bartholomew Fair As Blasphemy", Renaissance Drama, VIII (1965) 127-152.

Dessen, Alan C. "The Alchemist": Jonson's 'Estates' Play", Renaissance Drama, VII (1964) 35-54.

Donaldson, Ian. "Volpone: Quick and Dead", Essays in Criticism, XXI (1971), 121-134.

-----". "A Martyr's Resolution: Jonson's Epicoene", Review of English Studies, XVIII (1967), 1-15.

Dorenkamp, Angela G. "Jonson's Catiline: History As the Trying Faculty", Studies in Philology, LXVII (1970), 210-220.

Duncan, Douglas. "Ben Jonson's Lucianic Vision", Ariel, I (1970), 42-53.

-----". "Audience Manipulation in Volpone", Wascan Review, V (1970), 23-36.

-----". "A Guide to The New Inn", Essays in Criticism, XX (1970), 311-326.

Enck, John J. "The Case Is Altered: Initial Comedy of Humours", Studies in Philology, L (1953), 195-214.

Enright, D.J. "Crime and Punishment in Ben Jonson", Scrutiny, IX (1940-41), 231-248.

Ferns, John. "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman: A Reconsideration", Modern Language Review, LXV (1970), 248-253.

Gilbert, Allan H. "The Function of the Masques in Cynthia's Revels", Philological Quarterly, XXII (1943), 211-230.

- Greene, Thomas M. "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self", Studies in English Literature, X (1970), 325-348.
- Hallett, Charles A. "The Satanic Nature of Volpone", Philological Quarterly, XLIX (1970), 41-55.
- , "Jonson's Celia: A Reinterpretation of Volpone", Studies in Philology, LXVIII (1971), 50-69.
- Hamilton, Gary D. "Irony and Fortune in Sejamus", Studies in English Literature, XI (1971), 265-281.
- Hawkins, Harriett. "The Idea of a Theatre in Jonson's The New Inn", Renaissance Drama, IX (1966), 205-226.
- , "Folly, Incurable Disease, and Volpone", Studies in English Literature, VIII (1968), 335-348.
- Hays, H.R. "Satire and Identification: An Introduction to Ben Jonson", Kenyon Review, XIX (1957), 267-283.
- Hill, W.Speed. "Biography, Autobiography, and Volpone", Studies in English Literature, XII (1972), 309-328.
- Hussey, Maurice. "Ananias the Deacon. A Study of Religion in Jonson's The Alchemist", English, IX (1953), 207-212.
- Kaplan, Joel H. "Dramatic and Moral Energy in Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair", Renaissance Drama, n.s. III (1970), 137-156.
- Kifer, Devra Rowland. "The Staple of News: Jonson's Festive Comedy", XI (1972), 329-344.
- Kittredge, G.L. "King James I and The Devil Is an Ass", Modern Philology, IX (1911), 195-209.
- Knights, L.C. "Ben Jonson, Dramatist", in Boris Ford, ed., The Age of Shakespeare. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955.
- Lawrence, William J. "The Rise and Progress of the Complex-Disguise Play", in his Pre-Restoration Stage Studies. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.
- Leggatt, Alexander. "The Suicide of Volpone", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIX (1969), 19-32.
- Levin, Harry. "Jonson's Metempsychosis", Philological Quarterly, XXII (1943), 231-239.

- Levin, Lawrence L. "Justice and Society in Sejanus and Volpone", Discourse, XIII (1970), 319-324.
- ". "Clement Justice in Every Man in His Humour", Studies in English Literature, XII (1972), 291-307.
- Levin, Richard. "The Structure of Bartholomew Fair", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXXX (1965), 172-179.
- ". "The Staple of News, the Society of Jeerers, and Canters' College", Philological Quarterly, XLIV (1965), 445-453.
- ". "The New New Inn and the Proliferation of Good Bad Drama", Essays in Criticism, XXII (1972), 41-47.
- Litt, Dorothy E. "Unity of Theme in Volpone", New York Public Library Bulletin, LXXIII (1969), 218-226.
- Marotti, Arthur F. "The Self-Reflexive Art of Ben Jonson's Sejanus", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XII (1970), 197-220.
- Nash, Ralph. "The Comic Intent of Volpone", Studies in Philology, XLIV (1947), 26-40.
- Ornstein, Robert. "The Moral Vision of Ben Jonson's Tragedy", in R.J.Kaufmann ed., Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism. New York: Galaxy Books, 1961.
- Parfitt, G.A.E. "Ethical Thought and Ben Jonson's Poetry", Studies in English Literature, IX (1969), 123-134.
- Parker, R.B. "The Themes and Staging of Bartholomew Fair", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIX (1970), 293-309.
- Partridge, Edward B. "The Symbolism of Clothes in Jonson's Last Plays", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LVI (1957), 396-409.
- Petronella, Vincent F. "Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Study in Baroque Style", Discourse, XIII (1970), 325-337.
- Potter, John M. "Old Comedy in Bartholomew Fair", Criticism, X (1968), 290-299.



- Redwine, James D. Jr., "Beyond Psychology: The Moral Basis of Jonson's Theory of Humour Characterization", Journal of English Literary History, XXVIII (1961), 316-334.
- Robinson, James E. "Bartholomew Fair: Comedy of Vapors", Studies in English Literature, I (1961), 65-80.
- Scheve, D.A. "Jonson's Volpone and Traditional Fox Lore", Review of English Studies, n.s., I (1950), 242-244.
- Snuggs, Henry L. "The Comic Humours: A New Interpretation", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LXII (1947), 114-122.
- Symons, Julian. "Ben Jonson As Social Realist: Bartholomew Fair", Southern Review, VI (1940), 375-386.
- Thron, E.M. "Jonson's Cynthia's Revels: Multiplicity and Unity", Studies in English Literature, XI (1971), 235-247.
- Waith, Eugene M. "The Staging of Bartholomew Fair", Studies in English Literature, II (1962), 181-195.
- Weld, John S. "Christian Comedy: Volpone", Studies in Philology, LI (1954), 172-193.
- Wierum, Ann. "'Actors' and 'Play-Acting' in the Morality Tradition", Renaissance Drama, n.s., III (1970), 189-214.

#### ADDENDA

P.262

Greene, Robert. James the Fourth. Ed. J.A.Lavin. London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1967.

Lyly, John. Complete Works. Ed. R.Warwick Bond. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1902.

P.265

Add to Trimpi: Stanford University Press, 1962.