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JONSON: THE POET IN THE THEATRE

JONSON: THE POET IN THE THEATRE
STUDIES IN THE FATE OF AN IDEAL

By

BARBARA E. WARD, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Barbara E. Ward, B.A. (Trent University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Douglas J. M. Duncan

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I am concerned with the fairly consistent moral and aesthetic theory which seems to shape all of Jonson's writing. I am especially interested in Jonson's dictum that the good poet must be the good man. This leads on to an examination of the Jonsonian personality, with all its irresistible vigour, honesty, good-humour and coarseness, which always lurks under the surface of his writing. I attempt to come to terms with the obvious discrepancy between Jonson the man and Jonson the moral poet, and in particular how Jonson uses an understanding of his own personality to comment upon both the role of the artist in society, and the tenability of moral idealism.

I am further concerned with the problems presented to Jonson as a moral poet writing for the popular theatre. Throughout his career as a playwright Jonson was faced with the difficulty of writing so-called 'closet' dramas for a learned elite which would also perform successfully in the public theatre. The early plays under study have little theatrical value but do consistently dramatize Jonson's ideal of himself as the moral poet. In the 'Charis' sequence Jonson's ironic self-consciousness of his own humanity comments significantly upon the limitations of a moral and poetic idealism. By the time of the writing of the great comedies, Volpone, Epicoeone, The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair I find that Jonson has disguised his moral idealism so as to be successful in the theatre. These plays are remarkable for their dramatic excitement, an indication that Jonson had an obvious flair for the stage. The later plays, with their bittersweet and very personal tone, were written at a time when Jonson no longer had a voice or place in Caroline society, and when he was suffering from ill-health and poverty. Again I found a consistent upholding of the idea of the poet as moralist but, moreover, a crucial acceptance of the playwright's medium. At the very end of his writing career Jonson seemed to be closing the gap between the moral poet and the popular dramatist.

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DEDICATION

To my grandfather, B. A. Ward

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INTRODUCTION

Jonson, more than any writer of his day, was dedicated to a set of neo-classical literary principles, representing a constant, intellectual ideal of poetry and its maker. His neo-classicism presupposed that the work of art was ultimately a thing apart from its creator, and that the poet's personality must be wholly subordinate to perfecting the work as an objective unity. Interestingly, despite his professed allegiance to such a principle, Jonson's writing reveals a curious tension between an instinct to speak out personally, and the restraint imposed by classical literary theory. This tension is worth exploring for what insights it affords into Jonson's own personality and his ideal of himself as poet.

We are also left to wonder about the very nature and tenability of Jonson's moral and personal idealism. The two early plays, Cynthia's Revels, acted in 1600, and Poetaster, first acted in 1601, are selected for study because they best dramatize the young Jonson's intellectual ideal of the poet-satirist. But even these plays, for all their strains of an aesthetic and personal idealism, are fraught with unconscious but very real personal tensions jeopardizing the claims they make for the satirist's imperturbability.

The Charis lyric sequence is an excellent gloss on Jonson's growing consciousness of the vulnerability of poetic idealism, made much of in the later plays. J. B. Bamborough, in his perceptive study

of Jonson, argues that Jonson's best poems are in the forms of the epistle and the lyric, to which his classical literary theory was best adapted. That is, in these poems, Jonson's personality is subordinate to his ideal of the poet; they represent Jonson "as he would have liked to see himself, and (more importantly) successfully writing the kind of poetry he set himself to write."¹ The Charis sequence is so immensely enjoyable because in it Jonson questions the whole pretence of the man to the ideal role of the poet as lover. Jonson's consciousness of the very real discrepancy between literary idealism and human reality erupts in this fanciful repartee between the unrequited poet-lover and his mistress. In the sequence Jonson uses an ironic self-portraiture which leads us on to a consideration of Bartholomew Fair and the two later plays under study. It hints at the growing ambiguity in Jonson's vision of the artist and his role in society.

Bartholomew Fair, acted by the Lady Elizabeth's Servants in 1614, is a result of Jonson's increased consciousness of the impossibilities of living out the poet's moral idealism. This play is selected as representing his fullest achievement of a satiric vision which includes the satirist himself. The mature Jonson discerns nuances and irregularities in human behaviour, his own included, which do not allow for the rigid idealism of the younger Jonson. In Bartholomew Fair Jonson focuses attention on the problem of the social critic and moralist, by implication his own. There is a certain indulgence on Jonson's part, worth noting, toward the weaknesses of being human. At the same time he must admit to the irony of any imperfect moral

authority fulfilling the poet's ideal task of educating men to virtue and self-knowledge. However, the imperfections of human authority do not bring into question the ultimate validity of the ideal of moral authority. Because we cannot live an ideal is no reason to suspect or reject that ideal.

This is made clearer in Jonson's plays The New Inn, acted in 1629, and The Magnetic Lady, produced in 1632. In these late plays there seems to have occurred a discernible split in Jonson's vision of the poet. In each play, through two complementary characters, Jonson can satisfactorily present the poet in two complementary aspects -- his necessary moral integrity and the "arts" best able to persuade men to desired ends. These final plays are extremely important as a retrospective summary of the nature of Jonson's idealism. In them Jonson re-affirms the ideal of the poet's (and his own) moral authority; but at the same time he acknowledges the devices of the stage-artist which conflict with the poet's moral idealism but are essential for making it intelligible to the common understanding.

It is difficult not to respond to the dynamic and expansive Jonsonian personality always lurking under the surface of his writing. Although this study in part examines the role of the artist in his own work it is not meant to be a biographical approach to Jonson's art. I am interested in how Jonson uses an understanding of his own personality to comment upon both the role of the artist in society and the nature of human idealism.

FOOTNOTES (INTRODUCTION)

¹J. B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson, London: Hutchinson University Library, 1970, p. 168.

CHAPTER ONE

Jonson's Discoveries, published posthumously in the Folio of 1640, provides the most extensive record of his views on the nature of poetry and the poet's relation to society. In the tradition of the neo-classicists Jonson believed that "the poem is at the same time a finished object resistant to change and time, an imitation of a universal order which change cannot undermine but in which it has a place, and a pattern of order for society to imitate."¹ Poetry is best defined by Jonson as a "dulcet, and gentle Philosophy, which leades on, and guides us by the hand to Action, with a ravishing delight, and incredible Sweetnes."² In so far as it extolls virtue and goodness poetry has an all-embracing and beneficial influence in society:

The Study of it (if wee will trust Aristotle) offers to man-kinde a certaine rule, and Patterne of living well, and happily; disposing us to all Civill offices of Society. If wee will beleive Tully, it nourisheth, and instructeth our Youth; delights our Age; adornes our prosperity; comforts our Adversity; entertaines us at home; keepes us company abroad, travailes with us; watches; divides the times of our earnest, and sports; shares in our Country recesses, and recreations; insomuch as the wisest and best learned have thought her the absolute Mistresse of manners, and nearest of kin to Vertue.³

Fundamental to Jonson's definition of poetry was his belief in the idea that the good poet must be a good man. This idea is developed at considerable length in the Epistle prefaced to Volpone, dated 1607:

For, if men will impartially, and not a-squint, looke toward the offices, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselues, the impossibility of any mans being

the good Poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to informe yong-men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great vertues, keepe old-men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to childhood, recouer them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things diuine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the businesse of mankind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride, and ignorance to exercise their rayling rhetorique upon.⁴

The attributes of the poet and the scope of his poetry are further defined by Jonson in the following important passage from Discoveries:

I could never thinke the study of Wisdome confin'd only to the Philosopher: or of Piety to the Divine: or of State to the Politicke. But that he which can faine a Commonwealth (which is the Poet) can governe it with Counsels, strengthen it with Lawes, correct it with Iudgements, informe it with Religion, and Morals; is all these. Wee doe not require in him meere Elocution; or an excellent faculty in verse; but the exact knowledge of all vertues, and their Contraries; with ability to render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattling them.⁵

As we shall see, Crites of Cynthia's Revels and Horace of Poetaster best exemplify Jonson's view of the proper character and function of the satirical poet.

The Discoveries also reflect Jonson's interest in the more technical matters of composition. He reveals a preoccupation with discipline and revision rather than a trust in the fullness of inspiration, for "Ready writing makes not good writing; but good writing brings on ready writing."⁶ He abhors the stylistic excesses of his contemporaries, seeking in the "true" artificer moderation and decorum:

. . . his wisdome, in dividing: his subtilty, in arguing: with what strength hee doth inspire his Readers; with what sweetnesse hee strokes them: in inveighing, what sharpenesse; in Jest, what urbanity hee uses. How he doth raigne in mens affections; how invade, and breake in upon them; and makes their minds like the thing he writes. Then

in his Elocution to behold, what word is proper: which hath ornament: which height: what is beautifully translated: where figures are fit: which gentle, which strong to shew the composition Manly. And how hee hath avoyded faint, obscure, obscene, sordid, humble, improper, or effeminate Phrase . . .⁷

Underlying Jonson's concern for moderation and decorum is the assumption by Aristotle and Horace that the artist must subordinate his personality to his work, in order to perfect the work of art as a thing apart from its creator. As noted in the introduction, much of Jonson's writing reflects a controlled tension between the restraints imposed by classical theory and the poet's inclination to project himself and his private concerns into his work. Many of Jonson's critics have remarked on the extent to which Jonson's tendency to self-dramatization is highly un-Aristotelean. Herford and Simpson insist upon the very subjective tone and intent of Cynthia's Revels and Poetaster arguing that these two early plays, while affording an excellent example of Jonson's intellectual idealism, reveal his un-Aristotelean tendency to self-portraiture.⁸ Isabel Rivers, in her study of Jonson, finds that Cynthia's Revels and Poetaster give "a coherent exposition of Jonson's satiric role."⁹ J. A. Bryant, in his book The Compassionate Satirist: Ben Jonson and His Imperfect World, discovers in Jonson's plays an exploration of the relation of the artist to society and a concurrent growth in Jonson's self-knowledge:

A major subject of attention in most of the chapters will be the recurring reflections of Jonson's concern over his own role as a public comic poet. There is evidence to suggest that, for those years between 1598 and 1614 when his production for the public theatres was at its richest, he used his dramatic writing partly as a means of understanding the relation of a dramatic poet to society. That is, in the plays themselves he regularly dramatized, both

singly and in a variety of permutations and combinations, the public roles that he was as the poet obligated to assume from time to time -- specifically those of a moralist, literary critic, and satirist. He did this with a persistency, moreover, that almost compels one to believe that, as he came to consider himself committed to such obligations, he consciously attempted to explore them in the plays he was writing. In any case this book is in part an attempt to chart Jonson's growth in an area of knowledge that for him most likely became self-knowledge.¹⁰

In a study of Jonson's poems Wesley J. Trimpi has persuasively argued that the so-called plain style is most revealing of Jonson's personality. The poems have "the curious personal quality of the author's continued and unchanging presence coming through the lines, no matter in what genre the poem may be."¹¹ Despite the discouragement given to self-expression by classical literary theory, the writings selected for study here will demonstrate just how frequent and significant was Jonson's departure from basic Aristotelean principles.

Central to Jonson's ideal of the poet was a peculiar blend of Stoic and humanist ethical thought stressing honesty, constancy, self-knowledge and self-control. These rigorous personal criteria associated with the office of the poet have raised serious queries about Jonson's ability to live up to them in real life. Existing biographical evidence of the historical Jonson suggests a man who fell conspicuously short of the ideal of Crites or Horace. J. B. Bamborough raises the question of hypocrisy in Jonson's pose as a reformer of men and manners:

No doubt he desired in theory a moral perfection which in his own life he was incapable of achieving; most people do. He certainly did not find it possible to maintain the calm, moderate Horatian pose which he desired, and he appears

often ill-tempered, insensitive, and uncharitable. Yet this need not invalidate his attraction towards the ideal, or make him a hypocrite.¹²

Similarly Peter Hyland in his excellent dissertation on Disguise and Role-Playing in Ben Jonson's Drama dismisses the charge of hypocrisy:

He wrote as poet, not as man . . . 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.'¹³

It would seem that Jonson, in much of his writing, adopted the pose which represented him not as he was but as he would have liked to see himself. The extent to which Jonson realized his ideal of the poet is best seen in the dedicatory and commendatory poems to his friends and patrons. In his epistolary poems he achieved a familiar yet serious moral tone to effectively persuade men to virtuous living. In such poems as "An Epistle to a Friend to Persuade him to the Warres", or "To Edward Sackville, Earl of Dorset" Jonson concentrates on defining virtue and urging his friends to imitate the virtuous life. He distinguished between the public world and private, between greatness and goodness, and between fame, fortune and virtuous living. He presents his friends and patrons with an ideal pattern for living which will not only assure personal worth but will sustain the moral fibre of the commonwealth. It is clear that in these particular poems Jonson is committed to a belief in a higher social order which it is the poet's task to perpetuate. Contrary to the self-dramatization evident in many of the plays and the Charis lyric sequence, in the commendatory poems

Jonson rarely dramatizes himself or holds himself up for satiric exposure. While conscious of his social inferiority to his patrons, Jonson's confidence in his role as the moral poet puts him on a comfortable footing with his social superiors. In the world of ethics he is the diviner who shares a common touchstone with the men to whom he writes.

In Cynthia's Revels, first acted by the Children of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel in 1600, and Poetaster (1601), Jonson is pre-eminently concerned with defining in his own mind, and to the theatre-going public, the nature and function of the satirical poet. It is timely to examine these two plays in conjunction with the Discoveries to see how conscientiously Jonson strove to impart to his early art the major principles of his critical thinking.

Jonson creates a highly stylized allegory of virtue and vice in Cynthia's Revels. This play is unique for the way in which the poet is immersed in his creation of the ideal of the poet-satirist. However, even in the portrait of his ideal, Jonson's personality is not wholly subordinated. Some degree of self-dramatization is evident in the play, arguing for the difficulties of sustaining aesthetic ideals. This unconscious acknowledgement of his own humanity by Jonson looks forward to Bartholomew Fair and the New Inn where he exploits his essential humanity in creating drama.

In the playful Induction to Cynthia's Revels spoken by three of the child actors one perceives Jonson's characteristic uneasiness with the stage. The children's banter, in giving a cursory outline of the drama's plot, protects Jonson from the expectations of the audience.

And through the children Jonson sharply satirizes the ignorance and indiscriminate judgement of the stage-audience:

As some one ciuet-wit among you, that knowes no other learning, then the price of satten and vellets; nor other perfection, then the wearing of a neat sute; and yet will censure as desperately as the most profess'd critique in the house: presuming, his clothes should beare him out in't. Another (whom it hath pleas'd nature to furnish with more beard, then braine) prunes his mustaccio, lips, and (with some score of affected othes) sweares downe all that sit about him; That the old Hieromino, (as it was first acted) was the onely best, and iudiciously pend play of Europe. A third great-bellied juggler talkes of twentie yeeres since, and when MONSIEVR was heere, and would enforce all wits to bee of that fashion, because his doublet is still so. A fourth miscals all by the name of fustian, that his grounded capacitie cannot aspire to. A fift, only shakes his bottle-head, and out of his corkie braine, squeezeth out a pittiful-learned face, and is silent.¹⁴

He is careful to have the children distinguish his own art from the literary affectations of his contemporaries:

It is in the generall behalfe of this faire societie here, that I am to speake, at least the more iudicious part of it, which seemes much distasted with the immodest and obscene writing of manie, in their playes. Besides, they could wish, your Poets would leaue to bee promoters of other mens iests, and to way-lay all the stale apothegmes, or olde bookes, they can heare of (in print, or otherwise) to farce their Scenes withall. That they would not so penuriously gleane wit, from euerie laundresse, or hackney-man, or deriue their best grace (with seruile imitation) from common stages, or obseruation of the companie they conuerse with; as if their inuention liu'd wholly upon another mans trencher . . .¹⁵

Surprisingly Jonson makes light of the very real frustrations and anxieties of the poet, who, by staging his play, forfeits the artist's singular control over his creation. Indeed, a measure of good-humoured self-parody is evident in the children's portrait of the anxious, back-stage poet:

Not this way, I assure you, sir: wee are not so officiously befriended by him, as to haue his presence-in the tiring-house, to prompt us aloud, stampe at the booke-holder, sweare for our properties, curse the poore tire-man, raile the musicke out of tune, and sweat for euerie veniall trespasse we commit, as some Authour would, if he had such fine engles as we. Well, tis but our hard fortune.¹⁶

Jonson's confidence in his artistic merit shines forth in the prologue to the play. Here he exhibits that "masterful self-confidence"¹⁷ which sustained him throughout his life-time. Jonson was not a democrat who wrote to the norm of the common man's opinion; his art was concerned with depicting the truth about man, however discomfoting that truth might be:

In this alone, his MUSE her sweetnesse hath,
 Shee shunnes the print of any beaten path;
 And proues new wayes to come to learned eares:
 Pied ignorance she neither loues, nor feares.
 Nor hunts she after popular applause,
 Or fomie praise, that drops from common iawes:
 The garland that she weares, their hands must twine,
 Who can both censure, understand, define
 What merit is: Then cast those piercing raies,
 Round as a crowne, in stead of honour'd bayes,
 About his poesie; which (he knowes) affords
Words, aboue action: matter, aboue words.¹⁸

His disdain for the impermanence and illusion of stage-production is early felt in his production of Cynthia's Revels, where, as he was wont to do in his productions of court masques, he emphasizes words and matter over spectacle. Jonson's concern early in his career as a playwright for a more perfect medium for his art marks his critical self-consciousness. By 1612 he had begun arranging his plays for the definitive folio edition by which he wished them to be ultimately judged.

All of Jonson's early enthusiasm and idealism is infused in the

creation of the stage-character Crites. Crites becomes the ideal poet-satirist, a man without moral imperfections with a passionate concern for truth:

A creature of a most perfect and diuine temper. One, in whom the humours and elements are peaceably met, without emulation of precedencie: he is neyther to phantastikely melancholy, too slowly phlegmaticke, too lightly sanguine, or too rashly cholericke, but in all, so composde&order'd, as it is cleare, Nature went about some ful worke, she did more then make a man, when she made him . . . In summe, he hath a most ingenuous and sweet spirit, a sharp and season'd wit, a straight iudgment, and a strong mind. Fortune could neuer breake him, nor make him lesse. He counts it his pleasure, to despise pleasures, and is more delighted with good deeds, then goods. It is a competencie to him that hee can bee vertuous. He doth neyther couet, nor feare; hee hath too much reason to doe eyther: and that commends all things to him.¹⁹

Throughout the play, Crites, as Jonson's spokesman, passionately pleads for virtue, piety, and goodness in men's lives. He perfectly understands and expresses Jonson's ideal of the fundamental didactic purpose of the comic poet:

Humour is now the test, we trie things in;
 All power is iust: Nought that delights is sinne.
 And, yet the zeale of euery knowing man,
 (Opprest with hills of tyrannie, cast on vertue
 By the light phant'sies of fooles, thus transported)
 Cannot but vent the Aetna of his fires,
 T'enflame best bosomes, with much worthier loue . . . 20
 Then of these outward, and effeminate shades: . . .

In Crites, translated the "judge", Jonson appeals to the necessity for moral judgement. Sanctioned by the authority of Mercury and Cynthia, Crites effects the moral redemption of the corrupted courtiers, thereby dramatizing the fundamental function of Jonsonian comedy -- "The scope of wise mirth unto fruit is bent."²¹

One can argue that Crites, more than just being a spokesman

for Jonson, becomes an idealized personification of Jonson's own self. Through him Jonson idealizes his responses to a society contemptuous of his poverty and hostile to his learning and moralizing. The courtiers repeatedly revile Crites for his poverty and learning. To them he is a "whore-sonne booke-worme, a candle-waster"²² unfit for their society:

By this heauen, I wonder at nothing more then our gentlemen-ushers, that will suffer a piece of serge, or perpetuana, to come into the presence: mee thinkes they should (out of their experience) better distinguish the silken disposition of courtiers, then to let such terrible coorse ragges mixe with us, able to fret any smooth or gentile societie to the threeds with their rubbing deuices.²³

Crites responds to their contempt with a stoical imperturbability; he confidently remains loyal to his own ideals, "flicking off the insect malice of envious rivals."²⁴ Moreover, he is rewarded for his goodness by the goddess Cynthia. His true merit is rightly acknowledged, and he assumes his ideal post in society "that of the poet-teacher standing at the elbow of the monarch, unfolding wise and sane counsel."²⁵

Underlying this portrait of Crites is a tension arguing against his acclaimed imperturbability. There is a creeping tone of anger and bitterness in Crites's speeches insinuating Jonson's personal frustration with his own poverty and neglect:

Doe, good detraction, doe, and I the while
Shall shake thy spight off with a carelesse smile . . .
What should I care what euery dor doth buzze
In credulous eares? it is a crowne to me,
That the best iudgements can report me wrong'd;
Them lyars; and their slanders impudent . . .
I thinke but what they are, and am not stirr'd.
The one, a light voluptuous reueller,
The other a strange arrogating puffe,
Both impudent, and ignorant inough;

That talke (as they are wont) not as I merit:
 Traduce by custome, as most dogges doe barke,
 Doe nothing out of iudgement, but disease,
 Speake ill, because they neuer could speake well.²⁶

Moreover, most critics of Jonson argue that within Crites's exchanges with Arete and Cynthia lurks an urgent appeal by Jonson for approval and preferment by his own court:

Loe, here the man (celestiall DELIA)
 Who (like a circle bounded in it selfe)
 Contaynes as much, as man in fulnesse may.
 Loe, here the man, who not of usuall earth,
 But of that nobler, and more precious mould,
 Which PHOEBUS selfe doth temper, is compos'd;
 And, who (though all were wanting to reward)
 Yet, to himselfe he would not wanting be:
 They fauours gaine is his ambitions most,
 And labours best; who (humble in his height)
 Stands fixed silent in thy glorious sight.²⁷

Jonson's preoccupation in the play with the abuse of Crites and his subsequent reward suggests that Jonson, himself, cannot "like the Stoic he longs to be, remain indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune. He cannot despise the acclaim or scorn of others; he exults in approval and smarts painfully under criticism."²⁸

Poetaster (1601) reads as a polemic on the art of satire.

Bitterly reacting to Dekker's and Marston's anticipated attack upon his integrity as a poet in Satiro-Mastix, Jonson defends his practice of satire in a thinly-disguised attack upon Dekker and Marston in the persons of Demetrius Fannius and Crispinus. Jonson is torn between vindicating his own character from violent personal attack and, more critically, of documenting his ideals of excellence. The play primarily explores the relationship of the artist to society. The principal figures, Ovid, Horace and Virgil, are ranked in a kind of

hierarchy of artistic merit. The epic poet Virgil dramatizes Jonson's noblest ideal of the artist. He is isolated from the common man, a rare personification of virtue:

I iudge him of a rectified spirit,
 By many reuolutions of discourse
 (In his bright reasons influence) refin'd
 From all the tartarous moodes of common men;
 Bearing the nature, and similitude
 Of a right heauenly bodie: most seuer
 In fashion, and collection of himselfe,
 and then as cleare, and confident, as IOVE. 29

The young and sensual Ovid is typed as the amoral erotic poet, whose poetry, while satisfying the creator's own aestheticism, fulfils no fundamental didactic purpose. Ovid is severely eschewed by the sober Caesar for his irreverent impersonation of the gods, and corresponding betrayal of the poet's austere purposes.

Are you, that first the deities inspir'd
 With skill of their high natures, and their powers,
 The first abusers of their use-full light;
 Prophaning thus their dignities, in their formes:
 And making them like you, but counterfeites?
 O, who shall follow vertue, and embrace her, . . .
 Who shall, with greater comforts, comprehend
 Her unseene being, and her excellence;
 When you, that teach, and should eternize her, 30
 Liue, as shee were no law unto your liues . . .

Caesar's intellectualizing of the poet's task scarcely allows room for the poet's humanity. He rigorously applies an ideal of self-knowledge, self-control and piety to the poet's life:

I will preferre for knowledge, none, but such
 As rule their liues by it, and can becalme
 All sea of humour, with the marble trident
 Of their strong spirits . . . 31

The delightfully human Horace best dramatizes Jonson's ideal of the poet-satirist. He is ranked between Virgil and Ovid as the poet

with a positive educational function in society. Jonson reviews in his own mind his purposes as a satirical poet, through Horace's lengthy defense of the time-honoured tradition of satire and its mode of expression:

But this my stile no liuing man shall touch,
 If first I be not forc'd by base reproch;
 But, like a sheathed sword, it shall defend
 My innocent life . . .
 O IVPITER, let it with rust be eaten,
 Before it touch, or insolently threaten
 The life of any with the least disease;
 So much I loue, and woe a generall peace . . .
 'All men affright their foes in what they may,
 Nature commands it, and men must obay' . . .
 I will write satyres still, in spite of feare . . . 32

Horace personifies the satiric spirit of "wholesome sharpe moralitie"³³ and "modest anger"³⁴ esteemed by Jonson. He is the exemplary satirist whose writing instructs while delighting.

Many of Jonson's critics have felt that in the urbane and modest Horace Jonson offers a personal ideal of his own character. Rivers and Herford and Simpson, as previously noted, find evidence in Poetaster of Jonson's unwillingness to subordinate his personality to the work at hand. Indeed, try as he does in the play to internalize his own anger and insecurity, the recurrent and quite personal allusions to his own poverty and detraction shadow Horace's character.

It can be argued that through Horace Jonson presents a fantasized set of responses to his contemporaries' defamation of his character and art. Horace's rivals, Demetrius Fannius and Crispinus, closely parallel Dekker and Marston in their attack upon Jonson:

Deme. Alas, sir, HORACE! hee is a meere sponge; nothing but humours, and obseruation; he goes up and downe sucking from euery societie, and when hee comes home, squeezes himself drie againe. I know him, I.

Tucc. A sharpe thornie-tooth'd satyricall rascall, flie him; hee carries hey in his horne; he wil sooner lose his best friend, then his least iest . . .³⁵

To their envious and vituperative detraction Horace responds with a wholesome equanimity and good-humour seldom shared by Jonson. He defends his satire from their imputations of arrogance, self-love, and malice, proving "The honest Satyre hath the happiest soule."³⁶ Moreover, with a liberty lacking to Jonson, Horace rebukes the Augustan court for its derogatory suspicions of his poverty:

CAESAR speakes after common men, in this,
To make a difference of me, for my poorenesse:
As if the filth of pouertie sunke as deepe
Into a knowing spirit, as the bane
Of riches doth, into a ignorant soule . . .³⁷

Like Crites, Horace's true merit is rightly esteemed by the court; he is likewise endowed with the authority to administer the appropriate purgative to his rivals.

But that Horace's position is distant from Jonson's own is keenly felt in the prologue and lengthy apologetical dialogue to the play, where the explosive anger evinced by Jonson protests against Horace's pose as a truthful representation of Jonson's own feelings. The prologue to Poetaster answers Jonson's critics in a more real way than does Horace. His peers and detractors are bitterly satirized through the personified Envy:

Are there no players here? no poet-apes,
That come with basiliskes eyes, whose forked tongues
Are steep in venome, as their hearts in gall?
Eyther of these would helpe me; they could wrest,

Peruert, and poyson all they heare, or see,
 With senselesse glosses, and allusions . . .
 Here, take my snakes among you, come, and eate,
 And while the squeez'd juice flowes in your blacke jawes,
 Helpe me to damne the Authour . . .³⁸

The armed Prologue speaks Jonson's contempt for the spite of his "base detractors, and illiterate apes."³⁹ With highly figurative language Jonson bolsters his own artistic merit at the expense of that "common spawne of ignorance, our frie of writers."⁴⁰

The same hostility and isolation of the artist distinguish the apologetical dialogue spoken between the author and the fictitious Nasutus and Polyposus. The very real position of the poet, as contrasted with the idealized position of Horace, is manifest in these concluding speeches. Beset by the authorities for alleged slander in his play's satire of lawyers, soldiers, and actors, the poet has retreated to a proud and bitter silence. That contemporary audiences have misunderstood Jonson goads him to an incensed dismissal of the multitude's critical faculties, and an equally contemptuous denunciation of the artistic worth of his detractors:

They know, I dare
 To spurne, or baffull'hem; or squirt their eyes
 With inke, or urine: or I could doe worse,
 Arm'd with ARCHILOCHUS fury, write Iambicks,
 Should make the desperate lashers hang themselues.
 Rime'hem to death, as they doe Irish rats
 In drumming tunes . . .⁴¹

It is clear that Jonson is deeply hurt by the slanders to his character and artistic integrity. An insatiate desire for approval underlies the eloquent allusions to the Poet's lonely task, concluding the

apologetical dialogue:

O, this would make a learn'd, and liberall soule,
 To riue his stayned quill, up to the back,
 And damne his long-watch'd labours to the fire;
 Things, that were borne, when none but the still night,
 And his dumbe candle saw his pinching throes . . .
 I, that spend halfe my nights, and all my dayes,
 Here in a cell, to get a darke, pale face,
 To come forth worth the iuy, or the bayes,
 And in this age can hope no other grace -
 Leaue me. There's something come into my thought,
 That must, and shall be sung, high, and aloofe,
 Safe from the wolues black iaw, and the dull asses hoofe.⁴²

Because the audience has consistently refused to accept Jonson's self-definition, he withdraws to an alternate art form, tragedy, which appeals to an elite audience. Jonson's isolation as a satirist can, in part, be explained by his need to keep intact, from the world of opinion, his belief in the reality of his virtuous appearance. In his allegiance to the ideal of how the poet ought to be, Jonson is unable to acknowledge the self-interest -- the need for status and well-being -- motivating his behaviour. At this time in his career he cannot come to terms with the tension between the outer and inner worlds of Ben Jonson. Rivers raises the fundamental question of how to reconcile Jonson's hostility to, and rejection of, the stage audience with his duty as a poet outlined in the Discoveries:

Jonson's deliberate isolation as a satirist, together with his hostility toward the theatrical audience . . . conflicted with his allegiance to the traditional Renaissance view of the poet's legislative function.⁴³

In part this thesis will examine Jonson's difficulty, during his career, in closing the gap between theory and practice, and in reconciling his often contradictory attitudes to the function of the poet in society.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER ONE)

¹Isabel Rivers, The Poetry of Conservatism, Massachusetts: Rivers Press, 1973, p. 2.

²Discoveries, 2398-2400, in Ben Jonson, Ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols., 1925-1952. All subsequent references to Jonson's works are to this edition.

³Ibid., 2386-2396.

⁴Volpone, Epistle, 20-31.

⁵Discoveries, 1032-1041.

⁶Ibid., 1731-1732.

⁷Ibid., 787-797.

⁸H. and S., I, 410.

⁹Rivers, p. 22.

¹⁰J. A. Bryant, The Compassionate Satirist: Ben Jonson and His Imperfect World, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972, pp. 2-3.

¹¹Wesley J. Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style, California: Stanford University Press, 1962, p. 154.

¹²J. B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson, London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1970, p. 171.

¹³Peter Hyland, Disguise and Role-Playing in Ben Jonson's Drama, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1973, p. 243.

¹⁴Cynthia's Revels, Induction, 201-217.

¹⁵Ibid., 173-184.

¹⁶Ibid., 160-166.

¹⁷H. and S., I, 120.

¹⁸Ibid., Prologue, 9-20.

¹⁹Ibid., II, iii, 123-145.

²⁰Ibid., V, iv, 629-636.

²¹Ibid., V, xi, 160.

²²Ibid., III, ii, 2-3.

²³Ibid., III, ii, 28-35.

²⁴Jonas A. Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970, p. 87.

²⁵Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶Cynthia's Revels, III, iii, 1-31.

²⁷Ibid., V, viii, 18-28.

²⁸Barish, p. 87.

²⁹Poetaster, V, i, 100-107.

³⁰Ibid., IV, vi, 34-46.

³¹Ibid., IV, vi, 74-77.

³²Ibid., III, v, 71-100.

³³Ibid., V, iii, 138.

³⁴Ibid., V, iii, 139.

³⁵Ibid., IV, iii, 104-111.

³⁶Ibid., V, iii, 376.

³⁷Ibid., V, i, 79-83.

³⁸Ibid., Prologue, 35-46.

³⁹Ibid., 9.

⁴⁰Ibid., 18-19.

⁴¹Ibid., Apologetical Dialogue, 159-164.

⁴²Ibid., 209-239.

⁴³Rivers, p. 25.

CHAPTER TWO

Within the realms of literary convention, the poet has traditionally been regarded as the celebrant of love and beauty. An excellent expression of this literary tradition of the poet as lover, and Jonson's attitude to it, is found in elegy XLIII from The Underwood, first printed in the Folio of 1640-1641. Jonson humorously represents himself as the poet-lover whose obvious physical defects are overshadowed by the ideal of the efficacy of the word to move to love:

Let me be what I am, as Virgil cold;
As Horace fat; or as Anacreon old;
No Poets verses yet did ever move,
Whose Readers did not thinke he was in love.
Who shall forbid me then in Rithme to bee
As light, and active as the youngest hee
That from the Muses fountaines doth indorse
His lynes, and hourelly sits the Poets horse? (1-8)

As the poet-lover, he claims an interest in all that is called lovely:

Put on my Ivy Garland, let me see
Who frownes, who jealous is, who taxeth me.
Fathers, and Husbands, I doe claime a right
In all that is call'd lovely: take my sight
Sonner then my affection from the faire.
No face, no hand, proportion, line, or Ayre
Of beautie; but the Muse hath interest in . . . (9-15)

However, that the poet is more than a disinterested celebrant of the idea of beauty is clearly insinuated in the following lines where love is placed in the experiential world:

There is not worne that lace, purle, knot or pin,
But is the Poets matter: And he must,
When he is furious, love, although not lust.
But then consent, your Daughters and your Wives,

(If they be faire and worth it) have their lives
 Made longer by our praises. Or, if not,
 Wish, you had fowle ones, and deformed got;
 Curst in their Cradles, or there chang'd by Elves,
 So to be sure you doe injoy your selves . . .
 But I who live, and have liv'd twentie yeare
 Where I may handle Silke, as free, and neere,
 As any Mercer; or the whale-bone man
 That quilts those bodies, I have leave to span:
 Have eaten with the Beauties, and the wits,
 And braveries of Court, and felt their fits
 Of love, and hate: and came so nigh to know
 Whether their faces were their owne, or no . . . (16-36)

By placing love in the real world Jonson comments upon the insufficiency of the ideal. He somewhat warily admits to the duplicity in the poet's disguise and to the hypocrisy in celebrating an often false beauty.

The poem concludes with a pungent satire on the moral eccentricities and corrupt poets of Jonson's day. Contemporary emphasis upon external dress as an inducement to love, to the exclusion of an esteem for manners, wit, or beauty, is sharply ridiculed, as are the 'sneaking Songsters' (26) who betray the ideal calling of the poet-lover in an absurd idolatry of the "French-hood, and Scarlet gowne" (69). Jonson's satire is directed more at the debasement of love-poetry, than at the tradition itself in which a poet celebrated more than "any fat Bawd, in a Velvet scabberd" (85).

On the whole Jonson's attitude to the ideal of the poet-lover is equivocal. He is willing to participate in the ideal, yet always anticipates disillusionment over the efficacy of the word. Moreover, Jonson is keenly aware of his own physical imperfections which might jeopardize his claims as the poet-lover. Much of the unique power of Jonson's love poetry rests in his ironic treatment of the theme of love and the poet-lover. An excellent introduction to this kind of poetry

is Jonson's short, introductory poem to the collection of poems entitled The Forrest, first printed in the Folio of 1616. The poem "Why I write not of Love" effectively dramatizes the strain between the ideal of the poet as lover and the reality of the poet as man. Cupid's persistent eluding of the poet suggests the inefficacy of the word, the limitations of the Ideal:

Some act of Loue's bound to rehearse,
 I thought to binde him, in my verse:
 Which when he felt, Away (quoth hee)
 Can Poets hope to fetter mee?
 It is enough, they once did get
 MARS, and my Mother, in their net:
 I weare not these my wings in vaine.
 With which he fled me: and againe,
 Into my ri'mes could ne're be got
 By any arte. Then wonder not,
 That since, my numbers are so cold,
 When Loue is fled, and I grow old. (1-12)

Wesley J. Trimpi, in his illuminating study of Jonson's poems, observes that Jonson places the experience of love "in the context of his experience as a whole"¹:

Hence, he is not pre-occupied with isolating it in order to give it more emphasis than it would ordinarily seem to have; he does not wish to strip from it the ethical and circumstantial world in which it must take place. To do so would be to distort the truth. Real lovers exist in a real world. Hence, love is only one of their problems, and their feelings about it are greatly complicated by the others. This is why Jonson's poems seem to be less expressions of love, then statements about it. They take into account his age and his appearance, both of which he may reasonably expect to give him difficulty.

In this way Jonson comes to a crucial reconciliation of the ideal and the actual.

Accompanying Jonson's exploration of the ideal is an undeceiving honesty which furthers a true self-knowledge without lessening the

dignity of the ideal. The reader comes to a finer awareness of the accommodating breadth and receptiveness of Jonson's personality. The poem "My Picture left in Scotland" from The Under-wood provides the best illustration of this. The ideal of the poet-lover is ironically deflated yet curiously redeemed by the underlying, whimsical tone of the poem. The poem begins with a witty play on the traditional imagery of love as blind:

I Now thinke, Love is rather deafe, then blind,
 For else it could not be,
 That she,
 Whom I adore so much, should so slight me,
 And cast my love behind: (1-5)

Thus the reader is prepared for the lines in which the poet introduces the ideal of the efficacy of the word to move to love:

I'm sure my language to her, was as sweet,
 And every close did meet
 In sentence, of as subtile feet,
 As hath the youngest Hee,
 That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree. (6-10)

But this ideal of the poet as lover is ironically qualified by the subsequent, good-humoured self-portraiture:

Oh, but my conscios feares,
 That flie my thoughts betweene,
 Tell me that she hath seene
 My hundred of gray haire,
 Told seven and fortie years,
 Read so much wast, as she cannot imbrace
 My mountaine belly, and my rockie face,
 And all these through her eyes, have stopt her eares. (11-18)

The older lover "must persuade the lady with his language, but, even though she may listen to it and admire it, he has reason to fear that what she sees will make her forget what she hears."³ The poem terminates with an ironic return to the opening lines of the poem; it is because

Love 'sees' too well, that the word fails. One senses in the tone of the last lines a passing regret that the poet's language, directed to the understanding and suggestive of a more spiritual realm of love, should be negated by a less worthy but more real, sensual love.

The sequence of short lyric poems "A Celebration of Charis in ten Lyrick Peeeces" (The Under-wood, 1640-1641) is written within the literary convention of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence celebrating a lady. However, Jonson's sequence is more than a conventional Petrarchan sonnet cycle. He treats himself and the Petrarchan conventions with a playful urbanity which parodies much in the courtly rhetoric and behaviour of the Petrarchan hero. But, as in the poem "My Picture left in Scotland", there is an underlying seriousness to these poems which confirms Jonson's belief in the ideal of the efficacy of language and truth in making love.

Jonson's ironic appraisal of the limitations of what ought to be, by reference to what is, recalls the poet-lover's position dramatized in the poetry of Anacreon, the Greek poet invoked by Jonson in poem five of the sequence. Anacreon, with his white head, grey temples, and ragged teeth suffers from the same limitations. Although "blest with ample wit, / To fix the bridle and the bit"⁴ his words are recognizably impotent from the perspective of love in the real world:

My hair mislikes her, grown so white;
There's someone lovelier in her sight
Who draws that callow gaze.⁵

Similarly Jonson begins his sequence by exhibiting Anacreon's self-consciousness. The poet defensively anticipates ridicule, and seeks to forestall the reader's wonder or laughter at the folly of an

older man in love:

Let it not your wonder move,
 Lesse your laughter; that I love.
 Though I now write fiftie yeares,
 I have had, and have my Peeres;
 Poets, though divine, are men:
 Some have lov'd as old agen. (1-6)

He somewhat equivocally dismisses the importance of face, clothes, or fortune to move to love, substituting instead, a confidence in the efficacy of the word:

And it is not alwayes face,
 Clothes, or Fortune gives the grace;
 But the Language, and the Truth,
 With the Ardor, and the Passion,
 Gives the Lover weight, and fashion. (7-12)

As the sequence develops, documenting the trials and ultimate failure of the poet-lover, these words gather a rich irony. As Trimpi has observed "there is a sly sophistication in the word 'alwayes', which suggests the ending of his 'Storie', and implies his judgment on the impracticality of the idealized standards as well as on the people who cannot meet them."⁶ These lines unconsciously set up the discrepancy between the ideal of the poet as lover and the reality of the poet as man. It is precisely the humanness of the poet, intruding into the realm of the ideal, which accounts for the failure of "the Language and the Truth" (10).

The first poem concludes with an eloquent tribute to Charis's beauty:

When you know, that this is she,
 Of whose Beautie it was sung,
 She shall make the old man young,
 Keepe the middle age at stay,
 And let nothing high decay,
 Till she be the reason why,
 All the world for love may die. (18-24)

According to Trimpi these lines express a Neo-Platonic ideal of Charis's beauty:

Since it transcends the physical world and leads the lover to the realm of permanent values, is able to keep everything worthwhile from degenerating, and the lady herself will become "the reason shy, All the world for love may die." The double meaning of the word "die" creates a double meaning in the word "world". Love of this lady will lead everybody ("All the world") to put aside his own identity to unite with her, and such a transcendent love will literally destroy the physical world in the minds of the lovers.⁷

Yet these words reveal a less idealistic strain; there seems a deliberate irony in Jonson's choice of words. While seeking to idealize a spiritual beauty Jonson lays a curious emphasis upon the physically restorative and preservative worth of Charis's beauty. There also seems a sophisticated sexual innuendo in his use of the word "die". By such double meaning Jonson locates love in the real, sensual world, which proves to be its final testing ground. In these lines, too, is internalized the conflict, within Jonson, between his idealism and realism. The realm of the ideal is gently strained by an irony which accepts, without bitterness, the true nature of love.

In the second lyric of the sequence, "How he saw her", Jonson describes his first meeting with Charis. In a playful allegory of an adventure with Cupid the poet humorously parodies the convention of the poet as lover. An uncourageous Cupid, frightened by Charis's great beauty, deserts the poet at a crucial moment. Left alone the poet must play Cupid:

Love, if thou wilt ever see
 Marke of glorie, come with me;
 Where's thy Quiver? bend thy Bow:
 Here's a shaft, thou are to slow!
 And (withall) I did untie

Every Cloud about his eye;
 But, he had not gain'd his sight
 Sooner, then he lost his might,
 Or his courage; for away
 Strait hee ran, and durst not stay,
 Letting Bow and Arrow fall,
 Nor for any threat, or call,
 Could be brought once back to looke. (7-19)

With a sense of humour more urbane than bitter, the poet sees himself objectively and self-consciously as a grotesque parody of Cupid:

I foole-hardie, there up-tooke
 Both the Arrow he had quit,
 And the Bow: with thought to hit
 This my object. But she threw
 Such a Lightning (as I drew)
 At my face, that tooke my sight,
 And my motion from me quite;
 So that, there, I stood a stone,
 Mock'd of all: and call'd of one
 (Which with griefe and wrath I heard)
Cupid's Statue with a Beard,
 Or else one that plaid his Ape,
 In a Hercules-his shape. (20-32)

The poet has made himself appear foolish and ridiculous in love by forsaking the dignity of the older man for the gallant devices of the young. Jonson's self-portraiture relegates love to a world of physical reality. This poem looks forward to Charis's description of her 'ideal' lover who becomes the physical opposite to the poet.

Poem three "What hee suffered" chronicles the sufferings of the scorned lover. The poet melodramatically endures the humiliating vagaries of his Mistress and Cupid, soliciting only a feeble pity from his lady Charis:

After many scornes like these,
 Which the prouder Beauties please,
 She content was to restore
 Eyes and limbes; to hurt me more.
 And would on Conditions, be

Reconcil'd to Love, and me.
 First, that I must kneeling yeeld
 Both the Bow, and shaft I held,
 Unto her; which Love might take
 At her hand, with oath, to make
 Mee, the scope of his next draught,
 Aymed with that selfe-same shaft.
 He no sooner heard the Law,
 But the Arrow home did draw
 And (to gaine her by his Art)
 Left it sticking in my heart:
 Which when she beheld to bleed,
 She repented of the deed,
 And would faine have chang'd the fate,
 But the Pittie comes too late . . . (1-20)

Failing at the gallant games of love, the poet seeks recourse to the realm of the ideal:

Looser-like, now, all my wreake
 Is, that I have leave to speake,
 And in either Prose, or Song,
 To revenge me with my Tongue,
 Which how Dexterously I doe,
 Heare and make Example too. (21-26)

In returning to the standard of the efficacy of "the Language and the Truth" the poet restores the dignity and decorum first claimed by him at the start of the sequence.

How dexterously the poet uses his tongue is proven in poem four of the 'Charis' sequence, "Her Triumph". Jonson achieves in this lyric a delicacy and clarity of tone and subject, with no trace of his previous self-consciousness. He has imaginatively entered into the ideal of the poet-lover, writing with a persuasive romantic rhetoric:

See the Chariot at hand here of Love,
 Wherein my Lady rideth!
 Each that drawes, is a Swan, or a Dove,
 And well the Carre Love guideth.
 As she goes, all hearts doe duty
 Unto her beauty;
 And enamour'd, doe wish, so they might
 But enjoy such a sight,

That they still were to run by her side,
 Th(o)rough Swords, th(o)rough Seas, whether she would ride.
 (1-10)

Only the gentle images of transient beauty, in the last stanza of the poem, echo Jonson's awareness of how ephemeral and insubstantial the ideal of Charis and her beauty is:

Have you seene but a bright Lillie grow,
 Before rude hands have touch'd it?
 Have you mark'd but the fall o'the Snow
 Before the soyle hath smutch'd it?
 Have you felt the wooll o'the Bever?
 Or Swans Downe ever?
 Or have smelt o'the bud o'the Brier?
 Or the Nard I'the fire?
 Or have tasted the bag o'the Bee?
 O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she! (21-30)

In poem five, "His discourse with Cupid", the hypothetical dialogue between Cupid and the poet furthers the description of Charis's beauty. Jonson, cast as the poet-lover, effectively uses literary tradition as a starting point for comparison of Charis's beauty. He builds his description of Charis upon classical sources alluding to the beauty of Venus:

So hath Homer prais'd her haire;
 So Anacreon drawne the Ayre
 Of her face, and made to rise,
 Just above her sparkling eyes,
 Both her Browes, bent like my Bow . . .
 Such my Mothers blushes be,
 As the Bath your verse discloses
 In her cheekes, of Milke, and Roses;
 Such as oft I wanton in! . . .
 Nay, her white and polish'd neck,
 With the Lace that doth it deck,
 Is my Mothers! Hearts of slaine
 Lovers, made into a Chaine!
 And betweene each rising breast
 Lyes the Valley, cal'd my nest . . . (13-34)

But Charis's beauty transcends the mere sensual beauty of Venus. She shares in the more worthy dimensions of wisdom and grace, which ideally would enable her to respond to "the Language and the Truth" of the poet:

All is Venus: saye unchaste.
 But alas, thou seest the least
 Of her good, who is the best
 Of her Sex; But could'st thou, Love,
 Call to mind the formes, that strove
 For the Apple, and those three
 Make in one, the same were shee.
 For this Beauty yet doth hide
 Something more then thou hast spi'd.
 Outward Grace weake love beguiles:
 She is Venus, when she smiles,
 But shee's Juno, when she walkes,
 And Minerva, when she talkes. (42-54)

This poem is central to the entire sequence. It shows, at least temporarily, how completely Jonson is willing to partake in the ideal of the poet-lover. His idealization of Charis places love in a Neo-Platonic context, in which the lovers are seen to be mutually worthy of one another. The idealism of these last lines provides an effective starting point for the abrupt falling away from the ideal which occurs in the last five poems of the sequence.

In poem six, "Clayming a second kisse by Desert", we see the poet relying upon the efficacy of the word to reap more sensual rewards. We now begin to see Charis moving through the real world, and anticipate a corresponding failure on the part of the poet. In this poem Jonson sets up a contrast, flattering to Charis, between her and a bride at Whitehall:

That the Bride (allow'd a Maid)
 Look'd not halfe so fresh, and faire,
 With th'advantage of her haire,
 And her Jewels, to the view
 Of th'Assembly, as did you! . . . (8-12)

Yet the tone of this complimentary verse is dubious. The poet is uncertain as to the power of his words to move Charis. He leaves the decision, as to the effectiveness of his verse, to her whim:

Charis, guesse, and doe not misse,
 Since I drew a Morning kisse
 From your lips, and suck'd an ayre
 Thence, as sweet, as you are faire,
 What my Muse and I have done:
Whether we have lost, or wonne . . . (1-6)

The ambiguous wording of the last lines registers a dwindling in the self-assurance and power of the poet-lover:

Guesse of these, which is the true;
 And, if such a verse as this,
 May not claime another kisse. (34-36)

Poem seven, "Begging another, on colour of mending the former" is a delightful lyric, dramatizing the sensual urgings of the poet. With a teasing lightness of tone the poet asks for another kiss:

For Loves-sake, kisse me once againe,
 I long, and should not beg in vaine,
 Here's none to spie, or see;
 Why doe you doubt, or stay?
 I'le taste as lightly as the Bee,
 That doth but touch his flower, and flies away . . .
 (1-6)

This delicate imagery of a kiss hints of a spiritual love; but the poet's idealism soon subsides into the deeper-seated urgings of physical longing. Contrary to the persuasive imagery of the first lines is the more crude image of the insatiate lover:

This cou'd be call'd but halfe a kisse.
 What w'are but once to doe, we should doe long.
 I will but mend the last, and tell
 Where, how it would have relish'd well;
 Joyne lip to lip, and try:
 Each suck (the) others breath.
 And whilst our tongues perplexed lie,
 Let who will thinke us dead, or wish our death. (11-18)

By returning love to such a standard of physical reality Jonson must forsake the eloquent idealism of the poet-lover. The remaining poems of the Charis lyric sequence are suffused with an irony which questions the validity of the previous idealism.

In poem eight "Urging her of a promise" the poet erupts into a mildly satiric attack upon Charis. She degenerates from his previously expressed ideal to a woman of affectation, artificiality and vanity:

You shall neither eat, nor sleepe,
No, nor forth your window peepe,
With your emissarie eye;
To fetch in the Formes goe by:
And pronounce, which band, or lace,
Better fits him, then his face;
Nay, I will not let you sit
'Fore your Idoll Classe a whit,
To say over every purle
There; or to reforme a curle;
Or with Secretarie Sis
To consult, if Fucus this
Be as good, as was the last . . . (15-27)

Jonson's attack upon Charis, not to be taken as a serious indictment of her, does locate her in the sensual world of the court. It also reveals the extent to which the poet's own complex feelings of insecurity and physical unworthiness are plaguing him. He over-reacts to his previous idealism, expressing love in the crude terms the Lady of poem ten does.

In the poem "Her man described by her owne Dictamen" Charis finally speaks to the reader. She outlines her ideal in a tone teasing yet gentle towards Jonson, who falls pathetically short of the ideal lover. Charis teases Jonson in her insistence upon the French clothes and manners of her ideal lover. In her ideal of smooth face, woolly chin and genteel figure Charis pokes fun at the Jonson of "Hercules-his

shape" (32) and "Cupids Statue with a Beard" (30). Underlying Charis's dictamen is a self-consciousness which seems to acknowledge the unworthiness of her stress upon titles, fashion, youth and face.

Indeed, often her words seem to parody the affectations of the court:

I would have him, if I could,
Noble; or of greater Blood:
Titles, I confesse, doe take me;
And a woman God did make me:
French to boote, at least in fashion,
And his Manners of that Nation . . . (3-8)

Charis rescues her ideal from banality in her championing of the virtues of valour, courage, honesty and truth in her lover:

Valiant he should be as fire,
Shewing danger more then ire.
Bounteous as the clouds to earth;
And as honest as his Birth.
All his actions to be such,
As to doe no thing too much . . . (41-46)

Her lover softens into the ideal of an Aristotelean mean in behaviour. As Trimpi observes "the end to which the lover's abstract dimensions are directed is the love of 'Truth and me' which Charis playfully equates in value, while at the same time alluding to Jonson's praise of the language and the truth, both of which must be used in the effort not to overpraise 'nor yet contemne' 'Nor out-valew, nor contemne.'⁸ The poem ends on a very idealistic note. Charis's idealism demands that her lover have all of the qualities mentioned or she "can rest me where I am" (56).

Jonson concludes the sequence with a short witty poem which draws the fine line between what is legitimate and what absurd in Charis's idealism. The lady of poem ten plays on Charis's use of the word 'part', reducing love to a crude materialistic and sexual plane:

For his Mind, I doe not care,
 That's a Toy, that I could spare:
 Let his Title be but great,
 His Clothes rich, and band sit neat,
 Himselfe young, and face be good,
 All I wish is understood.
 What you please, you parts may call,
 'Tis one good part I'd lie withall. (1-8)

The lady's singular insistence upon title, clothes, face and sexual prowess qualifies Charis's dictamen. She lacks Charis's intelligent recognition of the banality of her stress upon the external; nor does she share what is, in comparison, even more commendable, Charis's concern with abstract worth. The extremity of Charis's idealism is softened by the lady's vulgar realism. Charis comes to represent, as Trimpi rightly points out, the mean between Jonson's 'excuse' and the Lady's 'exception'.⁹

The final poem of the sequence also reinforces Jonson's ironic consciousness of the discrepancy between the ideal and the real. The Lady's rooting of love in the sensual world comments upon the insufficiency of the ideal. In the shadows the reader is aware of the poet-lover who lacks precisely title, clothes, youth, face and figure. This poem returns full circle to the first poem of the sequence in which we saw Jonson balancing the efficacy of the word against the persuasiveness of externals. Throughout the lyric sequence he has played off the portrait of an older man ready to believe in the efficacy of the word to move to love, and the humorously objective self-portrait which comes to accept the physical basis of love and the fact of its power over "the Language and the Truth."

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER TWO)

¹ Wesley J. Trimpi, Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style, California: Stanford University Press, 1962, p. 209.

² Ibid., p. 209.

³ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴ Anacreon "Take her, break her", trans. W. Headlam, The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation, ed. T. F. Higham and C. M. Bowra, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944, p. 223.

⁵ Anacreon, "Love", trans. T. F. Higham, p. 221.

⁶ Trimpi, p. 215.

⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

⁸ Ibid., p. 224.

⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

CHAPTER THREE

Bartholomew Fair is central to an appreciation of Jonson's maturing reflections on his purpose as a poet. In this play, first acted by the Lady Elizabeth's men at the Hope Theatre in 1614, Jonson's function as the moralist is far from obvious. With greater ambiguity than is apparent in any of his other plays Jonson scrutinizes his share in the follies of mankind. On the surface Bartholomew Fair teases the reader into a sentimental view of an older, more mellow Jonson acknowledging his own weaknesses and thereby indulging mankind's. This play has the distinction of apparently vindicating the fools at the expense of the custodians of wisdom. Jonas Barish in his study of Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy argues that "both *Busy* and *Overdo* embody self-parody and self-penance of Jonson's part"¹ and further that with Bartholomew Fair:

Jonson confesses his own frailty and his own flesh and blood. Though he continues to satirize popular taste, he now -- momentarily at least -- identifies his own interests with it. Having, like *Busy*, failed to affect public morality, having like *Wasp* failed to educate fools, and having, like *Adam Overdo*, failed to maintain his Stoic neutrality amid the pressures and passions of life, he resigns himself to the status of a fool among fools.²

In the following pages I hope to demonstrate that Bartholomew Fair does not show Jonson relinquishing his ideal of the artist as the guardian of public morality. Whatever self-parody and self-penance are evident in Jonson's portrait of *Busy*, *Wasp* and *Overdo* should not

be construed as showing the poet genially resigning himself to the "status of a fool among fools."³ To be sure, in these characters, Jonson has turned a sometimes rueful and sometimes bemused eye on his personal shortcomings. This does not, however, set human weakness as the norm, to the detriment of the ideal of the poet as moral censor.

Admittedly the reader must strain to hear the moralist's guiding voice so distinctly heard in Cynthia's Revels or Poetaster. With Bartholomew Fair it seems that the ironist supersedes the moralist. The overt didacticism of earlier Jonsonian comedy is no longer apparent. Jonson's critical distance forces the reader himself to take up the exacting role of moralist made so difficult by the contradictory attitudes to judgement in the play.

The Induction to the play first sounds the theme of judgement. Unlike the inductions to his early plays, the Induction to Bartholomew Fair is not written in didactic tones and says nothing about Jonson's moral purposes. It does, however, say a great deal about Jonson's opinion of the theatre. His outline of the difficulties of stage production reveals the extent of his frustration with this medium. The biggest handicap to stage-production is the audience. The success of the artist's play is in the hands of ignorant men, whose expectations of noisy, empty spectacle are different from the poet's creation. Jonson's promise in the Induction to satisfy the audience's expectations with a play "merry, and as full of noise, as sport: made to delight all, and to offend none"⁴ cannot be accepted at face value. The ironist has a different meaning. The promise of a play made to delight and not offend hinges on the qualification "Prouided they haue either, the wit,

or the honesty to thinke well of themselues."⁵ Jonson wryly insinuates that there is a deeper moral level to his play.

The theme of judgement underlying the articles of agreement between the poet and the audience makes clearer Jonson's moral purposes in Bartholomew Fair. The stage-keeper's judgement, fit only for "sweeping the Stage? or gathering up the broken Apples for the beares within?"⁶ is the norm deliberately appealed to in Bartholomew Fair:

For the Author hath writ it iust to his Meridian, and the Scale of the₇grounded Iudgements here, his Play-fellowes in wit.

It is exactly this kind of judgement (or lack of it) which Jonson defies in his invitation to the audience to exercise their judgement of his play:

It shall bee lawfull for any man to iudge his six pen'orth, his twelue pen'orth, so to his eighteene pence, 2.shillings, halfe a crowne, to the value of his place: Provided alwaies his place get not aboue his wit
It is also agreed, that euery man heere, exercise his owne Iudgement, and not censure by Contagion, or upon trust, from anothers voice, or face, that sits by him, be he neuer so first, in the Commission of Wit: As also, that hee bee fixt and settled in his censure, that what hee approues, or not approues to day, hee will doe the same to morrow, and if to morrow, the next day, and so the next weeke (if neede be:) Hee that will sweare, Ieronimo, or Andronicus are the best playes, yet, shall passe unexcepted at, heere, as a man whose Iudgement shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these fiue 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 errour does well; such a one, the Author knowes where to finde him.

The induction is a pointer to the ironist's true intentions in the play. To exclude from the reading of Bartholomew Fair a fundamental didacticism is to ally our judgement with that so damningly satirized in the above quotation. The Horatian motto on the 1631 title-

page of Bartholomew Fair alerts the reader to the poet's deeper moral purposes:

If Democritus were alive now, he would find more to laugh at in the audience than in the play. He would think the author was telling his tale to a deaf ass.⁹

By concentrating his satire on the hypocrisy and folly of the fair's moral censors, Busy, Wasp and Overdo, Jonson deceives the unsuspecting reader into a mistaken rejection of moral authority. His play on the Christian sentiment, "Judge not that ye be not judged" deceives the reader into a too-ready suspension of moral judgement. A closer examination of Bartholomew Fair will hopefully demonstrate just how completely Jonson upholds the need for moral authority and, in turn, his function as an artist. To do so, it is crucial to resolve the conflict within the play between the 'apparent' moral and the 'true' moral. The essence of the play lies in its contradictory attitudes to judgement which must be sorted out and judiciously weighed against each other.

The fair itself is a chaotic world which reduces men to a kind of 'flesh and blood' primitivism. It becomes an inversion of the humanistic ideal of an ordered universe, which men approximate by virtue of their reason. In such a world rules Ursula the pig-woman. All "fire, and fat",¹⁰ she is a richly allusive, earth-mother figure presiding, in state, over the fair:

Thou shalt sit i' thy chaire, and giue directions, and shine Ursa maior.¹¹

Ursula's tent, with its offerings of ale, pig and 'punk' is the vital centre of the fair. It attracts the fair-people, its visitors and censors, levelling all to a common, human sensuousness. Ursula's animal

cunning is opposed, by implication, to the unstated ideal of human reason. Indeed, her very soul is held together with ale and tobacco. Although Jonson reduces Ursula to a morally-pointed identification with the animal kingdom, she cannot be dismissed as unappealing. He confers upon her a vigour and vitality which absolve her in a world tyrannized by the flesh.

Jonson's satiric treatment of Ursula's peers manifests the same tension between their spiritual debasement and their redeeming organic vitality. For instance, the ironic presentation of Leatherhead, "Orpheus among the beasts, with his Fiddle, and all!",¹² Joan Trash, "Ceres selling her daughters picture, in Ginger-worke!"¹³ and Nightingale, the minstrel of "The Wind-mill blowne downe by the witches fart!"¹⁴ never resolves itself into either a satire of the fair-people's profanation of art, or an approving glance at their creativity, however low. Jonson's detachment allows the fair-people to live on their own terms. The relationship between Trash, and Leatherhead, Edgeworth and Nightingale, or Ursula and Knockem, despite their competitiveness, suggests a sort of social cohesion amongst the fair-people. Isolated from the body social and politic, the fair stands as a portrait of unregenerate man's fight for survival.

In Bartholomew Fair the society of the uneducated becomes a point of reference for the educated. Left alone, the fair might have stood for a disarming kind of 'pastoral' society. However, by introducing the play's visitors to the fair, and its moral censors, Jonson forces the collision of two worlds. The fair draws out the innate folly of these visitors with sad consequences for their social

and moral well-being. They run a gamut of moral and social degeneration which forces the reader into a recognition of the compelling need for moral authority. It is this that makes Jonson's satire of Busy, Wasp and Overdo so significant. We come to see that in respect to religion, education and justice, Jonson is not satirizing moral authority per se but rather the corruption and failure of such authority.

There is no doubt that Jonson's satire of Busy is directed at exposing the hypocrisy of the Puritans. At the time of his writing of Bartholomew Fair the Puritans were increasingly vocal in their abuse of the theatre. It was certainly in Jonson's interests as a playwright to expose the hypocrisy of their stance. Before the audience even sees Busy, he is typed as a hypocrite in the conversation of Littlewit, Quarlous and Winwife:

A notable hypocriticall vermine it is; I know him. One that stands upon his face, more then his faith, at all times; Euer in seditious motion, and reprocuing for vaine-glory: of a most lunatique conscience, and splene, and affects the violence of Singularity in all he do's . . .¹⁵

Busy's initial appearance itself further betrays his folly. Through his inflated and rhetorical speech he reveals himself to be a canting hypocrite:

In the way of comfort to the weake, I will goe, and eat. I will eate exceedingly, and prophesie; there may be a good use made of it, too, now I thinke on't: by the publicke eating of Swines flesh, to professe our hate, and loathing of Judaisme, whereof the brethren stand taxed. I will therefore eate, yea, I will eate exceedingly.¹⁶

Busy's language and behaviour at the fair verify his true nature. He very quickly becomes a living symbol of gluttony, his religious authority put into true perspective by Knockem:

An excellent right Hypocrite! now his belly is full, he falls a railing and kicking, the Iade. A very good vapour! I'll in, and ioy Ursla, with telling, how her pigge works, two and a halfe he eate to his share. And he has drunke a pailefull. He eates with his eyes, as well as his teeth.¹⁷

Busy's zealous overturning of Trash's gingerbread stall is a damning exposure of his profanity. Jonson mirrors in the hypocrite's symbolic actions, Christ's cleansing of the temple. Busy's own irreligious nature imputes a kind of sacrilege to his actions. Finally Busy is justly pilloried for disturbing the Fair. The presence of the stocks on the stage is a visual reminder of the theme of judgement. Busy's incarceration symbolically pronounces the failure of the man of religion to exert a legitimate moral authority.

Busy's dispute with the puppet Dionysius is the final comment upon his diseased reason and judgement. The puppet argues with Busy that:

. . . my standing is as lawfull as his; that I speak by inspiration, as well as he; that I haue as little to doe with learning as he; and doe scorne her helps as much as he.¹⁸

This is a significant comment by Jonson both upon Busy's flatulence and upon the corrupted art which Dionysius represents. In his abrupt conversion, "For I am changed, and will become a beholder with you!"¹⁹ Busy fails to acknowledge and correct his shortcomings exposed in the words of Dionysius. He merely accepts as the legitimate norm the similarities between himself and an inanimate puppet. He abrogates the responsibility, distinguishing man from the rest of creation, of exercising reason and judgement.

In the Discoveries Jonson defines the role of the guardian or

counsellor:

Next a good life, to beget love in the persons wee counsell,
by dissembling our knowledge of ability in our selves, and
avoyding all suspition of arrogance, ascribing all to their
instruction, as an Ambassadour to his Master, or a Subject
to his Soveraigne; seasoning all with humanity and
sweetnesse, onely expressing care and sollicitude. And
not to counsell rashly, or on the suddaine, but with advice
and meditation . . .²⁰

Wasp, whose name itself suggests his testy nature, parodies this ideal counsellor. Very early in the play he displays a perversity of manner that quickly proclaims his limitations:

I know? I know nothing, I, what tell you mee of knowing?
(now I am in hast) Sir, I do 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 . . .²¹

Despite his recognition of Cokes's lack of judgement, Wasp fails to provide true guidance. He either petulantly resists Cokes's whims, or he genially indulges him, "a man must giue way to him a little in trifles."²² It is here worth noting that critics have taken the liberty of seeing, in the relationship between Wasp and Cokes, an allusion to Jonson's sojourn in France, as a tutor to Sir Walter Raleigh's son. From such evidence as Herford and Simpson provide it would seem that Jonson had a rather thankless task which, by reason of his penchant for drink, he did not aptly fulfil.²³ However, it is conjecture as to how much is autobiographical in Jonson's portrait of Wasp.

Wasp's decline as an authority is effectively symbolized in Act III when he enters, not as Cokes's guardian, but as the simpleton's beast of burden:

Yes faith, I ha' my lading, you see; or shall haue anon, you may know whose beast I am, by my burthen. If the pannier-mans Lacke were euer better knowne by his loynes of mutton, I'le be flead, and feede dogs for him, when his time comes.

Wasp's lack of wise counsel to Cokes is best dramatized in the purse-cutting incident, where the tutor unwittingly confesses to his own ineptitude as a guardian:

I know you, Sir, come, deliuer, you'll goe and cracke the vermine, you breed now, will you? 'tis very fine, will you ha' the truth on't? they are such retchlesse flies as you are, that blow cutpurses abroad in euery corner; your foolish hauing of money, makes 'hem. An'there were no wiser then I. Sir, the trade should lye open for you, Sir, it shoud i' faith, Sir . . .²³

Alan Dessen has rightly observed that in this speech:

Wasp is also ironically revealing to the audience that, given the presence of no wiser and more competent authority than his own demonstrably incompetent self to guide the fortune of such young men, both Cokes's 'trade' of breeding cutpurses and Edgeworth's 'trade' of cutting purses would 'lie open'. Both the need for and the lack of an authority 'wiser than I' to guide and protect these outsiders to the fair is thereby postulated for the audience.²⁶

The climactic exposure of Wasp's authority occurs in the game of vapours. Wasp, the scornful censor of the fair, is now a participant in the most senseless of its pastimes. Ironically enough, in this game to which Wasp's contentious nature is best suited, he confesses to having no reason:

I haue no reason, nor I will 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.²⁷

Wasp's censorship of the fair's follies has served, in the long run, only to expose his own shortcomings. He, too, is put into the stocks, thereby reminding the audience of yet another failure of moral

authority. Wasp is finally humiliated into silence by Cokes's discovery of his incarceration in the stocks:

Do's he know that? nay, then the date of my Authority is out; I must thinke no longer to raigne, my gouernment is at an end. He that will correct another, must want fault in himselfe.²⁸

Jonson here sounds the theme of judgement, central throughout the play. Significantly Wasp fails to follow his own astute advice. Instead of correcting his own faults, in order to sanction the legitimacy of his authority, the symbolic figure of education retreats to an ominous silence:

I will neuer speak while I liue, againe, for ought I know.²⁹

It was customary in Jonson's time for the city magistrates to suppress the fairs, whose "unlawful games and plays, drinking and debaucheries"³⁰ were feared to encourage immorality. Jonson's learned man and public officer, Justice Overdo, is satirized as an inept fool who directly contributes to the abuses of the fair. Significantly, Overdo first enters disguised as a madman. The irony intended by Jonson in Overdo's disguise is evident in Overdo's first soliloquy:

Well, In Iustice name, and the Kings; and for the commonwealth! defie all the world, Adam Ouerdoo, for a disguise, and all story; for thou hast fitted thy selfe, I sweare; faine would I meet the Linceus now, that Eagles eye, that peircing Epidaurain serpent (as my Quint. Horace cal's him) that could discover a Iustice of Peace, (and lately of the Quorum) under this couering. They may haue seene many a foole in the habite of a Iustice; but neuer till now, a Iustice in the habit of a foole. Thus must we doe, though, that wake for the publike good: and thus hath the wise Magistrate done in all ages. There is a doing of right out of wrong, if the way be found . . . Would all men in authority would follow this worthy president! For (alas)

as we are publike persons, what doe we know? nay, what can wee know? wee heare with other mens eares; wee see with other mens eyes; a foolish Constable, or a sleepy Watchman, is all our information, he slanders a Gentleman, by the vertue of his place, (as he calls it) and wee by the vice of ours, must beleeeue him . . . I Adam Querdo, am resolu'd therefore, to spare spy-money hereafter, and make mine owne discoueries. Many are the yeerely enormities of this Fayre, in whose courts of Pye-pouldres I haue had the honour during the three dayes sometimes to sit as Iudge. But this is the speciall day for detection of those foresaid enormities. Here is my blacke booke, for the purpose; this the cloud that hides me: under this couert I shall see, and not be seene. On, Iunius Brutus. And as I began, so I'll end: In Iustice name, and the Kings; and for the Commonwealth.³¹

Overdo's concern for triviality, his rhetorical misuse of classical sources, and his self-intoxication confirm the authenticity of his fool's habit. To the visual eye Overdo's person, complete with a black cape and black book, marks his romantic sense of self-importance. In the course of the play Overdo comes to emblemize the blind judgement which he intended in the above speech to dissociate himself from.

Overdo's exaggerated representation of his purposes as a magistrate is soon deflated in the course of the fair. His zealous search for "enormities" comically lights on the ingredients of Trash's gingerbread, and Ursula's corrupt ale-house practices. His discoveries are punctuated with a Ciceronian excessiveness confirming his foolishness:

O Tempora! O mores! I would not ha' lost my discouery
of this one grieuance, for my place, and worship o'
the Bench . . .³²

Significantly Overdo misapprehends the true nature of Edgeworth, the pickpocket:

What pittie 'tis, so ciuill a young man should haunt this
 debauched company? here's the bane of the youth of our time
 apparant. A proper penman, I see't in his countenance, he
 has a good Clerks looke with him, and I warrant him a
 quicke hand.³³

Ironically, his oration against the ills of tobacco and ale, intended for Edgeworth's salvation, provides the latter with the opportunity to pick Cokes's purse. With comic justice Overdo is beaten from the podium by Wasp as a suspected accomplice in the crime. Undaunted, Overdo renews his efforts to save Edgeworth, only to facilitate the cutting of Cokes's second purse. Overdo's misguided project leads him, too, to the stocks. The final representative of order and authority is pilloried for his misunderstanding of the true nature of the fair, and his place there.

The introduction of Trouble-All completes Jonson's satire of Overdo. Flattered by Trouble-All's esteem for his warrant, Overdo hails the madman, whom even the simpleton Cokes recognizes as an ass and a "dull foole",³⁴ as a "sober and discreet person."³⁵ Trouble-All's stress on 'warrant' and 'licence' keeps the theme of authority and judgement in the forefront. His lunatic refrain reinforces our sense of the corruption of Overdo's authority:

I thinke, I am, if Iustice Querdoo signe to it, I am, and
 so wee are all, hee'll quit us all, multiply us all.³⁶

Overdo's warrant confirms the madness of Trouble-All and the follies of the fair. His judgement not only absolves folly but generates it. In Trouble-All's refusal to fulfil basic instinctual needs, without Overdo's warrant, we witness the complete, symbolic debasement of Overdo as a figure of moral authority:

So that euer since, hee will doe nothing, but by Iustice Overdo's warrant, he will not eate a crust, nor drinke a little, nor make him in his apparell, ready. His wife, Sirreuerence, cannot get him make his water, or shift his shirt, without his warrant.³⁷

The disparity between Overdo's apprehension of his task and his performance of it is greater than the disparity visible in Busy or Wasp. Busy's sphere of authority is more restricted than Overdo's. Although he fails to provide proper guidance for the Littlewits and Dame Purecraft he does not directly contribute to the abuses of the fair. Noted by all as a hypocrite, his name does not command the trepidation that Overdo's does amongst the fair-people. As for Wasp, he does not contribute so much as unwittingly participate in the fair's folly. And his final admission of his own limitations insinuates a kind of self-awareness. But Overdo's sphere of influence and responsibility is greater than that of the other moral censors. He has a personal responsibility to his wife, Cokes, Wasp and his ward Grace Wellborn, a general responsibility to the fair-people and its visitors and an abstract responsibility to uphold the idea of justice. He fails utterly. And even more indicting of Overdo is his unawareness of his failure. To the end his personal vanity imperils his duty to judge.

Overdo, the symbolic figure of order and authority, is finally silenced by Quarlous, an amoral opportunist who has profited from the frailty of his fellow-beings. In Quarlous's rebuke to Overdo Jonson ironically mocks the very human frailty that has corrupted Overdo's authority:

. . . and remember you are but Adam, Flesh, and blood! you have your frailty, forget your other name of Overdoo, and inuite us all to supper. There you and I will compare our discoveries; and drowne the memory of all enormity in your bigg'st bowle at home.³⁸

Quarulous has exploited in Overdo the sentimentality he earlier revealed in his speech, "I loue to be merry at my Table."³⁹ Overdo genially accepts the norm of 'flesh and blood' neglecting the need for judgement. One cannot accept at face value his words "for my intents are Ad correctionem, non ad destructionem; Ad aedificandum, non ad diruendum"⁴⁰ for throughout the play he has repeatedly failed to wisely correct folly, or after correction, to re-build order out of chaos.

It is important to explore the behaviour of the visitors to the fair to determine to what extent Jonson is commenting on the need for the legitimate support of social authorities. Cokes has a seductive charm which endears him to the reader. However, to assume with Barish that Jonson's presentation of Cokes is "a kind of blessing on the idiots of the world, on the gulls and naifs and their state of being perpetually deceived"⁴¹ is to ignore much of the irony in Jonson's portrait of this simpleton. Cokes is a witless mimic. Instead of human reason he has a "head full of Bees!"⁴² exacerbated by an improper education:

His foolish scholemasters haue done nothing, but runne up and downe the Countrey with him, to beg puddings, and cake-bread, of his tennants, and almost spoyled him, he has learn'd nothing, but to sing catches, and repeat rattle bladder rattle, and O, Madge.⁴³

Cokes's lisping and "illiterate colloquialism"⁴⁴ combine with his child-like eagerness and stubbornness to re-create the sensibility of a child. Yet the characteristics disarming in a child have more serious

implications for a young man about to be initiated into the responsibilities of matrimony and land-holding. Wasp's astute comment (which assumes a proportionate irony as the play proceeds) prepares the reader for the educating of Cokes:

Gentlemen, these are errors, diseases of youth: which he will mend, when he comes to iudgement, and knowledge of matters.⁴⁵

In the world of Shakespearean comedy the reader could anticipate an educating process, leading to a measure of self-knowledge. But in Jonsonian comedy the ironist presents a comic regression from judgement and self-knowledge.

Cokes witlessly invites the perils of the fair until he lies stripped of self-knowledge, social status and companionship, a pathetic infant pleading for direction from a madman:

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; and my fine sword, and my sister, and Numps, and Mistris Grace, (a Gentlewoman that I should ha' marryed) and a cut-worke handkercher, shee ga' mee, and two purses to day. And my bargaine o' Hobby-horses and Ginger-bread, which grieues me worst of all.⁴⁶

He lies utterly debased, harshly judged even by the standards of the fair-people:

Talke of him to haue a soule? 'heart, if hee haue any more then a thing giuen him in stead of salt, onely to keepe him from stinking, I'll be hang'd afore my time, presently: where should it be trow? in his blood? hee has not so much to'ard it in his whole body, as will maintaine a good Flea; And if hee take this course, he will not ha' so much land left, as to reare a Calfe within this twelue month.⁴⁷

In his hapless confusion Cokes re-creates a debased human world from mimic images of reality -- the gingerbread figures, the hobbyhorses

and the puppets. His own creativity stems from the belly:

. . . what a Masque shall I furnish out, for forty shillings?
 (twenty pound scotsh) and a Banquet of Ginger-bread? there's
 a stately thing! Numps? Sister? and my wedding gloues too?
 (that I neuer thought on afore.) All my wedding gloues,
 Ginger-bread? O me! what a deuce will there be? to make 'hem
 eate their fingers ends! and delicate Brooches for the Bride-
 men! and all! and then I'le ha' this poesie put to 'hem:
For the best grace, meaining Mistresse Grace, my wedding
 poesie.⁴⁸

In Cokes Jonson has satirized the 'grounded judgement' alluded to in the play's induction. He is the 'Barthol'mew wit' that injudiciously applauds Nightingale's and Littlewit's profanation of the poet and his art:

I am in loue with the Actors already, and I'll be allyed
 to them presently.⁴⁹

Without the support of Wasp or her husband, Justice Overdo, Mrs. Overdo's predisposition to folly blossoms in the world of the fair. Her moral and social pretensions to Overdo's authority, and to rank as a gentlewoman "o'the hood"⁵⁰ are easily deflated by the instinctual stirrings of her 'flesh and blood':

Let her sell her hood, and buy a sponge, with a poxe to her,
 my vessell (is) employed Sir. I haue but one, and 'tis the
 bottome of an old bottle. An honest Proctor, and his wife,
 are at it, within, if shee'll stay her time, so.⁵¹

Eventually stripped of her french-hood by a whore, which is the only symbol distinguishing Mrs. Overdo as a gentlewoman, her behaviour comes to reflect that of the lowest common denominator at the fair -- in the end she is nothing more than the drunk and sick 'punk' Alice.

The Littlewits become significantly estranged in the course of the fair. In the first act Jonson foreshadows this estrangement in an

ironic play on Littlewit's insinuating trust of his wife, "I enuy no man, my delicates, Sir"⁵² and on Win's alluring sensuality:

Alas, you ha'the garden where they grow still! A wife heere with a Strawbery-breath, Chery-lips, Apricot-cheekes, and a soft veluet head, like a Melicotton.⁵³

Quarlous's and Winwife's admonitions to Littlewit, to be more sparing of his wit, prepare the reader for Littlewit's misapprehensions of the true nature of the fair:

Come, Iohn, this ambitious wit of yours, (I am afraid) will doe you no good i' the end.⁵⁴

The latter's inability to judge truthfully leads him to commit his precious Win to the fair pimps, "honest Gentlemen".⁵⁵ They cunningly play on the forsaken Win's 'longings' so that by the end of the play she exchanges the social and moral confines of matrimony for the "Greene-gownes, Crimson-petticoats"⁵⁶ of the fair's whores.

In his treatment of Quarlous, Winwife, and Grace Wellborn Jonson dramatizes how characters of a surface quality are inexorably drawn into the quagmire of the fair. Initially, the language and behaviour of Quarlous and Winwife come to prevent an easy acceptance of them as 'norm' characters. Winwife's courting of wealthy widows makes the audience suspect his quality and Quarlous's name itself alerts us to his true nature. Grace's aloofness insinuates an unattractive snobbery which prohibits a ready acceptance of her as a 'norm' character.

Quarlous and Winwife determine to go to the fair as spectators of Cokes's and Wasp's folly:

Well, I will leaue the chase of my widdow, for to day, and directly to the Fayre. These flies cannot, this hot season, but engender us excellent creeping sport.⁵⁷

However, their inability to remain aloof at the fair is early signalled with Knockem's invitation to them to take ale and tobacco. Winwife's attempts to snub Knockem and uphold social propriety are comically mistaken by Knockem, "are you in vapours, Sir?".⁵⁸ Quarlous's acceptance of their complicity in the fair exposes the snobbery in Winwife which argues against his being Jonson's spokesman:

Why, they know no better ware then they haue, nor better customers then come. And our very being here makes us fit to be demanded, as well as others.⁵⁹

By Act III, scene ii, Quarlous has come to accept the fair as an excuse for licence:

Now were a fine time for thee, Win-wife, to lay aboard thy widow, thou'lt neuer be Master of a better season, or place; shee that will venture her selfe into the Fayre, and a pig-boxe, will admit any assault, be assur'd of that.⁶⁰

Winwife's reluctance to approach Dame Purecraft on these terms provokes Quarlous's opinion on the theme of judgement, "come, 'tis Disease in thee, not Iudgement. . . ." ⁶¹ The irony of the gamester, falsely equating opportunism with judgement, looks forward to the irony of Quarlous's final admonition to Adam Overdo.

In the topsy-turvy world of the fair, Winwife and Quarlous come to recognize no moral standards. They view the world in images of a play and actors, refusing to judge mens' actions in conventional moral terms:

Wee had wonderfull ill lucke, to misse this prologue o' the purse, but the best is, we shall haue fiue Acts of him ere night: hee'le be spectacle enough! I'le answer for't.

They excuse Edgeworth's theft of Cokes's purse as 'sport':

Will you see sport? looke, there's a fellow gathers up to him, marke. He has it, 'fore God hee is a braue fellow; pittie hee should be detected.⁶³

Instead of detecting Edgeworth they, themselves, come to employ him in the 'sportive' theft of Wasp's black box. Their concept of sport points to:

the failure of those of rank and social obligation (significantly the only perceptive individuals on stage) to exert any moral authority over the chaotic world of the Fair, even when such control is within their power . . . The lack of good example and true 'manners' among the 'quality' is an important factor in the corruption of society . . .⁶⁴

Quarlous's and Winwife's courtship of Grace Wellborn is also tainted by the levelling effects of the fair. Grace, despite her professed reasonableness, submits love and matrimony to a fortuitous game of chance. She invites the attentions of two men she hardly knows, and further, leaves the choice of suitor, which she ought to exercise, to the vagaries of the madman Trouble-All.

The extent of Quarlous's immersion in the fair is best dramatized in the game of vapours. Here, as Quarlous's name suggests, he finds his true level. Amid the mists of ale, tobacco, and swaggering, Quarlous is distinguished by the same fractiousness as Whit, Knockem, Wasp and Val Cutting. Yet Quarlous significantly moves beyond the nonsense of the vapours game to disguise himself as the lunatic Trouble-All. With a shrewdness which shows how Quarlous is moving closer in outlook and behaviour to the fair-people, he obtains the hand of Dame Purecraft, the seal of Justice Overdo, and financial recompense from Grace. As Dessen rightly observes, Quarlous's successes as a madman exhibit how:

after the failure of authority . . . 'quality' must inevitably be degraded in such circumstances and is one more indication of the anarchy and meaninglessness which now hold sway in the world of the Fair.⁶⁵

The puppet-show in Bartholomew Fair serves a two-fold purpose. It comments upon the fair itself, and upon Jonson's view of art. The wooden puppets act out a vulgar, domesticated version of the mythical love of Hero and Leander, and the friendship of Damon and Pythias. They come to represent, in microcosm, the world of the fair, their language and behaviour echoing the same perversity of reason, and crudeness of the flesh. Through the puppets we come to sense the moral indignation that suffuses Jonson's comic treatment of the fair. The puppet-show is also used to distinguish Jonson's own purposes as an artist. It epitomizes the débâcle of art that Jonson has so earnestly denounced in the Discoveries:

But a man cannot imagine that thing so foolish, or rude, but will find, and enjoy an Admirer; at least, a Reader, or Spectator. The Puppets are seene now in despite of the Players: Heath's Epigrams, and the Skullers Poems have their applause. There are never wanting, that dare preferre the worst Preachers, the worst Pleaders, the worst Poets . . .⁶⁶

The puppet-play is written by a 'Littlewit' derisive of learning and didactic purpose for the 'grounded judgement' of a Cokes. Jonson cannot but dissociate his own art from the amoral and "as full of noise, as sport"⁶⁷ art of the puppets.

Jonson ruefully leaves the last speech of the play to Cokes:

Yes, and bring the Actors along, wee'll ha' the rest o' the Play at home.⁶⁸

Cokes's words remind us that the puppet-play is not yet over, but will continue at Overdo's house. The moral norms of the fair have, in the reconciliation of the censors and free-livers, been legitimized, only to now extend beyond the territorial confines of the fair-grounds. The

failure of reason and judgement, however fallible, threatens the preservation of any meaningful social order. In this vision of wholesale moral abdication Jonson makes it quite clear how far he has had to go in disguising his moral idealism in order to come to terms with popular taste in the theatre.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER THREE)

¹Jonas A. Barish, Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970, p. 212.

²Ibid., p. 238.

³Ibid.

⁴Bartholomew Fair, Induction, 80-82.

⁵Ibid., 83.

⁶Ibid., 51-53.

⁷Ibid., 56-57.

⁸Ibid., 87-112.

⁹Ibid., reproduction of the title-page of the Folio, 1631.

¹⁰Ibid., II, ii, 50.

¹¹Ibid., II, v, 189-190.

¹²Ibid., II, v, 8-9.

¹³Ibid., II, v, 11-12.

¹⁴Ibid., II, iii, 18.

¹⁵Ibid., I, iii, 135-139.

¹⁶Ibid., I, vi, 92-97.

¹⁷Ibid., III, vi, 47-51.

¹⁸Ibid., V, v, 109-112.

- ¹⁹ Ibid., V, v, 116-117.
- ²⁰ Discoveries, 93-100, in Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols., 1925-52.
- ²¹ Bartholomew Fair, I, iii, 19-22.
- ²² Ibid., I, v, 42-43.
- ²³ Marchette Chute, Ben Jonson of Westminster, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1953, pp. 199-203. Chute gives a very lively account of Jonson's trip abroad as tutor to Sir Walter Raleigh's son Wat.
- ²⁴ Bartholomew Fair, III, iv, 69-72.
- ²⁵ Ibid., III, v, 219-225.
- ²⁶ Alan Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1971, p. 155.
- ²⁷ Bartholomew Fair, IV, iv, 42-44.
- ²⁸ Ibid., V, iv, 97-100.
- ²⁹ Ibid., V, vi, 103-104.
- ³⁰ G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963, p. 250.
- ³¹ Bartholomew Fair, II, i, 1-49.
- ³² Ibid., II, ii, 113-115.
- ³³ Ibid., II, iv, 30-34.
- ³⁴ Ibid., IV, ii, 106.
- ³⁵ Ibid., IV, i, 27.
- ³⁶ Ibid., IV, ii, 108-109.

- ³⁷Ibid., IV, i, 58-60.
- ³⁸Ibid., V, vi, 96-100.
- ³⁹Ibid., III, iii, 21.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., V, vi, 111-113.
- ⁴¹Barish, p. 222.
- ⁴²Bartholomew Fair, I, iv, 81.
- ⁴³Ibid., I, iv, 72-76.
- ⁴⁴Barish, p. 221.
- ⁴⁵Bartholomew Fair, I, v, 43-45.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., IV, ii, 78-86.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., IV, ii, 54-60.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., III, iv, 157-165.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., V, iii, 131-132.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., I, v, 84.
- ⁵¹Ibid., IV, iv, 215-218.
- ⁵²Ibid., I, ii, 13.
- ⁵³Ibid., I, ii, 14-16.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., I, v, 71-72.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., IV, v, 8.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., IV, v, 92-93.

⁵⁷Ibid., I, v, 138-141.

⁵⁸Ibid., II, v, 55.

⁵⁹Ibid., II, v, 16-17.

⁶⁰Ibid., III, ii, 132-136.

⁶¹Ibid., III, ii, 144-145.

⁶²Ibid., III, ii, 1-3.

⁶³Ibid., III, v, 140-156.

⁶⁴Dessen, pp. 185-186.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 204.

⁶⁶Discoveries, 608-614.

⁶⁷Bartholomew Fair, Induction, 82.

⁶⁸Ibid., V, vi, 114-115.

CHAPTER FOUR

The New Inn (1629) is one of the last plays written by Jonson. It is a play which the sympathetic reader of Jonson should not hastily dismiss as a "dotage", as the majority of Jonson's critics do. I am not herein concerned with the aesthetic merits of the play, which are higher than critics have usually granted, but with the private reflections the poet shares with us. For this play is invaluable for the way in which it dramatizes Jonson's vision of himself as the comic poet. Near the end of a life-long career as a playwright, Jonson seeks to acquit himself before the world. From the vantage point of old age he recapitulates in The New Inn his life as an artist -- the conflict between the needs of the man and of the artist, the thirst for understanding and acclaim, the outrages of envy and poverty and the awful loneliness of the artist whose temporal sufferings must always remain subordinate to an ideal:

When e're the carcasse dies, this Art will liue.¹

The writing of The New Inn completes the metamorphosis of the satirist figure of early Jonsonian comedy. Here the poet's voice is dispersed through the principal characters, the Host and Lovel. These two characters, who throughout the play balance one another in behaviour and attitude, dramatize the duality in Jonson's vision of the comic poet. They represent opposing responses to a society in which men are becoming increasingly rootless as traditional institutions and morality

are threatened by the times. How do men retain a sense of stability and meaning in a time of corruption and impermanence? Lovel, the serious and melancholic scholar, lives on the periphery of realities. He is the traditionalist in practice, the classicist in belief. He will meet disappointments in the world but his idealism will sustain his personal meaning. He comes to represent for Jonson the ideal of the poet as moralist which he has extolled in a life-time of writing. Through Lovel Jonson is able to idealize his own reactions to the frustrations of personal experience and to dramatize how he ought to act.

The Host approaches life with a light heart and a 'carpe diem' attitude. He is the jovial cynic, unwilling to accept life at face value and always probing beneath the surface of 'men and manners' with the satirist's sharpness. He envisages life as a game, a play in which we are all actors unconfined by conventional morality:

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'ther game, which all the world is.²

Unlike Lovel, the Host suspends his moral judgement, content to have laughter without morality:

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 haue 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 iustling in,
 And out still, as they one droue hence another:
 Why, will you enuy me my happinesse?³

He comes to stand for the other side of the comic poet, the detached observer, the traveller of "all the Shires of England ouer"⁴ who creates from his observations of life. He searches out men's true natures, making, in true humanist fashion, the proper study of mankind man.

The Host, like the poet-playwright, seeks to control the comings and goings of his guests, the players. Lovel is a disturbing anomaly amongst the Host's guests, his seriousness offending the charter of "Be merry, and drinke Sherry."⁵ He is aloof and speculative, spending his time "pouring through a multiplying glasse, upon a captiu'd crab-louse, or a cheese-mite. . . ."⁶ These differences between Lovel and the Host are further dramatized in their argument over a page's education. Lovel is every inch the idealist as he delineates the greatness of the traditional education:

Call you that desperate, which by a line
Of institution, from our Ancestors,
Hath beene deriu'd downe to vs, and receiu'd
In a succession, for the noblest way
Of breeding vp our youth, in letters, armes,
Faire meine, discourses, ciuill exercise,
And all the blazon of a Gentleman?
Where can he learne to vault, to ride, to fence,
To moue his body gracefuller? to speake
His language purer? or to tune his minde
Or manners, more to the harmony of Nature
Then, in these nourceries of nobility? . . .⁷

In turn the Host is sharply critical of the realities of the courtier's education, sensible of the decline of the nobility. He burlesques Lovel's idealism in a salty critique of the court's moral corruption:

I that was, when the nourceries selfe, was noble,
And only vertue made it, not the mercate,
That titles were not vented at the drum,
Or common out-cry; goodnesse gaue the greatnesse,
And greatnesse worship: Euery house became

An Academy of honour, and those parts -
 We see departed, in the practise, now,
 Quite from the institution . . .
 Instead of backing the brave Steed, o' mornings,
 To mount the Chambermaid; and for a leape
 O' the vaulting horse, to ply the vaulting house:
 For exercise of armes, a bale of dice . . .
 . . . These are the arts,
 Or seuen liberall deadly sciences
 Of Pagery, or rather Paganisme,
 As the tides run.⁸

Level is likewise the idealist in love. Jonson's treatment of the 'questione d'amore' in The New Inn provides an interesting gloss to the 'Charis' sequence where the circumstances of an older man in love are the same. The courtiers' game of defining the true nature of love is a meeting ground for Jonson's ideal of the poet as lover and his avowal of the very human realities of love. Level is an older man whose love is undeclared and for the moment unrequited. Although Level does not idealize Lady Frampul, acknowledging in her her faults of indecorum and frivolity, he is given to an excess of romantic infatuation and rhetoric which Jonson, through the Host, satirizes. Jonson's satire is not directed at the ideal of Level as an older man in love, nor at the idealism of his love, but rather at his indecorous portrayal of the languishing Petrarchan lover. In the speeches of the Host, Level's lady is comically reduced to a "monster"⁹ and a "Cocatrice in velvet".¹⁰ Similarly Level's resolve to die for love is burlesqued:

I mary, there were happinesse indeed;
 Transcendent to the Melancholy, meant.
 It were a fate, aboue a monument,
 And all inscription, to die so. A Death
 For Emperours to enioy! And the Kings
 Of the rich East, to pawne their regions for;
 To s(h)ow their treasure, open all their mines,
 Spend all their spices to embalance their corps,
 And wrap the inches vp in sheets of gold,
 That fell by such a noble destiny!¹¹

In the confrontation between the attitudes of the Host and Lovel Jonson appears to be questioning to what extent human idealism is possible or indeed even valid.

Lovel, like the poet-lover of the 'Charis' sequence, comes to rely upon the efficacy of the word to move his lady to love:

. . . that you expresse your selfe, as you had back'd
the Muses Horse!¹²

At the heart of Lovel's romanticism is a sound and laudable ideal of love, derived from Neo-Platonic and Christian ideals of the spirituality and constancy of love:

Loue is a spirituall coupling of two soules,
So much more excellent, as it least relates
Vnto the body; circular, eternall;
Not fain'd, or made, but borne . . .
True loue hath no vnworthy thought, no light,
Loose, vn-becoming appetite, or straine,
But fixed, constant, pure, immutable . . .
The end of loue is, to haue two made one
In will, and in affection, that the mindes
Be first inoculated, not the bodies.¹³

Lovel here expresses the metaphysical truth about love, impossible for most men to translate into practice. In the comic asides of Lord Beaufort and his physical by-play with Lady Frances, Jonson gives recognition to the sensual needs of men in love:

(I relish not these philosophicall feasts;
Giue me a banquet o'sense, like that of Ovid;
A forme, to take the eye; a voyce, mine eare;
Pure aromatiques, to my sent; a soft,
Smooth, deinty hand, to touch; and, for my taste,
Ambrosiack kisses, to melt downe the palat.)¹⁴

Moreover Lady Frampul's rhetorical response to Lovel's discourse emphasizes the difficulty of even apprehending an ideal. Her romantic excessiveness suggests that she is affected, not by the truth of Lovel's

words, but by the love and passion shaping them:

What penance shall I doe, to be receiu'd,
 And reconciled, to the Church of Loue?
 Goe on procession, bare-foot, to his Image,
 And say some hundred penitentiall verses . . .
 Now I adore Loue, and would kisse the rushes
 That beare this reuerend Gentleman, his Priest,
 If that would expiate -- but, I feare it will not.
 For, tho' he be somewhat strooke in yeares, and old
 Enough to be my father, he is wise,
 And onely wise men loue, the other couet. 15
 I could begin to be in loue with him . . .

Ultimately Lovel qualifies his own expressed idealism. Like the poet of the 'Charis' sequence he anticipates sensual rewards for his verbal endeavours:

One more -- I except.
 This was but halfe a kisse, and I would change it. 16

In his treatment of the theme of valour Jonson acknowledges the inconsistency between men's actions and the ideal of how men ought to act. Initially the scene is set for Pru's court's discussion of valour by Lovel's comic routing of the drunken Tipto from the basement of the inn. Lovel's actions here argue against the ideal of valiant action he later extolls. Lady Frampul's comically idealized description of his heroics serves to underline for the reader the extent to which Lovel's actions do fall short of his expressed ideal of valour:

His rapier was a Meteor, and he wau'd it
 Ouer 'hem like a Comet! as they fled him!
 I mark'd his manhood! euery stoope he made
 Was like an Eagles, at a flight of Cranes!
 (As I haue read somewhere.) 17

Lovel's lengthy definition of valour reveals the same moral idealism which had shaped his view of love:

It is the greatest vertue, and the safety
 Of all mankinde, the object of it is danger.
 A certaine meane 'twixt feare, and confidence:
 No inconsiderate rashnesse, or vaine appetite
 Of false encountring formidable things;
 But a true science of distinguishing
 What's good or euill. It springs out of reason,
 And tends to perfect honesty, the scope
 Is alwayes honour, and the publique good:
 It is no valour for a priuate cause.¹⁸

His definition, like that on love, is contradicted by Beaufort and Latimer who, like the Devil's advocates, argue for a myriad of reasons motivating human actions, not the least of which are ambition, anger and pride. They account for the norm of human actions. No one man speaks for Jonson; his voice is dispersed through all of these speakers. The complexity of human nature and motive demands a less rigid exploration of right and wrong than a younger Jonson could have given.

Lovel's concept of valour insists upon a disciplined restraint and stoicism in the face of personal injury and misfortune:

The things true valour is exercis'd about,
 Are pouerty, restraint, captiuity,
 Banishment, losse of children, long disease:
 The least is death . . .¹⁹

Jonson in his own lifetime suffered poverty, captivity, long disease and loss of family. Indeed, Lovel's description of the man thrust out of the court Masque parallels Jonson's own ejection from a Christmas masque at Hampton Court²⁰:

I am kept out a Masque, sometime thrust out,
 Made wait a day, two, three, for a great word,
 Which (when it comes forth) is all frown, and forehead!²¹

As he did with Crites and Horace, so with Lovel, Jonson can dramatize how he himself ought to act. But now it is not so simple. Lovel's

actions are seen to be inconsistent with his ideals in a way that Crites's and Horace's were not. And the very structure of The New Inn argues against a ready acceptance of Lovel as Jonson's spokesman. The poet's ideas are diffused through more than one character and thrown open to public debate. Jonson is challenging the reader to discover for himself what is tenable in moral idealism.

The final resolving of the plot is of particular concern to the Host who, like the poet, hopes to "have had my last act best".²² He effects through the deus ex machina intervention of the nurse the unmasking and reconciliation of the inn's guests. In the abrupt revelation of true identities and the ensuing marriages Jonson can be seen to be parodying the highly romantic comedies of his day. However, of even more importance, is the very pointed comment the unmasking of the Host's household makes about the theatre. Actors, by nature, partake in an elaborate stage illusion, where the multiplicity of their disguises challenges the simplicity and truth in art favoured by Jonson. Jonson, who realizes how fully the playwright is fettered to artifice and illusion, speculates in The New Inn to what extent the stage presents an image of truth. Through Lovel he dramatizes the truth that should be the concern of the poet, but which, given the nature of the stage, is really inaccessible to the spectator's understanding. The Host, with all his earthly realism and theatricality, is more accessible to most theatre-goers. His is the art of laughter and illusion most comfortable in the theatre, but furthest from the art defined by Jonson for himself. The stage at best is an ephemeral medium, tied not to men's understandings but to their senses.

The Host's disguise symbolizes the mask of the artist in which the true identity of the man is always subsumed. As the poet, the Host must exchange domestic and social ties for the solitude deemed essential to the creative process. The Host can be seen to stand for that part of Jonson, the committed but isolated observer of society, who has:

. . . measur'd all the Shires of England ouer:
Wales, and her mountaines, seene those wilder nations,
 Of people in the Peake, and Lancashire;
 Their Pipers, Fiddlers, Rushers, Puppet-masters,
 Iuglers, and Gipseys, all the sorts of Canters,
 And Colonies of Beggars, Tumblers, Ape-carriers,
 For to these sauages I was addicted,
 To search their natures, and make odde discoueries!²³

Weary of the constraints surrounding the life of the artist, the Host exchanges his "beard, and cap here",²⁴ the emblems of the poet-host, for the real identity of lord and father. We can see Jonson suffered in his own life-time from the separateness of being an artist. In the poem eulogizing the death of his first son, Jonson dramatizes the agonizing conflict between the sufferings of the father and the duty of the poet. As father he laments the loss of his child, "thou child of my right hand, and ioy."²⁵ The poet demands that he "Loose all father, now",²⁶ transcend the personal and particular to assess the religious and philosophical implications of death:

Will man lament the state he should enuie?
 To haue so soone scap'd worlds, and fleshes rage,
 And, if no other miserie, yet age?²⁷

Jonson does not ever resolve the conflict but is able to temporarily reconcile the poet and the father through a clever metaphor of creation:

Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye
 BEN. IONSON his best piece of poetrie . . . ²⁸

The epilogue to The New Inn offers a very personal glimpse of the poet humbled by old age and a faltering creativity:

Playes in themselues haue neither hopes, nor feares,
Their fate is only in their hearers eares:
If you expect more then you had to night,
The maker is sick, and sad. But doe him right,
He meant to please you: for he sent things fit,
In all the numbers, both of sense, and wit,
If they ha' not miscarried! if they haue,
All that his faint, and faltring tongue doth craue,
Is, that you not impute it to his braine.
That's yet unhurt, although set round with paine, ²⁹
It cannot long hold out. All strength must yeeld.

Yet despite this disarming recognition of his personal mortality Jonson remains convinced of the immortalizing powers of his art:

When e're the carcasse dies, this Art will liue.
And had he liu'd the care of King, and Queene,
His Art in somthing more yet had beene seene;
But Maiors, and Shriffes may yearly fill the stage:
A Kings, or Poets birth doe aske an age. ³⁰

It is his concern for his art's immortality which leads Jonson to dedicate The New Inn to the reader. For with the stage failure of this play, so bitterly commemorated in the appended "Ode to himselfe", Jonson's dissatisfactions with the stage as a medium for his art culminate.

Jonson does return once more to the stage with the production in 1632 of his last complete play The Magnetic Lady. In this moral allegory of the effects of money on men, written five years before his death in 1637, Jonson again turns a reflective eye upon his life-long career as a poet-playwright. His reflections embrace all of his

writing in a final effort to present a comprehensive view of his art and the role of the artist:

The Author, beginning his studies of this kind, with every man in his Humour; and after, every man out of his Humour; and since, continuing in all his Playes, especially those of the Comick thred, whereof the New-Inne was the last, Some recent humours still, or manners of men, that went along with the times, finding himselfe now neare the close, or shutting up of his Circle, hath phant'sied to himselfe, in Idaea, this Magnetick Mistris . . .³¹

Jonson's accumulated anger at a life-time of audience misunderstanding is curiously balanced in this play by his pedagogical efforts to educate his audience to an appreciation of the practice of his art. However, with this play, the world of art closes in on Jonson. His private aesthetic reflections overshadow the sparkling theatrical genius which had operated in Volpone, The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair.

Jonson's voice is distinctly heard in the chorus to The Magnetic Lady, which serves as a mouthpiece for his ideas on the purpose and techniques of his own writing. Through the question and debate between Mr. Damplay, the boy and Mr. Probee, Jonson enunciates the underlying principles of comedy:

If I see a thing vively presented on the Stage, that the Glasse of custome (which is Comedy) is so held up to me, by the Poet, as I can therein view the daily examples of mens lives, and images of Truth, in their manners, so drawne fro my delight, or profit, as I may (either way) use them . . .³²

Moreover, he initiates the reader into the techniques of good writing; the observance of the rules of time and place, the decorum of character, the division of the play into the protasis, the epitasis, the catastasis and the catastrophe. The chorus has little dramatic worth.

It reveals the extent to which Jonson, in his later years, was concerned with defining his art for the understanding of posterity. He seeks from the reader a true acquittal of "my selfe, and my Booke".³³

Jonson's hostility towards the stage-audience rears its familiar head in the chorus to The Magnetic Lady. He reveals the extent to which he is still preoccupied with the audience and his relationship to it, both as an artist and as a man. In an often-heard voice he bitterly inveighs against the audience expectation, ignorance and judgement which have repeatedly frustrated his designs and distorted his purposes as an artist:

And therefore, Mr. Damplay, unlesse like a solemne Justice of wit, you will damn our Play, unheard, or unexamin'd; I shall intreat your Mrs. Madam Expectation, if shee be among these Ladies, to have patience, but a pissing while: give our Springs leave to open a little, by degrees! A Source of ridiculous matter may breake forth anon, that shall steepe their temples, and bathe their braines in laughter, to the fomenting of Stupiditie it selfe, and the awaking any velvet Lethargy in the House.³⁴

Jonson's sensitivity about his old age, his creative powers, and his indifferent fortune makes him uncomfortable with the audience. He defends himself from their anticipated censure in a passage which, while insisting upon his true worth as a man, appeals for recognition:

And may doe in better, if it please the King (his Master) to say Amen to it, and allow it, to whom hee acknowledgeth all. 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.³⁵

It is interesting to note that even in this last play, written to exonerate Jonson's practice of art, self-dramatization is still at work.

By far the most interesting of the various 'humour' characters in the play are Compasse and Ironside who, like the Host and Lovel of The New Inn, complement one another in behaviour and attitude. It can be argued that in his exploration of the relationship between these two characters Jonson is attempting to define, at this stage of his career, his idea of the poet.

In his portrait of Compasse and Ironside Jonson turns a sometimes bemused eye on his idea of the poet. Indeed, one finds a delightful self-mockery in his creation of Ironside. The blunt Ironside, much like Jonson himself, is a stubborn veteran of life who acts impulsively from simple instincts and honest emotions. In him Jonson dramatizes that part of himself which is harshly critical of human folly. Ironside is the active moralist, the censor of Lady Loadstone's guests:

Here's no man among these that keeps a servant,
 To inquire his Master of: yet i'the house,
 I heare it buzz'd, there are a brace of Doctors,
 A Foole, and a Physician: with a Courtier,
 That feeds on mulbery leaves, like a true Silkeworme:
 A Lawyer, and a mighty Money-Baud,
 Sir Moath! has brought his politique Bias with him:
 A man of a most animadverting humor:
 Who, to indeare himselfe unto his Lord,
 Will tell him, you and I, or any of us,
 That here are met, are all pernicious spirits,
 And men of pestilent purpose, meanelly affected . . .
 I must cut his throat now: i'am bound in honour,
 And by the Law of armes, to see it done;
 I dare to doe it; and I dare professe
 The doing of it: being to such a Raskall,
 Who is the common offense growne of man-kind;
 And worthy to be torne up from society.³⁶

However, Ironside's physical assault on Lady Loadstone's guests is reprehensible behaviour. He shows all too clearly that, like Macilente, he himself is not free of the folly he condemns. His moral indignation

needs to be presented in a comprehensible and palatable form.

Compaspe, Ironside's brother, is able to effectively transform Ironside's actions through his own arts. In *Compaspe*, Jonson focuses on the creative energies of the artist, ever restless and seeking direction through imaginary creations. He is the mastermind who bears a startling resemblance to *Volpone* and *Subtle*, equally artists of illusion, disguise and control. *Compaspe* represents that side of the comic poet who consorts with "Fidlers, Pragmatick Flies, Fooles, Publicanes, and Moathes",³⁷ creating art from his observations of human folly. Like the Host of *The New Inn* *Compaspe* argues for a comedy of laughter without morality:

I am for the sport; For nothing else.³⁸

He satirizes Lady Loadstone's guests with more regard to the play of his wit than from any desire to instruct men to good behaviour:

Welcome good Captaine Ironside, and brother;
 You shall along with me. I'm lodg'd hard by,
 Here at a noble Ladies house i'th'street,
 The Lady Loadstones (one will bid us welcome)
 Where there are Gentlewomen, and male Guests,
 Of severall humors, cariage, constitution,
 Profession too: but so diametrall
 One to another, and so much oppos'd,
 As if I can but hold them all together,
 And draw 'hem to a sufferance of themselves,
 But till the Dissolution of the Dinner;
 I shall have just occasion to beleeve
 My wit is magisteriall; and our selves³⁹
 Take infinite delight, i'the successe.

Like the poet behind the scenes, *Compaspe* arranges the sequence of events, after Ironside's assault, so as to effect the reconciliation of all opposite characters and their humours. His purpose in doing so has no moral context:

But, Brother, (could I over-interest you)
 I have some little plot upon the rest,
 If you would be contented, to endure
 A sliding reprehension, at my hands,
 To heare your selfe, or your profession glanc'd at
 In a few sleighting termes: It would beget
 Me such a maine Authority . . .⁴⁰

He selfishly arranges events for his own personal well-being, ending in securing Lady Loadstone's niece in marriage, a sizable dowry and Moath's interest. Ironside's pointed accusation that Compasse has forsaken him reminds the reader of Jonson's definition of the comic poet's purpose as two-fold, "to instruct and delight":

Why? will you
 Intreat your selfe, into a beating for him,
 My courteous brother? If you will, have at you,
 No man deserves it better (now I thinke on't)
 Then you: that will keepe consort with such Fidlers,
 Pragmatick Flies, Fooles, Publicanes, and Moathes:
 And leave your honest, and adopted brother.⁴¹

In the course of the play Jonson proves how Compasse and Ironside are necessary adjuncts to one another. On a more metaphysical level Compasse's strategems, coupled with Ironside's actions, have sought the truth. In Lady Loadstone's words:

Well, wee are all now reconcil'd to truth.
 There rests yet a Gratuitie from me,
 To be conferr'd upon this Gentleman;
 Who (as my Nephew Compasse sayes) was cause,
 First of th'offence, but since of all th'amends.
 The Quarrell caus'd th'affright; that fright brought on
 The travell, which made peace; the peace drew on
 This new discovery, which endeth all
 In reconcilement.⁴²

Their curious camaraderie suggests a willingness on Jonson's part to reconcile the necessary theatricality of the stage-artist with the poet's deeper moral purpose. Ironside's instinct for reform must be supplemented and softened by Compasse's tact and persuasiveness.

Jonson's abstract and moralizing mind could never have theoretically reconciled the idea of the poet as moralist with the playwright's medium. But through the dramatic process Jonson's imaginary creations point the way to such a reconciliation. Throughout his career as a playwright Jonson was torn between upholding his abstract ideal of the poet as moralist and making use of the 'practical' arts of the popular stage-artist. It can be argued that he finally came to terms with this painful tension in his creation of *Compassse* and *Ironside*. He accepts the fact that *Compassse*, who lives for the dubious rewards of status and personal well-being, best understands the audience and knows how to transform the poet's moral vision through the delusive medium of the theatre. Without him the moralist will meet with failure on the popular stage.

FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER FOUR)

- ¹The New Inn, Epilogue, 20.
- ²Ibid., I, iii, 104-107.
- ³Ibid., I, iii, 126-137.
- ⁴Ibid., V, v, 93.
- ⁵Ibid., I, ii, 29.
- ⁶Ibid., I, i, 29-30.
- ⁷Ibid., I, iii, 40-51.
- ⁸Ibid., I, iii, 52-84.
- ⁹Ibid., I, v, 48.
- ¹⁰Ibid., I, v, 48.
- ¹¹Ibid., II, vi, 233-242.
- ¹²Ibid., III, ii, 269-270.
- ¹³Ibid., III, ii, 105-154.
- ¹⁴Ibid., III, ii, 125-130.
- ¹⁵Ibid., III, ii, 216-233.
- ¹⁶Ibid., IV, iv, 246-247.
- ¹⁷Ibid., IV, iii, 13-17.
- ¹⁸Ibid., IV, iv, 38-47.
- ¹⁹Ibid., IV, iv, 105-108.

²⁰Marchette Chute, Ben Jonson of Westminster, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1953, p. 127. Lady Bedford selected the poet Daniel to write Queen Anne's first masque at court, much to Jonson's chagrin who had hoped for the commission. Evidently during the production of the masque Jonson created such a disturbance that he was forcibly ejected from court by Lord Suffolk, the Lord Chamberlain.

²¹The New Inn, IV, iv, 183-185.

²²Ibid., V, i, 26-27.

²³Ibid., V, v, 93-100.

²⁴Ibid., V, v, 87.

²⁵"On My First Sonne", Epigrammes, (in Ben Jonson, Ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), 1.

²⁶Ibid., 5.

²⁷Ibid., 6-8.

²⁸Ibid., 9-10.

²⁹The New Inn, Epilogue, 1-11.

³⁰Ibid., 20-24.

³¹The Magnetic Lady, Induction, 99-106.

³²Ibid., II, Chorus, 36-41.

³³Ibid., Dedication, 17.

³⁴Ibid., I, Chorus, 40-48.

³⁵Ibid., 52-57.

³⁶Ibid., II, vi, 115-138.

³⁷Ibid., II, vi, 143-144.

³⁸Ibid., I, i, 51-52.

³⁹Ibid., I, i, 1-14.

⁴⁰Ibid., I, i, 61-67.

⁴¹Ibid., II, vi, 139-144.

⁴²Ibid., V, x, 126-134.

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