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Ben Jonson's Modern Literary Reputation as a Dramatist (1925-1958)

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Ben Jonson's Modern Literary Reputation as a Dramatist (1925-1958)

by

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation intends to describe the literary reputation of Ben Jonson among English and American critics from 1925 to 1958. The study is based on a reading of all available modern commentary on Jonson's biography, dramatic art, and individual plays. Evaluating the significant criticism under these headings by distinguishing dominant trends and counter-trends, recurrent problems and suggested solutions, and the most valuable individual studies should facilitate an understanding of a massive, complicated, and important body of scholarship. It is hoped that in this way the dissertation will serve as a reliable guide to modern Jonson studies, and that, through an exact description of the status Jonson enjoys in contemporary scholarship, clearer meaning will attach to the phrase "Jonson's modern literary reputation."

The stages of Jonson's literary reputation have interested scholars throughout the modern period, and discussion of the reputation forms an important segment of modern Jonson studies. The discussion appears in a variety of forms, ranging from the briefest citations to very extensive commentary, but it seldom treats the reputation beyond the nineteenth century. Much of the material consists of minute additions to The Jonson Allusion Book. Occasionally, whole clusters of allusions with an accompanying commentary are offered, but only two such collections are at all noteworthy. Lester Swanson compiles, without discussion, many references overlooked by

The Jonson Allusion Book to which his study is offered as a modest supplement.\(^2\) Also without commentary, but by far the most useful of all the modern collections of allusions, is "Jonson's Literary Record," included in Herford and Simpson's edition of Jonson's works.\(^3\) These citations commence with contemporary references in the late sixteenth century and end with Swinburne's high tribute in 1882. Although highly selective, the collection is a valuable quick guide to Jonson's critical fortunes through two centuries.

Collections of allusions suggest the history of Jonson's critical reputation, but to see more clearly its various stages and to appreciate their significance, one must turn to three special studies. A consecutive reading of the three provides a full survey of Jonson's critical status from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Jonson's reputation in the seventeenth century is the special province of Gerald Bentley, who gathers numerous allusions overlooked by other scholars.\(^4\) Even more important than being a great addition to the store of allusions are the accompanying analysis and conclusion. Bentley's appraisal of references to both Jonson and Shakespeare through each decade of the century contradicts the conclusion of The Jonson Allusion Book that in the latter part of the seventeenth century Jonson's reputation declined rapidly while that of Shakespeare rose. Bentley's chronological analysis proves that through

\(^2\)Lester D. Swanson, "A Survey of Ben Jonson's Reputation from 1700 to 1875" (unpubl. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1936).


most of the period Jonson enjoyed much the stronger reputation of the two. Measuring the frequency of reference to name, play, and character reaffirms the thesis. Jonson's plays were better known; his popularity was greater; he was, in short, the dramatist of the seventeenth century.

The history of Restoration and eighteenth-century productions of Jonson's plays is the primary interest of Robert Noyes, but he also describes the reputation during the course of a century which saw the inception of traditions which became permanent parts of Jonson criticism. During the neoclassical period Jonson was commended for his robust personality, his correctness and judgment, adherence to nature, satirical power, the technical excellence in plots, and his drawing of humour characters. Criticism also admitted freely such faults as servile imitation of the classics, lack of interest in love, inadequate representation of women, and the cold and cynical tone of his comedies. During the eighteenth century admiration for Jonson lessened and detraction increased. By 1770 Jonson's reputation is in a state of unmistakable decline.

Freda Townsend's "Jonson and His Critics" examines the reputation from the Restoration to the twentieth century in an attempt to illustrate the thesis that Jonson has almost always been the victim of a critical "conspiracy of approval" which has burdened him with the undeserved reputation of a classical dramatist. The truth, Miss Townsend asserts, is that Jonson followed other ideals than the classical. A work such as this

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which studies the critical record for proof of a thesis admittedly is limited as a history. However, the quotations are so frequent and so representative for much of the time covered that one does derive at least an oblique knowledge of Jonson's reputation. According to Miss Townsend, Dryden launched the "conspiracy" by setting up the famous antithesis between Shakespeare and Jonson. From this grew the typical eighteenth-century appraisal of Jonson as a poet for the learned few, a man fundamentally alienated from the popular taste and typical drama of his time. The hostility Miss Townsend detects in later eighteenth-century criticism becomes contempt in Romantic and Victorian references. In the nineteenth century Jonson's literary reputation is in almost total eclipse. The nineteenth century continues the tradition that Jonson was a man quite apart from the main stream of English drama and one who founded an alien drama based on classical models.

When Miss Townsend claims that the "classical fallacy" continues to distort Jonson criticism in the twentieth century, her argument itself becomes fallacious. She sees as the typical twentieth-century critic one who judges Jonson's achievement according to the fulfillment or violation of certain self-imposed classical standards. This is too sweeping and too inaccurate a statement of the case. The conclusion is based on a very attenuated sampling of modern critics, comments quoted out of their context, and a failure to consider the extensive modern criticism which has nothing to do with Jonson's classicism. A more comprehensive and more objective study of the criticism, such as is attempted by this dissertation, shows that Jonson's classicism is but one of many interests followed by contemporary
scholars and that even among those who concentrate on the classicism there is not the flat and automatic reaction Miss Townsend implies.

Quite apart from their special approaches to the problem, all three of these works contribute to our knowledge of Jonson's reputation. Together with the collections of allusions, these writers provide a clear description, and a more significant one, of the reputation than was previously available. A reading of the three studies gives one a comprehensive view of the development of the reputation up to the twentieth century. Because they provide a knowledge of Jonson criticism in past centuries, the student can better understand the significance of modern Jonson scholarship and can better appreciate its radical or conservative bias. What these studies do not provide, however, is any adequate description of Jonson's reputation in the twentieth century. Miss Townsend presents a distorted picture, and the other casual and brief references one encounters give only a generalized and vague picture. To supply a full description of this very important stage of Jonson criticism is one of the purposes of this dissertation.

But this study attempts more than filling out a space in the history of Jonson criticism. Other more immediate and practical reasons justify a study such as this. The critical status at any period of a dramatist of Jonson's importance is a significant and interesting topic. The period since 1925 has seen so many new theories launched and so many of the older critical traditions severely qualified that some assessment seems called for. Perhaps the most compelling reason for an appraisal of modern Jonson studies is its great bulk and complexity. To read the hundreds of items which form the basis for this dissertation is an impossible and a
needless task for the Jonson scholar, and yet he should have a clearer and more accurate understanding of the scholarship than he now has. The intricacy of modern Jonson scholarship also demands a clarification and a description of its outlines and most prominent features. The great variety of critical response since 1925 has resulted in a stream of commentary, which, at first glance, seems unusually confused. Without some guide to this massive and complicated body of criticism, its importance and contribution may be ignored or misunderstood; the achievement of individual scholars overlooked or greatly overrated. No guide to this vast amount of commentary exists in modern Jonson studies. The Tannenbaum Bibliographies provide a fairly complete listing of the modern criticism, but, beyond an occasional brief description, no attempt is made to evaluate or to discriminate. The other, more selective bibliographies do not even perform this service. A comprehensive and reliable guide for modern Jonson criticism is needed, and this dissertation intends to serve as that guide.

Thoroughness of survey is necessary if a study of this kind is to have any validity, and the purpose throughout the dissertation is to present the fullest possible picture of Jonson's reputation. No attempt, however, will be made to describe all of the critical material contained in the bibliography, for such an attempt could result only in a confused and contradictory report. In order to extract a meaningful picture of Jonson's modern reputation certain limits will be observed throughout.

the dissertation. With very rare exceptions, only that criticism ap­
pearing between 1925 and 1958 will be described. 1925 is selected as a
starting date because of the publication in that year of the first two
volumes of the Herford and Simpson edition of Jonson. Not only does this
event make the year an unquestionably important landmark in the whole
course of Jonson studies, but the edition provides an unusually clear
division between traditional and modern criticism. If any event can be
accepted without question as seeing the inception of modern Jonson criti-
cism, it is the appearance of the first volumes of the Oxford edition in
1925.

This dissertation will be limited also to those areas of criticism
which are most prominent and most important: the commentary on Jonson's
biography, his dramatic art in general, and the individual comedies and
tragedies. The amount of scholarship under these categories and their
intrinsic importance have determined the selection. To overlook any one
segment would give a very incomplete picture. Awareness of biographical
criticism is necessary because this is one writer for whom many critical
problems continue to be solved through reference to the life or person­
ality, and much criticism evolves from assumptions about the man. The
concentration on the dramatic criticism both general and specific is
obvious for a writer whose reputation still rests upon his achievement
in comedy and tragedy.

This study will not deal with criticism of Jonson's poetry, prose,
or masques, all of which are neglected compared to the full appraisal of
the life and drama. Nor will foreign language studies be considered.
The very small amount of French, German, and Italian criticism and its miscellaneous nature do not justify inclusion. Significant is the lack of allusion to modern foreign commentary by scholars writing in English since 1925. Foreign criticism exists quite apart from the mainstream of modern Jonson scholarship and does not affect it in any way. The only important exception to this limitation is the reference made to the literary histories of Legouis and Cazamian—and these only in translation. Otherwise it is assumed that Jonson's is a literary reputation found exclusively in English and American scholarship and that from such scholarship alone can one derive an understanding of the reputation.

Within these clear limits the search for Jonson's reputation has involved a reading of every available pertinent reference listed in the essential guides to any serious study of Jonson: Tannenbaum's bibliographies, the annual bibliographies for the learned journals, especially that of Studies in Philology, the briefer bibliographies included in surveys of literary history and special studies of the drama. From the mass of material consulted, selection has been made of those ideas which recur with such frequency that they may be offered confidently as the constituents of the modern reputation. Particular attention has been directed toward the trends and changes occurring within this criticism since 1925, and toward the attitudes which have been modified or reemphasized during that period. Also many individual studies have been selected as highly important and deserving extended description and comment. Any work which has made an impact on subsequent criticism, suggests a new approach or
solution to critical problems, or is of great intrinsic importance has been detached from the mass of criticism and examined at length.

The dissertation is composed of three major sections: biographical studies, comment on Jonson's dramatic art, and criticism of the individual plays. The method of discussion will often change because of the amount and intricacy of the criticism itself. Wherever possible, the chronological order is followed, and particular stress is placed on Herford and Simpson's evaluation, which, usually, serves as a standard according to which advance, deviation, or reiteration may be judged. When a chronological presentation seems of little value, the criticism is discussed according to dominant problems or attitudes whose importance has no relevance to the time of writing. Whatever devices of ordering the material are used, they are intended to be simple and unobtrusive, to direct the reader's attention to what is characteristic and important in the modern criticism of Jonson.

This dissertation is not offered as a substitute for the criticism itself, for it is no digest of that material. But it will act as a guide to a most important section of modern scholarship by presenting an outline and appraisal of an unusually complicated and rich body of writing. It will call attention to what is most significant in modern Jonson studies. The changes occurring within that criticism will be more clearly understood and appreciated when seen in the context of the entire field of modern Jonson studies. And, finally, this study will record with greater exactitude than now exists the critical status of one of the most important and rewarding of all the English dramatists.
The attraction of Ben Jonson's life for biographers is readily understandable. His status as dramatist and poet and his relationship with many figures important in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries make him indispensable in any treatment of the times. His part in such significant events as the War of the Theaters and the Gunpowder Plot is further incitement to historical investigation. Then, too, there is the abundant record of the life. A series of facts and legends spin out Jonson's story with remarkable clarity and continuity. The episodes of the life constitute a series of sharp, vivid, and characteristic scenes almost always revealing a personality of coherence and force. And yet, if compared to other Jacobean dramatists Jonson's life record is unusually rich in detail, much still remains to be recovered from the past; and those facts and traditions which do exist invite a variety of interpretation. Finally, there is the dramatic pattern of the life. Jonson's career develops through several sharply distinguished, sharply contrasted periods. His turbulent early years, his cordial friendship with one king, his virtual banishment by another present a pattern attractive to literary treatment and scholarly investigation. The interest in Jonson's life and personality, strong always since his own time, is particularly evident in the twentieth century. The abundance of biographical study appearing
since 1925 proves that in this area of Jonson criticism neither neglect nor indifference exists.

1.

Strong proof of Jonson's enduring attraction as a personality is the appearance since 1925 of five biographies. The first is the life with which Herford and Simpson introduce their edition of the works. 1 In 1927 Francis Steegmuller, under the pseudonym of Byron Steel, composed O Rare Ben Jonson. 2 Eric Linklater's Ben Jonson and King James appeared in 1931, 3 and John Palmer's Ben Jonson in 1934. 4 The latest complete account of the life has been Marchette Chute's Ben Jonson of Westminster, which was published in 1953. 5 The impressive fact about these many biographies is that not one is called forth by important discoveries. Contemporary scholarship has uncovered new facts and has offered suppositions which fill out the life record more clearly, but these are neither numerous enough nor significant enough to require a recasting of the traditional account of the entire life. Nor does another source of biography—a novel and startling version of the life—explain the appearance of so many works. None of these supports or refutes a radical interpretation


2 Byron Steel [pseud. Francis Steegmuller], O Rare Ben Jonson (New York, 1927).


4 John Palmer, Ben Jonson (New York, 1934).

5 Marchette Chute, Ben Jonson of Westminster (New York, 1953).
of Jonson's life. The only explanation of the many full studies appearing in such a short space of time is the continuing fascination exercised by the life and personality of Jonson.

Each biography does approach the subject from a slightly different point of view, however, and each represents a varied achievement. To understand more fully the contribution of each is the first necessary task in any discussion of modern Jonson studies; but proper appraisal of this biographical scholarship involves several problems. The scope of study proposed by this dissertation prohibits a close description of all of this material. To evaluate all the detail and conjecture which make up each biography could result in only a meaningless welter of facts, further vexed by any attempt to elucidate through cross-reference. The differences and accomplishments of each are perhaps better illuminated by reference to the first, the prefatory life of Herford and Simpson. Besides being a valuable aid to an orderly and meaningful appraisal of all major studies of the life, greater stress on this biography is justifiable for several reasons. Herford and Simpson's presentation may not be the final judgment, but it is one of the most important. It is the indispensable starting point for any serious appraisal of modern Jonson biographies. Its examination of the historical evidence, its division of the life into several coherent periods, and its conclusions about Jonson's personality and character make this one of the most important statements in Jonson scholarship. Also, inclusion in the most influential edition of the work gives this biography a greater force of authority than the others. It certainly
serves as a very reliable standard against which to measure the additions and variations found in the later biographies.

As one proceeds through the Herford and Simpson account he gains an impression of soundness and reliability. It captures one's respect immediately through its judicious separation of fact from tradition and conjecture. Authenticity is a particular problem in any account of the ancestry, birth, and early years. Here the editors weigh and accept certain traditions or possibilities, while others, long a part of the Jonson legend, are rejected. Drummond's testimony of Jonson's Annandale ancestry, of his father's being a minister persecuted under the reign of Queen Mary, and of his mother's courage and fiery spirit is accepted as probable. Herford and Simpson place the dramatist's birth "in or near London" in 1572, about a month following his father's death; and they assume that the mother's remarriage to a hard-working but unsuccessful bricklayer occurred two or three years later. They also accept as reasonable the legend that Jonson was "brought up poorly." Fuller's note that Jonson received his early education in a private school in St. Martin's Church is considered more reliable than the tradition that Camden was the friend who entered him at Westminster. The possibility of any later university training is contradicted by Jonson's testimony to Drummond.

The period between 1589 and 1597 is recognized by the editors as quite problematical. Only two facts emerge with complete clarity, his soldiering and his marriage. If the dates of Jonson's time with the army in

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7Ibid., p. 3.
Flanders are difficult to determine, there is little mystery as to his probable motive. Herford and Simpson consider the quick return to London proof that the Flanders episode was no escape from intolerable living conditions, but rather an adventure, pure and simple, and an understandable step for a man of Jonson's excellent physical condition and skill in swordsmanship. Sufficient contemporary proof exists for us to accept the story of the single combat as unquestionably authentic. The editors place the marriage between 1592 and 1595. Because factual information on Jonson's wife is missing, her character, personality, and Jonson's infidelity must rest on his own evidence. That two children at least were born during these years is known from the epitaphs. Mary was the first daughter, and the first son, Benjamin, died in 1603. Of a second son, all that is known is that he died in 1635, two years before his father's death.

The period of Jonson's theatrical apprenticeship is somewhat clearer than the earlier parts of the life, but it presents the same serious problems of authenticating and proper interpretation. From the fragments of Jonson's personal history at this time the editors work out a credible sequence. Among the few recorded events is Jonson's appearance in 1597 as a member of a strolling company of actors. Jonson's was probably an inferior troupe, and if his physique and energy helped in this profession, there is no reason to believe he was a successful actor. By July 1597 he had possibly reached the position of playwright in Henslowe's employ. The Isle of Dogs (1597), important because it initiates Jonson's
troubles with the authorities, seems to have been his completion of a fragment by Nashe; but, the "principal if not the only hand was unquestionably Jonson's."8 The many loans recorded after the imprisonment indicate Henslowe's confidence in Jonson. That his name is so often coupled at this time with those of Marlowe, Kyd, and Shakespeare suggests his growing stature as a dramatist.

With the production of Every Man in His Humour in 1596 we enter a period of detailed and authentic data. From this point on the real significance in any Jonson biography is its interpretation of the many events and its eliciting from them some insight into Jonson's personality. The commentary provided by Herford and Simpson seems particularly interesting and valid. For several reasons the editors minimize Jonson's guilt in the slaying of Gabriel Spencer. Jonson had the shorter weapon, and Spencer was the aggressor. The few and mild contemporary references indicate a belief in Jonson's innocence as does his own casual later retelling of the adventure. His being spied upon in prison was probably for other reasons; and the mysterious questioning most likely concerned his conversion to Catholicism. The plays written during this period were performed by several companies, but the editors do not consider this evidence that Jonson could not get along with the various groups. His moving among the many companies proves only that he was, at this time, an unattached author with several specialties. Powerful proof of the strength of Jonson's reputation as a playwright is the Chamberlain's Men staging

8Ibid., p. 15.
Every Man out of His Humour, a very daring violation of precedent and tradition. The play is also an important symbol of the marked difference between Jonson and his fellow playwrights. And Jonson, these biographers insist, was not the man to diminish natural isolation by conciliatory manners. His relation to theater people was "from the first one of unstable equilibrium, and his temperament, at once vehement and exacting...of the sort which accentuates every incipient disturbance of a difficult poise." The play is historically significant for it seems to have struck the first spark in the War of the Theaters.

Herford and Simpson give a very clear, traditional reading of the "war." Marston's resentment at Jonson's satire of his diction in the character of Clove was intensified because he was almost a disciple of Jonson at this time. Furthermore, he had intended to compliment Jonson by introducing him in Histriomastix (1600) under the figure of Chrisoganus, a characterization which, unfortunately, resembled a caricature. Marston's next play, Jack Drum's Entertainment (1600), included an unmistakable caricature of Jonson in Brabant Senior. Jonson, aware of the attack, retaliated in Cynthia's Revels (1600) by ridiculing Marston and Dekker as Hedon and Anaides. Anticipating their elaborate revenge, Jonson rushed through fifteen weeks to compose The Poetaster (1601), which overwhelmed Marston through the force of its satire. The eventual result of the play was to make new enemies for Jonson, and perhaps even Shakespeare was provoked to retaliate; but the most drastic result was the ridicule of

9 Ibid., p. 24.
Jonson in Dekker's *Satiromastix* (1601). The conclusion of the affair is obscure, but it seems clear that Jonson felt his career in comic drama was temporarily at an end, for he withdrew into seclusion, even from his home.

The absence from his home for five years is reconstructed from a few contemporary references and from his works. That he lived with Lord Aubigny during this period is evidence of Jonson's personal magnetism as is his being entertained by Sir Robert Cotton and other friends during visits and flights from the plague. Perhaps the disreputable experiences recorded in the *Conversations* may be assigned to this period. But it was also a period of intense scholarship and included the quarrel with Campion and Daniel over rhyme, the translation of Horace, the observations from Aristotle, and the satiric and laudatory poems.

The accession of King James in 1603 meant a marked rise in the personal and professional fortunes of the dramatist. That he now enjoyed an improved status may be seen in his subsequent troubles with the authorities. The editors attach little importance to his being questioned after the disastrous production of *Sejanus* (1603). Since no summons has ever been discovered, the entire affair was probably not serious, and the result, perhaps, of Court intrigue rather than suspicion of treason. The Earl of Northampton may have wanted to divert suspicion from his own secret Catholicism by making of Jonson's religion a convenient target. The editors do not believe the Earl was avenging himself for Jonson's earlier beating of one of his servants. The release from the voluntary imprisonment following the *Eastward Ho* (1605) trouble also indicates
Jonson's improved standing at Court. Furthermore, his role in the Gunpowder Plot investigation hints at a strong trust on the part of the government. The real reason for Jonson's being commissioned in the affair is not known, but Herford and Simpson suggest he was here acting, not as a Catholic, but as an Englishman. His activity for the government may explain the lenient treatment he received during the recusancy proceedings against him and his wife in April, 1606.

The period following the Plot marks an even greater improvement in Jonson's status and prestige. He enjoyed the friendship of the King and was regarded more tolerantly by powerful people. His dramatic prestige was recovered through the presentation, in 1605, of Volpone, and its subsequent triumphant playing at the universities. His work as a masque-maker was steadily growing in importance as well as in vogue, and he came into the full compass of his dramatic power with the well-received Epicoene (1609) and The Alchemist (1610). However, Catiline, played in 1611, was a complete disaster and occasioned another retreat from the theater.

Knowledge of Jonson's personal life between 1602 and 1612, which rests mostly on conjecture and tradition, reveals a successful and happy period. The editors note that the frequent legends attaching to these years indicate that he was no recluse. Beaumont's verse epistle shows Jonson was a leading figure at the Mermaid between 1603 and 1604. During the period from 1602 to 1610 can be placed the famous wit-combats with Shakespeare, a tradition "too vivid and too intrinsically probable to be dismissed."^{10} Although the record of his life shows a notable lack of

^{10}Tbid., p. 50.
interest in women, Jonson's virility and rugged appearance help explain why, in this period, he enjoyed the friendship of many women and the intimacy with one, the unidentified "Charis." Among such noble ladies as the Countess of Bedford, the Countess of Rutland, and Lady Wroth friendship outweighed patronage, and his friendships with noblemen were equally illustrious and warm. However, a close scrutiny of all the evidence shows that while Jonson might have been a generous friend, he was also a difficult one, demanding recognition of his own dignity and that of his art. He respected intellect and learning, but proved a deadly enemy of courtly vice and folly. This attitude is shown in the many attacks on fops and court beauties—attacks which culminated in the "foul-mouthed ferocity" of the poem on Cecily Bulstrode.\textsuperscript{11}

The history of Jonson's professional relationships also reveals the intensity of his friendships and enmities. Toward some, such as Thomas Giles, the maker of dances, or Ferrabosco, the composer, he could be serene or even affectionate. In contrast is the famous, lengthy, and acrimonious quarrel with Inigo Jones. The cause of their first falling-out is unknown, but these biographers assume the quarrel was professional rather than personal and that each differed as to the importance and dignity of his separate work in the masque. A review of all the relationships, professional and personal, shows that between his thirtieth and his fiftieth years Jonson possessed a forceful, but neither very subtle nor very sensitive personality. He displayed a genial, versatile, full-blooded

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 59.
temperament, which revealed the discipline of the schools as well as
the "riotous abandonment of the tavern."\textsuperscript{12}

The next period, which the editors designate as the "Later Maturity,"
begins with two auspicious events, the preparation between 1612 and 1613
of the definitive edition of his works, and his selection as tutor to
Raleigh's son. The tour to France in 1612 with young Raleigh is most im-
portant for the two meetings during which the poet distinguished himself
as a scholar. His part in the debate on the Real Presence is convincing
proof of the sincerity of his return to Protestantism, and the un-
questionably authentic evidence of his encounter with Cardinal Duperon
further proves Jonson's brusqueness with important people when questions
of scholarship or literary integrity were involved.

The nine unproductive years following \textit{The Devil is an Ass} (1616)
probably signify that drama was of secondary importance during this time.
What details of knowledge we possess for this period come from "Exe-
cration upon Vulcan" and the \textit{Conversations}. The latter record of Jonson's
personality is thoroughly weighed by the editors. They admit this is a
monologue rather than a conversation, and there is much reserve in
Drummond's admiration. Nevertheless, Jonson's personality does perme-
ate the work, and if Drummond's fastidiousness blinded him to some of
Jonson's greater qualities, it "sharpened his perception of others."\textsuperscript{13}
Although little is known of Jonson's trip to Oxford and the very rare
honors conferred on him, the event is proof of the high status he had
earned in the educated English world. The period between 1616 and

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 63. \textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 81.
the close of the reign was the "heyday of his personal dictatorship in the literary world."\textsuperscript{14} The admiration of the "tribe of Ben" and the ex-hilarating "lyric feasts" were matched by an increasing royal favor bestowed upon a man whose relations with his King were always honorable and dignified.

The \textit{Staple of News} (1626) is, the editors suggest, a depressing landmark introducing the next stage in Jonson's biography. This return to the stage reveals the end of any real creativity in the drama and heralds personally difficult years for him. Jonson's fortunes undergo an almost complete reversal. His arrest in connection with the poem on Buckingham's assassination in 1628 symbolizes his new relationship with the Court. He lost the royal favor, he lost many old friends through death, and he lost his health through a paralytic stroke. Financial hardship drove him back to playwriting. His selection as City Chronologer was no honor, but an act calculated to prevent his ridiculing the City; and significantly, the plays from this point on omit topics which might offend. The arrogant "Ode to Himself," Jonson's response to \textit{The New Inn} disaster in 1631, not only proves he still enjoyed an imposing reputation, but may have provoked the gifts from the Westminster Chapter and from the King himself. The temporary nature of this relief, his dismissal as a provider of masques, and the withholding of his payment as Chronologer forced Jonson, "now almost desperate,"\textsuperscript{15} once more to turn to the stage. The unsuccessful result, \textit{The Magnetic Lady} (1632), is biographically important because it evoked detailed gibes from his enemies.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 84. \hfill \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 99.
A Tale of a Tub, presented sometime later, is accepted as a play of the early years to which was attached the violent caricature of Inigo Jones. The royal entertainments subsequently written by Jonson and the King's adjustment of the pension quarrel indicate a somewhat improved relationship with the Court.

Herford and Simpson modify considerably the traditions of Jonson's lonely and bleak final years. He was at this time the focus of learning and letters in London, and his deep reading and scholarly activity are proven by the Discoveries and the fragmentary English Grammar. His life was "eminently social" up to two years of his death, and the existence of a group of important, young literary men proves the extent to which he was sought out and the respect with which his literary opinion was held until almost the end of his life. While there is no certain information about Jonson between the year 1635, when his son died, and his own death in 1637, it is certain that he died almost penniless and in debt and possibly in a state of mental decline. Perhaps he planned to complete The Sad Shepherd, and there is another, less authentic, but probable, tradition that the final months of his life were marked by a vehement piety and regret at having profaned the Scriptures. The funeral, following his death in August 6, 1637, was honored by a mourning reminiscent of that for Sidney and proof, as is the mediocre Jonsonus Virbius, of the "radiating and mastering force of Jonson's personality." 17

In presentation and evaluation this biography is uniformly excellent. As a balanced introduction it is invaluable, but it can be read with equal 16 Ibid., p. 105. 17 Ibid., p. 116.
pleasure by one thoroughly familiar with the life record. Blunders do occur, particularly in the placing the date of the son's death in 1635. Acceptance of other dates and the explanation of blank periods in the life have been questioned or reversed by subsequent scholarship. But, generally, it is in this troublesome area of legend and conjecture that the account remains especially sound and reliable. Alternate interpretations are presented, and the choice of the editors always impresses one as being sane and convincing, given the available possibilities. One develops a similar confidence in their evaluation of Jonson's personality and character. Little is done with analysis deduced from the themes, motifs, and imagery of the works as an index of the inner man. Less is made of the sharp contrasts and almost contradictory traits one finds in Jonson—the expressions of delicacy and tenderness followed by his coarse and brutal forthrightness. Still, by omitting such interpretations, so tempting to later Jonson commentators, the editors manage to exclude much debatable material in their account. And if the portrait is without much depth and complexity, any reader should find satisfaction in the clear, sympathetic, but unsentimental picture of the man which does emerge.

Francis Steegmuller's *O Rare Ben Jonson*, written under the pseudonym "Byron Steel," is a curiosity rather than a contribution in modern Jonson studies. A "Note on Construction" explains but does not justify the purpose of this peculiar work. Rejecting the orthodox methods of research for the "more vivifying air of independent meditation," and intent on a "poetically true conception," Steegmuller avoids those facts

which make "dull reading," a description which fits all but a small amount of Jonson's work that is still readable and the "poetically absolutely true" Conversations.\textsuperscript{19}

The book produced by this extravagant method is neither biography nor fiction. The structure of the life is here, but so also are episodes and relationships unique even among Jonson apocrypha. Most problems are demolished, all blanks are filled, all explanations supplied. The shadowy ancestors of the standard accounts are here given names, professions, and personalities. When not spun out of pure air, the episodes proliferate from a phrase or brief incident in the orthodox biography. For example, the single combat in Flanders here becomes an epic duel between an aristocratic Spanish challenger and the courageous, plebian Jonson. The wife of tradition, the "shrew but honest," now becomes Jane Ashton, a tavern owner's daughter, whose marriage to the poet provides him with a home as he launches himself into a theatrical career under the sponsorship of the perpetually hostile Henslowe.

The events, successes, and failures of Jonson's professional and personal life, while following the familiar chronology, are almost always distortions or the most irresponsible kind of supposition. A priest, exploiting Jonson's craven fear of the gallows and his attraction toward the Church which was the "preserver of the great books,"\textsuperscript{20} effects his conversion. All early plays are spectacularly successful, and Jonson is completely triumphant in the War of the Theaters, an episode instigated by the jealous Henslowe. The monotonous parade of subsequent literary successes is interrupted only by frequent and fully described drunken

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 157. \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 47.
escapades. Jonson becomes the confidential companion to King James, and delights the Court with his masques. As his wife drifts from the narrative, she is replaced by a "charming lady in the country," who becomes the subject of Jonson's love verses until he is fifty. The wildly successful Bartholomew Fair gains the laureateship from a grateful King.

Unalloyed success is followed by unalloyed misery after the death of James. The loss of his pension, the preference of Inigo Jones, the cancellation of the city pension, and the failure of the plays in the popular theater result in a stroke and the hastening of Jonson's death. A repentant Charles visits Jonson as he is dying in time to hear and grant a request for a burial space of eighteen square inches in Westminster Abbey. Jonson, doughty to the end, is determined to meet his Maker on Judgment Day in a standing position.

That such a poor and in every way fallacious example of Jonson biography should escape a thorough critical castigation suggests the lack of much informed interest in Jonson among many reviewers in 1927. Jonson's life is of sufficient vigor and drama to need no fictional embellishments. Steegmuller's attempt to enliven the account is sophomoric and frequently vulgar. He ignores many of the facts, and overlooks the possible insights provided by the many fascinating legends. No sense of Jonson's personality is to be found in this biography, and no appreciation of his great and special literary gifts. The only incidental value a serious reader might derive from this distorted work is to read with more reliance and pleasure the life studies that followed Steegmuller's.

Ibid., p. 98.
Eric Linklater's *Ben Jonson and King James* is also a biography which includes imaginative reconstruction. For instance, Linklater speculates that a compromise between a nagging mother and a stubborn stepfather may have allowed young Jonson to be educated at Westminster until early adolescence before joining his stepfather's trade. Also, Jonson may have joined the army in Flanders because of a stirring of hereditary belligerency, and his single combat may have come from a memory of classical precedence. But, unlike Steegmuller, Linklater carefully marks off such imaginative, and not unreasonable, flights as such, and reminds the reader constantly of the real problems of detail and dating involved in many of the events of Jonson's life.

Linklater particularly stresses the historical background and the effect of changing literary tastes on the mind of Jonson. His acting experiences made a strong impression on him, but even more important in the years just before his first humour play was the shift from a romantic to a realistic literary ideal. *Every Man in His Humour* is here considered an inevitable advance in the whole development of realistic comedy rather than as a sharp, individual protest against the overwhelmingly popular romanticism. This period is also important for the start of Jonson's friendship with Shakespeare, never a particularly close relationship, and definitely overshadowed in dramatic interest by the slaying of Spencer and the conversion to Catholicism, a sincerely undertaken change and one for which Jonson was psychologically prepared. Regarding the War of the Theaters, Linklater assumes there was nothing unusual in the pursuit of private quarrels on the public stage, for the
London theater world was small enough to insure audience familiarity. Shakespeare's "purge" is assumed to be the satiric portrait of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*. The whole affair was inconclusive, and eventually drifted into a "peace of exhaustion."\(^2\)

Although the history of King James and his effect on Jonson assume more importance in this biography than in the others, the title is misleading. This is not a double biography. James is only slightly more prominent than the other figures surrounding Jonson, and he never really deflects our attention from the dramatist. Linklater agrees with all who have examined the relationship that Jonson was always respectful toward the King, but always aware too of his own dignity and worth. Linklater's description of the long, happy period of Jonson's maturity, which commences with the accession of James, resembles that of Herford and Simpson with only an occasional change in interpretation worth noting. This critic recognizes that Jonson's work in the masque represented a real advance in his personal and poetic fortunes, but he views this work primarily as a tragic waste of time and talent. The biographer attempts no reconstruction of the legendary meetings at the Mermaid, although he does accept the Fuller testimony of the wit-combats as reliable. The angry poem on Cecily Boulstred, a revenge unworthy "and without dignity,"\(^3\) possibly is Jonson's reaction to the young woman's jealousy of Lady Bedford, Linklater's tentative candidate for "Charis." Jonson's remorse at the death of Cecily reveals the excesses of anger and kindness, of tenderness and brutality present in his mind.

and art. His refusal to act as go-between for Overbury and Lady Rutland gives us insight into his sturdy moral character. The appraisal of Jonson found in the *Conversations* is that of the angry dilettante amateur Drummond responding to a brilliant but exasperating guest. Drummond's obvious hostility explains much of the destructive criticism. Linklater himself arrives at a more favorable, but somewhat negative, conclusion about Jonson's character. During this central part of his life, Jonson's personality reveals he was devoid of any passionate or tumultuous inner struggles. There are no "sentimental or pathological problems....He escaped the lurid strain of moral tragedy. His conflict with life was external rather than internal....Such inner conflict as he knew was intellectual."24

Linklater's account of the last part of the life is quite traditional with only an occasional comment distinguishing it from the Herford and Simpson presentation. He agrees that Jonson's quarrel with Inigo Jones involved pride in craft rather than pride in self, but he thinks that their being "essentially incompatable"25 is a partial explanation of the long feud. Linklater also sees a closer cause and effect relationship than did the editors between the many personal troubles and Jonson's failing health in the later years. Artistically, the final years show Jonson fighting a losing battle to adjust to the new spirit of the times. Like Shakespeare, Jonson turns to poetry for comfort at the end of his life, but without much popular success. Certain events brighten the record of the last years, however. The furor stirred by

the "Ode" written after The New Inn fiasco suggests that by now the poet stands for something unique. The existence of the "tribe of Ben" qualifies the tradition that Jonson was a neglected, lonely old man. Still, Jonson's death ends an unquestionably pathetic situation. He had outlived his family, and the age he represented had long since passed.

Linklater's is a pleasant, but not a really significant version of the life. It represents no important advance over the biography of Herford and Simpson. Those places where Linklater departs from the earlier biography are neither very frequent nor very important. Somewhat interesting is the biographer's general attitude toward his subject. Where Herford and Simpson are, at times, almost apologetic, Linklater is almost always enthusiastic and uncritical. In this way the work reflects the increased admiration which typifies modern Jonson studies, but, unfortunately, Linklater's enthusiastic approach produces nothing but a flat and uncomplicated portrait. One interesting feature is the author's insistence that Jonson was definitely a part of his time and shared its creative spirit. Here Linklater extends a theme found in Herford and Simpson and again significantly reflects an important tradition in modern Jonson criticism. But this interpretation is introduced so casually into the biography that it does not make Linklater's a remarkably different treatment. Instead, all the commentary provided by this author rests lightly on a very standard presentation of the life. Solutions to the many specific problems are suggestive rather than convincing. Linklater's account is, in short, readable and inoffensive, but it adds little to our knowledge of Jonson's life and
John Palmer's biography is unquestionably superior to those of Linklater and Steegmuller, and in many ways is the most interesting of all the longer studies. Palmer presents the strongest defense of Jonson, exhibits more enthusiasm for him, and is far more determined that the other biographers to rescue his work from critical neglect. As a consequence, Palmer's study is enlivened by a sustained attack on the traditional misreading of Jonson and his work, which this biography intends to correct. The degree of admiration distinguishes this from the earlier biographies, but even more unusual is Palmer's special interpretation of Jonson's life. He sees Jonson as an important historic symbol. Not only is Jonson of overwhelming importance to English literature because he was the most remarkable expression of the Renaissance in England, but he was one of the last great writers who symbolize a rejection of the "great negation...our present legacy from Geneva." This theme gives point and interest to the entire work, but nowhere does theme nor an enthusiastic attitude obscure the clear and familiar outline of the life.

Neither enthusiasm nor a particular interpretation prevents the biography from being a full and fair study. Palmer does not gloss over unpleasant facts, nor does he fill in the frequent lacunae. The account of the early years, for example, is a conservative mixture of dominant traditions, the few hard facts, and such cautiously offered, but reasonable inferences as Camden's being the friend who took an early interest.

in the boy and guided him into Westminster. Jonson's initiation into the world of the theater is considered typical for such a man at such a time. Palmer offers a special explanation of Jonson's money dealings with Henslowe. These transactions may have been exploitation on the part of the entrepreneur and attempts to repay loans on the part of Jonson, who may have been brought in eventually as a sharer in Henslowe's company. It seems certain that Jonson never took kindly to the popular theater in these early days or later. His defection from The Rose may have resulted from the "profoundly unsatisfactory" financial relationship with Henslowe. The resentment of his former company and their anger at the success of The Case is Altered possibly led to the Gabriel Spencer episode. The duel and slaying are mitigated by Palmer who assumes his being spied upon in prison resulted from earlier troubles with the authorities.

As he considers and weighs the facts of Jonson's history, Palmer is often primarily concerned with the light they shed on the man's imagination and attitude toward his art. For example, the War of the Theaters is seen as a struggle over literary integrity instead of the clash of irascible personalities as it is traditionally viewed. The actual cause of the "war" was Jonson's deriding the style and vocabulary of such romantic tragedians as Marston, but more significant was his assuming and maintaining the role of "prophet," the champion of Apollo, as part of the dramatist's function. Palmer feels the arrogance Jonson displayed during the quarrel was that of a prophet and not of a

27Ibid., p. 16.
personally vain man. However, the "war" would never have materialized if Jonson had been a man of normal sensibility and if he had not been one who must carry everything he touched to the extreme. The "postomachia" is a crucial episode in Jonson's life and a valuable example of stage manners in the reign of Elizabeth, but its general importance is small and the personal consequences were neither serious nor enduring.

Quite unusual is Palmer's interpretation of Jonson's life before and just after the appearance of King James. He sees these years as a wholehearted pursuit of patronage on the part of Jonson. _Cynthia's Revels_ is considered a "massive bid for the royal favor." The need for money to support his family may well explain the additions to _The Spanish Tragedy_, which Palmer sees as Jonson's insignificant contribution to the play and a surviving example of his typical hack-work. The failure of _Sejanus_ made the search for patronage more urgent, and the quest is highly paradoxical when one compares Jonson's attitude and that of the average seeker of patronage. The most illustrious and most important patronage of all, that of King James, results from the intellectual kinship of the two, their love of logic, their liking for friendly discourse, and, possibly, their mutual, congenital tactlessness. Jonson's early poems to the King may be read as his amazing pursuit of the royal favor, but they lead to a relationship marked by familiarity and candor on both sides and by Jonson's sustained sense of the poet's essential dignity and worth.

Palmer's account of the middle period of Jonson's life agrees

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28Ibid., p. 67.
substantially with that of Herford and Simpson. Religion, despite the occasional troubles it involved him in, is considered a matter of little importance. All evidence suggests a basic indifference toward women, although he was certainly capable of enduring friendships with them. Palmer offers the Countess of Bedford as "Charis" and Lady Covell as the woman Jonson may have loved in later life. He is less willing to accept the evidence of Jonson's tavern life than were the other biographers. He considers these traditions too vaguely reported to constitute accurate documentary. The persistent legends of Jonson's drunkenness are discarded as the spiteful reporting of Drummond. Recognizing the friendship with Shakespeare as the most interesting relationship of these years, Palmer rejects the legend of Jonson's traducing Shakespeare or being ungrateful toward him.

Of his remarks on the mature comedies, what Palmer says about Bartholomew Fair is especially significant in a study where Jonson is offered as the last of the English humanists and one who just missed the full effects of the Puritan disaster. This play, according to the Palmer interpretation, is an important and final statement in the very old and deadly contest between the church and the theater. Jonson's defense of the theater is poignant because, by the time he came to its defense, the cause of the stage was lost. The real conflict, Palmer insists, went very deep. "On one side were the claims of intellect and sensibility working towards a free development of human faculty—in effect that discovery of man which was an even more important feature of humanism than the discovery of the physical world. On the other side was a moral
discipline which ultimately diverted the spiritual energy of the Renaissance towards a moral regeneration of mankind based on an elaborate and essentially primitive system of repression and denial."\textsuperscript{29} This conflict or rivalry is fundamental, and in this perpetual quarrel Jonson clearly defined his personal attitude and faith. In this context Jonson's \textit{Bartholomew Fair} is no mere genial concession to popular taste, but the significant expression of a general attitude toward the life of the time and the world in general. "It is the play of a faithful and fearless lover of life and it is throughout a true bill."\textsuperscript{30} Technically, the play is important as a concentration of all the resources of his particular realism, but it is more memorable as a timely warning of what was coming to Jonson's England and as "England's carnival or farewell to the flesh."\textsuperscript{31}

Palmer's presentation of the remainder of Jonson's life follows quite familiar lines. He scrutinizes the \textit{Conversations}, the most important result of the trip to Scotland, carefully evaluates them, and accepts them as reliable. Although the document distorts Jonson and his views, and, unfortunately, launches too many hostile Jonson traditions, these were, after all, private notes and no wilful malice can be charged to Drummond. Despite the arbitrary arrangement, the talk is varied and displays an ease and intimacy which help prove their authenticity. The \textit{Conversations} are very important for they enrich and fortify our knowledge of Jonson's personality and intellect. The \textit{Discoveries},

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 193-194. \hfill \textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 199. \hfill \textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 207.
Jonson's nearest approach to a confessional mood, helps greatly our understanding of him. Although it possesses the miscellaneous quality of a commonplace book, in many passages the "poet comes breaking through," especially when he comments on his debt to the ancients and on the poet's meager rewards.

Palmer sees Jonson's final years as a series of increasingly melancholy events. The interrogation in the Buckingham assassination is considered relatively unimportant, and probably was the result of misunderstanding. Of greater significance is the alienation from King Charles, more fastidious than his father and more resentful of any familiarity. The poetic record of this relationship reveals Jonson in a mendicant mood, but there is no indication that he ever lost his independence of spirit. Palmer attaches great importance to the quarrel with Inigo Jones, for this, he considers, was the real cause of the later poverty and neglect. The few personal glimpses of Jonson in his last years fill out a melancholy picture of him as an enforced spectator of life. The indifference of the public is shown in the reaction to the death, and the funeral tributes prove to Palmer only that even in his own time Jonson's work was not easy of approach. The death, naturally, bears a special symbolic weight in this account, for it meant that "the English Renaissance had ceased to be an inspiration and became an episode."33

Palmer's biography is far more comprehensive than the other life studies so far discussed. Not only are the various episodes described

\[32\text{Ibid., p. 233.}\]  
\[33\text{Ibid., p. 325.}\]
more fully, but Palmer illustrates the life and the personality with many citations from the plays, masques, and poems. Consequently, we receive a richer impression of Jonson as an artist than is to be found in any of the earlier biographies. The warm admiration Palmer expresses for his subject both as man and artist is a forceful reminder of the rehabilitation that Jonson has enjoyed in twentieth-century criticism. However, Palmer's special interpretation of Jonson's symbolic importance is more interesting as an example of the kind of evaluation this life invites than it is a convincing and final explanation. The theme is not only somewhat extraneous to the life even as presented here, but exactly the opposite interpretation—that Jonson's reforming instincts are essentially those of a Puritan—has been argued at lesser length, but with equal conviction. Less dramatized, less overt, but more persuasive is the consistent presentation of Jonson as a man in and partaking of the spirit of his times.

The relationship of Jonson to his times is a theme of increasing importance in all these biographies. In each there is a progressively stronger insistence that Jonson was highly representative of his age. The emphasis on the intellectual and social background and its effect on Jonson reaches a culmination in Marchette Chute's biography. While she utilizes all of the familiar facts and many of the traditions, she is equally interested in the impact of certain contemporary ideals on Jonson's imagination and art. For example, she seems less concerned with speculation about his ancestry and birth than with the lasting effect of his early schooling at Westminster. School for him, she suggests, meant no resentment of a harsh and dull classical curriculum, but rather
an entry into "the serene, golden atmosphere of which the earlier humanists had dreamed." Jonson differed from the ordinary student of the classics from the start in the way his mind reached out for the principles behind the rules. Camden was especially important in these early years of Jonson's development for giving him a profound sense of poetry's moral dignity and value. A brief period at St. John's College, Cambridge is an admitted possibility, but Jonson's significant and formative education was finished at Westminster.

Miss Chute's description of Jonson's early manhood is not greatly different from that of Herford and Simpson, but minor shifts here and there and additional information provided by recent scholarship modify the traditional account somewhat. She suggests Jonson was possibly drafted into the reluctantly conducted war in Flanders. His duel with the Spaniard was neither unique nor common. Thanks to the research of Mark Eccles, Miss Chute is able to describe Jonson's marriage more precisely than any of the other biographers. The marriage on November 14, 1594, to Anne Lewis may have launched his dramatic career through the possible theatrical connections of his wife; but his first actual theater experience came through a provincial touring company. The work he had to do for Henslowe was according to the usual piecework system, and it is this slipshod writing together with the influence of Sidney's Defense of Poetry which propelled him toward a program of literary reform based on a selected, intelligent use of classical models. Miss Chute suggests that the immediate result of Jonson's artistic program

was *Every Man in His Humour*. The play did coincide with the contemporary taste for satire, and fitted in with the popular catchword "humour"; it certainly reflected the current feeling of disillusionment. But, most importantly, according to Miss Chute, the play stands as Jonson's first attempt in the classical tradition. That Jonson continued to work for Henslowe's group and the Admiral's Company proves only that he was still hard-pressed to support his family. Miss Chute feels that no unusual importance should be attached to either the killing of Spencer or the conversion to Catholicism.

In evaluating the causes and effects of the War of the Theaters, Miss Chute adds the economic motive—the rivalry of the Children and the adult companies—to the familiar combination of Jonson's personal and critical irritation at the plays of Marston and Dekker and their anger at his conceit and frank contempt. She discerns a triple target in *The Poetaster*: Marston, Dekker, and the Chamberlain's Men. Most significant in this play is Jonson's identifying himself with Horace, and the full-length portrait of him in *Satiromastix* is biographically invaluable. Shakespeare's playing in *Satiromastix* is offered as the mysterious "purge." The "war" ceases through Jonson's tactless attack on other professions in *The Poetaster*. His being mentioned in the Parnassus play as well as his inclusion in popular anthologies as early as 1600 is convincing proof of his growing fame.

As do all the biographers, Miss Chute sees a very close connection between the accession of scholarly, pedantic King James and the professional rise of Jonson. The King's appreciation of his quick wit and
the curious resemblance of the two partially explain his sudden and remarkable success at Court. In addition, Jonson's unusual attitude of relaxation and good nature was one which the aristocrats evidently enjoyed. Regarding the most famous enmity of these mature years, Miss Chute assumes a personal similarity rather than any profound differences explains the early and lasting antagonism with Inigo Jones. Most of the other events and relationships of this period give us a favorable impression of the man. The personality which emerges from these crowded, happy years is that of a genial and many-sided man who was able to maintain friendships with such diverse Jacobean figures as Coryat, Donne, and Sir Walter Ralegh. Jonson's happiness during this period is amply reflected in the tone of his work. The contented mood is particularly typical of Bartholomew Fair, and yet this play embodies a serious critical purpose, for it is an artistic retort to such unrealistic comedies as the recently successful Tempest. This critical aim suggests that Jonson's mind was haunted always by Shakespeare. But most of the record shows that these were self-confident and successful years. His selection as the first poet laureate proves that Jonson was one of the very few people able to build a permanent career at the slippery Court.

This biography presents a full description of the trip to Scotland. Miss Chute decides Drummond's antagonism is understandable in light of Jonson's failure to make any effort to be tactful. For one thing, the sensitive Drummond would have been particularly offended at Jonson's frank account of his early love affairs. Much of the talk sounds like genuine, drunken, random chatter, and the appended character sketch is
the release of an irritated man. Of the other notable events of this period, the author feels that the honors Jonson was accorded by the universities were not uncommon. His verses in the First Folio follow a standard convention for literary men of his time, but it is significant that the editors used him as an appealing bait to draw a better class of reader. Significantly, "...the judgment of Jonson is the only piece of writing on Shakespeare that assigns him the position he now holds." 35

The appraisal of the final section of Jonson's life combines an accurate and detailed description of the historical background and his personal history. Certain portions of this final period are far more precise in the Chute version than in the earlier biographies. Making use of the most recent scholarship, she is able to suggest that when Jonson was about fifty he may have taught for a while at Gresham College. The famous "tribe of Ben" certainly suggests evidence of a latent teaching instinct. Jonson may have married a Hester Hopkins in 1623, but his attitude toward love always remained cool and civilized. Jonson was definitely an anachronism in the reformed atmosphere of King Charles' Court, but this biographer can see no connection between his reversal of fortunes and his physical deterioration. While his bedridden days are cheered by many visitors, he exercised little actual effect on the young poets who admired him. The altercation following The New Inn proves that even this late in life Jonson was still instinctively combative. Miss Chute rejects the implausible legend that Jonson was pious and contrite in his last years. Judging from most of his writings, she

points out, it is safer to conclude he was rather a Senecan Stoic than a Christian. When he died at the age of sixty four, the evidence of the Discoveries, The English Grammar, and The Sad Shepherd disproves any suggestion of decayed faculties.

Miss Chute's is a full and affectionate study of Jonson. Her work is especially interesting for including all the new facts and possibilities offered by contemporary Jonson scholars. One might wish for a deeper interpretation of the man's aim and achievement as dramatic artist. Her emphasis on Jonson as a classicist and stage reformer implies a conventional and limited appraisal of his work—an appraisal which does not reflect the complexity and variety of contemporary Jonson scholarship. However, Miss Chute's book is not primarily critical but biographical, and her complete record of the life reveals a respect for the facts while including much intelligent and interesting supposition where it is pertinent. Most of her predecessors had made use of the social and intellectual background, but none more thoroughly or with more effective results than she. Of any of the studies which present Jonson as part of and a product of his environment, this is the most successful. Particularly effective is her ability to piece together fragments from the historical record, facts taken from a number of sources, to create vivid and convincing scenes giving us a stronger sense of immediacy and drama than is encountered in any of the other lives. The result is an attractive book and a pleasant introduction to Jonson and his work, a popularization, perhaps, but never a vulgarization.
The Chute biography concludes the series of major life studies appearing since 1925. The preceding discussion should indicate sufficiently the purpose, achievement, and distinctive quality of each. With the exception of Steegmuller's, and to a varying degree, each work is a useful addition to modern Jonson studies. The appearance of so many biographies within such a short period is certainly proof of the continuing interest this life holds for modern scholars and readers. Significant also is the variety of interpretation suggested by the life. Three interpretations are particularly notable. Herford and Simpson see the man as a balance of attractive and unpleasant traits, Palmer interprets the life as a symbol, Miss Chute discerns in Jonson a direct and vital response to the fundamental trends and ideas of his age. The different approaches suggest the literary vitality and variation possible in this life. Read in sequence the biographies clearly reflect important changes of attitude toward Jonson. An increase in admiration is found in each. A very clear contrast exists between the somewhat apologetic and defensive appraisal by Herford and Simpson and the forthright acceptance of the man by Palmer and Marchette Chute. Even more significant is the growing insistence that Jonson and his art are both quite typical of the seventeenth century. Finally, respect for Jonson as an artist and reluctance to discuss him as a vivid personality whose ideals in drama are irrelevant are increasingly characteristic of each biography.

A sense of gradually evolving attitudes toward Jonson is to be found in this sequence of biographies, and, certainly, the variety in interpre-
tation and emphasis distinguishes each. But far more impressive than
the differences are the many strong similarities among these biogra-
phies. Such efforts as John Palmer's and Marchette Chute's notwith-
standing, one does not accept these studies as a series of dramatic ad-
vances in biographical interpretation. There is little sense of dis-
covery of even of novelty as one moves from one biography to the next.
Instead one reads each work as a minor variation on a dominant and fa-
miliar theme. Several reasons account for this uniformity of im-
ression. The modern period has produced little factual addition to
the life record, and the facts of the life as they stand are so many,
so solid, and so familiar that a strong similarity in each biography is
unavoidable, and cancels out any ambitious scheme of interpretation that
the biographer may set up. Each treatment of the life almost inevitably
works out the same pattern, and there is a fairly consistent agreement
about the solution to the various problems. One very frequently finds
in comparing the various biographies that the only really essential
difference among them is one of literary skill.

The many similarities among these various studies result in a uni-
fied and strong impression of Jonson as seen through the eyes of his
most important twentieth-century biographers. The image of Jonson in
our time is predominantly a favorable one which emphasizes his vitality,
intelligence, and artistic integrity. His modern biographers resist the
temptation to present him as a man of inflated, heroic proportions, or
as a colorful, rather grotesque caricature. Instead they present a
human and understandable figure who is very much a part of the age that
produced him. His twentieth-century biographers represent a concerted effort to reconcile the divergent facts found in the life record and do succeed in presenting a picture of an integrated and very attractive human personality.

2.

The amount of commentary on Jonson's life appearing since 1925 in other sources—social and literary histories, biographies of other figures, and especially in periodical literature—is prodigious. It is also heterogeneous. Interest in certain problems unites portions of this miscellaneous scholarship, but we find here nothing resembling the trends occurring in the biographies which allowed us to judge each in relation to the others. Presentation according to time of publication would result only in labyrinthine confusion and, therefore, this material will be considered according to the chronology of Jonson's life. Because of the great amount of incidental commentary, attention here will be directed only toward material which is most representative or most important.

A survey of all this scholarship reveals that certain events, periods, and problems in the life attract much attention, while others, equally important and inviting to stimulating study and conjecture, are neglected. The earliest period, preceding and covering the first two decades of Jonson's life, for example, has evoked little interest. The one important exception is Mark Eccles' "Jonson's Marriage," a most valuable review of the traditions making up the earliest portion of the life.36

Eccles discards the tradition, derived from such late authorities as Fuller and Wood, that Jonson was born at Westminster. He asserts that wherever Jonson may have been born it was almost certainly not in Westminster. Jonson's period of bricklaying is placed in 1588, when considerable construction was going on in Lincoln's Inn. Since he was born about 1572, his age would have been sixteen, the terminal date of his formal education. Before Eccles' article, our earliest date of undoubted authenticity was July, 1597, when Jonson appears for the first time in Henslowe's Diary. Eccles extends our factual knowledge several years by his discovery of the entry in the parish register of St. Magnus the Martyr, for November 14, 1594, stating: "Beniamine Johnson and Anne Lewis maryed." Since the parish adjoined the theatrical parish of St. Saviour's in Southwark, by 1594 Jonson was possibly already an actor. This discovery replaces the earlier tradition that the marriage must have occurred in 1592 because a child named Maria Johnson was buried November 17, 1593. Eccles' attempt to clarify the tangled account of Jonson's children is part of his valuable contribution. An examination of the available records destroys one traditional fallacy. Eccles disputes the existence of a son who is supposed to have died in 1635, two years before the death of his father. This incorrect information, Eccles discovers, resulted from the mingling of two mistaken statements, one of them a misdating of Jonson's own death. In a document prepared for Herbert and Thelwell in their suit against Betterton in 1662, the death

37 Ibid., p. 258.
of the dramatist is placed in 1635. In Gifford this mistake became en-
tangled with the fallacious tradition that Jonson had a son of the same
name to whom the reversion of the Master of the Revels had been promised.
On the troublesome matter of the dates of the actual children, Eccles
offers several possibilities, and discards several traditional identi-
fications. Neither the infant Ben Jonson, who was buried October 1,
1600, nor "Elizabeth, daughr of Johnson, bricklayer," are felt to be
children of the dramatist. But, "Joseph, the sone of Benjamyne Johnson"
born Dec. 9, 1599, as registered at St. Giles Cripplegate, is a plausi-
ble relationship. "Benamin Johnson sonne to Benamin," christened on
February 20, 1607/8 at St. Anne's Blackfriars "may reasonably be ac-
cepted as a child of Jonson."\(^{38}\) The christening on March 25, 1610 of
christened at St. Martin in the Fields on April 6, 1610, can both be
credited to the dramatist by different mothers, and may be considered
proof of Jonson's telling Drummond of his illegitimate children.

Eccles' suggestions about subsequent events in Jonson's life, which
are noted later in this chapter, are also significant; but his ad-
ditions to and clarification of the early years are his major contribution—
the contribution of greatest value among all these brief appraisals of
the life.

The only other article touching on Jonson's early years worth noting
does not present new facts, but coordinates already familiar information.\(^ {39}\)

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 267.
Bowers assembles a number of scattered references in order to fill out the hazy picture of Jonson's theatrical career just before his appearance in Henslowe's Diary. Utilizing available fact and tenable conjecture, he decides that 1595-1596 marked Jonson's first connection with the stage: his work as an actor for Pembroke's Men and his acting Hieronymo on tour. In February, 1597, Jonson may have acted Zulziman at the Swan, although the part may also have figured in The Isle of Dogs. Henslowe's loan probably enabled Jonson to buy a share in the Admiral's Company, and, after October 3, 1597, when released from prison, he may have joined the Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain and played Christopher Sly in The Taming of the Shrew at least once. By December, 1597, he gravitated toward the Admiral's Company, and by 1599 his acting career was over.

Concerning the next period of the life, when Jonson was writing his early plays, one encounters a mass of reference. Some writers attempt an exact interpretation of existing information such as the conjecture that the term "share" in Henslowe's Diary describes both the liquidation of a debt and the actor's share of the gallery money. A particular line of scholarly inquiry concerns Jonson's relationship with the world of the Elizabethan theater and his cordiality or enmity toward other dramatists. Such investigation may result in such reasonable inferences that Every Man out of His Humour is the "displeasing play" mentioned in Henry IV, Part 2, or the very useful conclusions of T. W. Baldwin based

40 Alwin Thaler, Shakespeare & Democracy (Knoxville, Tenn., 1941), pp. 266-271.

on a thorough study of the Shakespearean Company, Baldwin is convinced that the dramatist's famous slowness in composition is probably the only reason he never remained with the company for more than a year at a time, but the dates do show that he made the company a "regular haven of refuge in time of storm," and there could never have been any real enmity on either side. The comment in Every Man out of His Humour on actors buying coats of arms was not maliciously intended and could not have been included without the consent of Shakespeare and his fellows. Other commentators see a far less peaceful relationship existing between Jonson and this group. Arthur Acheson, while convinced that Shakespeare provided the collaboration in Sejanus and that Jonson's is the "third hand" in Henry V, responsible for the comic prose passages, still assumes Dekker and Shakespeare were in definite alliance against such scholastic enemies as Jonson. More restrained is the interpretation of Harrison, but he also feels that Jonson left the Chamberlain's Men because his conceit had become insufferable and he had "made a nuisance of himself in the theatre."

The game of identification is frequently played by the scholars dealing with the period of Jonson's early plays. Certain conjectures are closely reasoned and represent a contribution; others are too peculiar


43Ibid., p. 434.

44Ibid., p. 439.


in method and conclusion to be considered anything more than curiosities. Other identifications are more orthodox and more convincing. H. L. Snuggs notes that Jonson's practice often departed from his assertions that he aimed at no personalities in his satires. Consequently, while he was undoubtedly satirizing the prevalent vogue for speculation, the speculation of Fynes Moryson on his trip to and from Constantinople in 1595 may well have been a special target for Jonson's satire in Cynthia's Revels and "another proof...that Jonson presents in his satirical comedy a truly realistic image of the times." Another valuable study in identity and a finding offered as reluctantly as its title suggests is Bentley's "A Good Name Lost." Bentley notes that only in the title of Jonson's poem commonly called "An Epitaph on Salathiel Pavy" is the Christian name "Salathiel" used to identify the boy. All other seventeenth-century documents make reference to either "Salmon" or "Sollomon" Pavy. The "Salathiel" spelling most probably originates with Gifford's

47 Writers embroiled in the Shakespeare-identity controversy give particular attention to Jonson's early plays. For those who are convinced that Oxford was the "real" creator of Shakespeare's plays, much evidence is derived from the sardonic references in Every Man out of His Humour, Cynthia's Revels, and The Poetaster. These plays are considered, from this point of view, only as a tissue of references to the ill-kept secret. See Eva L. Clark, The Man Who Was Shakespeare (New York, 1937); Percy Allen, The Life Story of Edward de Vere as "William Shakespeare" (London, 1932) and The Oxford-Shakespeare Case Corroborated (London, 1931); and W. Montagu Douglas, Lord Oxford and the Shakespeare Group, (London, 1952).


49 Ibid., p. 233.

Identification is also Mark Eccles' purpose in his research into Jonson's early sojourn in prison. Eccles attempts to clarify the story of the spies put upon Jonson at that time. Working with the significant hint provided by Jonson's Epigram CI, "Inviting a Friend to Supper," where he says, "we will have no Pooey, or Parrot by," Eccles is convinced that "Pooey" is clearly the Robert Poley who was present at the stabbing of Marlowe, and the kind of treacherous informer who would have had opportunity to spy on Jonson during the imprisonment. Parrot possibly would be a Henry Parrot, who made a number of unfriendly references to Jonson in his epigrams. Furthermore, the "close imprisonment" is not the result of the Spencer murder, a less serious offense in the eyes of the Council, but punishment for Jonson's part in The Isle of Dogs. Eccles notes that Jonson's conversion to Catholicism took place at Newgate. The monthly fine of twenty pounds he was liable to as a recusant was usually not enforced, and Jonson's lack of estate and his eventual value to the Court as a writer of masques undoubtedly protected him. One other piece of research adds to our knowledge of Jonson's imprisonment and his conversion. Stroud offers Father Thomas Wright as the priest who converted Jonson. The priest had convenient access to Jonson's cell at the time, his The Passions of the Minde in Generall re-


ceived a dedicatory sonnet by Jonson, and he was, like Jonson, a Catholic always loyal to the English throne.53

Scholarly investigation of Jonson's part in the War of the Theaters forms a considerable and an interesting section of the biographical studies. This scholarship includes such minute additions to our knowledge as Bowers' contention that Dekker's clothes references in Satiromastix allude to Jonson's acting the part of Christopher Sly in late 1597.54

Some writers may stress Jonson's effect on theatrical history. Hillebrand, for example, notes that not only do we depend upon Jonson for the identity and history of the children's companies, but also it was the children's staging of the controversial Cynthia's Revels and The Poetaster which launched them on a course of satire whose rewards were publicity, but whose penalty was imprisonment and dissolution.55 A critic may ignore the details of the "war" and discuss only its broader significance. Henry Wells considers the episode important, for he interprets it as a basic struggle between the forces of romanticism and conservatism.56

But the most characteristic and interesting approach to the problem is one which diminishes both the extent and the importance of the entire

53 The belief that Jonson's change of religion was of very little import to him is reinforced by those who consider him from this special point of view. See Edward Hutton, Catholicism and English Literature (London, 1942), p. 79; Elbridge Colby, English Catholic Poets (Milwaukee, 1936), p. 91.


55 Harold N. Hillebrand, The Child Actors, Univ. of Ill. Stud. in Lang. and Lit., XI (Urbana, 1926), 266.

affair. Sharpe feels much of the "war" was a literary and personal flyting directed against the "dictatorial Jonson." He points out that it was merely a frivolous symptom of the friction existing among the competitive theater groups and that it had little practical effect on the fortunes of the companies. Halstead suggests the lack of bitterness and the speedy resumption of collaboration among the combatants proves the quarrel was a money-making diversion dropped after Satiromastix because it had turned into a fiasco. Bad feelings may have resulted from the war; they would not have caused it. Berringer states that we have here not a war, but a skirmish. Concerning the identity of Hedon, the "light voluptuous reveller," of Cynthia's Revels, Berringer rejects the traditional identification with either Marston or Daniel as untenable. Jonson, usually direct and unmistakable in his personal attacks, is here presenting a type which was conventional in the literature of the 90's. The play describes a "generalized and typical situation," and, therefore, should not be associated with the war. The war is comprised only of The Poetaster, Satiromastix, and What You Will; all evidence suggests that the quarrel was a "far more circumscribed" affair than tradition allows.


60 Ibid., p. 10.

61 Ibid., p. 22.
One biographical mystery connected with the "poetomachia" is Shakespeare's connection with it and the exact nature of his "purge" of Jonson. Attempts to solve the mystery account for a considerable portion of the incidental commentary on Jonson. A number of ingenious solutions have been offered, but each has been vigorously rejected by other scholars. Henry Gray relates the "purge" reference to the troubled fortunes of Cynthia's Revels. Shakespeare, presented as Aesop in The Poetaster, "purged" Jonson by preventing his earlier work being played at Court. Although Jonson reacted bitterly, the quarrel was resolved by the tribute in the Folio. Simpson completely rejects the explanation and asserts that Aesop should be identified with Heminge, a possibility as firmly rejected by Gray in his turn. Joseph Durfee states that Troilus and Cressida has no particular significance in the "war," and he is especially concerned to disprove theories that the play satirizes Jonson. However, Elton calls for a reexamination of Fleay's theory that Ajax is Jonson. He points out that "Ajax" was a common low pun of the time signifying "privy," and this may explain the phrase "bewray his credit" if translated as "befouling his credit."


66 Ibid., p. 745.
according to this writer, is justified considering Jonson's particularly vicious attack on the Chamberlain's Company in *The Poetaster*. Ajax not only contains many of Jonson's own attributes, but the production of the play at the Inns of Court would have avenged the offended lawyers. Arthur Gray issued a pamphlet to present his own elaborate interpretation. Because the Parnassus play reference means we must look for a publicly presented caricature of Jonson, Thersites will not serve as the explanation. Far more plausible is the character of Jacques in *As You Like It*. The inoffensive Jacques illustrates the vogue for personal satire, makes reference to the key-word "humour," and reflects such Jonsonian faults as swearing. His renunciation of court life at the end of the play symbolizes Jonson's determination to abandon comedy, his conversion to Catholicism, his break with the Chamberlain's Company, and his living with Townsend. Jacques shares many traits with Asper of *Every Man out of His Humour*, and Jonson's demarcation of the sphere of satire is echoed in Jacques' "country, city, court" reference, a triad significantly repeated by Dekker. There is no malice in this gentle satirical portrait when compared to that of Marston and Dekker, and it is always "as much an apology and defence as an attack." M. T. Tilley rejects the identification and notes that the "country, city, court" reference is no clue, for this is a commonplace Elizabethan tag. Gray himself in a later comment discards the suggestion that Nym is the "purge," feeling that

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68 Ibid., p. 33.

there is no point of contact between Jonson and this character, who uses "humour" as a word without specific meaning. 70

Comment on the period of Jonson's introduction to Court life is also dominated by a quarrel over identification. The dispute commences with R. W. Short's attempt to dispel the mystery surrounding the identity of Jonson's "sanguine rival." 71 Short asserts that Michael Drayton is the rival and that the cause of the rivalry is competition for the patronage of the Countess of Bedford. Jonson's mentioning Drayton's jealousy to Drummond, the sanguinary nature of The Civil Wars, and his many connections with Lady Bedford make Drayton a more likely candidate than the traditionally accepted Daniel. Simpson rejects the argument completely and reaffirms the claim of Daniel by citing the very close resemblance between Epistle XII in The Forrest and Jonson's comment that Daniel was "a good honest man, but no poet." 72 The contemptuous reference to lines and characters of Daniel in several plays is contrasted to the distance and reticence marking the relationship with Drayton. But Short, in further investigation of the rivalry, 73 says that Drayton's attack on a patroness "Selena" and her protected poet "Cebon" stands for the Countess of Bedford and Jonson. Drayton, after his last dedication to the Countess in 1597, was in Henslowe's employ and expressing his resentment in this way. He expunged references to the lady in the revised

73 R. W. Short, "Ben Jonson in Drayton's Poems," RES, XVI (April, 1940), 149-158.
edition of *The Barron's Wars* (1603), and his inserted comments on "Monists, and Satyricke sects" and "light humours" may well be glancing in the direction of the now-favored Jonson. Additional motivation may have been Drayton's desire for the Countess to exert her great power over Court masques in behalf of his own work. Short concludes that Jonson fits the dates and the language better than any other poet. Simpson retorts by suggesting that Short's article might well be called "Biography by Conjecture," and charges that it is a misreading of Jonson's character. There is no justification for assuming that "Ceboron" was a poet or that Lady Bedford had that much power over the selection of masques.

Another phase of Jonson's life at this time, his attending the poets' sessions at the Mermaid, is subjected to sharp and sceptical scrutiny by I. A. Shapiro, who assigns the tradition to Gifford's edition. Reviewing the few facts, he notes that the earliest datable evidence for any tavern meeting is September, 1611, a dinner for Coryat, which was not primarily a literary gathering. Coryat's letter from India in 1615 describes regular meetings of the "Sirenaics" at the Mermaid, but this refers to political personalities, Jonson being the only literary man present.


75An earlier comment by Simpson ("Ben Jonson and Cecilia Bulstrode," TLS, March 6, 1930, p. 187) contains an interesting addition to our knowledge of Jonson's Court life. He describes the finding of an autograph letter which throws light on the palinode Jonson wrote to Cecily Bulstrode upon learning of her death. Jonson's hurried and emotional epitaph completely reverses the previous ferocious attack and hints that the misunderstanding between the two was caused by others.

76I. A. Shapiro, "The 'Mermaid Club,'" MLR, XLV (January, 1950), 6-17.
as he was the only writer composing commendatory verses for the *Crudities*. The authenticity of the Beaumont verse letter, both its authorship and its dating in 1606, is debatable. A review of all evidence shows, at most, that Jonson was the leading figure in some tavern meetings held about 1613, or a little later, and it is clear that Shakespeare attended none of these meetings. Simpson, a determined champion of the status quo as far as the Jonson traditions of this period are concerned, discards Shapiro's thesis entirely. He says there is not the slightest doubt of the authenticity of the Mermaid tradition, and accepts Coryat's mention of meetings as reliable evidence. Shapiro, in rebuttal, continues to question the reliability of the tradition, pointing out that the statement of Gifford goes far beyond Aubrey, who was himself writing confusedly and long after the event. Again the dating of Beaumont's poem and the doubtful authenticity are suggested, but Simpson, after tracing out the history of the "well-authenticated" poem, accepts Gayley's decision that the poem belongs between 1608 and July, 1610, and is acceptable and vivid evidence of the meetings at the tavern.

The most important literary event of this middle period of Jonson's career is the composition of the great comedies, and any historical or


78 According to the several novels and plays in which Jonson figures, tavern life was his only milieu. He may be met in various stages of drunkenness and usually babbling his admiration of Shakespeare in: Bruce B. McConnell, *A Letter for William Shakespeare*, Gentleman (Evanston, Ill., 1931); Charles Williams, *A Myth of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1928); Arista E. Fisher, *To the Sun* (New York, 1929); Samuel A. Tannenbaum, *The Knight and the Crystal Sphere* (New York, 1946).
biographical information concerning any of these is of great interest. Of the several articles touching on these plays, W. W. Greg's discussion of Jonson's chronology is of utmost importance. Greg is concerned with the chronology of the entire Jonson canon, but, since he discusses with particular detail the problem of dating some of the mature comedies, his article may be most effectively considered here. He notes that Jonson had no fixed practice of either Calendar dating or so-called legal dating—i.e., using the old date up to and including March 24. Because of this casual attitude, Volpone presents a special problem. Although it is dated 1605, internal evidence, especially references to the porpoise and the whale, suggests a 1606 date, while other allusions point to an earlier date. The New Inn has a performance according to the Calendar reckoning, but because of the lines on the coronation in The Staple of News, it could only have been written in 1625, according to legal dating. In general, Greg concludes, Jonson is inconsistent until 1620, from which time the dates follow legal reckoning. The adjustment of the performance date of The Alchemist at Oxford in 1610 is the purpose of Geoffrey Tillotson. Information discovered in correspondence would place the performance at Christ's College in September, not October, 1610 as Herford and Simpson assume. Even more important for the insight it shows into Jonson's method of writing is a report of the extraordinary story of Thomas Rogers, a wealthy epileptic who was victimized in 1610 so much in the manner of


Dapper that the episode seems an exact reflection of what actually oc-
curred. 81 The audience's special knowledge must have added much to the
episode at the first production, and perhaps the Dapper character was
made up to show resemblance to Rogers.

Comment on the work of revision of the plays for the 1616 edition of
the *Works* is almost exclusively dominated by Henry de Vocht and his sever-
al volumes of criticism of the texts, in each of which he advances the
radical theory that there was no preparation, no revision on Jonson's part,
but that the *Works* were prepared by the printer, not the author. Evi-
dence is deduced from a minute examination of changes between the Quarto
and the Folio versions of *Every Man out of His Humour*, *The Poetaster*,
*Volpone*, and *Sejanus*. 82 After examining many factors, including scene
division, stage directions, and punctuation, de Vocht decides that the
Folio was copied, almost always imperfectly, from the Quartos, and that
far from correcting the Folio edition, Jonson did not even supervise it.
Simpson, in an Appendix to his and Herford's edition, easily and con-
vincingly dismisses this persistent attack on the integrity of the Folio.
He notes that de Vocht presents no facts about Stansby's office. He con-
fuses editors and publishers. He evades discussing the crucial revision
of *Every Man in His Humour* and seriously misrepresents the Folio in his
treatment of the conclusion to *Every Man out of His Humour*. He hopelessly

Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. James G. McManaway and others (Washington, D.C.,
1948), pp. 739-741.

82 Henry de Vocht, *Comments on the Text of Ben Jonson's "Every Man out
of His Humour" (Louvain, 1937); Ben Jonson's "Poetaster or the Arraignment"
(Louvain, 1934); Ben Jonson's "Volpone or The Foxe" (Louvain, 1937);
and Ben Jonson's "Sejanus His Fall" (Louvain, 1935).
misunderstands Jonson's method of grouping names at the head of each scene, and not even an elementary understanding of metre is displayed in his comments. "Ignorance of Elizabethan English is another melancholy feature of Dr. de Vocht's criticism." 33 Finally, Simpson charges that de Vocht has never seriously considered the two obvious objections to his theory: Jonson would not have tolerated a systematic sabotage of his text, and Stansby would not have wasted time and money in rewriting and inserting new readings in the text.

Of the period of Jonson's life extending from the publication of his Works until the end of James' reign in 1625, the most significant research attempts to establish definite dates and activities. Here again the work of Eccles is important. He suggests an important rearrangement of the traditional chronology by placing Jonson's "five years with Aubigny" in the years just before the trip to Scotland in 1618. The usual assumption that this long absence from his own family began in 1602 or 1603 is incorrect because records of the Consistory Court in London, discovered in 1921, indicate Jonson and his wife were living together in January 1605/6. The citation from the register of St. Giles Cripplegate of a marriage on July 27, 1623 between a "Beniamyne Johnson and Hester Hopkins" cannot be denied or dismissed without consideration. This second marriage "seems unlikely,...but it is not impossible." 34 Equally interesting is Sisson's theory derived from testimony in the

Ralegh law-suit. When Jonson describes himself as of "Gresham Colledge in London gent.," he may mean he was no mere resident, but a professor of rhetoric. This may very well have been at some time in his career which would include the year 1623, and it would explain the dramatic inactivity between *The Devil is an Ass* and *The Staple of News*. The translation of Horace might have fitted in with his teaching duties, and *The Discoveries* might have been lecture notes. If this possibility could be documented, the Oxford degree, necessary for such an appointment, would seem less unusual. Because the records do not mention Jonson as a regular professor, he would have been at most a deputy to an appointed professor. Sisson presents his theory cautiously and only as a possibility, but he reminds us that Jonson's work shows everywhere a passion for teaching.

Regarding the trip to Scotland, the most dramatic problem in modern criticism is whether or not the resulting *Conversations* are genuine. C. L. Stainer's assertion that the work is an eighteenth-century forgery by Sir Robert Sibbald may be unconvincing, but it has had a marked effect on modern Jonson studies. All biographies since 1925 have been at great

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86 Interesting also, but difficult to verify or evaluate are the jumbled notations made by the "eccentric" Lord Stanhope in a copy of Jonson's 1640 *Works*. (See James M. Osborn, "Ben Jonson and the Eccentric Lord Stanhope," *TLS*, January 4, 1957, p. 16.) Stanhope states that Jonson was at this period a teacher at Gresham, that Donne was the poet who superseded Jonson in Lady Bedford's patronage, and that at the time of the French trip he was involved in some financial investments with Bacon.

pains to prove the genuineness of this essential biographical record. Stainer's suspicions are stirred by the absence of the original MS, the lack of evidence that Jonson really knew Drummond, and the possibility that Drummond was absent from Scotland during Jonson's tour. Stainer's doubts grow apace as his work progresses, and he rejects any evidence supporting the traditional view that the Conversations are a rather clumsily presented account of a real meeting. The recorded facts, Stainer insists, are either improbable or could have been derived from Jonson's poems, prefaces, and dedications, or from the works of Drummond himself. Stainer's conclusion and his critical method are thoroughly be-rated by every critic considering the proposal. Objection is made to his use of assumption instead of research, his throwing the burden of proof on the other side, his exploiting mistakes in the Conversations which are clearly the lapses of a copyist. W. W. Greg rejects the contention that Margaret Fowler, who died in 1592, was Jonson's mother, an identity on which much of Stainer's argument rests. For Greg the Conversations are sufficiently established by the Gabriel Spencer business. Simpson points out the fact that the conspiracy Stainer suggests is incredible, that he is confused on dates and original blunders in the manuscript, and is grossly ignorant of the facts of Jonson's life. That this book is

88 *Blackwood's Magazine*, CCXVIII (December, 1925), 881.

89 *TLS*, November 12, 1925, p. 754.


"a monument of misreading and perversity"\(^9\) is Simpson's final judgment.\(^9\)4

Commentary on Jonson's part in the First Folio in 1623 forms a separate and, in places, a distinctly peculiar body of criticism.\(^9\)5 There is nothing exceptional in orthodox criticism, which is usually more concerned with Shakespeare than with Jonson. We are reminded of Jonson's gift for the tenacious and stinging phrase by the lengthy and thorough investigation of T. W. Baldwin in *William Shakespeare's Small Latine & Less Greeke*, an examination of Jonson's "brilliant aphorism" and much of the rest of the poem.\(^9\)6 The statement on Shakespeare's learning is apparently no

\(^9\)3 Ibid., p. 50.


\(^9\)5 As with the comment on the comical satires, a dismaying amount of writing is devoted to "proving" that someone other than Shakespeare wrote the plays assigned to him. The evidence of Jonson's contribution is triumphantly produced to show that the "true" author was any one of a number of aristocratic playwrights: Oxford (Percy Allen, *The Case for Edward de Vere as "Shakespeare"* [London, 1930]; Gerald H. Rendall, *Ben Jonson and the First Folio* [Colchester, 1939]; the Earl of Derby (Richard M. Lucas, *Shakespeare's Vital Secret* n.p., 1937); the Earl of Rutland (Peter S. Porohovshikov, *Shakespeare Unmasked* [New York, 1940]).

The Baconians are especially busy in deciphering Jonson's verses in the First Folio and his subsequent plays and masques. Much is made of the hidden riddles in *Neptune's Return* and *The Staple of News*, which, we are assured, refer almost blatantly to Bacon's authorship of the plays. See for examples of this argument: W. Landsdown Goldsworthy, *Ben Jonson and the First Folio* (London, 1931); Bertram G. Theobald, *Exit Shakespeare* (London, 1931); *Enter Francis Bacon* (London, 1932); and R. L. Eagle, "Ben Jonson and Shakespeare," *Baconiana*, XXVII (January, 1943), 28-34.

"derogation...when fairly interpreted in its context." If Jonson's testimony is valid, we must concede that Shakespeare had some Greek and a considerable proficiency in Latin. The division between Art and Nature is a threadbare convention by the time Jonson wrote, but the whole weight of the tradition that Shakespeare was a poet of nature rests "squarely on the Jonson tradition." Other comment on Jonson's contribution to the First Folio is general and warmly commendatory. Spencer, for example, notes that Jonson's poem was "the noblest tribute, and remains so." Spencer notes too that Jonson's poem was discriminating and that "of all the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers he was best qualified by critical bent and creative fire to appraise a peerless colleague worthily."

While the final period of Jonson's life has attracted its share of scholarly interest, most of the research makes little contribution beyond a reaffirmation of the already well established record. Comment on the biographical or historical significance of the last plays is sparse and usually intent on clarifying minor points. Investigation into one of the less melancholy traditions of Jonson's latter life, his sessions

97 Ibid., I, 3.
98 Ibid., p. 49.
100 Ibid., p. 86.
101 Fredson T. Bowers, for example, discerns a reference in the first and third intermeans of The Staple of News to a scene in The ffary Knight, possibly written by Thomas Randolph, which may refer to a specific performance at Westminster and to some story about the play which was current ("Ben Jonson, Thomas Randolph and the Drinking Academy," NQ, CLXXIII [September 4, 1937], 166-168.) Oliver Lodge suggests that the change from "Cis" to "Prue" in The New Inn was made, not to avoid a topical allusion, but merely to avoid an ugly sound ("A Ben Jonson Puzzle," TLS, September 13, 1947, p. 465.)
at the Devil's Tavern, usually summarizes and evaluates existing information, but adds nothing new. We may learn a bit more about the location and dimensions of the tavern, but we learn little that is essential about Jonson himself. Modern commentary on the famous quarrel of Jonson and Inigo Jones almost invariably emphasizes it as a professional struggle, a point we have seen firmly established in the biographies. James Lees-Milne, for example, sees the quarrel in terms of artistic impulse and progressive irritation. Admitting Jonson's ridicule of Jones's bad Latin, malapropisms, and tendency toward bombast as justified, he protests that there is no supporting evidence for the charges of dishonesty, and concludes that most of the blame for the quarrel and its unfortunate outcome should attach to Jonson. However, D. J. Gordon, in a most thorough and illuminating study, insists that so little is actually known of Jones that blame should not automatically be placed upon Jonson. Very important, he feels, is the quarrel as a reflection of Renaissance attitudes toward the relative importance of the various arts. Part of Jonson's anger comes from Jones's trying to usurp the poet's function. The terminology of the quarrel, as found in A Tale of a Tub, Neptune's Triumph, and other works of Jonson, as well as in the


allegorical figures used by both men, fits into an old and recognized tradition, the recognition of which gave an extra dimension of meaning and tension for knowing spectators.

Jonson's relationship to King Charles is examined briefly by Margaret Pickel, who attempts to sift and evaluate the evidence as distinct from the pathetic legends. Her conclusions give a less grim picture of the situation than tradition usually allows. Jonson's receiving a pension from Charles is, of course, strong evidence of a return to Court favor. While no cruelty or indifference may be charged to the King, his amiable and equable temper undoubtedly found Jonson's "imperious obstinacy" trying. Another scholar suggests a particular slight and humiliation that should be added to the many others Jonson suffered in his last years. Nethercot thinks William D'Avenant may have already begun to usurp the functions of the aging Jonson before his death.

Any novel interpretation of the established record of Jonson's life is certain to evoke an angry and sarcastic response from scholars who cherish the traditional. None of these tiny, fierce struggles is more surprising and amusing than that over the true reading of Jonson's epitaph. Christopher Morley, after examining the famous inscription, concluded that "O" and "Rare" are so spaced that they may be read as one word or two. The possibility that Jack Young intended a pun or that

105 Margaret B. Pickel, Charles I as Patron of Poetry and Drama (London, 1936).
106 Ibid., p. 45.
an illiterate stone cutter made a mistake is forwarded, and Morley sug-
gests that the famous epitaph may have been intended as "Orare Ben
Johnson,"—"Pray for Ben Johnson," noting that the use of the infinitive
is always possible in taphology. Further evidence offered by Morley as
part of his "one contribution" is the reminder that a stone-mason who
could misspell Jonson's name could easily have misunderstood the Latin
word. Morley finds no similar use of the word "rare" aside from Herrick's
Hesperides. The reaction to this pamphlet of apparently whimsical in-
tent and superficial content was unexpectedly full and solemn. The New
York Times reports the agitation and the fervent hopes that the "alarm-
ing alternative proposed by Mr. Morley may not have to be accepted."\(^\text{109}\)
A number of scholars responded to the "singularly unattractive"\(^\text{110}\) sug-
gestion of Morley by reminding him that the learned authorities at
Westminster would hardly have allowed an illiterate stone to remain, nor
to repeat the blunder on a second slab, and that the Latin would require
"pro," and that "O Rare" was in quite common use in Jonson's time.\(^\text{111}\)

The general appraisals of Jonson as a man and as a personality, which
comprise the last type of brief biographical criticism to be considered
here; are among the most negligible items in modern Jonson commentary.


\(^{110}\) Edward Bensly, NQ, CLXXXIII (September 11, 1937), 196.

While such articles may indicate a kind of indestructible popularity, they add no fact nor insight for understanding the man. Typical is the effusion of Henry Alexander,¹¹² who takes advantage of the three-hundredth anniversary of Jonson's death to loosely examine the resemblances the dramatist bears to Samuel Johnson—their social origin, their physical appearance, the part each played as literary dictators, and their similar critical attitudes. In both men "physical amplitude was accompanied by a corresponding mental vigour, an intense dislike of sham, a compelling sincerity and candour which frequently landed them in difficulties but which have commanded the respect of posterity that has learned to admire them in spite of these asperities."¹¹³ Both live less through their works than through their personalities, being types of Englishmen who have persisted through the centuries.

This brief survey may reflect the variety of incidental commentary on Jonson's biography, but because of selection and compression, it scarcely reflects its profusion. Both the amount and variety of the criticism certainly prove the continuing interest in Jonson and point up the many areas of his life which invite interpretation and revaluation. The quality and contribution of this scholarship fluctuates widely. Certain kinds of criticism, especially that which concerns itself directly with the life record, are very noteworthy. Research such as Eccles' or Sisson's which results in new facts or very strong suppo-

sitions is, naturally, of utmost importance because it clarifies shadowy areas of Jonson's life. The work of other scholars, in particular the detailed studies of Percy Simpson, reaffirms the received traditions and allows us to accept with greater reliance the assumptions and interpretations which were already a part of the record. Of lesser importance are the many articles concerned with identification, theatrical history, or a recapitulation of quite familiar material. Although, as has been indicated in the preceding discussion, this extensive collection of comment brings occasional items of value to our notice, little in this whole body of writing revolutionizes or even modifies the image of the man already found in the full biographies. The life record is too solid and circumstantial, perhaps, to induce any sweeping revaluations, and the biographical areas and problems approached are too constrained to result in any fundamental changes. But, aside from the fatuous and the unacceptably eccentric, this body of criticism does make its contribution. It fills out and enriches the record of the life. The concentration on debatable episodes reminds us that biographical problems exist. This mass of brief, incidental criticism is always the possible incitement to later, more thorough, and more fruitful study. And always, the existence of this extensive and varied criticism is proof of the vitality of Jonson's personality in twentieth-century criticism.
CHAPTER TWO

GENERAL APPROACHES TO JONSON'S DRAMA

Despite variety in interpretation or point of view, modern biographical commentary on Jonson is unified and stable. The record of the life itself, the almost tangible personality, and the persistent legends—all impose a unity remarkable considering the amount and nature of the individual items. Whatever the selection, whatever the distortion, a recognizably similar picture of Jonson as a man and as a personality remains. The case is different as one searches for the twentieth-century image of Jonson as an artist. One looks for those general explanations which tell us what kind of art this is and what artistic ideals Jonson followed. Such a quest leads one through an extensive amount of writing, but leads to no single final answer. Few of his many modern critics have failed to supply a descriptive tag for Jonson's dramatic art, and few have lacked complete confidence in their description. One dogmatic pronouncement after another has been made about the nature of Jonson's art and the measure of his achievement, and the only relationship that usually exists among most of these evaluations is one of flat, unapologetic contradiction. In this diverse, complicated body of criticism certain general approaches dominate. Analyzing the drama in relationship to Jonson's personality, his times, his classicism and scholarship, his realism and satire are most prominent in
modern criticism, and will form the basis for study in this chapter.

1.

The attempt to understand and explain Jonson's dramatic art through his personality forms an important strain in modern criticism. This sort of comment is neither haphazard nor occasional, but persists throughout the modern period. One finds within this tradition several clearly recognizable themes or trends which require evaluation. One finds too that a number of important critics have utilized the approach in an effort to understand the special quality of Jonson's dramatic art.

The existence and strength of the tradition is an unmistakable fact. Its value in understanding Jonson is another matter. Usually, such comment even when provided by first-rate critics is not literary criticism at all; far too often it floats lightly and vaguely between biography and literary criticism.\(^1\) Even the efforts of such authoritative commentators as Herford and Simpson do not really succeed in establishing the connection between Jonson's personality and his dramatic art. In the conclusion to their biography the editors appraise Jonson's personality and imagination in which they see an almost even balance of traits. On the one hand there is his rich and resourceful intellect, his immense

\(^1\) For some critics the personality of Jonson is sufficiently engrossing, and they neglect or evade an appraisal of the drama. Little attempt is made to relate the man's personality to his work, and, instead, the critic indulges in an impressionistic character sketch useful neither as biography nor as literary criticism. See, for example, William Lyon Phelps, "The Oxford Ben Jonson," The Forum, LXXIV (October, 1925), 634-635; Charles Whibley, "Ben Jonson, the Man," Blackwood's Magazine, CCXVIII (November, 1925), 680-691; Leonard Woolf, "Ben Jonson," Essays on Literature, History, Politics, etc. (London, 1927), p. 12.
and expansive temperament, his character of "imposing weight," and his imagination to which no profusion or richness was alien. But in definite contrast to all of these must be placed Jonson's poverty in speed and scope of fancy, and his personality, "singularly cont" and incapable of inner growth. Moreover, the editors assert that Jonson's personality in all its strength and weakness is everywhere apparent in the work. "Almost every sentence he wrote, however derivative in substance, carries an unmistakable relish of the man, is...a document of the Jonsonian temperament and the Jonsonian will." The phrasing and the assurance of such a sweeping statement are certainly impressive, but one finds little reference in the editors' subsequent criticism to the force of Jonson's personality. In the lengthy evaluations of the plays the factor of Jonson's imagination is seldom mentioned. Perhaps the strong emphasis on the personality as well as the frequent degradation of Jonson's imaginative gifts in comparison to Shakespeare's are merely vestiges of earlier critical approaches to Jonson. Whatever value the discussion may have as a graceful conclusion to a biographical essay, it has little as a convincing explanation of Jonson's drama.

Since 1925 many other critics have proclaimed that in Jonson's personality lies the clue to his drama. But the explanations are too brief and allusive to be anything but disappointing. We are told merely that Jonson was as redoubtable in literature as in life and that his enjoyment of

\begin{itemize}
\item[3] Ibid., p. 120.
\item[4] Ibid., p. 119.
\end{itemize}
disputation and his egotism permeated all he did.\textsuperscript{5} The contradictions in Jonson's dramatic achievement are equated with the contradictions in his life, and we are assured that the variety of Jonson's characters comes from the many alternating characters within himself, or that in each play we find the varied strata of Jonson's own personality.\textsuperscript{6} Occasionally this comment may be favorable and a critic will perceive in the tone of the comedies Jonson's own full, rich enjoyment of life,\textsuperscript{7} but more often one is presented with an unfavorable, or very mixed evaluation of the man and his work. A typical catalogue will note that Jonson, unlike the elusive Shakespeare, is an intruding presence in his own plays. He possesses little of Shakespeare's delight in men and women as they are, and in even the gayest of his plays, the harsh, rancorous disposition of the dramatist is apparent. "The display of power is at times almost oppressive."\textsuperscript{8}

Edmund Wilson's "Morose Ben Jonson" is important for showing the extremes to which both hostile criticism and the fusion of literary and biographical criticism can go.\textsuperscript{9} The essay is also unique in modern Jonson studies as the only Freudian interpretation of the man. Part of Wilson's purpose is to correct T. S. Eliot's interpretation of Jonson, which, he

\textsuperscript{5}Benjamin Brawley, \textit{A New Survey of English Literature} (New York, 1925), p. 118.


\textsuperscript{8}W. Bridges-Adams, \textit{The Irresistible Theatre} (Cleveland, 1957), p. 241.

\textsuperscript{9}Edmund Wilson, \textit{The Triple Thinkers} (New York, 1948).
suspects, has made "respect for this poet de rigueur in literary circles." Wilson himself discovers little to respect and nothing to admire. To him Jonson seems inferior in sensitivity and intelligence compared to other great dramatists. His work is faulty in every possible way; he lacks natural invention, his plots are incoherent and clumsy, his characters are unbelievably disguised in order to play practical jokes, his plots give no sense of movement or proportion, and the alien, obtrusive classical allusions are merely an example of Jonson parading his knowledge. This onslaught, savage and comprehensive though it is to this point, merely clears the ground for the real attack on Jonson himself, an attack based on a very special interpretation of Jonson's characters. "Though he attempts a variety of characters, they all boil down to a few motivations, recognizable as the motivations of Jonson himself and rarely transformed into artistic creations...we have merely to put these pieces together to get Jonson, with little left over." For Wilson what the pieces revealed is an obvious example of a psychological type, the "anal erotic," characterized by orderliness which may become pedantry, parsimony which may become avarice, obstinacy which may become irascibility and vindictiveness. Further symptoms may be discovered in Jonson's life, a life, Wilson contends, marked by a constant fear of failure. The interest in food and digestive processes, the learning, and that other form of hoarding, the accumulation of the special jargons, are all sinister proof of his real character. The saving and withholding of money, which is the "whole subject of that strange play

10 Ibid., p. 214. 11 Ibid., p. 215.
"Volpone," and the high incidence of sadistic practical jokes in his plays also help prove the charge. Through Morose and similar characters Jonson tormented himself for what was negative and recessive in his own nature. It is significant that there is no love in his plays to compensate for their negative values.

Few would deny the value of a psychological analysis in understanding Jonson and his art. Any discipline which might add to our knowledge of the man is welcome. But Wilson’s effort is inadequate and unsatisfactory in every way. His judgment is too sweeping and all-inclusive. The essay is based on a reading of, or at least a reference to, too few plays. The peculiar emphasis amounts to a distortion. Scatological humour is, obviously, present in the plays, but it does not dominate them. Spite and bitterness are by no means the only moods expressed in Jonson’s drama. Wilson’s essay is a curiously isolated item in modern Jonson studies. He is indifferent to or possibly unaware of alternative approaches, and his insistence on his own explanation seems arrogant. The tone of the article is distractingly personal and furious. As Wilson pursues his diagnosis, his anger constantly spills over, and we become more aware of the venom of the critic than of the vindictiveness ascribed to the playwright. Too quickly and too often do we lose sight of the playwright in the patient, the artist in the personality.

The extravagance of Wilson’s interpretation points up the weakness inherent in the whole biographical approach. Jonson’s is one case of the ease with which the strong personality of the artist can obscure or distort an understanding of his art. Consequently, one notes with interest

Ibid., p. 219.
and approval the growing tendency to moderate this approach or to discard it completely. One critic frankly complains that this is a playwright about whom we know more than we need to know,13 and another agrees that although we know much of Jonson's life, it is of very little aid in understanding his works, for few of the many facts of his known life "are of real value to criticism."14 Douglas Bush, considering the blurring of the artist by the tradition of the personality, could almost wish the loss of the most important life record, the Conversations, a book which "has contributed more than anything else to establish, in place of the magnanimous Renaissance humanist and poet, the popular picture of a burly, arrogant, swashbuckling toper and scabrous gossip."15 Such irritation with the entire approach is justified by the critical record. The comment of thirty years has produced little of value. The relationship of the personality and the art is, in most cases, only loosely indicated, a series of generalizations about the plays attached to a series of generalizations about the personality without much light being shed on either.

Jonson's relationship to his age, the problem of whether or not his drama was typical of his times, is the focus of another segment of modern criticism. The problem is discussed more frequently than that which equates personality and drama, and the discussion is often more genuinely analytical.


However, there are also certain drawbacks characteristic of this approach. Too often it gives rise to simple, unexamined assertions that Jonson was a colorful, flamboyant playwright whose work does or does not typify the English Renaissance. It is also too easy for Jonson to be smothered under details of social or literary history, which tell us much about the times, but nothing of the writer's relationship to them. Still, when skillfully used, this approach gives us a probing, intelligent analysis of the ideals of the age and convincing proof that Jonson embodied those ideals. Appraisals of the relationship more often result in a sound knowledge of Jonson's art and come nearer being genuine literary judgments than does commentary on his personality.

The merits of the individual evaluations may vary, but the discussion as a whole is remarkably clear and direct. Views on Jonson's relationship to his time are so crisply presented, and the division is so distinct, that the entire commentary reads very much like a debate. According to one point of view, Jonson was definitely alienated to the fundamental artistic impulses of his age, a man alone and apart—"Jonsonus contra mundum." Jonson's "stridently expressed" opposition to popular literature is so complete that a simple reversal of Jonson's preferences gives us a full, sound picture of the tastes of the ordinary theater patron. Those who advance this opinion will allow only an occasional and reluctant

18 Mr. T. Clare Byrne, Elizabethan Life in Town and Country (Boston, 1926), pp. 239-240.
connection between Jonson's work and the literary ideals of his time; his work, they say, coincides with popular taste only when he violates his real inclination toward the classical and the satiric.\textsuperscript{19} One influential critic will grant originality to Jonson only in his angry, arrogant opposition to the Elizabethan stage.\textsuperscript{20} The exact reason for the alienation has been described in many ways,\textsuperscript{21} but, for whatever cause, an impressive number of modern commentators agree that Jonson was quite distinct from the dramatic impulses of his time.

The contrary opinion, that Jonson was very representative of the Elizabethan period, is offered with just as much assurance and even more frequency. This side of the argument is the more convincing. It is usually conducted with more abundant and more specific detail. Any extended examination of the problem reveals unmistakable affinities between Jonson and his time. Also the point of view has been adopted by many of the most important Jonson scholars. For example, Herford and Simpson insist that Jonson, despite his aggressive singularity and aloofness, was not really alien to his time. "No other man of his time has comparable claims

\textsuperscript{19}Martha T. Bellinger, \textit{A Short History of the Drama} (New York, 1927), p. 236.


\textsuperscript{21}The non-typical nature of Jonson's drama has been explained as: his championing a foreign standard in the drama against a natural, native method (E. E. Kellett, \textit{The Whirligig of Taste} [New York, 1929], p. 75.); his writing for the intellectual and aristocratic part of his audience (Louis B. Wright, \textit{Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England} [Chapel Hill, 1935], p. 269.); his concern with the homogeneous and sophisticated private theater audience (Gerald E. Bentley, \textit{The Swan of Avon and the Bricklayer of Westminster} [Princeton, 1936], p. 6.); his uniquely self-conscious purpose and method of dramatic composition (Una Ellis-Fermor, \textit{The Jacobean Drama} [London, 1936], p. 116.)
to have been...its most salient and indispensable personality." Jonson's persistent criticism of the literary taste of the time, according to these commentators, is misleading and obscures the fact that in essential respects literary taste "was flowing strongly on his side." His early career coincided with the steadily growing appetite for realistic satire, the humourous portrayal of manners, and the relish for classical learning. His humour plays may have broken sharply with the dramatic traditions, but "they formed the crown and culmination of the literature of humourous social satire..." For many other scholars also, a study of the actual history of Jonson's times shows how naturally and inevitably the playwright fitted into his setting.

This conclusion is strengthened by those scholars who place Jonson in a continuous literary tradition. Scholarly investigation may link Jonson not only with the English literary past, but with certain aspects of the European medieval tradition. The unmistakable parallels between Rabelais and Jonson, for example, are so strong that he has been called the most important of Rabelais' English disciples. Both are fond of invective and abuse, and Jonson, like Rabelais, possessed the personality of a "hearty animal, honest, convivial, and frank to the point of

22Op. cit., I, 121. 23Ibid., p. 11. 24Ibid.


26Huntington Brown, Rabelais in English Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), p. 94.
bearishness, and his excess of spirits frequently found vent in the grotesque vein that distinguishes so much of Rabelais' work." 27 Jonson's weakness for eccentricity is a Gothic trait, and his passion for allegory is but one of the links through which this dramatist kept in touch with medieval England. 28 His method of selection and subordination in characterization reminds another writer of the old moralities. 29 The general relationship of Jonson to both his times and to the English literary tradition is stated broadly by Morrison: "Jonson drew materials and ideas of technique from that which had been developed in English literature and availed himself of his classical knowledge to shape those things to themes he was able to conceive." 30 Another critic agrees and stresses Jonson's place in the continuity of English literary history as "the legitimate heir of the Renaissance, of the Elizabethan age, and of Christopher Marlowe." 31

The interest in this approach to Jonson and the persistence with which critics relate the man and his times indicate a critical tradition of real vitality and importance. But, whichever side of the question a critic takes, the whole question remains rather vague, and perhaps we have here a problem which will always attract scholars, but which will never be perfectly solved. Any criticism, however, which attempts a solution by defining the problem itself certainly performs a useful service. This is

27 Ibid., p. 93.
28 Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, pp. 270-271.
the value of L. J. Potts' analysis. Feeling that the neglect of Jonson comes from erroneously thinking of him as an Elizabethan and comparing him unfavorably with Shakespeare, Potts reminds us that the two dramatists do not compete. Although both belong to the transition from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean age, the decade which separates them is sufficient to place Shakespeare at one end of a bridge and Jonson at the other. Accepting Jonson as the greatest of the Jacobians clarifies his exact relationship to his times and the abstract discussion becomes less ambiguous. Potts proceeds to elucidate the relationship by comparing Jonson and two other highly representative seventeenth-century figures—Donne and Bacon. While Donne influenced Jonson more than any other English poet, the response of each to the new philosophy is significantly different. To Donne "it was an earthquake," while to Jonson it was the foundation and textbook of his thought and art. Jonson's relation to Bacon reveals even more about the influence of the age on his thought. Jonson is clearly a "greater man than Bacon...more generous and disinterested, certainly more upright, wiser, more closely attached and nurtured by what is important in life," but there is a close affinity between the two, and Jonson's expressed attitude toward Bacon gives the important clue to his own position in the seventeenth century. Jonson is a complete Baconian for whom, as with Bacon, ethics are based on the study of Nature. To Jonson Nature is more than the sum of things, the visible universe to

33 Ibid., p. 8.
34 Ibid., p. 13.
be studied. She is a force and being with a life independent of the life of the individual. Awareness of Jonson's agreement with Bacon's philosophy should, Potts is convinced, help us place the dramatist with greater accuracy, and also should give a sounder understanding of the plays. Jonson's plays have a texture and structure which are particularly rigid, not because he slavishly imitated classical models, or followed neo-classic rules, but because he was determined to make literature conform to the new philosophy. "The poet's conceits are pictures of things, not of abstractions; on the other hand he is not an imitator of imitations, but of things which in themselves belong to a glorious and eloquent order."  

Potts' essay may be too brief to be accepted as the definitive study of Jonson and his times, but, at least it attempts to outline and define the problem before going on to a solution. It also avoids the exercise in abstraction and generalization so characteristic of those who proclaim a deep antagonism between Jonson and his times. Critics who insist, as Potts does, that Jonson is quite representative of his age, convince us through the detailed, specific nature of their argument. Their views are supported by the frequent agreement of those who study Jonson's drama from a special point of view. But, as was indicated earlier, the approach in itself does not seem a completely satisfactory one. Too much energy is dissipated in discussing events and ideas only vaguely connected with Jonson's work. The approach is certainly less satisfactory than the criticism which will be discussed in the rest of this chapter where, whatever the shortcomings of the individual items, we are always in closer contact

35 Ibid., p. 16.
with the material, method, and kind of dramatic art which Jonson practiced.

2.

The approach to Jonson's drama through his classicism is perhaps the most frequently undertaken. Jonson's dramatic practice and the many comments found in his plays, prologues, and critical writings demand the discussion. That he composed no systematic statement of his own classicism has incited many modern scholars to create the outline of his classical aims and method. Many have attempted to define Jonson's classicism, and many more have commented exhaustively on its range and significance. The discussion is widened and the problem blurred because so many commentators bring in the general topic of all classical and neoclassical literature or else weave in a comment on the classicism with discussion of every other imaginable element in his drama. We find, as a consequence, a body of scholarship made up of numerous single items and diffuse and complicated in content. The welter of critical reference to the classicism constitutes a discussion of the broadest possible kind. Comprehensive description of this criticism within a brief space would be impossible and, considering its profuse and contradictory content, of doubtful value. What a survey such as this can best do is to indicate the boundaries of the discussion, the dominant ideas, the most representative and most important individual comment.

That this is an area of Jonson criticism often characterized by divergent opinion is clearly seen in the range of comment on the specific classical literature Jonson chose to follow. For every possible choice
there are articulate and persuasive spokesmen.\(^{36}\) One writer, noting Jonson's frequent restatement of the doctrine of the Poetics, feels he followed the precepts and example of the Greeks.\(^{37}\) Others acknowledge his acquaintance with Greek literature, but assert that his real model was Latin literature.\(^{38}\) Still another group sees in Jonson no reflection of pure classicism either Greek or Latin. Instead they accept him as a spokesman for the Renaissance pattern of classicism, finding him a catalyst who gave "firm shape to the comic material which had been drifting about Western Europe during the medieval period."\(^{39}\) For those adhering to this point of view, a close scrutiny of Jonson's classicism will show that he was particularly affected by the Dutch Latinists of his own day\(^{40}\) and by such powerful Renaissance critics as Minturno.\(^{41}\)

Investigation of the influence of specific ancient writers on Jonson's comedy makes up one of the largest divisions of all the commentary on

\(^{36}\) There is fairly unanimous agreement, however, that Jonson's practice of classicism was assimilative. Legouis (op. cit., p. 137) notes that Jonson's career may be viewed as a process of gradual assimilation of classical qualities, adding that he never displayed all of them in one work. Others may elaborate upon this theme, but they are in agreement with the basic concept. See Henry ten Eyck Perry, Masters of Dramatic Comedy and their Social Themes (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 114 and Marvin T. Herrick, The Poetics of Aristotle in England (New Haven, 1930), p. 37.

\(^{37}\) Scott-James, op. cit., p. 123.


\(^{39}\) Perry, op. cit., p. xvii.


Jonson's classicism. Much incidental comment and a number of extended studies point out the parallels between Jonson and a host of classical writers. Jonson's drama has been given such divergent descriptions as Platonic, because he sets up such external requirements as truth to nature and general type, or Aristophanic, because he "deliberately, coldly, and objectively strips bare the contemptible affectations which constitute much of society." But the most persistent comment of this type invariably describes the parallels between the comedy of Jonson and that of Plautus and Terence. Almost every appraisal of Jonson's drama discusses this influence, and detailed studies have been incorporated in a number of theses and dissertations. Similarity in both procedure and conclusion is noticeable, and one is more aware of agreement than of variation and advance. Quite typical is Gertrude Learned's study. She finds, as do almost all who examine the topic, that the borrowings from ancient comedy on the part of Jonson, "one of the great masters of classical culture," are more apparent in the earlier than in the later comedies. The use of type characters, disguise, and trickery mark the Plautine contribution to Jonsonian comedy, while the superior character portrayal and plot structure are taken from Terence as is the basic


44 Gertrude Learned, "Jonson's Debt to the Comedies of Plautus and Terence" (unpubl. thesis, Ohio State University, 1936).

mechanism of the Jonsonian plot, which is built upon the idea of intrigue and surprise. Despite many strong resemblances, there is no evidence that he took over wholesale the plots of Latin comedy. "He has gone beyond his Latin models in every element of dramatic vigor and richness." Similarly, although his characters are drawn from the stock types of Latin comedy, Jonson changed and adapted them as stock types for the English theater. His plays in their fundamental features are undeniably classic, but the "decorations" are Jonsonian, and the borrowing is never indiscriminate.

The proportion and depth of classicism in Jonson's drama is a problem occupying many critics, and has produced some of the most discerning remarks in the entire discussion. A number of writers, especially those who touch on the problem very briefly, may label Jonson as completely or predominantly a classicist. However, few critics who consider Jonson extensively from this point of view label him a classicist pure and simple. They see many factors which balance or modify the unquestionably important classical strain in his work. They insist that Jonson was always reasonable, consistent, and surprisingly liberal in his dramatic theory and that his attitude toward his classical models was complex and sensible. After his apprenticeship in drama, Jonson developed his strong, satirical bent

46 Ibid., p. 22.

and originality of plot and characterization beyond classical and other models.\textsuperscript{48} It has been pointed out that even if Jonson borrowed the classical method of the intriguer as manipulator of plot, his satiric result is as unlike the mood of Roman comedy as is Shakespeare's.\textsuperscript{49} If a critic designates Jonson as the "first neo-classicist," he also insists that his designation is only relative in describing so "tough-minded an observer of life" for whom the classics were only guides.\textsuperscript{50} Almost every reliable study of Jonson's theory and practice in drama concurs that he betrayed no slavish classicism, and quite easily proves that he followed the classical laws of comedy with freedom, and that he was as liberal in the theory as in the use of classic models.\textsuperscript{51}

Carlton Culmsee's extended general appraisal of this element is a characteristic statement of the modern reluctance to force Jonson into the category of a complete classicist.\textsuperscript{52} Culmsee suggests that those who advance the opposite view assume that Jonson's classicism was simple and complete, an isolated phenomenon of classical symmetry in an age of relatively formless romanticism, are mistaken. The truth is far from that simple. Jonson's independence and originality prevented him from becoming a slave


\textsuperscript{49}Madeleine Doran, \textit{Endeavors of Art} (Madison, 1954), p. 150.


\textsuperscript{51}See, for example, Josephine A. Hodnett, "A New Study of Ben Jonson as a Critic of Comedy" (unpubl. thesis, Oklahoma, 1929).

to any system, and confident generalizations will not serve to describe his practice of classicism. "Sometimes he overshot the mark of the classics, sometimes he undershot it; from some angles he did not even see it."

Culmsee concludes that the classicism was a complicated and somewhat inconsistent part of Jonson's drama. His style, for example, reveals the paradox of classicism carried to unclassical lengths. Very often his writing is clear, dignified, and restrained in feeling, but frequently he develops with great care superfluous details, the result apparently of his strong admiration for learning and a desire to put real substance into his own work. That Jonson was a dramatist who owed only partial allegiance to classical ideals is also reflected in the structure of his plays. He goes beyond Aristotle in the unity of time; and in practice of the other unities proved himself remarkably liberal. The chief purpose of Jonson's comedy is classical: to satirize typical follies and affectations and to etch these sharply on the minds of his spectators through exaggeration. But, when his social purpose descends into schoolmasterish exhortation as it does in the late plays, his comedies are less classical and less pleasing. Paradoxically, in his tragedies upon which he staked so much hope of his reputation, Jonson is in some ways farther from any type of classicism than in his comedies. He either missed the point or did not have the same purpose as the true classic tragedies. His own arouse neither pity nor terror. They are scholarly pictures of a period, but neither one possesses the soul of

53 Ibid., p. 67.
tragedy. This is partly, Culmsee assumes, because Jonson lacked the fusing power to bring all parts of a drama into a thoroughly satisfying oneness, and this critic suspects that he did not recognize the true soul of the classics. However, his contemplation of the great ancient models did teach him valuable lessons: comparative restraint, order, harmony, and general care of workmanship, and an emphasis on form which links him with the neo-classicists.

A persistent strain in modern criticism insists that in Jonson we have a dramatist combining in almost equal proportion classical and English literary ideals and practice. Such a comment is so often voiced that it is a critical commonplace—but one that is of undoubted importance. A variety of reasons are advanced as proof that the classicism was only one force in Jonson's drama and balanced by the realistic native tradition. According to one critic Jonson's work is an exploitation of the stage technique of the public theater as well as his highly publicized rebellion against it. For, if he adhered to the unities in his plots, he also responded to the "full exuberance of life" in Elizabethan England, and his plays are "crowded with vital figures." Reference is made to the accurate reflection of both contemporary English life and literary tradition as proof that in Jonson we have a dramatist of a distinctly English classicism. F. R. Leavis also insists that any

54Thomas M. Parrott and Robert H. Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1943), p. 149.
55Boas, op. cit., p. 49.
consideration of Jonson's classicism cannot easily separate it from the idiomatic quality of this playwright, who remains "natively and robustly English." Jonson, he believes, made an effort always to feel the ancients as contemporary with himself, or rather to achieve an English mode of contemporaneity with them. "Vernacular classicism" is Harry Levin's apt description of Jonson's special use of ancient models and of his remarkably straight-forward and pragmatic classical program.

When a critic discusses in general terms the effect that classicism had on Jonson's dramatic method, he is usually one who accepts the classical as the most important influence and the clear explanation of everything that is distasteful in the man's work. Jonson's complete acceptance of classical authors as his models, according to one source, led directly to his painstaking, laborious, and self-conscious art, and turned him into a literary conservative "at times rigid in adhering to rules, given overmuch to imitation of the classics and slow to accept modern achievement when it seemed foreign to ancient law and precedent." Complaint is made too of the heavily artificial effects of his plots and the

60 Not all attempts to distinguish and accurately describe Jonson's unique classicism are successful. Erma R. Gebhardt's suggestion that the "classic realism" of Jonson is in contrast to the "romantic realism" of Dekker merely reshuffles familiar terms and does little to clarify the problem ("Classic and Romantic Realism in Early Seventeenth-Century Comedy" [unpubl. thesis, Columbia, 1927]).

one-sided view of life in this "chief classicist of the English Renais-
sance." Individual plays such as Every Man in His Humour may be viewed
as no synthesis of various artistic impulses but as representing a con-
flict between Jonson's classical ideal and contemporary realism. On
the other hand, according to Herford and Simpson, any assumption that
Jonson's classical adherence was an impediment, should, for many reasons,
concede it was also salutary. If the unities, for example, preclude him
"from Shakespeare's freedom of expansion and evolution, they provoke him
to the invention of plots, in his greatest plays, at once complex and
highly organized to an unsurpassed degree."

Finally, there is that examination of Jonson's classicism which sees
it as a fact of literary history which arose from certain causes and
effected certain important results. The entire discussion closely re-
sembles the debate over Jonson's general relationship to his times. Again

62 Percy H. Houston, Main Currents of English Literature, Revised ed.
(New York, 1931), p. 129.
65 Reference to the effect of Jonson's classicism on later literary
history is constant in modern criticism. Most of this comment merely re-
peats the fact of Jonson's historic importance without significant vari-
ation. See, for example, Alfred Harbage, Cavalier Drama (New York, 1936),
pp. 255-256. An expression of regret at the influence is not unusual,
but B. Ifor Evans (op. cit., p. 42) considers it unfortunate that the
Jonsonian tradition did not come through as a living model into the nine-
teenth century since he might have proven a more positive, useful pattern
than Shakespeare for an industrial age.
he is frequently presented as a classical writer in an age of romanticism.\textsuperscript{66} He is also viewed as a man whose rebellion against Elizabethan abandon\textsuperscript{67} impells an attempt to impose neo-classical principles on English drama, or as one making a specific attack on Shakespearean romantic comedy.\textsuperscript{69} The alternative interpretation, of course, views Jonson as merely part of a larger movement, the inevitable and healthy reaction against a rudderless, outmoded romanticism, and in his classicism definitely a reflection of the spirit of the age. It has been pointed out that the revival of classical comedy was a natural and inevitable development attendant upon the revival of classical learning.\textsuperscript{70} His influence has been considered a healthy curb on the romantic outbursts which would have proved disastrous for mediocre writers.\textsuperscript{71} In his time Jonson stood as an example of the effectiveness of reason and common sense on the stage,\textsuperscript{72} and, it is suggested, his adhering to the classic models pointed a way to others to lead from fantastic romance to realism and satire.\textsuperscript{73}

To note the importance of critical comment on Jonson's classicism is

\textsuperscript{66}Thorndike, \textit{CHEL}, VI, 8.

\textsuperscript{67}Willard Smith, \textit{The Nature of Comedy} (Boston, 1930), p. 138.


\textsuperscript{70}Perry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{71}Scott-James, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 121.


\textsuperscript{73}Thorndike, \textit{English Comedy}, p. 43.
to note the obvious. The topic itself is essential in any understanding of the man's drama, and its importance is emphasized by the great amount of criticism specifically concerned with the classicism produced since 1925. But the discouraging conclusion about most of this writing is that it adds up to very little in the final judgment. Certain individual comments are valuable, and the fact that much of the criticism minimizes the classical influence and tries to define it with precision is significant. Still, judged as an approach to Jonson's drama the entire discussion is disappointing. It is dominated too much by generalized and vague appraisals, and one does not find here the focus or the clear-cut division one would like. The long critical studies more often typify these general faults than they provide a definitive analysis. Criticism of the classicism is perhaps the most static sub-division in all of modern Jonson studies. It presents pretty much the same ideas with the same emphasis throughout the entire period. This criticism seems almost untouched by any new discoveries about Jonson or new concepts of his art. Discussion of the classicism mostly follows along traditional lines, and the modern commentary merely adds to the weight of the tradition without illuminating the problem of Jonson's classicism in any significant way.

3.

While modern discussion of Jonson's scholarship occurs less frequently than that of his classicism, the discussion is far more integrated and harmonious. Contemporary attitude toward the learning and its effect on
his drama is clear and almost unanimously favorable. The dominant critical theme states that Jonson's learning, remarkable in its extent and richness, played a vital, functional part in the creation of his plays. This theme runs throughout the period, and the really significant criticism is that which elaborates the idea or reaffirms it through an analysis of specific aspects of Jonson's learning.

One of the most extended appraisals of the learning is provided by Esther Dunn. In an excellent chapter devoted to the topic she asserts that not only was Jonson's use of learning intimately connected to his whole theory of artistic creation, but also was a very natural development in an age which ushered in a "spacious and exhilarating" world of scholarship. She makes a sharp distinction between Jonson's admiration of accurate scholarship and contempt for any show of learning for its own sake. His profound faith in knowledge caused him to oppose any use of the intellect for the mere solution of ingenious problems. Furthermore, he felt that scholarship should be informed with creative light, for he believed knowledge and the power of reason are the salvation of the world. It is only when scholarship is threatened by the vicious affectations of fashionable people that Jonson's ill-nature becomes apparent. Miss Dunn does not consider Jonson's scholarship to be flawless, and her analysis is no panegyric. She recognizes, for example, Jonson's

74 Traces of an earlier, hostile criticism, which sees the scholarship as lifeless pedantry weighing down the plays, can be found in contemporary reference. See, for example, Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 1; Sampson, op. cit., p. 296. But this unfavorable criticism is sporadic and makes a very slight impression on modern scholarship.

"passion for setting limits to limitless things, for defining qualities which ought never to be precisely defined, narrowed his view of the function of scholarship as it narrowed his view of the function of the stage." Still, this sympathetic criticism gives one a highly favorable impression and convinces one that Jonson's scholarship was intelligent and pragmatic, that for Jonson the test of any kind of learning was its usefulness in human affairs, and that his severest condemnation is reserved for the perversion of knowledge to improper uses.

The admiring, respectful attitude introduced by Miss Dunn continues and deepens in most subsequent comment. The thoroughness of the scholarship is one fact that has especially impressed modern critics. Don C. Allen, for example, selects Jonson as one of the very few careful inquirers into astrology, noting that he possessed both the intellectual pride and the intellectual curiosity lacking in the other writers.77 That the knowledge and scholarship is perfectly integrated in the plays is also stressed by modern commentators. Hardin Craig dwells on the logic and dialectic, which sharpened the significance of the comedies.78 Craig decides that Jonson was "a man whose extensive knowledge of school learning has so united itself with the mind of the man that he is perfection as a rhetorician and at the same time seems only to be following

76 Ibid., p. 81.


the method of unaided naturalness."79

Longer studies inevitably confirm the assumption that scholarship played an intelligent and functional part in the creation of the plays. This is the eventual conclusion of Starnes' and Talbert's research into the method of the scholarship. Starnes cites Jonson's reliance upon such well-known reference books of the time as Stephanus' Dictionarium, Historicum, Geographicum, Poeticum,80 and in a longer study,81 he and Talbert jointly investigate the use Jonson made of such dictionaries. Both scholars affirm the general view of Jonson's scholarship, showing that his use of the material derived from the dictionary in such a play as Cynthia's Revels is intelligently selected and creatively fused with the major design of the play. Also typical in its admiration is the introduction to Charles Wheeler's glossary of the myths used in Jonson's work.82 Wheeler is especially impressed with Jonson's ability to fit in his vast knowledge of myth with so many and such diverse characters in his plays. He is equally impressed with the scope of Jonson's scholarship, which "confirms one's opinion that his resources were almost inexhaustible."83 The study of Harry K. Russell offers even more extended and explicit proof of the

79Ibid., p. 169.

80D. T. Starnes, "The Poetic Dictionary and the Poet," The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas, II (Summer, 1946), 75-85.


83Ibid., p. 4.
range, contemporaniety, and integration of one phase of Jonson's knowledge.

After analyzing the Renaissance doctrines of natural and moral philosophy, Russell selects Jonson as the dramatist for whom the doctrines constituted an intimate and essential portion of the thought, language, and structure of his plays. That Jonson shows complete familiarity with such doctrines as the humours, elements, spirits, the soul, reason, and will is proven. Russell concludes that Jonson was a "curious and exact artist," that the doctrines of natural and moral philosophy were a part of the classical literature that he loved, and that his knowledge of natural and moral philosophy is inevitable.


85 Ibid., p. 350.

Appraisal of Jonson's realism accounts for as large a portion of the general approaches to his art as does commentary on the classicism and satire. As with comment on those other major aspects of his art, reference to the realism shows an extreme range from the briefest statements to the most thorough and complex evaluations. Also, as is the case with each of these broad approaches to the drama, discussion of the realism involves certain difficulties. Jonson's realism resists precise definition and embodies no clearly worked-out program. The topic is a far more ambiguous one in its very nature than are the classicism and the satire, which, at least, can be reduced to specific formulæ and definition. Consequently, one is very impressed by the clarity and value of the discussion developed by modern scholars. As the reader proceeds from the mass of brief, general remarks to the longer, more complicated studies, he finds the problem being described with greater accuracy and the discussion conducted with greater subtlety and validity.

A tremendous proportion of the references to Jonson's realism is little more than brief acknowledgement of the fact and a terse statement of approval or disapproval. Jonson is commended by a score of writers for the vivid, convincing pictures he provides of Elizabethan life, and for

his "keenness in portraying contemporaneous types."\(^{90}\)

For a great many commentators, however, Jonson's value as a dramatic historian is qualified or even destroyed by the limitations and the tone of his realism. His huge appetite for the details of life around him is dismissed as only a compensation for the deficiencies in his imagination.\(^{89}\)

He is castigated for concerning himself merely with the oddities and follies of his time,\(^{90}\) for creating a realism too brutal or too contemporary,\(^{91}\) for reflecting too accurately his own discontent with the world,\(^{92}\) and, the most frequently invoked charge, for picturing his world without charity or charm.\(^{93}\)

This kind of commentary is important as a simple, graphic reflection of one phase of Jonson's literary reputation. As criticism, however, it is not satisfactory. Whether enthusiastic or contemptuous, these remarks remain only remarks, assertions, intuitions, or opinions which rarely touch on the entire work or the individual plays. Only occasionally is an attempt made really to distinguish the special quality of Jonson's realism and to comment significantly upon it. Among the few shorter comments which are anything more than a quick reaction is Stoll's stress on

\(^{88}\) Bellinger, op. cit., p. 236.

\(^{89}\) TLS, July 30, 1925, p. 501.


\(^{93}\) Sampson, op. cit., p. 300.
the intelligence and purpose behind Jonson's type of realism. He accepts as unquestionable Jonson's value as a document of the period, but also feels that Jonson's realism involves much more than mere reporting. Jonson's imitation of reality was a studious and rigorous program; the incidents in his plays, although farcical, are kept strictly within the bounds of the comic, and are "not romantic, fantastic, or tragic, as in Elizabethan comedy they often are." Also valuable as an approach toward a genuine analysis are the comments of Ashley Thorndike and Una Ellis-Fermor. Thorndike points out the logic and intelligence of Jonson's realism which was part of a rational and ordered study of his time. His program, solidly founded on the models of Plautus and Aristophanes, analyzed society through the theory of the humours and fitted in with his belief that the comedian's duty was to satirize and to reform. Miss Ellis-Fermor sees Jonson's work as a response to the changed intellectual milieu following the death of Elizabeth, when there was a new concentration on man as a social, non-poetic and non-spiritual animal. But, besides responding to these ideas, Jonson was a "realist by principle," and one whose attitude toward his material distinguished him from his contemporaries. In the manner of Bacon he deliberately schooled himself in objectivity. He differed from the other playwrights because he was unwilling to descend to the popular attractions of sensation or sentiment. For

95 English Comedy, p. 170.
Jonson, instead, there is the "deliberate absorption in the immediate surroundings...striving for ever closer precision in detail," a narrow, sharp focussing on an immediate area of experience, and a scientific treatment of material.

No critic would deny that Jonson presents all the materials for a circumstantially real picture of the London of his day and that his value to the social historian is immense. He is a rich and reliable source for any one wishing to recapture the flavor of English life in the earlier seventeenth century, as can be seen in the copious quotations from his plays. That a full historical survey of seventeenth-century London can be derived from Jonson's plays is proven by Nicolaas Zwager's work which is composed of citations from Jonson rearranged to fill out descriptions of various sections and activities of Jacobean London. The description is, as one would expect, full and comprehensive, but even more interesting is Zwager's comment on the achievement and limitations of Jonson's realism. The critic's attitude is ambivalent, changing frequently from high praise to denigration. Zwager feels compelled to defend his selection

97 Ibid., p. 99.


of Jonson for his study, asserting that "rare Ben" excels the other writers as the realistic dramatist of contemporary London, but then quickly admits that there are certainly far greater men in the period. He diminishes the importance of the realism itself by calling it a "minor task" to which Shakespeare's genius did not stoop, but one which Jonson fulfills, "making us acquainted with the manners of his age in an admirable manner."\(^{100}\) His unnecessary and excessive apology to one side, several of Zwager's comments on the realism are sensible and pertinent. He notes that while Jonson's picture is certainly exaggerated, the exaggeration is not wild. Jonson's is a closely realistic, but not sympathetic study of his world, and he proves himself a realist of the Langland rather than the Chaucer type. His state of mind excludes any idealistic vision. He presents nothing like Dicken's genial atmosphere, for the playwright is not a humanitarian, but a satirist. His report cannot be accepted as a completely accurate document because he has the tendency of seeing things always worse than they are. Since he looks through the eyes of a satirist, his pictures "are not meant to be taken at their face value."\(^{101}\)

As a proof of the valuable record Jonson's plays represent, this is interesting. As an analysis of Jonson's use of realism, the work is far less comprehensive than one would wish. Ideas are too timidly and too sporadically advanced, and, while valid, certainly deserve a deeper and more extended appraisal than they receive at the hands of Zwager.

A more reflective and more valuable discussion of the problem is

\(^{100}\) Ibid., p. 2.  
\(^{101}\) Ibid., p. 6.
contained in Esther C. Dunn's book-length study of Jonson. She considers the realism to be a far more subtle affair than do those who see it as a mere record of the times. Miss Dunn suggests that Jonson was always intent on turning the impressions of life around him into corrective satire and philosophical comment. Jonson had the ability to detach himself and reduce his experience to order, with the object to "give this ordered reflection back to the world, in the hope of clarifying its vision and correcting its follies." 102 Because he used exaggeration, because he slightly distorted the objects, and because he heightened deformity, we cannot take his picture of contemporary society at face value. On the other hand, there is in Jonson the zest and enthusiasm for minute observation which often reproduces the "familiar face of life and custom in the various social groups which made up this great London of three centuries ago." 103 He gives an accurate picture of the atmosphere and has a remarkable ability to take one into various interiors. Jonson, this critic asserts, saw color in people even more than in objects, and his attitude goes beyond a kinship with picturesque rascals to encompass a whole segment of London society. Miss Dunn's comment is superior to Zwager's and more fully documented with evidence from the life and the plays, but even hers is not a complete study of Jonson's realism. Her appraisal is too broad and somewhat superficial. She embarks on almost no literary analysis beyond the rather obvious fact that Jonson built his comedies around the foibles of society, or that he employs an artistic economy in utilizing his realistic

103 Ibid., p. 101.
details by making all of them serve a purpose.

Expectations of a thorough, definitive analysis of Jonson's realism in the dissertations which include reference to it are only partially fulfilled. Lester Proebstel's study promises the most, but ends as the most disappointing of the three studies to be considered. Proebstel proposes to trace Jonson's development from the "pure" classicism of Volpone to the equally "pure" realism of Bartholomew Fair. All the earlier comedies, which are seen as preparatory work for the "first great classical masterpiece," are placed in special categories: vernacular farce, romantic comedy, humour comedy, allegory, personal, and general satire. From Volpone on, Proebstel sees a weakening of the classical impulse which results in such "true hybrid" types as Epicoene and The Alchemist, the latter being at once the most classic and the most realistic of his plays to this date. But it is Bartholomew Fair, a complete triumph of realism, in which we have, at last, the "real Jonson," a Jonson whose "real reason" for deserting classicism was his desire for popularity. Proebstel's analysis is composed almost entirely of such generalizations and commonplaces about Jonson as these. His analysis oversimplifies the development in Jonson's art; the reasons he suggests for the shift toward realism are unconvincing. His categories are arbitrary, and the exceptions which must be made for many plays confuse rather than illuminate. Little real sense of any "progress" is conveyed by this unconvincing thesis.

104Lester Proebstel, "The Progress in the Comedies of Ben Jonson from Pure Classicism to Pure Realism" (unpubl. thesis, University of Oregon, 1941).
105Tbid., p. 19.
Benjamin Morrison analyses *Every Man in His Humour* as part of a general study of the social element in English comedy. Morrison claims Jonson's realism is merely one of several techniques in the comedy. He relied on the appeal in the near and familiar situation for the audience; but, although he had "an intimate familiarity with his age and the colorful parade of the men in the age to give him definitely qualifications to portray Englishmen...he had zeal as a satirist and fancy as a scholar which distorted the picture and slightly deflected his purpose." 106 His remaining faithful to the demand for dramatic probability held Jonson in the channel of realism "against his inclination to teach." 107 Morrison concludes that Jonson is undeniably attractive to the student of social comedy, but he cannot be labeled as a pure realist.

Richard Perkinson, however, in a most impressive study of the realistic comedy of the period does not hesitate to designate Jonson as realist. 108 Perkinson is primarily interested in the Jonsonian realist tradition as it affected Restoration drama through the creation of the fop and the genre of topographical comedy, but he has also several trenchant things to say about the realism itself. He sees Jonson, like Shakespeare, aiming at the effect of verisimilitude and achieving it by narrowing his fictional world, by accumulating realistic detail, and by appealing to the intellect and experience of his audience through his striving to be convincing. Viewed

107 Ibid.  
historically, Jonson's realism stands midway between the early Renaissance, against which he was reacting, and the baroque, toward which he was moving. "Realism in Jonson is not yet as complete as it is in Restoration drama; nor is the vitality of the Renaissance so weakened."\textsuperscript{109}

Although discussion of Jonson's realism forms only part of the purpose of both Morrison and Perkinson, both provide a discriminating approach to the topic and a convincing reminder that the realism is a more involved problem than do those critics who consider the problem very briefly. With her emphasis on the complexity of the realism, Madeliene Doran develops the same line of inquiry, and comes closer than most critics do in providing a careful and perceptive definition. She cautions that unless the terms "realistic" and "romantic" are carefully qualified, they are misleading. There is little romance in Jonson, but there is much in the way of contrived plot and caricature so that he cannot be considered purely realistic. He differs so definitely from Plautus and Terence that "classical" is an even less satisfactory description of the great plays. Miss Doran sees Jonsonian comedy as a fusion of many elements. "Its sphere of observation is the real life of ordinary men and women, its attitude critical, its means pleasurable, its aims at least partially corrective. The realism in such comedy is apt to be...mainly realism of detail, or local color. The critical attitude leads, in the treatment of character, in the direction of satiric exaggeration and even caricature, and, in the management of the fable, to intricate manipulation in order to bring about a witty exposure

\textsuperscript{109}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 52-53.
Most other critical commentary on Jonson's realism is in the form of statements of his gifts or limitations as a recorder of seventeenth-century London life. The strand of realism is isolated and appraised according to its classical model or reliability as a report on the age. Jonson is either complimented on his comprehensiveness and accuracy, or the reader is reminded that selection, distortion, or exaggeration preclude a complete acceptance of the dramatist's picture. Little is said of Jonson's attitude toward the scene he so thoroughly recorded. Usually, when a critic moves on from a surface appraisal of Jonson's realism, he evaluates him as a satirist. Otherwise discussion of the philosophy behind Jonson's realism is occasional in nature—a general description of a general attitude. Typical is the casual observation that Jonson was neither hopeful nor concerned for the state of society. "He had no conception of political, educational, or economic reform, of the hope of progress, or the fear of social calamity." Another critic infers from the tone of Jonson's comedies merely that Jonson's laughter is always mixed with contempt or disapprobation, and he "is as uneasy and contemptuous in the society he satirizes as is Pope among his dunces."

For many reasons, but especially because it contains a full discussion of Jonson as a serious critic of the world he described, L. C. Knights'  

op. cit., p. 149.

Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 198.

Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson is of utmost importance. The work describes the economic and social forces which developed in the early seventeenth century and the reaction of the dramatist to these forces. Jonson occupies a central position in the study because Knight recognizes him as the greatest dramatist handling social themes. His conservative reaction to the widespread changes was a reaction he shared with the majority of his contemporaries, but he expressed it more forcibly. Knight insists that Jonson, like the other dramatists, judged his times from the traditions of economic morality inherited from the Middle Ages. These were the traditions and attitudes of the small, independent community, and were antithetical to those of the new capitalist age.

The first part of Knight's study describes the new order which was in conflict with the old morality. He proves that with the discovery and development of capitalism the economic welfare of England became dependent on the movement of forces beyond the controlling power of any one individual. The development of industry gave increased importance to credit and usury; the growth of monopolies and projects, with their scandalous malpractices, increased the inherent fear and distrust of the new institutions. Contributing also to the disturbing new pattern of economic life were the accelerating enclosures, the growth of a land-market, and the uneasy dislocation of social forces which resulted in an avaricious and vulgar group scrambling from one class to another in violation of the ancient virtue of keeping one's place. Closely related to the great changes

113 L. C. Knight, Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson (London, 1937).
were the increase of luxury and the enormously greater importance of money. These developments especially dramatized the transition from a subsistence economy to an economy of plenty and pointed up the impact of poverty, unemployment, and trade depressions.

Knights shows the sharp contrast between the new, dynamic, and complicated pattern and the traditional norm, which still appeared to be a staple equilibrium within which each man would "walk contentedly in his vocation."114 The majority of people were unable to conceive of an impersonal economy, but continued to visualize society in the traditional terms of a small locality which followed the ideals of unity, concord, and proportion. Differences in rank and status were accepted as part of the natural order, and involved obligations as well as privileges. In any conflict between the claims of public good and private profit, the prior claim of public good should be honored. Because, according to the older religious tradition, riches should be subordinated to the proper dignity of man, wealth remained somewhat suspect. The suspicion of unregulated activity directed toward one's private gain was shared by statesmen, moralists, and the common people. Regulatory legislation by the Tudor and Stuart governments proves that the theory was far from being a remote ideal. "For the bulk of the population in the age of Jonson the traditional ideas were far from being meaningless."115

This survey of the economic structure is explicitly and convincingly stated. Knights' suggestion of the impact of the economy on the drama is

114 Ibid., p. 139.  
115 Ibid., p. 164.
extremely interesting. One reason, he notes, that the drama was so successful was its sharp, pertinent comment on contemporary problems. Dramatic social criticism did not involve analysis of economics, however, but satire of classes and individuals. Individuals seemed more apparently the cause of social ills, and the diagnosis was moral rather than economic. Of the dramatists displaying a clear attitude toward economic problems, Jonson's overtowering importance seems inevitable, for, as Knights enthusiastically says, "he seems...so immeasurably superior to all his contemporaries—with the one obvious exception—and...his greatness as a poet makes clear the value of the popular tradition which is only dimly apprehended in the work of the lesser men such as Dekker and Heywood."  

While concentrating on Jonson as a powerful commentator on his society, Knights also examines other aspects of his dramatic art, which, in turn, illustrate the thesis. The whole problem of Jonson's "traditionalism," for example, is one which interests Knights very much. He feels that undue insistence on Jonson's indebtedness to the classics "violently distorts the sense in which Jonson is 'traditional,' by ignoring his debt to the native tradition," and obscures his originality. That Jonson's art is "intimately related to the popular tradition of individual and social

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116 Ibid., p. 178.
117 Ibid., p. 179.
118 In an essay written much later, "Ben Jonson, Dramatist," (The Age of Shakespeare, ed. Boris Ford [Hammondsworth, 1955]), Knights places even greater stress on the importance of the native tradition in forming Jonson's art. He feels that criticism exclusively concerned with the effect of classicism has obscured the fact that in Jonson learning and classical elements "are assimilated by a sensibility in direct contact with its own age" (p. 304).
morality is to be seen in all the plays starting with Sejanus, a play offering the theme that lust for political power and pettiness often accompany political greatness. Most significant in this play and typical of Jonson's method is his presenting a world of complete evil from a special angle of vision. This Jonsonian point of view results from the vein of farce which threads through the play and supplies violent contrasts. This play, like any of Jonson's, presupposes an active relationship with the audience: a double response through which the audience would recognize and appreciate an appetite for worldly power and pleasure, and, at the same time, remembering the traditional morality, would reject the appeal and condemn the character for surrendering to it. This is Knights' explanation for such centrally important episodes as the seduction speech of Volpone to Celia and Mammon's overheated plans for the philosopher's stone. Knights offers as further evidence of Jonson's relation to the native literary tradition the many references he makes to older authors as well as the obvious morality influence found in The Devil is an Ass, The Magnetic Lady, and The Staple of News.

A careful examination of the plays elicits the special importance of the anti-acquisitive theme in Jonson's thought and art. The commentary furnishes proof of the existence and importance of this theme and provides incidental interpretation of the plays as types and entities which is both fresh and credible. For example, Volpone not only contains much criticism of accumulation, but the play, so often considered atypical of Jonson, is

here accepted as displaying nothing exotic or romantic in either plot or setting. Knights finds no violation of unity, but points out the many variations at different points, which relate explicitly to the main theme. The necessary contrast that evokes the double response is the contrast of religion and greed in the powerful opening scene. Volpone is, according to this point of view, definitely a play of its time. "The comedy of Volpone is universal, but it would be perverse not to relate it to the acquisitiveness of a particular time and place." Similarly, the details of alchemy in The Alchemist are more than the contemporary reflection of a back-street fraud because they symbolize the desire of men for human riches. Like Volpone, the play is built on the double theme of lust and greed, and the whole play is constructed so as to isolate and magnify the central theme. The satire of The Devil is an Ass not only reflects popular opinion and anticipates parliamentary action, but never before had Jonson handled a major political issue so effectively. As in the greater plays, Jonson draws upon and refines the healthy instincts of his audience by giving point and coherence to a vague popular sentiment. More important than the remarkable and extended knowledge of the intricate plots used by the patent seekers is "the method, the angle at which the abuses are presented." The irony of the play is directed not against invention itself, but at the greed which prompts this and other schemes. "The play goes beyond economics and questions of expediency...to the root of the disease, shaping the material in the light of an humane ideal that is implicit throughout."
The Staple of News is a curious mixture of social and political references based on the power of money, but it is the money which provides for moral comment that makes the best parts of the play and exhibits "Jonson's firm grasp of humane schemes of values."\textsuperscript{123} Similarly, in The Magnetic Lady the only parts of interest are those that deal with money and business methods. From his first play to the last, one of Jonson's main preoccupations is with acquisition. In the earlier and greater plays, it is part of a rich and complex organization, and we cannot appreciate the greatness of Jonson's art until we are fully aware of that attitude. When Jonson's handling of the theme is compared with that of Dekker, Middleton, and Heywood, as Knights does in the rest of his study, Jonson's superiority is unmistakable.

Knights' book, important and welcome though it is in modern Jonson criticism, is not without fault. Neither the historical survey nor the criticism of the plays is developed with the thoroughness one might wish. A closer integration between the lengthy historical discussion and the dramatic criticism would lessen the sharp division which disturbs the unity of the work somewhat. The critical remarks are apt to be scattered and occasionally tangential to the main purpose. At times one suspects too much attention is given to plays of rather minor importance as far as Jonson's total achievement is concerned.

But such random observations qualify only slightly the great importance of this work. If considered part of the critical movement which

\textsuperscript{123}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 223.
sees in Jonson an accurate reflection of his own age, the work may be ac-
cepted as the culmination of the tradition. If viewed as critical rehabili-
tation, Knights' book is one of the most significant documents produced
during the modern period. The evaluation of the plays themselves provides
us with a fresh, perceptive, and rewarding method of understanding a com-
plicated and subtle art, and adds a full dimension to their interest and
achievement. Viewed from almost any angle, Knights' contribution is
readily apparent. Considered as it has been here as a comment on Jonson's
realism, the book is more penetrating and illuminating than any other
study. Other critics may place the realism with accuracy or measure it
with care; Knights alone gives us the philosophical and intellectual sig-
nificance of Jonson's comment on his times.

5.

Criticism of Jonson's satire strongly resembles that of his classicism
and realism. The most important and most interesting commentary is that
which develops one of several recurrent themes, and a number of special
studies give a certain focus to the entire discussion. But as was the
case with the criticism of the other general approaches, much of the criti-
cism is embedded in brief remarks made in such a chance, stray fashion that
their critical value is very slight. The preponderance of these brief com-
ments is a reminder of the importance of the satire, but only when they
mirror points of view found in other areas of Jonson criticism are they
of much interest.\footnote{124}

In the large, somewhat miscellaneous body of criticism formed by the longer comments on the satire the popularity of certain approaches is noticeable. For example, most treatments of Jonson's satire abound in allusion to classical satirists. Comparison with Horace is inevitable, and Aristophanes is also frequently invoked as a comparison or standard. But the satirist whose aim, tone, and temper seem even closer to those of Jonson is Juvenal. Of the many analogies drawn between the two that of Kathryn McEuen is the most detailed and the most interesting.\footnote{125} Miss McEuen sees in Jonson a man by nature a satirist and by preference and education a classicist. His pose of assured and arrogant satirist is definitely a reflection of Juvenal's attitude. In the prologue to Every Man in His Humour Jonson, like Juvenal, asserts his intention to expose types rather than personalities. Also Juvenalian is Jonson's belief that men's appearances are not to be trusted, his inveighing against the feeble, imitative writing of his day, and his compulsion to attack contemporary vices.

\footnote{124}Two approaches appearing in the briefer commentary are particularly worth noting. A number of critics profess to see a direct equation between the personality of the man and the satire of the artist. See, for example, Nicoll, op. cit., p. 150; Legouis, op. cit., p. 286; Wright, op. cit., p. 652. An even more frequently stated idea is that Jonson's satire is a very accurate reflection of the disenchanted spirit of his times. See F. E. Halliday, Shakespeare in His Age (London, 1956), p. 202; Doran, op. cit., p. 167; and Levin, op. cit., p. 14.

\footnote{125}Kathryn A. McEuen, "Jonson and Juvenal," RES, XXI (April, 1945), 92-104. Because Jonas Barish's "Ovid, Juvenal, and The Silent Woman" is particularly concerned with the effect of Juvenalian satire on the play, the article will be considered with the criticism of Epicoene. See below, pp. 285-288.
Both are merciless toward women, and complain at the unfair way Fortune favors certain people. Jonson's penchant for Juvenalian invective is apparent everywhere in his work, and he especially recalls the ancient satirist when he complains in *The Poetaster* of the poverty which so often seems the reward of the serious writer. The resemblances between the two, found particularly in the early plays, leads this critic to conclude that both "fearlessly exposed the follies and vices of their day in such mordant language that there is little doubt as to the similarity of their attitude." 126

Such a catalogue provides a convincing proof of the Juvenalian quality of Jonson's satire, but it still leaves us with only a very generalized impression of the satire itself. We approach a more exact description in the occasional discussion of his satiric technique. But, unfortunately, little specific analysis of this technique has been attempted since 1925. His method is ignored, vaguely described in terms of selection and subordination, or summarily dismissed as exaggeration and caricature. One of the very few modern commentators who discusses the problem in any detail is George Kitchin, and even he is primarily interested in Jonson's manipulation of burlesque and parody to gain his satiric effect, noting that so much parody is sprinkled through his plays that Jonson might well be called the "English Aristophanes." 127 The times were right and fruitful for his type of satire, but the over-specific ridicule of foibles defeats his own popularity. He is Swift-like in his indignation against imposters and his

126 Ibid., p. 104.

plays show the culmination of the intense literary cultivation of the Fool. His work might be succinctly described as the Ship of Fools dramatized.

Much more to the point is Madeleine Doran's comment on Jonson's technique and its central importance in his work. Miss Doran provides a definition of Jonson's particular variety of satire and an analysis of the way it developed in his plays. She claims that Jonson's use of satire is part of his essential originality. The control of the central design of a play by a satiric conception appears occasionally in others, but as a thoroughly realized method of conception only in Jonson, who is the great master in English comedy of the structural use of satire. He achieved his special mastery of satire through a process of learning and experimentation. In his first play, Every Man in His Humour, he hesitates between action motivated by humours and action arbitrarily complicated, with a resultant blurring of emphasis. In Every Man out of His Humour the humours are merely exhibited mechanically and motivate no genuine intrigue. But in Volpone Jonson at last finds the way to make a satiric conception of human behavior produce exciting dramatic action. In their moral-psychological combination of motives, his great comedies seem to have a closer affinity with the morality play tradition than with Latin comedy. But essentially they are something new, a distinct form in themselves, for, whatever his sources, Jonson "worked restlessly until he achieved an original dramatic form capable of carrying his satiric purpose."128

Any hopes a reader might entertain for a complete and thorough analysis

of Jonson's satire in the major contemporary studies are not completely satisfied. The two extended appraisals produced in the modern period, which will now be considered, are broad surveys rather than close analyses. While both make a useful contribution to the discussion and include a more effective appraisal than almost anything so far considered, neither is the complete and satisfactory account one searches for. The earlier of the two, Rachel Chait's dissertation on Jonson's satire, \(^{129}\) while more ambitious in scope than Helena Baum's work, \(^{130}\) is also the more disappointing. Most of her major ideas are too familiar or too obvious to convey much interest. For example, as do almost all commentators, she pictures Jonson as a born reformer and a satirist who usually implied rather than stated his ideals. She notes that Jonson's full theory of life and morals as well as his rationalistic philosophy derive from many sources, but are perfectly blended and harmonized in his work. The value of Miss Chait's comment on the specific satire varies. Her handling of Jonson's personal satire seems rather contradictory. Most modern critics accept Jonson's disclaimer that he is not aiming at individuals in most of his plays. Miss Chait's discussion of the topic is ambivalent. Although she agrees that far too much critical energy has been wasted in the search for personal identification in Jonson's plays, the first section of her own study follows the over-familiar path of biographical and historical reference. She concludes that personal satire is a powerful and detracting force in the early plays, where we have evidence of Jonson allowing personal animosity to

\(^{129}\) Rachel Chait, "Satire of Ben Jonson" (unpubl. diss., Cornell, 1932).

\(^{130}\) Helena W. Baum, The Satiric & the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy (Chapel Hill, 1947).
influence his writing. If Jonson had curbed the arrogance which interfered with his satire, this writer has no doubt that the early plays would have ranked with the greatest English satires. When she considers the entire body of work, however, Miss Chait is mollified, for here she finds we have the "most illuminating satirical commentary upon the Elizabethan age," and an unusual commentary in that the whole conception of the dramatic work is satirical.

Miss Chait examines the satirical content of each play by listing or noting the absence of such objects of satire as classes, fashions, superstitions, morals, and humours. The procedure is comprehensive but monotonous. Little attempt is made to analyze, and the intermittent commentary is derivative in content and phraseology, with many resounding echoes of Herford and Simpson. She discerns a development in Jonson's satire from the very earliest plays such as A Tale of a Tub and The Case is Altered, which are almost void of satire, through such humour plays as Cynthia's Revels and The Poetaster, which are little more than dramatized satire. The popular failure of these plays led Jonson to placate his public by minimizing satire in the great comedies. He returns to overt satiric writing in The Staple of News and the final plays, a resumption which explains the decline in his art and the failure of the plays. The interpretation is oversimplified and not a convincing proof of the thesis. The bulk of Miss Chait's study is a laborious cataloguing of the kinds of satire in the plays, and, while not without value as a means toward analysis, is no analysis in itself.

Miss Baum's book, although uneven in quality, is a far more original offering, for it is interpretive as well as descriptive. Unlike Miss Chait, Miss Baum does not merely rephrase Jonson's ideas, but launches a number of debatable, lively interpretations of her own. Her intention is to explain all of Jonson's satire—to show it as a program with definite aims and following a definite progression. In the first part of her study Miss Baum attempts to delineate the nature of Jonson's satire and to clarify its purpose. Her most important contention, constantly stressed as the key to Jonson's satire, is that his standards for truth and virtue are intellectual and social, not religiously or narrowly moral. The idea is rephrased and elaborated upon frequently in this early section. Jonson's work in comedy is seen as an important and serious enterprise involving years of experimentation before he worked out a suitable medium for his purpose. The comedies, which reveal a slowly worked out satiric technique, contain always a consistent point of view. Regardless of the achievement of the individual works, the judgment of life is always primarily intellectual—a judgment according to which ignorance and stupidity were the cardinal sins.

The extended examination of the objects of Jonson's satire, which occupies the next section of the study, is, for several reasons, the weakest part of the book. While the connection between this analysis and the theme of the study is occasionally pointed out, more often it is overlooked and we seem to be involved in a completely new and distinct discussion of the satire, one which at best has only a tangential connection with the rest of the study. Judged as a new approach to the problem the discussion is,
for many reasons, disappointing. The choice of satirical objects for examination seems both narrow and arbitrary. Some of the topics discussed are unquestionably central in Jonson's satire; others seem rather haphazardly chosen, and the quality of the discussion is uneven. Of the several vices Miss Baum examines, her handling of avarice is most satisfactory. The discussion is at its strongest when she traces the development in Jonson's ability to integrate the theme in succeeding plays. In the earliest plays the theme is inserted in a clumsy and obtrusive fashion, but Jonson gradually gained greater skill and mastery, and his mature plays reveal a very skillful integration of the theme. Miss Baum notes that avarice becomes increasingly important in each play and dominates in the final dramas. Her analysis of the theme in each play is thorough; she succeeds in isolating the presence and the effect of the vice, but the discussion of the theme in Volpone is particularly rewarding. She shows that this is the prevailing interest in the play and that here we have an amazing instance of Jonson's ability to use the substance of heavy material, not inherently comic, as the basis for satiric comedy. The theme of avarice and the didactic purpose are submerged and tightly interwoven into the elements of plot and comedy.

Among the reasons why the discussion of avarice is the most interesting is that it is the first and the most thoroughly examined. The other objects of satire are described in too brief and peremptory a fashion to be of much interest or value, and the whole discussion seems negligible. The selection and the examination of both drunkenness and witchcraft seem particularly incidental. Despite the insistence that Jonson's treatment
of the latter problem proves his reluctance to turn his plays into moral tracts, the effort expended on what is a minor theme in Jonson is not justified. Somewhat more pertinent is the final examination of a satirical object, the Puritan. Miss Baum notes that Jonson employs parody, repetition, comic contrast, and incongruity to produce a treatment broadly comic and satiric rather than doctrinaire. The treatment of the Puritans in The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair shows the perfection in Jonson's comic satire and proves his determination to keep satire true to its aim. To reach such interesting comment as this, we are forced to accompany Miss Baum as she repeatedly trudges through the plays in search of evidence of the many objects of satire. The procedure is monotonous, and too often produces a plethora of details which obscure any central, unifying aim.

The discussion of the effect of Jonson's satire on his dramatic technique is clearer and more discerning. Miss Baum agrees with Madeleine Doran that in Jonson we have a dramatist who considered his satiric material of sufficient importance to build his play out of that material rather than to fit it into a conventional plot with its necessary imperfections and contradictions. The originality of his plots and characters helped greatly in working out an effective method of infusing the satiric and didactic in the plays. His concentration on the satiric aim and his stubborn determination to solve the aesthetic problems caused by his program had a very salutary effect on his drama. "It becomes increasingly obvious that much of Jonson's excellent comic technique grows out of his reliance upon the didactic theory and out of his determination to hit the exact vice at which he aims his satire."\textsuperscript{132} Not only does he attack more

social evils than any other Jacobean dramatist, but the toughness of the satiric fabric is obvious by comparison.

The inclusion of such ideas helps redeem this otherwise disappointing section. One need not search for compensating features in the most original and stimulating portion of the work, the description of Jonson's developing dramatic technique. Here Miss Baum carefully describes the progressive changes in method which result in a gradual harmonious blending of satire and comedy. That the search for technique was deliberate and intelligent is indicated by the reappearance of certain comic devices. Jonson's early work shows everywhere a search for a technique that would be at once comic, satiric, and didactic. All comedies until Volpone are experimental, with either comic or satiric method dominating. The Case is Altered is Jonson's attempt to divert romantic comedy toward didactic ends, but his satire lacks any great didactic value. Although Every Man in His Humour combines an appreciable amount of satire with comedy, at least half the material is non-satiric and the satire loses force. But, when in Every Man out of His Humour, he overburdens the play with satire of false social and intellectual standards, he fails. The primary purpose is satiric, the characterization is expository, and the overweighted plot dies of inanition. "His dramatic sense was, in fact, almost completely obliterated by his desire to include didactic satire in his play."\(^{133}\) Jonson's search for a proper technique leads him, in Cynthia's Revels, to a new type of construction, a mythical framework and masque-like scenes played by the antithetical characters who contrast the good and the bad elements.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 155.
in court society. The play is one in which the point is blurred by the mass of details, and, as in all of these early plays, one in which the relatively high comic elements in themselves could not sustain the weight of heavy satire. The Poetaster is also an unsuccessful alliance of undramatic philosophical material on good poets and true poetry with satire on bad poets. In some ways the play marks an advance in skill because the didactic techniques are disguised more skillfully. But like all of these early plays, The Poetaster is essentially experimental and only partially successful. The primary interest in these early works is that they show Jonson in search for an adequate technique. Although the plays contain a wealth of satiric material, it is not adequately sustained by either laughter or dramatic action.

In Volpone Jonson's comic and satiric techniques are displayed in their maturity; the satire is implicit, not explicit, and the comic technique acquired earlier is magnified and deepened. He needs no commentator to explain the didactic function. The play marks the culmination of Jonson's desire to include didactic elements in his comedy. Up to this point he worked with a wide assortment of comic techniques, molding them to suit his fundamental purpose. By degrees he strengthened his plot and dialogue so that they would carry an enormous weight of thought flexibly, simply, and dramatically. Here the characters develop through the compulsion of their own personalities and the situations in which they naturally involve themselves. The characters in Volpone are inseparable from the comedy they produce, and the thought they inspire in the audience. Miss Baum concludes by noting that the great plays which follow Volpone also
have satiric themes which are integral parts of the plot, characterization, and comedy. These mature comedies show Jonson's consummate success in his dogged determination to make comedy convey serious thought and serious laughter. There is no question of his talent for drama, but he developed by main force the comedy of his middle period according to his didactic theory and achieved a fusion of comedy and thoughtful satire. "He never forgot his purpose, but only when he dealt as an artist as well as a theorist, did he succeed in it."\(^{134}\)

It remains only to note briefly two other recurrent types of appraisal. One of these concerns the effect of Jonson's satire on literary history. As with so much of the appraisal of this aspect of his dramatic art, the discussion consists of a multitude of tiny remarks. The usual assumption is that in theory and in practice Jonson's satire made a deep impression on English drama. Typical of the general statements one encounters is the assertion that while Jonson's satire did little to mitigate the abuses of his age, he did have a most satisfactory effect on the drama itself.\(^{135}\)

Occasionally, a critic will suggest in more exact detail the measure of Jonson's influence. For example, one critic believes that the dramaturgical norms of corrective satire were shaped chiefly by the "humourous comedy" or "comicall satyre" of Ben Jonson.\(^{136}\) Another critic, touching on the problem briefly, credits Jonson with several important innovations in satirical drama. It is he who perfects the use of satirical commentators

\(^{134}\)Ibid., p. 185.

\(^{135}\)Nicoll, op. cit., p. 147.

and clarifies their function of keeping alive the strong spirit of mockery in the audience. He perfected the dramatic construction by providing sharply outlined satiric portraits. He established more immediately and more effectively the satiric atmosphere. He also established more firmly the conventional ending for a satirical play, even though his own endings, by giving us an intensified scorn of human folly and futility, miss giving us that deep ethical satisfaction we expect from satirical drama.  

Finally, there is that criticism which attempts to take in at a glance the whole quality of the satire. A surprising number of these reactions are ones of reservation or even displeasure. Some of the dissatisfaction is a response to satire as a literary mode, but much also is excited by Jonson's own practice. One scholar examines satire as a special genre, and concedes that Jonson's work is exceptional in that its whole conception and framework are satirical and that in his comedy "he has left by far the completest satirical commentary we possess upon the Elizabethan age." However, the same critic diminishes Jonson's achievement by considering it of an inferior kind, satire being a relatively low form of literature embodying a relatively small element of truth and missing the "profounder reality in the 'golden world' of As You Like It." Much of the other comment centers on the fact that Jonson's satire presents a distorted and unacceptable vision of life. The occasional assertions that Jonson's satire and didacticism do not constitute an impediment to his

139 Ibid.
interpretation of life and manners\textsuperscript{140} can be easily matched by contentions that his satire, despite its vivid color and artistic consistency, is an imperfect image of life.\textsuperscript{141} Complaint is voiced that Jonson's satire does not have the genuine literary attitude, that it is too "blunt, downright, cauterizing."\textsuperscript{142} Even as sympathetic a critic as Harry Levin admits the satire is too harsh and points out that Jonson too often took it upon himself to dispense poetic justice, to regulate his comical satire by a more rigorous ethic than life itself ever provides, and that, consequently, the Jonsonian comedy invariably tends in the direction of an arraignment.\textsuperscript{143} Herford and Simpson also see the satire as bestowing, at best, a mixed benefit on Jonson's dramatic art. The propensity toward satire meant that his dramatic imagination would always be stirred by practically any man who had some knavery or folly in his composition, with the result that his good or simply blameless people are almost all without dramatic color. "But within the limits thus drawn by his flagellant scorn Jonson is genuinely creative,...\textsuperscript{144}

The difficulty of drawing many sound conclusions from a body of critical writing so bulky and so diverse is the first reaction of anyone who has done comprehensive reading of all this material. It is impossible

\textsuperscript{140}Thorp, op. cit., p. 73.
\textsuperscript{141}Stoll, op. cit., p. 145.
\textsuperscript{142}Leah Jonas, \textit{The Divine Science} (New York, 1940), p. 37.
\textsuperscript{143}Op. cit., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{144}Op. cit., I, 125.
to make a clear summary which would cover all or even many of the individual items. But one can, after a careful study of all this scholarship, offer a few cautious suggestions and can describe the impression made by the whole body of criticism. The proportion that this criticism occupies in the total appraisal of Jonson is unmistakable proof of its importance. The types of criticism discussed in this chapter are among the main approaches to the drama of Jonson—the problems they include are the predominant and unavoidable problems. Despite the sprawling nature of the discussion and the ponderous weight of the criticism, one finds a coherence of sorts. A sufficient amount of the criticism follows the same interests or seeks to solve the same problems so that we have a body of writing with direction and tradition. Consideration of the source, extent, and exact effect of such factors as realism, classicism, and satire divides and subdivides the vast area of criticism and imparts a structure to it. One recognizes in the various parts of this scholarship certain changes and modifications which have altered the traditional image of Jonson. The tempting but rather useless approach to Jonson's art through a quick and crude sense of his personality is less and less utilized. A tendency to see the plays as related to ideas of fundamental importance in the age—a more justified and fruitful approach than the earlier interpretation of Jonson as an isolated peculiarity—is a tradition that has been strengthened in the modern period. An even wider and more important change is the reluctance to label Jonson exclusively as a classicist, a realist, or a satirist, and this is symptomatic of a subtler and more intelligent weighing of the elements which comprise his art.
Despite the changes and the importance of the whole body of writing, certain negative qualities characterize it. Too often the individual discussions are appraisals of abstract qualities with little specific connection with the plays. Also the whole discussion is heavily weighed with a sense of the past. There is in this mass of critical commentary an unusual sense of continuity, not only within the modern period, but with the generations of previous criticism. The awareness of traditional criticism and the constant reference to it impose a caution and even a sluggishness which is not found in other areas of contemporary Jonson scholarship. There is, consequently, an impression of repetitiveness and conventionality about much of this writing. Many exceptions, of course, exist. One might mention L. C. Knights and Madeleine Doran as representative of those offering a fresh and perceptive view of the essential nature of Jonson's art. However, most of the criticism which struggles toward a new understanding of Jonson must work its way through a rather inert mass of conventional commentary, and often loses much force through the need to define and the need to defend. Valuable contributions are often found in this portion of the criticism, but as a body of scholarship it certainly does not generate the interest and the intellectual excitement that analysis of Jonson's craftsmanship does.
CHAPTER THREE

JONSON'S DRAMATIC METHOD

The second great division in the criticism which deals with Jonson's art in its entirety is that which discusses his craftsmanship or method. Although it is as extensive as the commentary described in the preceding chapter, which attempts to classify or define the art, it differs markedly in approach and in result. There is little of the repetition or almost imperceptible modifications of critical stands which made commentary on the general approaches so predictable and monotonous. Discussion of the craftsmanship has seen discovery of many new ideas and significant changes in conventional assumptions. Because they are less hampered by weighty traditions, evaluations of Jonson's method seem refreshingly and original. While novelty in itself is no criterion for the acceptance of a critical approach, other characteristics invite reliance. This type of criticism is very specific and detailed. There is far less discussion of abstract qualities or of the biographical or historical problems that hampered the type of criticism we have just considered. Instead, this scholarship concentrates on the work of Jonson, and searches for the exact nature of his art through a close, logical, and orderly reading of the plays themselves. As a result, we discover here many of the major contributions in modern Jonson scholarship. Compared to the rather diffuse criticism described in the last chapter, discussion of the method is concentrated in several clearly defined areas. Of these, Jonson's structure, his characterization, language,
and the general achievement or limitations of his art are most significant, and in this chapter we will consider the most important criticism under each of these headings.

1.

Comment on Jonson's plot and structure is a distinct and vigorous section in modern criticism.¹ Scholars are almost always commendatory, agreeing that "cunning and careful work"² is the chief characteristic of Jonson's plots. But, when critics attempt to define the specific characteristics, the discussion becomes more complicated, for there is little agreement as to what constitutes the plot or structure of a Jonson play. A sampling of the most typical comment reveals the great variety in interpretation. Muriel Bradbrook sees in Jonson's plays an attempt to define comedy through a series of experiments and a continuous stream of discussion upon them, with alternative definitions.³ She notes that instead of the

¹ Analysis of separate aspects of Jonson's method yields important results, but comment on his method in general is meager and forms only a slight tradition in modern criticism. The almost invariable comment found in the casual remarks on this topic is that Jonson started with his characters in mind and then devised a plot to suit and exhibit them. See Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 174 and Smith, op. cit.; p. 27. A more thoughtful suggestion is made by Elmer Stoll (op. cit., p. 149). He describes Jonson's method of composition as one of comic repetition and variation—a method which in the greatest plays reaches the perfection of music. Thoroughness, Stoll suggests, is also a salient characteristic of Jonson's method. The only lengthy study of Jonson's general method of composition is Percy Allen's Shakespeare, Jonson, and Wilkins as Borrowers (London, 1928), which ruthlessly and unacceptably reduces Jonson's method to shameless, wholesale plagiarism from Shakespeare.

² Stoll, op. cit., p. 144.

multiple fable with groups of characters which contrast each other, Jonson returned to a single complex intrigue. Simpson decides that Jonson's habitual complication of his plot by some countermovement which checked the progress of the action is the most important characteristic of his method. 4 Schelling finds the plots a basic fabric of contrivances and devices controlled by the cleverness and ingenuity of the characters. 5 The plots are marked by a struggle of wit—a play of mind against mind. For Harry Levin the motive of chicanery is most important, for this determines the strategy of any Jonson play; Levin also feels that the plot is given an external framework by the trials which appear in each play. 6 James Culp's comments also emphasize the central importance of the judgment scenes. 7 The judgment denouements of Jonson's plays, like those of mediaeval drama, are an integral part of the action because they are expected and referred to in the action preceding the final scene. Schamberg offers a broader and more comprehensive definition of Jonson's plot construction by suggesting as their three major characteristics: the intricacy of the intrigue, elongated scenes with a superabundance of dialogue, and a crowded stage. 8 Schamberg recognizes the careful planning in


the plots, but can discover no one inevitable denouement in a Jonson play.

These general notations suggest at once both the great interest in Jonson's structure and the lack of any critical focus. That the entire discussion is really still exploring a topic new in Jonson criticism is the impression also given by the extended evaluations. The assumptions and conclusions are diverse, and the criticism as a whole seems to be struggling toward basic definitions and a firm groundwork. The fact that we have here a critical tradition that is particularly modern is suggested by the first of the longer studies of Jonson's plots to appear in the modern period. As late as 1929, Edgar Knowlton is able to offer his essay as the first complete treatment of Jonson's plots.9 Knowlton believes that Jonson evolved a distinctively personal formula for a dramatic plot. Among the features which controlled most of his plays were the five-act division, his desire to assemble the characters in two or more scenes, his inclusion of character sketches, and the special problem presented by the fourth act. According to the formula that he worked out, the first two acts of the play presented exposition of character and situation; in the third act the business of the play got under way; and, most uniformly, in the fourth act there was some kind of solution to the intrigue of the characters. This solution, however, was neither satisfactory to the moral taste of the spectator nor forcible enough to end the activity of the leading characters. Some element in it incited further

activity to bring about a more palatable solution in the fifth act. The
reversal from the fourth to the fifth act involved a turning of the tables
with wickedness punished, but not invariably with severity. The formula
is not only effective, but clearly original. Knowlton is unable to find
anything quite like it in previous drama, and, therefore, feels it de-
serves recognition along with the formula of the humours as part of Jonson's
contribution to the English drama. The discussion leading to this con-
clusion would have gained through a more extensive presentation of the
thesis and through a more detailed examination of the individual plays,
but Knowlton's article is important just as it stands because it initiates
the evaluation of Jonson's plots in the modern period, because it con-
vincingly outlines the fundamental features of Jonson's structure, and be-
cause it provides a clear and simple explanation.

Far more comprehensive and far more contentious is Freda Townsend's
dissertation, a work almost equally balancing explanation and attack. ¹⁰
Miss Townsend is as determined to demolish the tradition that Jonson was
a classical dramatist as she is to advance her own views. She is es-
pecially irritated at that criticism based on Jonson's supposed adherence
to the unities. This mistaken view, Miss Townsend contends, obscures the
great importance of "digression and art" in his drama.¹¹ Jonson's plots
were constructed in the Renaissance mode; their complications are not only

¹⁰Freda L. Townsend, "Jonson and His Critics: A Study in the Classical
Fallacy" (unpubl. diss., Duke, 1944). (Adapted and published as Apologie
for Bartholomew Fayre New York.)

¹¹"Jonson and His Critics," p. 119.
along a single "horizontal" line as in Roman comedy, but were also "later-
al." Jonson's career as a dramatist, properly seen, shows an increasing ability to control the wide variety of material in his plays. Prodigality is the determining in his development as a playwright.

Within each of the three major groups formed by the comedies: the early, mature, and late, Miss Townsend discovers abundant evidence that Jonson strove for and perfected a complicated dramatic structure. Nothing is extraneous in a Jonson plot and only seems so if the fallacious standard of the classical unities is applied. Miss Townsend discovers a pattern of diversity in each of the early plays. Unity of action and straightforward progression are impossible to find in the two earliest works. Every Man in His Humour, properly understood, consists of a complex of intrigues with the major characters involved in the successive intrigues, none of which can be minimized without destroying the structure of the play. The traditional complaint that this play is loaded down with non-dramatic material which destroys the classical structure is mistaken, and can be so proven by an examination of Garrick's eighteenth-century revision. This version by omitting much of the original destroyed its structure and proves how essential for unity all of Jonson's devices are. Every Man out of His Humour continues and extends the method by which the diverse elements are woven together into a completely interrelated pattern, perfecting the "interlacing and intertwining technique." The structure of Cynthia's Revels also follows the pattern of a web woven of a wide variety of

12 Ibid., p. 167.
materials, here given unity by the framework of mythological elements. The work is not successful; for in this and all the earlier plays Jonson was still experimenting, and had yet to find the precise form that he was seeking. Only partial success is achieved in The Poetaster, the final play of Jonson's "journeyman" period. But, according to Miss Townsend's thesis, the play shows a significant interweaving of the threads of action, and the work embraces an impressive range of materials.

The structure of the great comedies reveals the special Jonsonian method of construction in its perfection. Each of the plays is completely unified, but the unity does not derive from any classical ideal or model. Regarding Volpone, for example, Miss Townsend contends that if the play is judged from the classical point of view, the underplot and the entire fifth act must be considered a violation of classical unity. But proof that the play is perfectly unified as it stands is easily seen when it is compared to the eighteenth-century "improvement." The omission of certain speeches and minor characters found in the original distorts the character of Volpone and blurs the unity of theme. Every part of Jonson's play is necessary to illuminate the theme of money and the power it confers; nothing in the original is extraneous. The Would-bee's connection with the theme is obvious. The fourth act crisis and apparent solution to the crisis give greater tension and variety to the entire play. The techniques which Jonson uses in Volpone are carried over into Epicoene, and again we find a play composed not of one action, but of a combination of actions. All elements in the play are superbly fused. The excellent structure of The Alchemist is unmistakable, but Miss Townsend insists that it is not unique in Jonson's
work. It is merely the most perfect example of the structural pattern found in all of his plays. It seems different from that found in the other plays because the movement of the play is slower and the progress of each separate intrigue is always patent. The central feature is neither the quarrelling nor the alchemist's laboratory, but the diversity of customer. "Contiguity, not simple unity, was the trademark of this art."^{13}

The complicated, intricate *Bartholomew Fair* is of central importance to this interpretation, for Miss Townsend regards this play with all its furious activity as the culmination of Jonson's method in structure. Any suggestion that his dramatic method regresses here is firmly rejected. The play shows no lapse in control, but is a further development of the technique used from his earliest plays. In *Bartholomew Fair* the static center is abandoned, and, as in *Every Man in His Humour*, a number of characters, all bent on interests of their own, interweave their various business with each other through mutual acquaintance and common locale. The six separate actions initiated at the start of the play are resolved in the last scene with a remarkably close interweaving of the various threads.

No classical model can be found, for the principle of simplicity and symmetry has given way to the principle of complexity. Unlike the Plautine and Terentian principle of one trick at a time, many things happen at once.

Whatever flaws Miss Townsend will concede in the final plays, debility in construction is not among them. Until the end of his career she finds the same tendency always present in Jonson's art: the desire to

^{13}Ibid., p. 197.
build varied materials into firm wholes. The Devil is an Ass shows Jonson's sustained excellence of construction in his new experiments and the skillful connections of the various lines of the intrigue. One result of his complicated plot is that the "consequences of any one act are never single, but are multiplied, and these further sub-divide into far-reaching consequences."14 In The Staple of News Jonson's method of handling and coalescing the allegorical and realistic portions of the play is proof of his persistently rich inventive power. The lack of a single action in the play is, Miss Townsend feels, substantiation of her general thesis. In The New Inn preoccupation with the "diversity of guests"15 is the guiding motive, and there is no carelessness of structure. Various interconnecting characters are used, and the intrigues are also joined at strategic points. The play represents Jonson's continuing experimentation in new potentialities of dramatic form, and it is impressive that even in days of illness he should continue to write in "large challenging patterns."16 While The Magnetic Lady contains no central intrigue, the numerous intrigues of the play are bound together by a number of characters. The structure is a little too mechanical, but the play is a ready illustration for Miss Townsend's point that to the end of his career Jonson remained an artist and innovator and that his forming power remained uppermost to the last.

In a summary which resembles an indictment, Miss Townsend accuses the traditional critics of postulating a classical standard and then condemning Jonson for a too close adherence, or blaming him for not being classical.

14 Ibid., p. 211. 15 Ibid., p. 216. 16 Ibid., p. 218.
enough. A far sounder judgment, she suggests, would come from an aware-
ness of Jonson's truly Elizabethan eclecticism, and his great powers of
assimilation. A glaring disregard of classical structure is the real key
to Jonson's concept of dramatic structure. The loom rather than the line
became the pattern he worked by, and this is apparent from the earliest
plays. The "web" of Jonson's dramatic construction finds its culmination
in Bartholomew Fair, where the line has completely disappeared. "Manifold,
multiplex, multiform—these are the characteristics of Jonson's art." 17

In this interesting, overwrought study the angry, shrill tone dis-
tracts from much useful and suggestive content. Miss Townsend's thesis
would have been more impressively developed if she had been less intent on
correcting two centuries of Jonson criticism. As it stands, her thesis is
more convincing in parts than in whole. The insistence on the unity of
Volpone coincides with one of the major critical decisions about that play.
The individual plays, especially the earlier ones, sustain the multiplicity
theory better than does the entire canon. As Miss Townsend continues to
run the rest of the plays through her special gauntlet, the interpretation
seems increasingly automatic, and the conclusions less convincing. Miss
Townsend's views have made little impression of Jonson criticism, and her
stand as the lone and valient rebel against the "classical fallacy" is less
rare than she seems to believe. As the research for this study shows, mini-
mizing the importance of classicism in Jonson's art is rather a commonplace.
Only the persistently angry tone in this dissertation imparts a spurious

17 Ibid., p. 229.
note of literary radicalism.

Effie Hunt examines the same evidence as Miss Townsend, but arrives at a quite different conclusion about Jonson's structure. Miss Townsend had claimed that the linear structure of the plays disappeared by the time of *Bartholomew Fair*. Miss Hunt, after a laborious study of all the plays, concludes that the linear structure is to be found in each of them and that in this Jonson was clearly following classical theory and precedent. She theorizes that Jonson always utilized a five-act structure. In his formula the first act introduced the important persons, the second act showed the real beginning of the action, the third contained the complications of the argument, the fourth brought on the catastrophe, and the fifth act distributed rewards and punishments. Jonson's theory of dramatic composition does not support the belief that he had a greater interest in character than in plot, but it does show an "awareness of classical ideals and techniques of construction." Jonson believed a plot should have unity and credibility, that it should build gradually to a high point, and that it should conclude with a complete alteration or reversal.

Most of Miss Hunt's dissertation is a thorough and eventually relentless pursuit of evidence of the five-act structure in each of the plays.


19 Robert Van A. Bauer discusses the structure of Jonson's plays at length in his "The Use of Humours in Comedy by Ben Jonson and Contemporaries" (unpubl. diss., Illinois, 1947). He is in substantial agreement with every important idea introduced by Miss Hunt (See pp. 96-129).

20 Hunt, op. cit., p. 17.
She has no difficulty in finding the proof she requires, and the argument becomes formidable and unassailable. But since the procedure is unchanging for each analysis and the terminology always rather oppressively technical, the reader welcomes the variety of any additional comment and is especially impressed with the appraisal of those plays that have troubled other critics searching for structural unity. For example, Miss Hunt finds that *Every Man in His Humour*, not only uses the five-act structure in both versions, but is an example also of morality structure—a combination characterizing many of the succeeding plays. Miss Hunt easily discerns an effective structure in *Cynthia's Revels*. "Jonson's 'plot' may have escaped most of his critics, but the elements are there, and they fit exactly into the structural plan he learned in grammar school."21 In fact, the play follows the formula so closely that Miss Hunt accepts it as one of the better constructed of the early plays. *The Poetaster*, however, when measured by Miss Hunt's standard, is the worst constructed play of the group written before 1603. The difference from the other work is so profound, that the author suggests that here Jonson may have been piecing together two old plays he had on hand or was rewriting an old one.

Examination of the plays written between 1603 and 1611 shows an almost flawless use of the five-act structure. *Sejanus* is a marked constructive advance over the comical satires. Because so many other critics complain of the faulty structure of *Volpone*, Miss Hunt's analysis is of special interest. She sees the play as clearly following the formula through Act

III. But from this point on there is a slight deviation. While an event at the end of Act IV prepares for the action in Act V, the construction of the play does not lead inevitably to a reversal and a conclusion as in the preceding plays. Also, Jonson gives in to his inclination to crowd too much into his final acts, and Act V contains not only the conclusion itself, but the circumstances leading to it. In *Epicoene* Jonson's constructive skill reaches new heights, especially in Act I. The most important event, structurally, is the marriage of Morose to Epicoene. The play is a comedy of intrigue constructed in the traditional manner. The *Alchemist* falls almost effortlessly in the tripartite division: protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe, but it places greater emphasis on the action of Act IV than did most of the other plays. The play is not only arranged according to the Terentian formula, but the structure also resembles that of the morality; it is another of Jonson's attempts to fit a moral theme into the Terentian structure. *Catiline*, like *Sejanus*, shows every evidence of being constructed according to the traditional formula, and is further proof that Jonson knew and practiced the rules. Both tragedies are more carefully constructed according to the five-act formula than the early comedies.

Miss Hunt's appraisal of the final plays contradicts the criticism which sees a headlong rush toward complete artistic disintegration, beginning with *Bartholomew Fair*. Miss Hunt discovers in the final plays a strong control over structure until the last. She finds a complete and clear structure in *Bartholomew Fair*, which differs from the early humour plays only in that Jonson has now become more adept at handling a
complicated plot within the traditional five-act structure. A study of the way in which Jonson arranged the appearances of the characters shows that he wrote a well-ordered, proportionate play representing his own version of Terentian structure. *The Devil is an Ass* is a morality play brought up to date and one in which Jonson combined morality figures with intrigue and allegory which fits it into the Terentian pattern. *The Staple of News* adapts and uses material found in the masques, and intends the Pecunia plot as the main one. Although the plot of *The New Inn* is overshadowed by the exposition of ideas on love and valor, it shows little evidence of mental decay. The play is organized around the debate between ideal and profane love. A careful study of *The Magnetic Lady* reveals most of the structural techniques prevalent in Jonson's comedies throughout his career.

The two remaining significant comments on the structure of the plays, those of Ray L. Heffner, Jr. and Wallace A. Bacon, develop ideas as distant from each other as both are distant from the critical approaches so far considered. Both exhibit general similarities in approach, however. Neither examines the problem according to any traditional standard. Instead each assumes that the Jonsonian structure is a unique thing, and each attempts to locate the source of the uniqueness and thus a definition of the structure.

Heffner's essay drifts about through a number of vague ideas. He is


convinced that Jonson achieved unity without plot, but, as Eliot phrased it, through a "unity of inspiration," a concept Heffner proposes to discover by analyzing the dramatic devices by which it is attained. He finds that the essential unity of Jonson's comedy is thematic and comes, not through a fully developed plot, but through fantastic comic conceits and exaggeration of human folly to which the realistic characters and incidents have reference. This structural technique is found most clearly in *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair*. *Epicoene* consists of a number of separated but related actions, each being a trick played on a dupe and each proceeding by carefully marked stages, with a different major action dominating each act except the first. The thematic structure of the play is the ridiculous situation in which Morose finds himself as a combatant in the war of the sexes and as a participant in the debate of the active versus the quiet life. The other episodes in the play, like mirrors, reflect various aspects of this central situation and extend its significance.

Essentially, the play is an exploration of the themes implicit in the central comic conceit of a noise-hating man married to a noisy woman. In *Bartholomew Fair* five or six actions seem to be ripening simultaneously, and the play has a thematic structure much like that of *Epicoene*. Again Jonson is not arguing a thesis, but investigating diverse aspects of a central problem, and various parts of the action mirror one another. The central theme is the problem of what "warrant" men have, or pretend to have, for their actions, and consequently, the most important character is Troubleall with his demands for a warrant for all in Act IV. He serves as a most significant unifying device in the play, and Jonson's warning
seems to be that even the best of warrants is not enough to insure the right actions.

Heffner concludes that in such grand comic conceits as these does Jonson's "unity of inspiration" reside, "for in them the interplay of realistic satire and fantastic caricature is most highly concentrated, and from them it does truly 'radiate into plot and personages alike.'"\(^{24}\) The conclusion, however, is not convincing in terms of this essay. His views are presented with considerable verve and assurance, but the negligible examination of two plays is insufficient proof of such a sweeping thesis. The interchangeability of such terms as "plot," "structure," and "theme" confuse, and one is always troubled with the reservation that if Jonson's plots are insignificant, we must include the dramatist himself among those who are mistaken about the careful, consistent, and continuous nature of his craftsmanship.

Bacon's article is offered as a compromise for those who search for unity and those who seek variety in Jonson's plots. He tries to solve the problem by developing a suggestion Jonson himself makes in his last comedy, the notion of the magnetic field. Jonsonian drama, Bacon says, takes place in the relation between the individual character and the environment. For various reasons, not one of the early comedies before Volpone possesses a successful magnetic center. Volpone is the first play in which Jonson successfully manages to relate character and environment in such a way that they "interact and interdetermine structure."\(^{25}\) The discussion of this

\(^{24}\)Heffner, p. 96.

\(^{25}\)Bacon, p. 139.
central point is confused since it transpires that both setting and character can serve as the magnetic center, and Bacon designates the play as the first in which a single character acts as the center. "Volpone himself is in a very real way the environment in which all the other characters are permitted to operate." The unity of theme is expressed through unity of environment as determined by the magnetic center. Bacon evades the problem of the so-called extraneous sub-plot by saying that the Would-be action makes little difference in estimating the structural success of the play. In Epicoene also, he assures us, plot and environment, as well as the action, coalesce in a remarkably unified structure, with the London scene presumably acting as a magnetic center and giving solidity to the satire. The Alchemist is important because it reveals the direction Jonson was travelling all along. Its prime virtue is that it localizes and specifies environment. The occupants of the house act as a magnetic center, and, in the largest sense, character and environment are made to work together. This is what Jonson needed always, an environment which by its nature will suggest both characters and action—an environment against which and through which the satire can operate effectively. Bartholomew Fair is the fullest, finest, most coherent of his plays and a culmination of his art. The Fair is the magnetic center throughout and a stimulus very congenial to Jonson's method of workmanship. As far as the magnetic centers of the rest of the plays are concerned, they are so negligently developed that not one of them can be said to possess unity.

There is too great a distance between Bacon's theory and the analysis

26 Ibid., p. 135.
he provides. The theory, which is all-inclusive and promising, results in little more than a superficial investigation. Not only is there a too narrow focussing on one aspect of plot, but two-thirds of the plays have to be discarded because they do not fit into the theory. While the terminology has a certain novelty, the interpretation is quite conventional and unsuccessful.

It is difficult for the non-specialist to judge fairly the modern discussion of Jonson's structure, or even, when it becomes especially technical, to follow it very clearly. When one contemplates the pattern of criticism, in which the major theories are developed independently of each other and are presented with such a dogmatic and often extravagant manner, it is tempting to dismiss it all as a curious little by-path in modern Jonson studies. To do so would be a mistake. The criticism is significant for more than the extreme view and the atmosphere of dissent. It has been through this restless, exploratory scholarship that the serious appraisal of Jonson's structure has been initiated. This criticism establishes the existence of a peculiarly Jonsonian plot; it encourages critics to isolate and define it as well as to determine its function in Jonsonian comedy. If the critical decisions have been inconclusive, the many attempts described here help to introduce and nourish a scholarly tradition of prime importance.

2.

While the scholarship on the structure of Jonson's plays seems to be
developing toward a tradition, that on his characterization shows strong links with many well established points of view. A good deal of the criticism is in the form of brief statements which proclaim one of the familiar attitudes toward this phase of Jonson's art. But the contemporary period has seen a significant modification of the traditions and thus makes an important advance. Modern scholarship has provided a much sounder knowledge of Jonson's purpose and technique in humour characterization; it has accepted his total achievement in characterization with greater sympathy and admiration. A more thorough awareness of what Jonson achieved in character types and individuals is also part of the contribution of this whole division of scholarship. The discussion is a compact and coherent one, composed of a number of clearly distinguished critical interests and problems. The commentary of greatest importance, which will be described in this section, is that dealing with the humours theory and practice, studies of the characters as groups, types, or individuals, and the evaluation of his achievement as a whole.

The most extensive and essential commentary on the influences on Jonson's characterization is that describing the theory and practice of the humours. While reference to the humours is probably the most frequent

Comment on one other source of influence might be briefly described. There is a small body of criticism which concerns Jonson's debt to the kind of character writing so popular in the seventeenth century. There is general agreement that the influence is never strong enough to cast a shadow on Jonson's fundamental originality. See W. C. Paylor, ed., The Overburian Characters (Oxford, 1936), p. x and Wendell Clausen, "The Beginnings of English Character Writing in the Early Seventeenth Century," PQ, XXV (January, 1946), 32-45. Gwendolen Murphy sees the influence of character writing as the possible reason for the undramatic nature of such plays as Every Man out of His Humour, Cynthia's Revels, and The Magnetic Lady. (See A Cabinet of Characters [London, 1925], p. xx.) The most specific and valuable
item in all of Jonson criticism, the merits of the commentary vary widely. Much of the brief space allotted to Jonson in the general surveys of literature and drama is usurped by a flat description of the four elements, the four humours, and pertinent quotations from Jonson's prologue to Every Man out of His Humour, with the implication that this is all that need be said about Jonson's method of characterization. Certain critics assume that the humours are to be found everywhere in his comedy and that all of his work to a greater or lesser degree contains this element. But a contrary tendency to minimize the importance of the humours is the most significant development in this incidental criticism. Contemporary scholars remind us that the use of humours is only one of the means, and not even the basic one, in Jonson's conception of comedy. "No theory of humours could account for Jonson's best plays or the best characters in them." One of the most recent critics of Jonson restricts the problem to Every Man out of His Humour. By the time of The Poetaster, this critic suggests, the humours had begun to wane, and, if applied insistently to the later plays can result only in misunderstanding. Another critic seems to discard the humours theory entirely, feeling sure that Jonson considered it criticism of the influence is Rosalie C. Elliott's "Character Writing and its Influence on the Drama of Ben Jonson" (unpubl. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1935).


nothing more than a "convenient metaphor."\textsuperscript{32} When the discussion reaches this stage, the critic ceases to provide an acceptable solution to the problem, and reveals only his understandable boredom with a cumbersome, tedious topic—-a boredom shared by anyone who has done much reading in the repetitive, deadly, general discussions of the topic. But to omit any consideration of the humours theory, while it may lighten and facilitate a discussion of the characterization, is to evade a topic of central importance in understanding that characterization.

The importance of the subject and a revelation of its complexity, not hinted at in the brief accounts, are emphasized in the two long, excellent analyses produced by Henry L. Snuggs\textsuperscript{33} and Robert Bauer. Both approach the subject historically, and both provide a sound basis for appraising Jonson's achievement. Snuggs examines the definition and development of the humourous character between the years 1596 and 1642, when Jonson's work was of central importance. Snuggs' discussion of such unmistakable literary influences on humour characterization as the principle of decorum and the method of Theophrastus is especially helpful as is the history he sketches of the long evolution of the concept of humour itself. As developed by Jonson, the humour character is not simply any deep-seated mood or passion; but one which shows man as absurd, foolish, odd, eccentric, or incongruous—any of which makes him a fit object of satiric comedy. The definition of Jonson rules out any idea of affectation, but the strict

\textsuperscript{32}Levin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{33}Henry L. Snuggs, "The Humourous Character in English Comedy, 1596-1642" (unpubl. diss., Duke, 1934).
theory described in Every Man out of His Humour is by no means adhered to in all the humourous characters, some of whom are clearly affectations. The definition was intended only to apply to the foremost class of humours—the mastering bias.

All the preliminary discussion is highly interesting, but more important is the lengthy and careful analysis of the humour characters in the plays. The early comedies prove that Jonson did not begin his dramatic career with the theory of the humours, and, despite its title, not all the people in Every Man in His Humour are humours. The full-fledged application of the theory begins only with Every Man out of His Humour, which, although by no means Jonson's best comedy, is, from the viewpoint of humour characters, his most outstanding production. There are a greater number of diversified humours than in any other comedy based on the theory, and the devices by which they are put out of their humours are clever and ingenious. If judged as a play, however, the work is "tiresome" and "demonstrates that the humour theory carried out completely, does not conduce to the best dramatic art."\textsuperscript{34} The failure of Cynthia's Revels is also ascribed to the extreme application of the humours theory, which is here not a useful servant but a bad master.

The humours are present in the remaining plays but never with the same overwhelming force. The Poetaster, a comedy of personal satire, has only traces of humours in many characters. A marked departure from the early method is found in Volpone. There is no mechanical application of the humours, and Volpone's cure is a natural and logical outcome of the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 127.
whole action. Also, since most of the characters are "decidedly more
criminal than foolish," the play does not fulfill the promise made in
the prologue to Every Man in His Humour to deal with follies instead of
with crimes. From the humourous viewpoint, Politic, the humour of credi-
bility, and his wife, the woman of affected learning, are the best creations.
Epicoene is important not only for exhibiting such individual humours of
social aspiration as the gulls, Day and LaFoole, and the pretentious
learned ladies in the Collegiates, but also it marks a return to the treat-
ment of humours as in Every Man in His Humour and Every Man out of His
Humour. As in the earlier plays the intriguers prove successful in duping
the humours and come through unscathed themselves. The play also returns
to the principle that "acuteness and balance of intellect should be para-
mount over the obliquities of intellect which the humours imply." The
Alchemist proves that the humourous character, when not mechanically used,
can produce great comedy. As in all the great plays the characters are
more vitalized and are, therefore, greater creations; moreover, they are
more integrally a part of a unified action. The humours which arise out of
avarice, the underlying motif, are eccentricities and social humours rather
than deep psychological biases. Modification is also clearly apparent in
Bartholomew Fair, where even Cokes, the most finished picture of the country
gull, is a more complex and richer version of the type than the earlier
Stephen. Waspe, Knockem, Quarlous, and Ursula all show the influence of
the theory, but are too individualized to be called humours.

Although Snuggs views the last comedies as a degeneration in Jonson's

dramatic art, he is able to find an occasional outstanding example of 
humour characterization. Fitzdottrell, for example, the central and 
best delineated character in The Devil is an Ass, is "unquestionably one 
of Jonson's immortal humourists."\(^{37}\) No humour character in The Staple of 
News approaches him. Most humourists in this play are but faintly por-
trayed likenesses of previous Jonsonian characters. The Magnetic Lady 
announces a definite program of humours, but most of the characters are 
either repetitions of types who have already appeared in Jonson's comedies 
or fraudulent professional men having no special eccentricity.

Robert Van A Bauer also makes a painstaking and rewarding study of 
several aspects of the humours. Like Snuggs, he refuses to accept the easy-
going explanation provided by the literary histories. He complains that 
no definition of the humours is comprehensive and valid enough to describe 
all of Jonson's work, nor is there any satisfactory answer to the problem 
of Jonson's adherence to a special humour theory throughout his career. 
Bauer himself is interested in the introduction and the progression of the 
humour technique in the sequence of Jonson's plays. He approaches the 
problem from a number of angles, including a study of the use of the word 
in the plays. In Every Man in His Humour so many of the various con-
temporary meanings of the word occur that it seems impossible to say that 
Jonson was either limiting or specializing the word's meaning. Frequency 
of use is also characteristic of Every Man out of His Humour, but here 
Jonson makes a careful attempt to relate the word to its original physio-
logical meaning. The most important fact about the use of the word in this

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 165.
play is the extraordinary emphasis Jonson places upon it. He does not allow his audience to forget that it is the humours of these characters which make them ridiculous. Although still prominent, the word is less often used in the next two plays. In *Cynthia's Revels* the word is chiefly used to denote the fashionable vanities and relatively petty stupidities. When the word occurs in *The Poetaster*, it can denote any one of several meanings, which indicates that Jonson was less concerned with restricting it to a specific meaning. The use of the word in the rest of the plays is infrequent and vague. Not until *The Magnetic Lady* does there appear to be a revived interest in the word.

Commentary on the actual humour characters is a most valuable feature of this study. Bauer insists that in no one of Jonson's comedies can every character be assigned a humour. Those who do the gulling, keep the action moving, or exhibit the humours of others very rarely have humours themselves. In the first humour play only Kitely, Downright, Stephen and Matthew can be considered humour characters. In *Every Man out of His Humour*, where Jonson forces us constantly to think of his characters as humours and not as people, he uses humours more consistently than in any other of his comedies excepting *Cynthia's Revels*. In the great comedies the attack on one large folly instead of a host of minor ones gave scope for individualizing the characters. Therefore, the characters of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* are more intense than those of the earlier comedies and are less dependent upon a humour. The characters of *Bartholomew Fair* are too close to life to be called humours. Bauer's inevitable conclusion is that by 1605 Jonson had virtually abandoned the plans for the new kind of
comedy he had experimented with in *Every Man in His Humour* and *Cynthia's Revels*. He seemed to realize when he resumed comedy in *Volpone* that there was no reason to continue his concentration on humours, and from that point one he was no longer concerned with the galleries of "anatomized" vices and follies. The human follies, once labelled humours, became "manners of men."\(^{38}\)

Both of these studies represent solid, valuable contributions to modern Jonson criticism. Considering the rather forbidding nature of the problem, entangled as it is with matters of semantics, medical, and literary history, both provide surprisingly enjoyable reading. The mass of incidental information and the involved historical background come through clearly. Problems are distinguished, evaluations of the exact weight and importance of the humours theory are made, and the progression of this factor in the body of the work is so authoritatively described that the reader can, with accuracy and assurance, measure and evaluate the other commentary on the humours.

One durable theme connected with the humours concerns the acceptability of Jonson's characterization as a reliable report on credible human behavior. Reaction differs sharply. Those who approve of Jonson's method see the humours concept as a natural development of the idea that a defect of character is innate in man.\(^{39}\) They insist that since the humours elaborate activities usually centered around love or the gaining of sustenance,


they are neither unique nor peculiar.\textsuperscript{40} It is said that Jonson's humour comedy shows a firm grasp of the notion of eccentricity, which, in turn, implies the measurement of everyone against a natural norm.\textsuperscript{41} In essence, this body of critics sees nothing startling in the humour technique, which is "simply an extension of the typical treatment of character essential to social comedy, where...exaggerated human weaknesses are...subjected to the standard of implied idealism."\textsuperscript{42}

This frequently expressed approval neither obliterates nor obscures the hostile response. Jonson is scolded for imposing a specialized and distorted meaning on the humour concept.\textsuperscript{43} The humour method he uses, it is suggested, reveals only the severely limited imagination of the dramatist, being a mechanical device and precisely the recipe one would expect his powerful brain to evolve as infallible in the manufacture of comedies.\textsuperscript{44} The humour theory itself is said to petrify character,\textsuperscript{45} and results in hostile, cruel laughter.\textsuperscript{46} But the most serious and most popular charges are that Jonson's characters are not true to life because they represent

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Florence C. Hearn, "A Theory of Comedy Illustrated from English Renaissance Comedies," Bulletin of Vanderbilt University, XXXIV (August, 1934), 38-39.}
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Potts, p. 24.}
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Perry, op. cit., p. 114.}
\textsuperscript{43}\textit{H. Norman Hurst, Four Elements in Literature (London, 1936), p. 166.}
\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Bridges-Adams, op. cit., p. 245.}
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Smith, op. cit., p. 27.}
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Crump, op. cit., p. 104.}
only one quality,\textsuperscript{47} are oversimplified and artificial,\textsuperscript{48} and are little more than personifications of abstract qualities.\textsuperscript{49}

Much evaluation of Jonson's characters is made without reference to the theory of the humours or with only incidental reference to it. The most important conclusion to be deduced from this mass of appraisal is that the possibility of a really rewarding study increases with the more concentrated and specialized the scrutiny. Attempts to include all aspects of Jonson's method of characterization seem automatically doomed to attenuated, sketchy results. The thesis of Marguerite Hays, for example, is a study proposing to tell us everything about Jonson's characterization, but it ends by telling us little of value and nothing original.\textsuperscript{50} We encounter here no analysis, but rather a number of broad judgments on such matters only loosely connected with the method of characterization as Jonson's moral bias, his theories of comedy and satire, and his predilection for exaggeration. Her appraisal also reviews much over-familiar material on the humour theory. The defects Miss Hays finds in the characterization are the predictable ones: the lack of individuality, the revulsion the characters engender, the lack of fidelity to life. The insipid female characters reveal little knowledge of human nature because Jonson never understands the


\textsuperscript{48}John W. Draper, The Humours & Shakespeare's Characters (Durham, 1945), p. 94.

\textsuperscript{49}Walley and Wilson, op. cit., p. 14.

\textsuperscript{50}Marguerite Hays, "The Characterization in Ben Jonson's Comedies" (unpubl. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1930).
subtleties and complexities of human nature. The series of character sketches which conclude this study are little more than a compendium of familiar, stale judgments. The whole work is a convenient review of hostile Jonson criticism; it serves no other purpose in Jonson studies.

Of the specialized studies, Zella M. Shy's discussion of Jonson's women characters is the only thoroughly disappointing one. Her thesis belies its title by quickly veering away from any valid criticism toward a series of extended impressionistic jottings. The major idea advanced is that Jonson's women are not only more "human" than his male creations, but that they escape from the humour trammel, and, as a result of Jonson's neglect, the ladies spring into a life of their own. The theory has the attraction of whimsicality, but it is untenable; not a single contention offered here can be seriously accepted. Of far greater critical value are those studies which isolate and scrutinize certain types of character. Jonson's thorough knowledge and grasp of such a professional type as the Jacobean doctor are noted by MacLeod Yearsley and Herbert Silvette. The latter, after many citations from the plays, concludes admiringly, that "in point of erudition" Shakespeare cannot be said to compete with Jonson. Also highly approving is the comment of Robert Reed, who contemplates the vast range of eccentric personalities to be found in the


52MacLeod Yearsley, Doctors in Elizabethan Drama (London, 1933), p. 16.

plays. Reed concludes that "never again, until the time of Dickens, did an author reproduce such an unforgettable ensemblage of eccentrics, rogues, and prospective cutthroats."\(^{54}\)

Those studies which view the character types as part of an historical development also tend to stress his innate skill as well as historical importance. Mueschke's study of the wits and the would-bees in Jonson's comedy\(^{55}\) proves his literary importance as the first to portray the gull with sufficient adroitness and vigor for contemporary imitation. Jonson's habitual juxtaposition of true and false wits foreshadows the technique of Restoration drama. Juxtaposition and stratification of the wits according to intelligence is the secret of Jonson's influence. His work anticipates the social philosophy, character types, and dramatic principles out of which the comedy of manners was moulded. Perkinson finds Jonson historically important for inventing the fop in his drama as a variation on the classical gull.\(^{56}\) Epicoene's Amorous La Foole is as complete a fop as any of the multiple creations of the Restoration. The "soul of the Restoration type...animates this altogether foolish knight."\(^{57}\)

Edward Vandiver surveys the development of the parasite in English drama, and decides that Jonson's work culminated the tradition. Sejanus,


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 140.
he decides, belongs partially to the parasite class because of his fawning nature, his contempt for inferiors, and his failure to display strength in a crisis. Jonson's shaping of historical material and inclusion of typical traits results in Sejanus being the most towering and impressive historical parasite in Elizabethan tragedy, "a wonderful dramatic creation, which one almost fears to call a parasite lest a mechanical puppet be suggested." Of Jonson's other characters of this kind, Mosca is considered one of the most important parasites in Elizabethan drama and represents a complete break with the Plautine and Terentian tradition, and Polish in _The Magnetic Lady_ is labelled as the first female parasite in Elizabethan drama.

Of the groups drawn from actual seventeenth-century life, Jonson's handling of the Puritan has attracted most comment. The prominence and acidity of his portraits has evoked an occasional note of protest, but the general critical response remains one of amused approval. Among the critics who investigate the problem, two should be noted. Myers considers Jonson the Elizabethan dramatist who most persistently and cleverly unmasked the Puritans as rascals. Aggressive zeal typifies all of Jonson's Puritans, and zealousness, for him, seems synonymous with Puritanism. Their


59 Ibid., p. 179.

60 See, for example, Learned, op. cit., p. 16.

61 Aaron M. Myers, Representation and Misrepresentation of the Puritan in Elizabethan Drama (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 133.
low social class and ignorance are also points emphasized. Myers thinks that the satire on Puritan hypocrisy is especially virulent and unjust. The early plays were a preliminary study giving him a detailed knowledge of the Puritans and showing a keen penetration of their weaknesses. "In these and other plays Jonson brought to perfection a way of treating characters, themes, and circumstances, differing, in several particulars, from that which had up to this time been the practice of the dramatists." 62 Holden's more recent study would support the Myer conclusion, and adds that Jonson's characters are "in complexity and sharpness of delineation" a great advance over the attempts which had been made earlier. 63 Busy reflects the ultimate exaggeration of the Puritan manners, and in his fight with the puppets reviews all of the old conflicts between the Puritans and the drama.

The final type of criticism which will be considered is that evaluation of the total quality or achievement in characterization. There is little hesitation or ambiguity here; most critics are vociferous in their disappointment or admiration. The attitudes, although briefly expressed, serve as a distillation of the criticism so far considered and provide at a glance a quick, powerful summary of one important phase of Jonson's modern literary reputation. Adverse criticism abounds in modern scholarship and has the advantage of concentration on and reiteration of a single, powerful complaint: the lack of credibility or humanity in Jonson's

62 Ibid., p. 133.

characters. The contemptuous key-word for Jonson's characters is "flat," and it is pointed out that all of them sound monotonously alike, that in his fixed, narrow characterization he is inferior to other contemporary playwrights, that his single-faceted personages are incapable of growth, and that they are caricatures. It is charged that the conflicts are external, never within the character. The flatness of the characters arises, one scholar suggests, from Jonson's insistence on the dominant trait and his failure to include a necessary "inconsistency" and the "warmth and the soft play of life." Others are disturbed by Jonson's apparent attitude of aloof contempt toward his own creations.

The admirers and defenders of Jonson's characterization may be less numerous, but they are equally insistent; and their side of the question is presented more effectively. There is more reliance on analysis than on a mere repetition of a rigid critical position. There is far more variety in approach and more willingness to prove the point in terms of specific characters and types. A special advantage that the favorable criticism


65Legouis, op. cit., p. 13.

66Bridges-Adams, op. cit., p. 242; Learned, op. cit., p. 19.


68Smith, op. cit., p. 139; TLS, July 30, 1925, p. 501.


enjoys is that it is led by the most prestigious and persuasive of all the modern critics of Jonson. T. S. Eliot accepts Jonson's characters, as those of all the greatest drama, as drawn in positive and simple outline. Despite his humours theory, Jonson was not preoccupied with types. Even in the early plays the humour is not a type, "but a simplified and somewhat distorted individual with a typical mania." 71 In the later work "humour" does not account for the total effect produced. With Volpone, for example, "the life of the character is inescapable from the life of the drama." 72 Jonson shows recognizable differences from Shakespeare, in whom characters gain their effect through the way in which they act upon one another. In Jonson the effect comes from the way in which the characters fit in with each other. Shakespeare's characters differ because of his susceptibility to a greater range of emotion and emotion deeper and more obscure, but "his characters are no more 'alive' than are the characters of Jonson." 73

Other critics are also intent on dispelling hostile attitudes toward the characterization. Stoll is especially opposed to the "romantic fallacy" according to which Jonson does "not present characters, but caricatures, not real people but single traits or abstractions." 74 Stoll insists that the dramatist's purpose was not analysis or schematization of human nature, but a rationalization and a simplification of it, and, if sometimes the framework is a little too apparent or the proportions too lopsided, the character is generally both intelligible and dramatic and the motivation

71 Op. cit., p. 132. 72 Ibid., p. 133. 73 Ibid., p. 137.
74 Elmer Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), p. 98.
perfect. If there are no "mysterious depths" in Jonson's characters, "there are at any rate no muddled ones." His psychology is truer and more consistent than that of most Elizabethans and it is more dramati
cally presented. Unlike Shakespeare's, Jonson's characters do not arouse affection or sympathy, but they do possess "force, point, subtlety" despite all their limitations.

Discussion of Jonson's language is not only particularly acute and rewarding, but, like the criticism of his structure, seems particularly modern.

75 Ibid., p. 98. 76 Ibid., p. 110.

Additional favorable comment points out that Jonson's characters are completely realized and drawn with an unerring hand and that his people are the proper ones for critical satiric comedy (Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 150). His method is defined as artistic, clear, and one which offers a simple formula for achieving unity in characterization. His technique, it is said, is not mechanical; Jonson carefully brings out individual traits and produces types at once universal and particular (Paul R. Lieder and others, edd. British Drama [Boston, 1929], p. 73). H. R. Hays ("Satire and Identification: An Introduction to Ben Jonson," Kenyon Review, XIX [Spring, 1957], 267-283) places the blame not on the characters, but on modern readers who are unable or unwilling to identify themselves with the satirized personages. Jonson is universal in his dramatization of basic, unworthy human traits. That his characters resemble puppets is a criticism of satire itself, not of Jonson. His method of characterization has the sanction of ancient precedence, and the span and variety of his characters are impressive.

Criticism which takes a middle ground seldom produces an acceptable compromise or synthesis, instead it presents a list which contrasts the ineffective and attractive points and lets it go at that. The automatic resolution of the problem according to this critical approach is that Jonson's character portrayal is indeed thin and abstract but overlaid with a counterbalance of realistic detail. See John B. Moore, The Comic and the Realistic in English Drama (Chicago, 1925), p. 205; Schelling, op. cit., p. 191; Thorndike, English Drama, p. 188; Edgar Jonson, ed. A Treasury of Satire (New York, 1945), p. 182; Parks and Beatty, op. cit., p. 618; N. Scarlyn Wilson, European Drama (London, 1937), pp. 53-54.
Aside from Dryden's brief comments, there is no previous tradition to be weighed, accepted, or discarded. This blank in the critical picture has been filled in rapidly and comprehensively in the modern period. The individual studies are each important; their total contribution is a full and precise understanding of this aspect of Jonson's art. Since almost no comment exists among the briefer, generalized type of criticism, a graphic proof of the lack of any previous tradition, one may proceed immediately to that extended and significant criticism which makes up this area of modern Jonson studies.

The basic characteristics of Jonson's language have been described in two very reliable studies. Neumann's article, a broad survey of the subject, includes comment on most aspects of the language—Jonson's linguistic interests, his opinions on the language of his day, and his own practice. 78 Jonson, this critic points out, was writing during a period of great vocabulary growth, and helped greatly to modernize and standardize the language. Although he had scant knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and Middle English etymology, the comments he makes on them do contain the germ of historical grammar and the awareness that language is in a state of change. His own language was not Latinate; he was keenly aware of the differences between the two languages and usually preferred English. His use of English dialects is remarkably wide and thorough, and his work is an important reservoir of the various occupational dialects of Jacobean society. When he theorizes on language, Jonson is tentative and liberal.

He had a wholesome dislike for artificiality of phrase and diction, feeling that plain language was best and that the ultimate arbiter was custom.

Many of Neumann's general conclusions are reaffirmed in the thorough analysis of Pennanen. For example, statistics on Jonson's classical borrowing prove that he was far from Latinate. Further qualification of the view that he was a classicist is deduced from Jonson's study of and use of English dialects. His dialogue reproduces genuine dialect with almost scholarly accuracy, in which respect he is unique among his contemporaries. A preference for native English words is shown in the very moderate number of foreign terms that occur in Jonson's plays. It seems clear that most of the foreign words he does use were never intended as permanent additions to the English vocabulary.

Analogy, both semantic and contextual, seems to have been the formative principle in Jonson's wordmaking. His substantive compounds are mostly drawn from colloquial speech, and those compound epithets which are emotive or poetical are in a clear minority. Pennanen notes Jonson's facility in coining opprobrious epithets, "a natural expression of his harshly satirical temperament." His vast range of allusion is essentially learned and encyclopedic, not "poetic." Most of his compounds are decidedly prosaic, and when he is not being satirical,"he remains normal and moderate in his employment of formations that were the jargon of the fashionable Elizabethans." Jonson's derivative word-making was

80 Ibid., p. 71.
81 Ibid., p. 76.
conservative compared to Shakespeare's. His conservatism results in the insignificant number of conversions introduced by him and in his sparing use of the most recent formations made by others. Words which are first recorded in his work show the wide range and closeness of his observation.

Pennanen concludes that Jonson's laborious manner of composing was conscious rather than inspired. As a conservative he lacked boldness and originality in his new formations. His proficiency in invective, his immunity to the exotic, and his class-consciousness are noticeable. "The important and interesting conclusion to be drawn is that Jonson's inventive methods bear a resemblance to those of a man of the people rather than a classical scholar and a learned poet." His vocabulary was definitely Anglo-Saxon and he was "decidedly English" in his word-making.

The evaluation of the quality and dramatic effectiveness made by three critics is especially important because of their prestige, their great importance, and their influence in modern Jonson criticism. T. S. Eliot's comments are most significant because his ideas about Jonson and even his chance phrases have sent reverberations through later criticism.

\[82\textbf{Ibid.}, p. 200.\]
\[83\textbf{Ibid.}, p. 201.\]

\[84\text{A. C. Partridge's Studies in the Syntax of Ben Jonson's Plays (Cambridge, 1953) and The Accidence of Ben Jonson's Plays Masques and Entertainments (Cambridge, 1953) are valuable additions to our knowledge of Jonson's language and further indication of the contribution made by modern scholarship. But Partridge offers little criticism beyond such generalized comments that Jonson's plays are a repository of seventeenth-century English. "There is hardly a doubt that the speech in these works is an authentic document; we appear to have in them the opportunity of studying Elizabethan and Jacobean English practically as it was spoken." (Accidence, p. xiii). This interpretation is not shared by other critics who study the language closely. See below, p. 161.}\]
This is especially true of his incidental remarks on Jonson's language. His famous phrase "poetry of the surface" introduces the idea that Jonson requires close study, "for to deal with the surface of life, as Jonson dealt with it, is to deal so deliberately that we too must be deliberate, in order to understand."\(^8^5\) While other writers may be suggestive and provocative, "the polished veneer of Jonson reflects only the lazy reader's fatuity."\(^8^6\) Jonson's words arouse no swarms of inarticulate feelings, for his immediate appeal is to the mind. His emotional tone is not to be discovered in the single verse but in the design of the whole. We can rarely detach a single line of Jonson's and say confidently that it is great poetry; "but there are many extended passages to which you cannot deny that honour."\(^8^7\)

L. C. Knights' remarks are even more extended and touch on technique as well as quality. Knights, in scrutinizing a single passage, will discover an "attitude of sophisticated detachment towards the words,"\(^8^8\) and notes that while alliteration directs maximum attention toward each word, it is the "solidity, weight, and unambiguous directness of expression"\(^8^9\) which gains the total effect. Highly characteristic is Jonson's linking together words inviting sympathy or admiration with those demanding an exactly contrary response. Knights rejects the tradition of Jonson's Latinized formation as a mistaken exaggeration. That his language was

\(^8^6\) Ibid., p. 183.  
\(^8^7\) Ibid., p. 133.  
\(^8^8\) Knights, Drama & Society, pp. 182-183.  
\(^8^9\) Ibid., p. 183.
very largely the popular English of an agricultural country is indicated by its derisive compounds, its predeliction for alliterative jingles, and its natural bent for coining nicknames. The amazing fertility and the native vigor is "typically Elizabethan." 

Harry Levin scatters several memorable comments on Jonson's language throughout his introduction to the dramatist. He is convinced that Jonson's language resembles Marlowe's in possessing a "texture woven with equal richness and a comparable barrage of sensuous appeal." But its accumulation of images is even denser and more various than Marlowe's. Levin's remarks include a special theory on the nuisance value of certain words in Jonson. There is no dramatic value in the accumulated cant words and phrases beyond their sound, and Levin suggests that this trick reaches its logical limit in Epicoene, where "everything spoken has a high nuisance value and the words themselves become sheer filigree." Levin also stresses the flexibility of Jonson's language. His language throughout the most tortuous stanzas remains pure English. "The language itself is completely idiomatic, uninhibited by the formality of plot and characterization or the complexity of scenes and speeches." Jonson's idiom is primarily pictorial, addressing the visual rather than the auditory instincts. Graphic speech is the generic trait of even Jonson's ugliest characters. His imagery is surprisingly tangible; it presents objects not as fanciful comparisons but as literal descriptions, usually without

90 Ibid., p. 192.
92 Ibid., p. 30.
93 Ibid., p. 31.
the aid of metaphor or simile. However, Jonson, in the humorous manner, heightens the commonplace, and because he deprives himself of other figures of speech, relies much on hyperbole.

The individual comments of all three critics are very interesting in themselves and often brilliantly suggestive, but they do not form a complete critique of the language. The remarks are too incidental in nature and usually are submerged in other critical purposes. Much more valuable is the brief, excellent commentary of Henry Wells, the most commendable of the shorter introductions to Jonson's language.94 Wells offers Jonson as the progenitor of speech study and one with a remarkable ear for speech. Jonson's career involves a change from a student of language into a great rhetorician and exact observer, one who assimilated far more for his plays through the ear than through the eye. Most important is Wells' insistence that because of rhetoric and caricature Jonson's is not a reproduction of popular speech. Jonson may incorporate common expressions and may endow characters with his own eloquence, but his characters are not real people, nor do their speeches constitute real talk. "There is, happily, not a single page of natural dialogue in his works."95

The careful study of speech is everywhere revealed in the plays, which show the keenest interest in the usages of different classes of society. Jonson particularly stressed the peculiarity of speech brought about by professional and vocational life. His finest perceptions of actual speech


95Ibid., p. 56.
appear in the roles of his Puritans. Very significant in his technique is the realization that language is an expression of personality. Almost every one of his people has distinguishing speech characteristics. His great emphasis on the manner of speaking rather than on words or their pronunciation is the cardinal point regarding Jonson and English speech. Wells concludes that the voice in a Jonson play may be thought of as parts of a symphony with the contrast of speech supplying the essentially dramatic touch. Bartholomew Fair, like a comic opera by Mozart, ends with a sublime trio in a scene which "becomes an ideal specimen of Elizabethan polyphonics."96 The arrangement of sounds at the end of The Alchemist and Epicoene is further proof that "Jonson makes language a new music, just as Byrd, Gibbons and the Elizabethan composers were making music a new language."97 His plays are vast fugues based on themes of real speech.

The attraction that Jonson's language has begun to exercise over contemporary critical imagination, reflected in the criticism so far described, is also seen in three important studies of some length devoted to the subject, the work of Alexander Sackton, Jonas Barish, and Edward Partridge. The rich possibilities in approaching the drama through this one element are suggested by the fact that each attacks the problem from a different point of view and each develops a complicated and extended analysis. There is a difference of quality and achievement here, but a reading of all three gives us a remarkably full survey of Jonson's language as well as a renewed admiration for his enormous skill.

96 Ibid., p. 61. 97 Ibid.
Alexander Sackton concentrates on Jonson's rhetoric, feeling that this must be understood to appreciate the plays adequately. A review of the plays reveals that Jonson utilized a kind of rhetoric which a sophisticated audience would most appreciate as adding a special dramatic meaning to the plays. Because of the rhetoric, the audience would be forced into constant vigilance in exercising a critical judgment on the speech and action of the characters. In justifying this essential point in his thesis, Sackton presents a detailed survey of language study and criticism in the Renaissance, which, as he shows, always involved subtle judgments. Jonson, as he develops as a rhetorician, reverses the practice of other playwrights, because he does not conceal his devices, but emphasizes them so that the audience is forced to become an ironic spectator of rhetorical persuasion. No other dramatist makes such frequent and powerful use of the fact that rhetorical speech is so often thus abused.

The remainder of Sackton's study is a detailed analysis of the use of jargon and hyperbole in the plays. Jargon in this context consists of two kinds of affected speech. The more important is the language of "professors" in the mature comedies. Also significant is the language of gentlemen, which is especially prominent in the early works. The jargon used in the first two plays is unimportant, but from this point on Jonson greatly expanded affected speech and, in doing so, made progressively "greater demands on the literary sophistication of his audience." In


both versions of *Every Man in His Humour* affected speech is important, and in the revision Jonson consistently elaborated the kind of language which the audience is forced to recognize as jargon. *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster* display Jonson's use of brilliant affected speech which required an alert, critical response. The dramatic effect of jargon in the early plays depends very little upon action. It is used instead to delineate several types of characters whose speech the audience can observe with an ironist's superiority of knowledge and judgment.

In the mature plays Jonson used jargon not only to satirize character but for several other purposes and effects. Jargon is now usually spoken by knaves with the conscious purpose of persuasion and is imitated by fools. It represents character, forwards the plot, and emphasizes the irony of situation. Professional jargon makes certain scenes in *Sejanus* different from anything he had produced before, and the comic effect arises from the ironic light the language of technical jargon casts on the dramatic situation. *Volpone* shows a further integration of rhetorical language with action. The technical terms complete a disguise, "thereby creating the dramatic situation itself."\(^{100}\) In the play there is an accumulation of rhetorical terms bolder than in the earlier plays. Rhetorical satire in *Epicoene* is somewhat weakened by Morose's aversion to speaking of all kinds, but even here jargon has become a means by which the characters interact upon each other. *The Alchemist* is the crowning point in Jonson's use of jargon and the play is thoroughly permeated with it. Of central importance is the jargon of the alchemists and the Puritans.

\(^{100}\) *Ibid.*, p. 75.
In the opening scene jargon is used quite naturally as a source of personal invective. The scene not only introduces the situation, but the special language in which much of the play is written and establishes an attitude toward it. Later, Subtle's handling of Surly's criticism shows a rhetorical skill which "must have impressed a Jacobean audience."\textsuperscript{101} With the appearance of the Puritans, the audience is introduced to a rich comic theme—the pitting of one professional jargon against another. In \textit{Bartholomew Fair} the Puritans use jargon as rhetoric to disguise their hypocrisy, and Jonson prepares the audience to listen carefully to the rhetoric. The jargon in \textit{The Devil is an Ass} and \textit{The Staple of News} is the language of projectors. Although the language of these later plays is similar to that of Jonson's prime, its use as dramatic speech is less effective. \textit{The New Inn} and \textit{The Magnetic Lady} display a further decline in power. The use of jargon is confused, and the effects so brilliantly achieved in the earlier plays are completely dissipated here. When it is used as professional speech, its purpose is often divided between persuasion and allegory, and the rich meanings on which dramatic irony depend are blurred.

Sackton's analysis of Jonson's hyperbole follows the same procedure as that of the jargon, and is based on very similar general assumptions. From the very early plays on, Jonson directs the critical awareness of his audience toward his use of hyperbole in a fashion "so exaggerated that the audience is made sensitive to its presence."\textsuperscript{102} The major function of hyperbole in all the early plays is to project a comic irony of which the audience is to be clearly aware. Instead of diminishing the convention

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 87. \textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 114.
in the mature plays, he so exaggerates the hyperbole that he forces his audience into an even more heightened consciousness of its presence. In *Volpone* Jonson seems to have perfected his technique of using rhetorical hyperbole for the effect of irony. The main uses are to express an emotion in conflict with the normal attitude of the audience. In the opening scene the formal elevated speech is used to praise that which the audience feels is unworthy of praise, and the effect is ironic. Even more conspicuous is the use of hyperbole as rhetorical persuasion in such episodes as Volpone's attempted seduction of Celia. The great exaggeration calls attention to itself, and helps to maintain in the audience the judicious attitude which is "essential to Jonson's purpose."¹⁰³ The play represents the peak of Jonson's achievement with rhetorical hyperbole. In *Epicoene* also the audience is aware of rhetoric, and can observe its effects with detachment. But the rhetoric of the play expresses little or no emotion and raises no moral questions. In *The Alchemist*, as in *Volpone*, the gulls use hyperbole to dupe themselves. Mammon, for example, uses hyperbole and other rhetorical devices but is quite unaware of their effect. The hyperbole of *Bartholomew Fair* is concentrated in the language of Busy and Overdo, both of whom are conspicuous by the use of exaggerated rhetorical devices. Both use figures without a sense of decorum, and, ironically, the audience recognizes the difference between what language pretends to be and what it really is. Because the hyperbole in *The Devil is an Ass* lacks Jonson's characteristic irony, and the hyperbole in the last plays is grotesque, all are considered examples of Jonson's hyperbole gone to

Sackton's conclusion reemphasizes the audience's awareness of Jonson's rhetoric, for the effects at which he aimed are dependent upon their awareness, which gives the rhetoric its dramatic significance. Those plays widely regarded as his greatest, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, are particularly marked by the rhetorical quality which enhances the spectator's sense of irony. Irony is more pervasive in Jonson than in Shakespeare. It arises from an ironic view of life in which "vice and folly among men seem constantly to expose themselves."\(^{104}\) This study shows, that as long as Jonson was capable of creating situations the irony of which would be increased by excess of rhetoric, the method was successful. In the last plays, where the quality of language no longer forms a consistent commentary on characters and action, the method fails. Rhetoric is, therefore, "the most suitable expression of Jonsonian realism."\(^{105}\) Finally, the richness and variety of dramatic effects which he created with rhetoric are revealed by a study of his language.

Sackton's study must be appreciated as the first extended study of its kind, but its contribution is uneven. Far too much time is wasted on descriptions of classical and Renaissance attitudes toward rhetoric. Space thus used could have been devoted to analyzing Jonson's rhetoric in its entirety. What Sackton does provide us with is not a study of the rhetoric, but of two important features of it, and the concentration at times seems rather narrow. Still, the two elements he chooses to discuss are examined

with such thoroughness that the work may be considered a limited but de-
finite study. Certainly no subsequent study of the language can afford
to ignore Sackton's work. The study has a particular interest because it
ties in with other contemporary critical traditions, especially those
which stress the complicated appeal to the audience's moral sensibilities,
and because it gives illuminating readings to many important passages.

Perhaps Sackton's and all other studies of the language seem some-
what thin and a bit tentative because of the thorough, brilliant, and most
satisfying study of any aspect of the language provided by Jonas Barish.106
Barish is equally impressive when he is examining the fundamental features
of Jonson's prose in general or brilliantly analyzing the prose of the
plays themselves. He uses Croll's categories in order to establish the
norm for Jonson's prose style, which is both baroque and anti-Ciceronian
and uses the techniques of the curt and loose periods. The syntax of the
curt style allowed Jonson to achieve a deliberately desired anti-rhetorical
effect, which approximated, but did not literally copy ordinary speech.
The asymmetry, so highly characteristic of Jonson, is drawn from the curt
style, as is the tendency to leap from the concrete to the abstract. Such
characteristics of the loose style as reliance on parenthesis, absolute
participle construction, and the employment of connectives other than the
simple co-ordinating conjunctions are abundant in Jonson. His wish to
transcribe the living process of thought to the printed page resulted in a
deliberate cultivation of a natural syntax, and the trailing period became

106 Jonas A. Barish, "Ben Jonson's Dramatic Prose" (unpubl. diss.,
Harvard, 1952).
an ideal vehicle for conveying the ebb and flow of thought. Both loose and curt styles willingly sacrifice grammatical neatness for psychological accuracy. Other characteristics of Jonson's style were the disturbance of the usual word order by the addition of an element, as if it were an afterthought. The isolation and the cavalier distribution of elements are also typical. To avoid an impending symmetry Jonson would sometimes deliberately suppress some grammatical element. His asymmetry is purposeful and is the characteristic of baroque prose with the resulting "slight sense of offness." His style is irregular as a matter of principle, and his procedures are those of a prose struggling to be rid of the regularity of verse.

Barish devotes most of his long study to a description and analysis of the prose style in the early and the mature comedies. The Case is Altered is apprentice work in which the best prose occurs in digressions or set speeches, which sacrifice narrative movement. Every Man in His Humour, however, reveals a mastery of style even in the quarto version. Each character speaks his own language and is defined by it. Everywhere there is a keener feeling for character in language than in the earlier play. But despite the general advance, "we can sense a tentative quality in much of the language." In Every Man out of His Humour all traces of apprenticeship have vanished as Jonson experiments with new uses for his prose style. The prose is more versatile and displays a greater power of graphic characterization. The play represents a definite advance in the

107Ibid., p. 140.  
108Ibid., p. 175.
development of his prose and makes much heavier demands on the language in
the type of character it must depict and the range of complicated emotion
it must convey. Cynthia's Revels continues the experiments, but the in-
creased attention to the style itself ends in excess. The occupation with
detail strangles any sense of movement. The elaboration of rhetoric, reach-
ing a height in this play, results in a tremendous load of set-pieces, and
Jonson seems deliberately to side-step the theatrical possibilities of the
plot. The Poetaster at once looks back and forward. New is its superior
moral intensity and its profounder grasp of ethical subtleties, but the
prose style and verse seem to revert to the technique of Every Man in His
Humour. We have here a return to the relatively simple colloquial quality
of the earlier play. In the vernacular of Captain Tucca we have the "poetry
of the surface" rendered so precisely, so completely, and so substantially
that the reader's demand for reality is fully satisfied. The revision of
Every Man in His Humour shows a persistent replacement of certain word
forms with their colloquial equivalents, showing an "increasingly sharp ear
for vernacular speech tones."\textsuperscript{109} Some changes are effected for clarity;
the remainder for a greater vividness or precision. The changes also cor-
rect previous lapses from decorum and help make the character more ac-
curate or add a new dimension to the character.

Barish's scrutiny of the mature prose comedies is, if anything, an
even more penetrating appraisal. Extremely important is his interpretation
of Epicoene. Besides displaying Jonson's usual pattern of prose, the play
contains a good deal of rather simple balance and antithesis. But these
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., p. 236.
terms, Barish cautions, require a careful qualification, for a close exam­
ination often reveals how illusory the apparent antithesis is. As he
analyzes the nature and extent of the "balance," Barish notes that Jonson
habitually disturbs the surface of an antithesis with some irregularizing
phrase or by "concealing an antithetic substructure under an irregular
superstructure." However, if it suits his purpose, Jonson can go to
considerable lengths to buttress an antithesis. Barish concludes that
balance in the play is rudimentary, and it contains as much irregularity
as regularity, as much unbalance as balance, with the same tension between
symmetry and asymmetry, but less obviously, than in his other plays.

The value of a study of the language as an interpretation of charac-
ter is proven by Barish's study. Truewit's diction, for example, shows
him to be one of Jonson's more logical characters. He rarely starts a
speech without some prefatory explanatory matter. Barish considers him a
surrealist—one who embraces all planes of reality. "Truewit represents
an almost disembodied intelligence, flickering over the action and light-
ing up its odd corners." While Truewit's speech is mobile and shifts
according to the exigencies of the moment, Morose, who is always himself,
is exhibited in two styles: the ordinary language of self-congratulation
and the highly excited language of distraction. The first type, more
carefully planned, is pedantic and artificial, and very likely the result
of reading rather than listening. His speeches are clogged with poly-
syllabic Latinisms and Anglo-Saxon archaisms, which impart a stilted tone

110 Ibid., p. 304. 111 Ibid., p. 321.
to his speech. His courtship scene, an attempt to translate the Petrachan conceit into practical terms, is strong evidence of his being an absurd recluse. Changes in Morose's language belie the hostile charge that Jonson's characters are "flat." When he speculates vindictively on his planned revenge, Morose drops all archaic artificiality for a "ghastly... exhibition of senile malice," and he is able only to babble in the idiom of infancy. When he becomes tormented, his language changes sharply from anger to despair. The break-down of his quaintly elaborate periods into huddles of shrill exclamation is accompanied by a rise in metaphorical intensity. His suffering reduces him to a more human level and he comes to command our sympathy. Thus through language Jonson is suggesting a way of atonement.

Barish is also able to distinguish the major themes of the play through language. These themes would include the problem of time and Clerimont's unawareness of it. The imagery of the play regularly emphasizes the passage of time and leads us into the final, decayed stage of human life through the stress on frosty, sterile imagery. The sexual atmosphere of the plot is dominated by the epicene figure of the title, and the play deals with unconsummation instead of consummation. Although the life impulse, noise, triumphs over death, silence, there is not enough release or promise of fruition indicated at the end of the play. One important theme which is deduced from the language is connected with the torments of Morose. The moral here is that it is worse to lose touch with

\[112\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 334.
life than to participate in its follies. The notion of torment appears early in the play, is persistently associated with images of coldness, hardness, and sterility, and certainly qualifies any view of the work as a gay and genial comedy. The play is actually transitional. Morose is the last spokesman for the satiric spirit of the early comedies, and Truewit is the herald for the benignity of the later ones.

The prose of Bartholomew Fair amounts to the most monumental satire on language. The play is one of enormous variety, and this is reflected in the prevailing irregularity of language. "The characters of Bartholomew Fair speak a highly inflected, recklessly peculiar language from which even rudimentary symmetry is usually absent, and their voices have a more pronounced individuality than those of the characters in Epicene."\textsuperscript{113} Each character is brilliantly defined through his speech pattern. The speech of Quarlous shows a lack of forethought and less impersonality than Truewit's. Most of Littlewit's expressions reek of the City, and his prevailing linguistic vice is garrulity and repetition. Jonson's great triumph here is "the difficult art of making pure vapidity interesting."\textsuperscript{114} Busy is one of Jonson's most thorough and devastating pieces of linguistic caricature and possesses a language which is all rhetoric, all peculiarity, and is saturated in cant. The abnormal amount of repetition gives a distinctive incantational hum, but the repetitions involve no growth in meaning. His false eloquence and false Biblicality are meant to be pseudo- logical and pseudo-casuistical. The models for Overdo's lofty rhetoric

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 401. \textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 417.
are classical and stoic, but he often seems like a secular version of the zealous preacher. However, Overdo is unaware that he is canting. He is a fool taken in by his own eloquence and by his self-ordained role as saviour of the commonwealth. His preference for a "certain stylized syntactical arrangement"\textsuperscript{115} points to a myopic unworldliness like Morose's. Also like Morose, most of his knowledge is acquired from books, and he tries to "turn the rhetoric of the ancients into a code for everyday behavior."\textsuperscript{116}

Language is also the key to the other characters of the play. Wasp's characteristically short phrases and all of his language are thoroughly waspish. Cokes, who epitomizes foolish humanity itself, expresses himself in a rudderless language, "hopelessly lacking in direction,"\textsuperscript{117} and characterized by many archaisms, solecisms, and illiterate colloquialisms. His complete aimlessness of mind appears in his total oblivion to any but the most immediate feeling and an inability to hold two thoughts in his head at once. He is the "ideal gull in a world of coney-catchers."\textsuperscript{118} The language of Grace proves Jonson's inability to make "straight" characters interesting. She is a somewhat unsympathetic character, whose cool, reasonable voice "lays a blight on the irrational, organic human warmth that pervades Smithfield."\textsuperscript{119}

A consideration of the language in terms of thematic development

\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p. 453. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p. 456. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{117}Ibid., p. 480.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p. 486. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{119}Ibid., p. 490.
clarifies certain aspects of the play. The language is insistently physical, and the imagery of the body that pervades the whole play emphasizes the body's grossness and the degradation of the brain and soul. Everything is "reduced to animality and carnality, to fatness, softness, greasiness, heat, and fruitfulness..." The puppet-show relates to the motif of vapours, which are responsible for all the absurdities in human behavior. Jonson's attitude toward the puppet-show is complex and profoundly ambivalent. The puppet-show, "a grotesque travesty of true art and true drama," is an object through which Jonson both "satirizes the taste of the rabble and identifies his interests with it." Busy, who comprises everything censorious and morally astringent in Jonson, is made a worse offender than those he would chastise. For the first time in Jonsonian comedy the complete fool is treated indulgently. The play may be considered Jonson's last will and testament, a closing of the circle, and a point of equilibrium with his audience toward which he had been moving for ten years.

Barish concludes that Jonson's prose represents a compromise between the chaos or a purely colloquial idiom and the strict formality of current literary language. The models were Tacitus and Seneca rather than Cicero. The curt period and the loose period were fundamental to the style and allow for the combination of living speech and rhetorical power. Jonson's dramatic prose betrays unmistakable affinity with realism. He shows an increasing preoccupation with life-like speech paralleling the increasing

120 Ibid., p. 514.
121 Ibid., p. 530.
use of appropriate every-day subject matter. Jonson imitates real speech with increasing brilliance and accuracy, with less exaggeration and distortion, and the result is "an achievement in its originality and variety, monumental in the way it gives definitive expression to one aspect of the language of a generation." 122

A brief description such as this unavoidably does violence to the complexity and depth of Barish's brilliant study. One cannot think of an expectation that this dissertation does not fulfill. In limitation of subject and thorough treatment of that subject it is eminently satisfactory. Examining Jonson in terms of literary history and through the complete analysis of the plays, Barish covers all possible aspects of the prose style. Insight into character, theme, and intention are presented most convincingly. A discussion of formidable technical matters at unusual length is done with such deftness that the reader completes the account with understanding, pleasure, and appreciation. Barish has, without question, written the most distinguished and valuable of all the modern studies of Jonson's art.

Edward Partridge, in the most recent extended study of Jonson's language, examines the imagery as a means of discovering the dramatist's artistic and thematic purpose. 123 He sees in Jonson's work, as in that of all comic poets, an exploration of the gap between what men say and what they do. Jonson characteristically inverted the commonly accepted

122 Ibid., p. 652.

values and made those inverted values the real values of the world he
created, a world in which money, food, or sensual experience are regarded
as divine. In his plays he used religious imagery in order to arouse the
greatest scorn for those who have so lost their sense of the right way of
living that they love what normally they should hate. The emotions ap­
propriate for religious worship are metaphorically applied to the worship
of worldly goods. The effect of this inversion appears most clearly in
Volpone and The Alchemist, which create a world governed by counsels,
strengthened by laws, corrected by judgments, and informed by religion
and morals; but a world so "preposterously transchanged in religion and
morals that it appears ridiculous." 124

Partridge admits that a study of Volpone's imagery cannot entirely
clear up the problem of its genre, but it may reveal a tone which, in
turn, may suggest a category. This critic agrees with Knights and Sackton
that this is a play demanding a complicated response of its audience.
That the play will concern the reversal of normal values is emphasized
immediately with Volpone's opening speech, a parody of prayer. When
Volpone says that his gold transcends the joy found in children, parents,
or friends, he exposes the barrenness and the monolithic fanaticism of
his life. The perversion of religious images suggests simultaneously the
debased world of Volpone and the world of traditional Christian values.
The second scene prepares us for the coming of the birds of prey and drama­
tizes one of the effects of this perversion of human values through the

124 Ibid., p. 69.
living emblems of the perverted culture of this mean world: the misshapen, the degenerate, and the castrated.

The attempted seduction scene combines imagery from the classical world, religion, and love. Celia and Bonario represent Christian values; Corvino and Volpone represent the debasing of those values; and when Celia is alone with Volpone, the two kinds of imagery are most eloquently expressed. Volpone's ethical system proves almost point for point the reverse of Christian ethics. He debases both classical allusions and erotic imagery with his stress on publicity and quantity. Both comic and moral implications are intended here, for anyone who pursues an object with Volpone's singleness of aim lacks a sense of proportion. Also important here is that gold itself, previously eroticized, is given the supreme sexual function: it excites love. This excitation of gold brings to a climax the lines of both classical allusion and erotic imagery. The final lines of the play sum up the imagery of feeding, the central image of the play, which symbolizes the double theme of greed for riches and lust for sensuous pleasures. The misuse of images throughout the play intentionally violates the principle of decorum. Great vehicles are used with mean tenors; the vehicle is exaggerated "beyond the bounds of subtlety or imaginative truth;" and sometimes the indecorum is ludicrous as a combination of the great and the low is likely to be.

Partridge selects the fourth act explosion in *The Alchemist* as the key in understanding that play. More than one of Jonson's plays seems to
work on the same principle of an explosion. His favorite rhetorical device, hyperbole, is found everywhere in the play, and the dialogue "trembles on the edge of bombast." The situations are close to burlesque or mock-heroic, the characters become grotesque, and the actions race toward an explosion. From the outset, two motifs of abuse and pretension exist side by side, and both abusive and euphemistic names, typical of thieve's cant, are perfectly characteristic of the speakers. The basic strategy in much of the comic imagery seems to be to violate decorum by bringing together a tenor and a vehicle which shock us into laughter. One of Jonson's particular methods is to bring together terms from the ancient world and the modern world which clash.

The imagery also employs vehicles taken from religion, medicine, sex, commerce, and warfare, and centers this complex of imagery through alchemy, which in one way or another, "transmutes all of these diverse elements of life." In order to show alchemy as a caricature of Christianity, Jonson had his knaves apply religious terms to impious things. Commercial implications are latent in the central situation of cheating and prostitution. The distance between the tenor and the vehicle maintains a continuous comic tone, and keeps us at a distance from the characters. The imagery is perfectly functional and shows how thoroughly mean the situation is by bringing into the context the very standards by which it could be measured: the Christian and humanistic civilization of rational man. The images are also characteristically extravagant, inflated, and ludicrous. The imagery suggests that in the alchemist's world, the acquisition of gold

126 Ibid., p. 114.  
127 Ibid., p. 126.
is solid and substantial because it has a religion, an ethic, and a government.

Partridge's exploration of the imagery of *Epicoene* qualifies Levin's belief that nuisance-value words here reach their height. Such an interpretation, Partridge suggests, causes one to "ignore the subtle allusiveness of much that is spoken."\(^{128}\) The allusions to the key-word "epicene" suggest the abnormal no man's land between the normal male and the normal female, a meaning central to the play. Nearly everyone in the play is epicene in one way or another. The collegiates and their suitors, for example, unconsciously reveal their deviation from the feminine and masculine standard. The Otters reverse the traditional marriage roles. There is the ambivalent nature of Epicoene herself and Morose's willingness to surrender his dominance as a husband over her, and, most significantly, there is his abject plea of impotence. Like all of Jonson's major comedies, *Epicoene* explores the questions of decorum, in this case the decorum of the sexes and the decorum of society. Other images exploring the theme of the natural and the deviations from nature allude to prodigies, to the strange, and to the monstrous. Another important question of the play, the relation of art and nature, is examined through references to dress and the idea that a person's dress can become the person. *Epicoene*, Partridge concludes, is a comedy about nature, normality, and decorum, but it is a play which "does not offer any final answers."\(^{129}\)

\(^{128}\)Ibid., p. 161.  
\(^{129}\)Ibid., p. 176.
Partridge's examination of the last plays finds the same pattern of metaphor and the same inversion of the values of the normal world. He discovers an equally thorough exploitation of religious and sexual imagery. Enough evidence is assembled to show that Jonson was using the same technique here that he had used in the great comedies. But the evidence shows also that his symbolism has become obvious, oversimplified, and automatic. The masterful control and subtlety characteristic of his greatest work is missing in the final poor efforts. Jonson never developed philosophically and the last plays bring nothing new to the Jonson canon. They are only more rigid, more obvious, and less unified versions of *The Alchemist* and *Volpone*.

Partridge's conclusion not only summarizes the ideas on Jonson's imagery that he has so thoroughly explored throughout his book, but offers far-reaching comments on the general nature of Jonson's imagination. Like other Jacobean writers, Jonson used a common source for his imagery—the colloquial language and the cant terms of the age. Religious terms, educational terms, and the coney-catching vocabularies, which he utilized, had been standardized by the time he began writing. The manner in which he uses these sources suggests that his imagination worked out from the core of a real event. His imagery is characterized by "concreteness and consistency" as well as imaginative restraint.\textsuperscript{130} There is a solidity and a constancy about the verbal universe which Jonson creates which gives the plays strength and cumulative intensity. But

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., p. 220.
a rigidity, a lack of "play," and a poverty of imagination seriously limit the appeal of his imagery. Even in Jonson's best plays one is rarely surprised into a wholly new emotional state. His dramatic speech is a unique language never heard off the stage. The style of the language, seen by Barish as a masterful example of the asymmetrical, beautifully formed and executed, is dismissed by Partridge as "Jonsonese," a choked and obscure jargon with too few connectives, a twisted syntax, and an un-English idiom. At its best this stylized language is a dramatic speech of great power and subtle decorum; "at no time is it the language of men."\textsuperscript{131}

Partridge's study is interesting and important because of the complete analysis of the plays he selects for appraisal. One reads his account with profit and is impressed with his thesis that the imagery is consistently logical throughout the plays. The theory of Jonson's dominant comic tone as the result of violation of decorum is convincing. However, because it ignores the early comedies, the study seems somewhat fragmentary. One would also appreciate a closer connection between the analysis and certain points in the conclusion. The assertions Partridge makes about the figurative designs of the various plays are commendably thorough and convincing. But too few of his general complaints grow out of the preceding study; too many read like those generalized impressions of Jonson of which an overabundance already exists.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{131}Tbid., p. 223.

\textsuperscript{132}The criticism of Jonson's dramatic verse makes up a small, compact tradition in modern Jonson studies, and may be reviewed here quickly as an appendage to evaluation of the language. Each of the few existing
Discussion of structure, characterization, and language contain the significant modern criticism of Jonson's dramatic method. What comments concentrate on a special aspect of the verse. For example, Alexander H. Sackton, "The Rhymed Couplet in Ben Jonson's Plays," The University of Texas Studies in English, XXX (1951), 86-106, finds the rhymed couplet used prominently in only three of the plays, The Poetaster, Sejanus, and The Sad Shepherd. Sackton shows the skill with which Jonson used this device for a variety of dramatic effects. Through rhymed couplets he is able to elevate the tone of certain lines, to suggest deliberate calm on the part of certain characters, and to emphasize the complexity and ingenuity of their minds. In other words, Sackton finds Jonson always able to assimilate the rhyme to a dramatic purpose. Sackton's "The Paradoxical Encomium in Elizabethan Drama," The University of Texas Studies in English, XXVIII (1949), 83-104 offers a quick comment on the use of the encomium in Jonson's plays, which contain richer examples than do those of any other Elizabethan dramatists.

The nature and function of Jonson's dramatic lyrics have attracted a certain amount of scholarly interest. Willa M. Evans, Ben Jonson and Elizabethan Music (Lancaster, Pa., 1929), traces a clear development in Jonson's lyrics, which show that after the awkward efforts of the very early plays, Jonson achieved and sustained a mastery of song. Miss Evans' study reveals several reasons for Jonson's success in combining music with dramatic incident. The songs carry the plot forward, replace conversation, emphasize emotional moments, and introduce characters. William R. Bowden's The English Dramatic Lyric, 1603-42 (New Haven, 1951) agrees with Miss Evans on the dramatic function of Jonson's songs, which, used as a principal structural element in comic scenes, show him as a past master in this technique for high comedy. Bowden takes issue, however, with Miss Evans' view that Jonson progressed through a series of stages toward mastery of song. He feels that Jonson's mastery is evident in all his work, and that Miss Evans disregards the context of the early clownish songs and the very good songs in the last plays.


Meaningful discussion of Jonson's themes almost exclusively concerns the themes of the individual plays and will be considered with the criticism of those plays in later chapters. Comment on Jonson's general theme
remains of the general criticism of Jonson's art to be surveyed in this chapter is a large, miscellaneous body of criticism which attempts to describe or analyze the quality of Jonson's art. Imprecise, repetitious, and dull much of this commentary admittedly is, but it is so close to the central interest of the present study, Jonson's modern critical reputation, that it cannot be overlooked. Much of this general appraisal cannot, of course, be forced into a number of neat and convenient is too scattered and inconclusive to make much of an impression on modern criticism. However, certain suggestions about the underlying and uni­fying theme of the Jonsonian drama arouse interest. René Wellek sug­gests that the plays reveal a belief in the idea of universal decay (The Rise of English Literary History [Chapel Hill, 1941], p. 34). Clifford Leech thinks that the plays reflect the changed and disillusioned Renais­sance ideals (Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth-Century Drama [New York, 1950], p. 39). But the most frequent as­sumption about the general Jonsonian theme is that it concerns greed for money. See, for example, Perry, op. cit., p. 115; Levin, op. cit., p. 22; Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter (New York, 1952), p. 16; and Edmund Wilson, op. cit., pp. 213-232.

One of the rare appraisals that go beyond a summary statement is D. J. Enright's "Crime and Punishment in Ben Jonson," Scrutiny, IX (December, 1940), 231-248. Enright counters T. S. Eliot's remark that Jonson's comedy does "not find its source in any precise emotional at­titude or precise intellectual criticism of the actual world" (p. 231). Jonson's attitude, Enright finds, is precise, powerful, and so con­sistent that it may be equated with the theme of spiritual modesty or the acknowledgement by an individual of his proper and ordained place in the universe. The theme requires a repeated scheme of crime and punishment worked out completely and solidly in the plays. Enright concludes that Jonson's philosophy shows "his deep rooted and energetic belief in modesty, moderation, a categorical norm in matters social and religious" (p. 232).

Somewhat related to this interest in Jonson's themes are the comments on his religious and philosophical outlook. See Bastiaenen, op. cit. and Bertil Johansson, Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton, Essays and Studies in English Language and Literature, VII (Upsala, 1950). The assumption that Jonson examined life from the view of Stoic philosophy is occasionally suggested. See Levin, op. cit., p. 24; Chute, op. cit., p. 328. The topic is examined at length in Clarence B. Hilberry's "Ben Jonson's Ethics in Relation to Stoic and Humanistic Thought" (unpubl. diss., Chicago, 1933).
categories. However, one quickly recognizes and may legitimately uti-
lie similarities in approach, response, or attitude, which impose some
semblance of order on a collection of heterogenous criticism.

One way of tracking that elusive game, Jonson's artistic quality,
is through comparison with other writers. Without doubt, the most fre-
quently invoked comparison is that between Shakespeare and Jonson. Al-
though in relation to earlier periods of Jonson criticism, the compar-
ison is less frequently used, it still appears often enough that a special
study of Jonson's reputation from that point of view alone might be made.
Little would be gained as far as an appreciation of Jonson is concerned,
however. The valuable light occasionally thrown on some aspect of
Jonson's work through this comparison is slight compensation for the
repetitive and discouragingly negative lists of Jonson's dramatic
shortcomings which are the usual results of this kind of appraisal. 134
The frequency of reference throughout the modern period would suggest
the inevitably—perhaps the immortality—of this sterile approach, but
one can also discern a growing tendency to discard the validity of the
comparison. 135

When Jonson is compared to other Jacobean dramatists, his literary

134 See Bastiaenen, op. cit. for an extended and crude example of the
comparison. More sophisticated but more damaging is the comparison made

135 See Potts, p. 8; L. Musgrove, Shakespeare and Jonson (Auckland, 1957),
pp. 3-4; Francis Birrell, Rev. of C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, Ben
Tucker Brooke, Rev. of C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, Ben Jonson, Vol. I,
The Saturday Review of Literature, II (February 27, 1926), 592; George B.
Johnston, Rev. of Marchette Chute, Ben Jonson of Westminster, Shakespeare
Quarterly, V (Autumn, 1954), 422; H. R. Hays, p. 267; and Enck, op. cit.,
p. 5.
reputation is usually enhanced. Much depends, of course, on the basis of the comparison. As Oliphant points out, "compared with others in regard to their qualities, he may cut but a sorry figure, as some of his critics are fond of pointing out; but compare the others with him in his qualities, and they are equally overshadowed."\(^\text{136}\) Jonson's towering superiority over his contemporaries is easily discovered by Esther Dunn through a series of quick comparisons. Chapman possesses the austerity of Jonson's art but does not sustain it nearly so well. Dekker's easy-going comedy is inferior to Jonson's self-conscious art, while Middleton's plays lack Jonson's point of view. Marston is showy and shallow by comparison, and Heywood's photographic accuracy of detail doesn't compare to the "neat, unswevering dissection of the very nerves and sinews of the times which appears in Jonson."\(^\text{137}\) Massinger can achieve the quality of Jonsonian comedy only in isolated passages.

Of the analogies made between Jonson and later writers, only two are encountered with any frequency, those with Dickens and Shaw. The most thorough comparison between the seventeenth-century dramatist and the nineteenth-century novelist is that made by Evelyn Simpson in a study more comprehensive than analytic.\(^\text{138}\) The fullness and accuracy of each author is, naturally, the cardinal point of resemblance. Other common traits are their knowledge of and love of the city, the thorough knowledge of the mean streets, alleys, and slums. Dickens is kindlier


than Jonson, he is seldom so cruel, but, like Jonson, he was unable to create attractive heroines. Jonson was more of a realist, was harder, fiercer, less humane, and was not sentimental; but he shares with Dickens the perennial fascination London has for the English.  

Points of resemblance between Jonson and Shaw are even more frequently noted. Muriel Bradbrook suggests that both tend to dispense almost completely with the intrigue and depend rather on character and rhetoric. Furthermore, neither was the kind of dramatist able to lose himself in the world of his own creation. Both created a public image of themselves, half-heroic, half-comic, which they manipulated with great skill. Elizabeth Drew considers Jonson and Shaw the two great writers of direct satiric comedy in English. Both prefer talk to action. But while Shaw is suave, rational, and witty, Jonson is passionate and abusive. His comedy is one "of moral disapproval." Robert Withington notes that both produced plays which lack action and forced their characters into situations where they are moved as puppets. Both are full of theories which they do not let their public forget. Neither has Shakespeare's sympathy nor his poetry.

139 See also Marguerite Hays, *op. cit.*, p. 25 and Bridges-Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 244.


Among that criticism which attempts to deal directly with the Jonsonian quality or achievement, we find a confusing and, at first, a rather shapeless picture. The commentary is saved from complete formlessness, however, by the repetition of certain ideas and attitudes. What impresses one here primarily is the prevalence of highly subjective appraisal and what might be considered a number of stock responses which seem to come to the critical mind automatically when the name "Jonson" is mentioned. Much of this general criticism seems an unthinking repetition of traditional appraisals. Among those who strive for an original, comprehensive impression of the art there is only a minimum of agreement—a reminder, perhaps, that in our time, while aspects of the art, the personality, and the individual plays have enjoyed a critical rehabilitation, the reputation as a whole is still undergoing the long, slow, and probably unpredictable process of revaluation. Citation of the general criticism here is intended to suggest the rather contradictory nature of this type of scholarly comment, and will include that which is inescapably important and that which is typical in content and approach.

Typical of one clear attitude and rather oppressively frequent is that appraisal which discards or severely qualifies Jonson's artistic achievement. Many reasons are advanced by many critics, but the adverse criticism generally focuses on the obtuseness of Jonson's imagination and the coldness of his heart. Curiously, considering their position in modern Jonson studies and their great admiration for specific qualities in his work, Herford and Simpson's "Final Appreciation" of Jonson
gives impetus and the weight of authority to this general criticism. Here we find ideas and phrases which have continued to haunt Jonson criticism since their appearance in 1925. The editors point out the corrective value of Jonson's drama in that he scornfully rejected the literary affectations and eccentricities of his time in the name of classical plainness and common sense. But they also see in him a prosaic and earth-bound imagination. His ideas were ordinary, for "the things he had to say were, in general, 'common' things. He was no adventurous explorer in the unknown solitudes of the human soul." His masterful self-confidence precluded him from the heights and depths which men of aspiring humility can achieve. He was gravely wanting in the sense of beauty, and his satisfaction in the logical neatness of a well-made action blinded him to the loneliness which Shakespeare elicited from wild and fantastic plots. The limited imagination which his editors so freely concede in their summary and the lack of warmth and charm continue to be the grounds for adverse critical appraisal. Additional complaint points out that Jonson as a playwright was critical rather than dramatic, that he was morally arrogant, that the life


146 Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 116.

147 Drew, op. cit., p. 164.
is squeezed out of his plays by the too abundant scholarship, and always complaint is made of the lack or thinness of emotion is his plays, the "prevailing astringency...and the almost complete lack of sentiment."  

Laudatory criticism is as frequently and as strongly asserted. Much of this is as generalized as the hostile or mixed appraisal just noted and tells us little more than the critic's enthusiasm for Jonson's "magnificent intellectual power," his "typically Elizabethan capacity for encompassing experience and mirroring it with gusto and intensity," his admirable "hard, glittering comedy," or his ability to "raise indignation to such a fine art." But an impressive amount of even the condensed appraisal is based on a sensible reference to Jonson's technical skill. A sampling of the criticism seems almost like a reprise of the criticism considered in the preceding sections of this chapter. Oliphant bases his approval on the masterly construction and the marvellous management of complicated plots as well as Jonson's inventiveness. Schelling points out similar excellencies in Jonson's

150 Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 149.
153 William S. Clark, Chief Patterns of World Drama (Boston, 1946), p. 328.
work and directs our attention to the wonderfully clear, brilliant, and witty dialogue.\textsuperscript{155} Stoll commends Jonson's unique gift for working out a single comic scene fully and delightfully, his fine economy of means, and his nice calculation of effects.\textsuperscript{156} Ashley Thorndike, one of the most discriminating of the general critics of Jonson, selects for distinct praise Jonson's clear and certain comic characterization, which is notable for its rich humour and dramatic veracity. He notes too that Jonson's classicism is an intelligent but not slavish adaptation of classical rules to the peculiarities of the English theater. English comedy is in his debt because he elevated the comic from its lowly position to its proper place as an ethical art form, sharing with tragedy the function of moral catharsis.

Several extended commentaries are to be distinguished from the mass of general criticism. Such studies are valuable not only because of their content, but because they attempt to make a real discrimination of the special Jonson achievement. None of these critics is more significant than T. S. Eliot, whose opinions, as I have already suggested, dominate so much of Jonson criticism in the period covered by this study. Eliot considers many factors in his attempt to determine the Jonson quality. He is convinced that Jonson has suffered greatly from the rather deadly approval of traditional critics. His reputation of great intelligence as a critic and theorist has minimized the reputation of the

\textsuperscript{156}Shakespeare and Other Masters, p. 149.  
\textsuperscript{157}English Comedy, p. 188.
plays. "We forget the comedy in the humours, and the serious artist in the scholar."\textsuperscript{158} Eliot admits it is difficult to see how the special Jonsonian effect is brought about but asserts that Jonson's drama is not superficial, although it does not have the depth that the work of his greatest contemporaries had. His verse is solid. "It is what it is; it does not pretend to be another thing."\textsuperscript{159} It is conscious, deliberate, and unique. It is essential to understand that Jonson created his own world, a world from his followers, as well as the contemporary dramatists following different aims, are excluded. The world of Jonson is sufficiently large, for "it is a world of poetic imagination."\textsuperscript{160}

Harry Levin explores the same problem from several points of view. Unlike Shakespeare, Jonson presupposes that life is a compact, rational affair, needlessly complicated by impulse and artifice. His attitude is that of society, Shakespeare's that of the individual. Jonson's instrument is logic, Shakespeare's psychology. We criticize Shakespeare in "terms of movement and warmth," Jonson in "terms of pattern and colour."\textsuperscript{161} Because Jonsonian comedy necessitates subordinating parts to the whole, characterization is not its outstanding feature. Each character has only his typical move, as in chess, and the object of the game is to see what new combinations have been brought about. What is said, frequently, does not matter so long as something is said, and then Jonson is at special pains to make what is said interesting for its own sake. In his fecundity and in his artificiality, in his virtues and in his faults, Jonson

\textsuperscript{158}Op. cit., p. 134. \hfill \textsuperscript{159}Ibid., p. 135. \hfill \textsuperscript{160}Ibid., p. 138.
\textsuperscript{161}Op. cit., p. 25.
remains the craftsman. It is no mere chance that any effort to describe his work falls repeatedly into the vocabulary of the fine arts. If we are looking for a single impression of Ben Jonson, it is of the Flemish painters that we are finally mindful—of crowded street scenes and rich interiors, of sharp portraiture and lavish ornament, of the gloss and the clarity and the tactile values that are tokens of mastery.

Wells considers Jonson's work the hybrid product of a man who is intellectual, logical, and masculine. The critical task is to show how he was a great artist as well as a great scholar, a task of which "none invites a richer reward."162 The crux of the problem, according to Wells, is Jonson's truly Elizabethan eclecticism. His great plays reveal his prodigious powers, which are baffling in their richness, and make difficult reading. His excellence comes, not from amassing, but from harmonizing all parts with artistic success. Jonson is clearly at his best in his most complex work. There is a tremendous variety in attitude in each of his major comedies. The best and simplest way to envisage the typical work of Jonson is to regard it as a synthesis of all the familiar types of drama except pure tragedy and romance. There is a variety of purposes and effects, and sentiment and compassion are banished. There is never any question of the seriousness of his moral and intellectual intentions.

The criticism described in this chapter is notable for its range

162Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 191.
and its richness. Complicated though individual comments may be, the discussion as a whole is lucid and coherent, and one whose outlines and interrelations are easily comprehended. Concentration and extensive commentary on certain critical problems, especially those of plot, character, and language make this an emphatic, solid, and comprehensive body of criticism. Possible interpretations are by no means exhausted, but this scholarship, as it stands, is satisfyingly complete. There is much variety in achievement and contribution among the individual studies, of course, and one hesitates to offer generalizations covering all of these. However, certain characteristics do seem typical of the more successful commentaries. After a clear limitation of the problem to be investigated, the superior studies proceed to analyze with almost exhaustive thoroughness. It is almost axiomatic in Jonson criticism that that evaluation which proves its thesis in terms of the entire body of drama, or with a substantial proportion of it, results in the most valuable and convincing criticism. The only really unsatisfactory analysis of Jonson's method is the sort which tries to spin out an involved critical theory from the study of a handful of plays. Also, the closer and more detailed the scholarship, the more interesting and fruitful the study. Studies which deal most intimately with the very material of the work—the language—have been most successful, but the others, the considerations of plot and character, because they provide so close and so thorough a scrutiny of almost all the plays, also make a significant contribution. One particularly appreciates the quality of these studies when he recalls the other approaches in Jonson criticism. Criticism of this dramatist often seems an invitation to the very generalized appraisal, and the
airy dismissal or the complete acceptance are exasperatingly common. The results of the criticism of the artistic method usually come from a closely reasoned analysis, packed with citations from the works themselves, which allow for a valid test of the theories being offered. We derive from this criticism a sound and convincing knowledge of the fundamental features and techniques of Jonson's art and a much more valuable insight into his imagination and intent than we do from most of the comments on his classicism, realism, and satire. The "art" of Jonson becomes a clear and meaningful idea through the series of studies which make up one of the most successful, fresh, and vital discussions in all of modern Jonson studies.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY COMEDIES

The remainder of this study will describe the modern criticism of Jonson's plays and will attempt to delineate the critical traditions which have persisted or have appeared since 1925. The procedure will be as follows. Most of the discussion will concern the major studies of the individual plays. The mass of miscellaneous comment encountered in surveys of the drama will be considered only as part of the general reaffirmation or rejection of the more extensive criticism. To give focus to the discussion a rather full description of the evaluations of Herford and Simpson will be presented. The editors' criticism will here serve not only as the starting point of modern criticism but as the norm, according to which one may see developments in subsequent scholarship. Wherever possible, but depending upon the amount and the direction of the specific criticism, the commentary following Herford and Simpson will be examined under certain categories: plot, characterization, theme, language, special problems, and general appreciation.

1.

The first impression one derives from this entire body of criticism is the obvious neglect of the very early and the very late plays. The criticism of A Tale of a Tub, for example, exists almost exclusively in Herford and Simpson's introduction. The play is mentioned in extended,
specialized studies of Jonson's drama only for those elements which illustrate a particular development in his dramatic art, and one never receives a sense of the play as an entity. Most surveys of literature ignore this play and The Case is Altered, and begin discussion of Jonson's work with Every Man in His Humour. A thorough search unearthes a few incidental comments to add to those of Herford and Simpson, but it is to that source that one must turn for any full and meaningful appraisal.

After deciding on the basis of content and versification that this is a very early play of Jonson's, the editors discuss two aspects in detail: structure and characterization. They find evidence of skill in plot structure. The familiar intrigue, the struggle for the possession of a girl, is worked out clearly and effectively; and the play avoids such later faults as pedantic symbolism. The work, the editors suggest, is best understood as an original bit of English life filtered through a classically trained mind. The plot shows that this early Jonson had a strong predilection for classical discipline. No English play up to this date had observed the unities so thoroughly. The only flaw the editors detect in the classical form of the play concerns the unity of action, since the activities of the characters fall into two distinct parts.

The method of characterization differs from the later manner in that character is nowhere elaborated for its own sake at the expense of action—a temptation Jonson could later rarely resist. Here the main concern is plot, and because character elaboration is avoided, the play gains in rapidity and directness. The characterization shows notable
affinities with Elizabethan fashion and tradition. For example, the play reflects contemporary satire upon constables, and Hannibal Puppy is the one clear example in Jonson of the professional jester type. Audrey is not only the principal link between the rural clowns and the persons of higher life, but she is probably the extremest example of this anti-romantic type in the Elizabethan drama, emerging as a "vulgar and phlegmatic hoyden, with a keen eye to the main chance...." Yet even she is drawn with wit and skill, and remains in perfect keeping with the atmosphere and temper of the play.

2.

The Case is Altered has attracted slightly more critical attention than the first play, but once again Herford and Simpson's interpretation is the only important one, and even it seems unfortunately condensed. Among the few problems which the editors discuss is that of correct dating. The romantic plot and the non-characteristic simple structure,


2 The bits and scraps of later criticism neither modify nor extend this basic evaluation, but they do illuminate briefly certain aspects of the play. One scholar suggests that Jonson was temporarily on bad terms with the King's Men, since this is the only play of his later career which was not staged by this group (E. R. Brown, "Jonson's A Tale of a Tub," TLS, May 10, 1928, p. 358). Henry ten Eyck Perry causes mild surprise by preferring this play to The Case is Altered because it is "a much better constructed piece of work" and is more amusing (op cit., p. 84). Examination of the Catullan motto of the play is undertaken to prove that we have here no apology, but a forthright evaluation of the work itself (James A. S. McPeek, Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain [Cambridge, Mass., 1939], p. 78). Francis L. Hoskins considers Hannibal's aspiring to a higher position a satiric presentation of the Renaissance theme of misalliance ("Misalliance: A Significant Theme in Tudor and Stuart Drama," Renaissance Papers 1956, pp. 72-81).
they feel, place this work before the truly Jonsonian plays. A quick review of the evidence results in a probable dating of 1597-1598. In his mature plays Jonson never multiplied his motive, but here the interest is deliberately divided.

In their examination of sources, adaptation, and characterization, Herford and Simpson show special interest in the "romanticism" the play may contain. The choice and manipulation of the original plots cast much light on Jonson's intention. The sources, Plautus' Captives and Aulalia, are remarkably diverse, for one is a serious romance with touches of pathos, and the other a satirical exposure of ridiculous vice. Either story would have been a suitable vehicle for Elizabethan romantic comedy, but the indispensable romantic motive, love, is lacking in them. Jonson's choice of story and his sparing alterations not only show a familiarity and sympathy with Latin comedy, but they also insure that his own play is only partially a romantic work.

That Jonson was drawn strongly toward classical art is further seen in his insistence on the unities. Their presence in this quasi-romantic play shows how early was his resolve to moderate the extravagance of the drama of his time. The theme of fidelity, present in The Captives, had a strong attraction for romantic drama, but Jonson persistently treats the theme in a way closer to satire than to sentiment, and shows a fondness for exposing the seamy side of friendship. In some ways, however, Jonson's working out of the stories reflects a certain relish for Elizabethan and romantic effects. As Herford and Simpson say, "Even when he is closest to Plautus in situation, he is new and fresh in detail, his extraordinary gift of inventing characteristic traits being
in fact already mature, while in plot-construction and characterization he was still an apprentice."³

Discussion of characterization is restricted to a quick description of each and an occasional suggestion of how a character fits into a line of literary development. Otherwise there is little analysis. The editors acknowledge the charm of Rachel but also the sketchiness of her portrait. Angelo, they feel, is intended to symbolize the treacherous lover, and Onion the burlesque lover of the piece. Aurelia and Phoenixella are definitely Elizabethan types. Each sister exhibits, announces, and expounds her humour. The miser, Jacques, is seen as a classical nucleus overlaid with the trappings of more romantic circumstances, given more poetic speech, and provided with a sinister past. He has unexpected flashes of humanity, but does not approach the keen dramatic imagination of Volpone. Partially original, but also partially derivative are the jesters and serving men. Juniper is no lampoon of Gabriel Harvey but a Jonson variation of the London shoemaker type, which had been well defined in Elizabethan comedy. In characterization as in the other elements of the play there is constant evidence of the Jonson who was to emerge and to remain: "the ingeniously elaborate plot construction; the multiplicity of parallel variations; the joy in sheer abundance."⁴

Three decades of later criticism have produced only two independent discussions of the play worth mentioning. One of these⁵ attempts to

⁴Ibid., p. 327.
apportion the authorship of the play. Herford and Simpson had said that most of the work is clearly Jonson's and that all might have been written by him, but they do not rule out the possibility of a second hand. Nowsorthy suspects that there was a second hand and that it belonged to Henry Porter. Collaboration, this critic feels, would explain the suppression in the 1618 edition, since Jonson would not include a work not entirely written by himself. Much of the play "exhibits a hard Jonsonian core," but likenesses also exist between this play and Porter's *The Two Angry Women of Abington*. Porter may well have written those parts of the play which concern Aurelia and Phoenixella. These sections are quite unlike Jonson or any other known Elizabethan dramatist aside from Porter. The similarities of the two works include tone and style, but are less suggestive than "the general impression." If the play were written in the latter half of 1598, the collaboration would explain the references in Henslowe's Diary to Jonson's working with Porter. If we accept the plausible suggestion that the original title was *Hot Anger Soon Cooled*, which describes the action of Jonson's play, many problems would be solved.

John Enck's article is the only comprehensive appraisal besides Herford and Simpson's. Enck reaffirms the editors' contention that this play is no misguided attempt at a comedy of manners. Instead he finds here abundant evidence of an embryonic comedy of humours. He considers the play quite characteristic of Jonson's later drama instead of

a clumsy early attempt at romance. The characters and their language are based on assumptions found in all of Jonson's plays until *Catiline*. Typical, for example, is the central idea of the play, which concerns identity, the recognition of the truth about one's self and others.

"The plot always hinges upon this problem of identity; the figurative language refers predominantly to it; from the outset the costumes reinforce it." Betrayal in the play comes not from malice, but from misunderstandings the people have about themselves or others. Jacques is one of the humour types who quickly lend themselves to deception. Just as their betters were, so Onion and Juniper are servants of what they wear. On every level partial errors about appearance and identity provide motivation.

The play is self-contained and understandable in its own terms, but remembering subsequent dramas, one can clearly see the separate parts which were closely drawn together in the humour comedies. Juniper and Onion, like the gulls in the later plays, strive to appear what they are not. Failures to distinguish the truth both about oneself and others account for much of the conduct in the humour comedies. In this play, as in all the others until *Sejanus*, the pretenses and impostures are open. Distrust of the eye, when directed exclusively to externals, and duplicity of the voice also mark this and the later humour plays. *The Case is Altered*, Enck concludes, is a preliminary sketch of a humour comedy. Its proportions are imperfectly realized, but all the elements are discernible. The difference between this and the plays in Jonson's

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published *Works* is one of accomplishment, not of intention. "The whole design reveals a minor comedy of humours, a play which cannot with any precision be called romantic."\(^{10}\)

3.

Not until the criticism of *Every Man in His Humour* do we reach a full and evenly distributed body of scholarship. We have also, especially for a work of Jonson's, an unusually harmonious critical response. Starting with the approving comments of Herford and Simpson, most modern critics agree that this first important play of Jonson's is an admirable achievement. While the evaluation of the editors does not dominate the field as it does for the first two works, it is certainly among the most important made in the modern period; almost every topic they consider has been thoroughly examined by later critics. The fact that this later critical commentary seems almost always an amplification of the views first stated by Herford and Simpson imparts an unusually strong note of continuity in this discussion from first to last.

The essential originality of the play in conception and execution is stressed by Herford and Simpson and most other scholars. The editors say that because Jonson adapts the principles of Renaissance criticism so profoundly, his play is sharply distinguished from any other "classical" drama in literature. In some ways Jonson may conform very closely to classical principles, but his individuality is clearly seen here, especially in plot, character, and unities. In the unity of action, for

example, we find Jonson applying a manner distinctively his own. The plot, although bearing rudimentary traces of classical origin, has no real counterpart in Elizabethan literature; it is clearly devised for his own purposes. It is a complex of several actions ingeniously tangled together. The originality of the plot also accounts for its flaws. The germs of plot disintegration are here, and come from the satirist's desire to exhibit each of his characters suffering from the effect of his "humour." The multitude of minor actions are not always integrated into a single all-embracing action. While unity of tone is aimed at, it is not completely attained because Jonson's occasional earnestness, his denunciation of the enemies of poetry, and the savage punishment of the gulls are out of keeping with the comic spirit and impair the unity of comic tone.

Without providing as detailed an examination, other modern critics echo Herford and Simpson's idea that the play is essentially original, a work controlled by classical ideals perhaps, but one in which Jonson "weaves a racy tapestry of contemporary London life."¹¹ A significant amount of later criticism also agrees that the originality arises from the plot. But, if the plot is recognized as original, description of its structure varies somewhat. It is said that here Jonson typically develops action from character,¹² that the play is constructed out of


the clash of incongruous humours, and that Brainworm is the pivot of the play, dividing into groups the passive and the protesting victims.\textsuperscript{13} One point of view rather minimizes the structure, asserting that the play possesses a loose construction which "is a masterpiece of its kind,"\textsuperscript{14} that it is marked by the absence of a narrative and exhibits only Jonson's delight "in the sights and sounds and smells of a great city."\textsuperscript{15} Most recently the structure has been visualized as a "loose frame from which the episodes are suspended."\textsuperscript{16}

Study of the characterization is an even more prominent feature in the criticism of \textit{Every Man in His Humour}. The nature of the play enforces some consideration of the humours theory, and of the many comments, those provided by Herford and Simpson are the most extended and the most useful. They note that by Jonson's time three currents of literary trends had intermixed with the humours: the Elizabethan idea of the master passion, the academic doctrine of decorum, and the typical character sketch. By the late sixteenth century, "humour" had acquired a suggestion of something odd or overbalanced, and had come to denote mere passing impulse and caprice, or even a mere trick of manner or dress. Jonson, who was a whole-hearted adherent of Sidney's theory of decorum, insisted that his own doctrine of the humours was a physiological and psychological counterpart of the aesthetic doctrine of decorum, and his innate realism saved


\textsuperscript{14}Gassner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{15}Spencer, \textit{Elizabethan Plays}, p. 254.

\textsuperscript{16}Enck, \textit{Jonson and the Comic Truth}, p. 34.
him from the mere rendering of types. In fact, the humours as practiced by him were far from being a hindrance. The flexibility of the theory released the poet from the traditional categories of comic character types. It bridged classical theory and modern life and helped to render it possible "for the master of satiric comedy, the doughty champion of classicism, and the most powerful of Elizabethan realists" to be united in the same writer.

The best brief description of the effect of the humours theory on the characters is also provided by Herford and Simpson. They do not agree with the assumption that all the characters are humours. They see Kitely as a complete exemplification of the theory and the best example of the humours working in Jonson's hands. But only one part of Edward Knowell's character, his attachment to poetry, can be assigned a humour. Brainworm is more significant for showing Jonson's power of forging composite materials into a life-like character than as an example of the humours theory. The gulls, naturally, in a comedy of humours are the focus of interest and an example of Jonson's method in characterization. Bobadil, the most original and subtle creation, approaches two or three conventional types, but he falls within none. The three delightfully imagined figures, Downright, Cob, and Clement, inject an atmosphere of breezy sanity, and Cob's honest simplicity especially contrasts with the affected fools and knaves.


18 The criticism of many other scholars amounts to a general reaffirmation of the views of Herford and Simpson. Most note that Jonson was able through his theory to reduce character to one striking trait, but most also see here a combination of humour theory and realistic practice. See Parrott and Ball, Op. cit., p. 134; Harrison, Every Man in His Humour, p. 25; Schelling and Black, Op. cit., p. 273; and Knck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 41.
In the old magistrate Jonson's judicial temper is completely reconciled with his comic invention. Clement is an individual figure who stands outside the humour scheme.

There is much discussion of the characterization of this play simply as characterization, without reference to the humours theory, and here again the editors lead the way. This is one of the areas in which approval is not automatically bestowed. The major complaint of Herford and Simpson is the narrowness, the single plane, on which the characters exist. His imagination being strong rather than subtle, Jonson saw humanity as a collection of trenchantly defined groups. "He seizes character under one aspect, because he sees it so; neglecting, because he does not see them, the cross-play of impulses, the inconsistencies and conflicts, the mingled strength and weakness of which they are normally composed. His observation was prodigiously active and acute; but its energy was spent in accumulating illustrations of a single dominant trait, not in distinguishing fine shades."19

Critical displeasure from such an impressive and respectable source gives substance to the generally adverse appraisal of this aspect of the play. Complaint about the narrowness of characterization is the focal point for what hostile criticism exists. Jonson is also scored for using the method of Dickens without his cheerfulness,20 and berated for limiting his characterization by emphasizing individual oddities. He is accused of exaggerating the varying weaknesses of his persons to the point of


denying them common sense. 21  Another critic qualifies his admission that Jonson makes his character types human by pointing out that he does not rouse any sympathy for them, and "there lies his greatest weakness." 22

Certain characters escape the general displeasure—notably Bobadil. He has generated more interest as a dramatic character in his own right than has any of the others and is cited constantly as proof of Jonson's ability to transform a stock type. Enthusiasm and delight are often the reactions of the critic as he considers this "supreme glory of the play." 23 He is described by one critic as "probably Jonson's happiest character," 24 and by another as the personage who brings in an amazing amount of lively comedy when he is in action. 25 For another, Bobadil is that rare comic character who might have met Falstaff and not utterly quailed. 26 In one of the few excursions into historical interpretation that the play has evoked, Aylward suggests a theory which might explain the convincing personality that Jonson bestowed on this character. 27 Aylward thinks Rocco Bonetti, a fashionable master of the rapier who came from Italy to England

21Spencer, Elizabethan Plays, p. 254.
22Schweikert, op. cit., p. 65.
23Ibid., p. 774.
24Marguerite Hays, op. cit., p. 35.
25Sampson, op. cit., p. 299.
about 1569, at a time when some felt the use of the rapier was cowardly, was the model. Perhaps Jonson, as a practiced swordsman, was comforting other swordsmen by holding up their ancient enemy to ridicule.

Unless a comparison between the Quarto and Folio versions is being developed, evaluation of the language of the play is surprisingly scattered and generalized. Usually one encounters only such typically broad appraisals that the play proved Jonson a "master of sinewy and incisive prose," or that "the ready wit, the sharpness and polish, the unflagging thrust and parry of the dialogue are classical...but the force and naturalness are Jonson's." The only really notable commentary takes us into the debatable area of literary influence, where two scholars present antithetical interpretations. Taylor attempts to establish Shakespeare's responsibility for many expressions in the play, used frequently by him, but never used by Jonson. Especially convincing, he feels, is the fact that the phrases are those belonging to Kitely, the character Shakespeare may have played. One has but to read in close connection The Merry Wives of Windsor and Every Man in His Humour to notice how much more they resemble one another in countless details of expression, character, and situation than do any other plays of these two dramatists. Another critic, however, sees Shakespeare as the beneficiary. Noting that Shakespeare is

29Schelling and Black, op. cit., p. 273.
31Claire McGlinchee, "Still harping..." SP, VI (Summer, 1955), 362-364.
supposed to have played the elder Knowell, and that, like Polonius, this character spies upon his son, Miss McGlinchee suggests that the Polonius' speech of precepts may have had as one source the speech of advice of the Elder Knowell. The speech of both characters covers similar points.  

When critics discuss the historical importance of the play, they are almost unanimously complimentary. Complaints about the "pernicious" influence of this "flat and dull play" and its inconsistent credibility exist, but they are rare. Usually critics express unmixed pleasure at the play's achievement, and emphasize its great influence—perhaps the greatest influence exercised by any single play of Jonson's. Whatever

32 One presumes that most of the general comment on this play concerns its revised version. If the critical problem of the revision is mentioned at all, it is usually dismissed in a brief and summary fashion. The only exception is the detailed and impressive evaluation made by Herford and Simpson. They carefully weigh all possibilities for the date of the revision, and decide that it belongs to the time he was writing Epicoene and The Alchemist, when Jonson had definitely abandoned exotic scenery and personnel and had begun to devote himself to really showing an image of the times. The system of scene division in the Folio reflects a characteristic approximation to the technique of Roman comedy. The punctuation of the second version avoids ambiguity, and produces a more deliberate and balanced delivery. The revised diction is designed simply to give the same matter a more supple, expressive, and colloquial form. The ordinary terms replace the earlier pedantic or inkhorn terms. There is a similar preference for the more colloquial forms of grammatical usage. The underlying motive of all Jonson's changes is the more consistent preservation of the tone and atmosphere of comedy and comic decorum. Structural changes often show signs of Jonson's trying to simplify and compress, to excise repetitions of the same motive. There can be no question that the revised play is at every point superior in execution to the original. See also Spencer, Elizabethan Plays, p. 254; Schelling and Black, op. cit., p. 270; and Jonas Barish, above, p. 170.


34 Lawrence, Pre-Restoration Stage Studies, p. 295.

precedents exist, Jonson is credited as the foremost practitioner of the
comedies of humours and his play as surpassing all others of this type. 36

The play has been offered as founding a whole new motive for drama,37 and
we are told that the historical importance of the work cannot be over-

It is also selected as a great force in English comedy,39 and
it is said that the success of the play determined the whole course of
English comedy for the next two hundred years.40

Of the special problem of Jonson's literary influence on contemporary
literature, two articles on the possible effect of the play on Shakespeare
should not go unnoticed. Paul Mueschke and Jeannette Fleisher are con-
vinced that a direct relationship exists between the comic underplot of
Twelfth Night and the method Jonson developed in this play and his next.41

The relationship of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew is that of the Jonsonian
victimizer and gull. Furthermore, Malvolio is Shakespeare's adaptation
of the Jonsonian "humour." A very intriguing resemblance is noted in the
rendezvous of the gulls which brings about the exhibition of their humour.
An atmosphere of conviviality and riot, violently disturbed by the entrance
of authoritative virtue, is common to both. Shakespeare's treatment of
Andrew exemplifies to the fullest extent the Jonsonian conception and


41 Paul Mueschke and Jeannette Fleisher, "Jonsonian Elements in the Comic
Underplot of *Twelfth Night*," PMLA, XLVIII (September, 1933), 722-740.
treatment of the gull and his relationship to his victimizer. The trick of inveigling him into challenging Cesario is thoroughly Jonsonian in character. Andrew's perpetual echoing of Sir Toby is an almost invariable characteristic of the stupid gull. His closest counterpart in the Jonsonian gallery of gulls is Stephen. Malvolio is even more complex, and only the long tradition of the Puritan interpretation has prevented us from recognizing his close kinship with the Jonsonian humour character, one whose "humour" is self-love.

Sallie Sewell works out another relationship between the two dramatists through a comparison of The Merry Wives of Windsor and Every Man in His Humour. The fundamental resemblances she sees involve character, plot, and the ridicule of current foibles. Both Stephen and Slender share the type characteristics of the gull; both are stupid, dependent creatures who rely upon books to guide their activities. Falstaff strongly resembles "the inimitable Babadill," and, like him, is led to his downfall through vanity. Even more important is the similarity between Ford and Kitely. In both jealousy is considered a disease to be cured, and the jealousy of each is motivated by vanity. Each is constantly concerned with what other people will think of him. Kitely's obsession has gone much further than Ford's, who is able to think clearly and to act. Kitely is the more interesting as a study of jealousy, but Ford is more dynamic as a character.

Details of the plots are so different that Miss Sewell concedes

42 Sallie Sewell, "The Relations between The Merry Wives of Windsor and Jonson's Every Man in His Humour," SAB, XVI (July, 1941), 175-189.

43 Ibid., p. 178.
that *Every Man in His Humour* cannot be considered as a source for Shakespeare, but she points out the remarkably similar structure of both plays. In the main plot we have the guller gulled, and in both subordinate plots we have the plotter revealing his plans by inadvisedly showing a letter to his servant. Both have a remarkably similar cure of a jealous husband. The characters in both plays are not contending forces, but are divided into groups of aggressors and more or less passive victims. Among the other miscellaneous similarities are the ridicule of heraldry, of duelling, of the government's attempts to prevent duelling, of hunting, and of dependence upon books of instruction. Most significant is the ridiculing of the misunderstanding and the abuse of the word "humour." This study illustrates the general belief that Jonson's comedy of humours exerted an influence which not only permeated his own plays "but those of most of his contemporaries, Shakespeare not excepted."44

Pronounced dislike is the most characteristic attitude expressed by most modern critics toward *Every Man out of His Humour*. Indifference and contempt are so frequently found in Jonson criticism that they seldom surprise or jar. The distaste felt for this play, however, is so constant and so deep that one accepts it as the most compelling fact about the whole body of criticism. So pervasive is this impression that one soon begins to classify reactions less by content than by the moderation or the astringency of tone. If it were not for the handful of extended and

44 Schwei kert, op. cit., p. 65.
important appraisals of the play, its modern literary reputation would rest on a series of terse, condemnatory statements with which most critics dispose of the play.

Representative citations will indicate both the universal distaste and the many reasons for it. The play is dismissed as "long-winded, didactic, and over-charged with satirical criticism...." The absence of any amusement is blamed on the over-elaborate characters and the too detailed exposure of folly. One commentator, uncritically enthusiastic over many of the other plays, complains that here Jonson's talent for caricature "goes completely beserk." Others discard it as a theoretical and humorless comedy, which is plotless, dry, and arid, and one in which the reader sighs "in vain for a scene which would simply show humanity." The kindest thing one critic can say is that Jonson was too inexperienced a playwright to attempt such a work, and others can justify anthologizing part of the play only on the grounds of its historical importance. But the great majority of critics do not attempt to extenuate the play, insisting that we have here a total failure in

45Sampson, op. cit., p. 299.
46Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 172.
47Gassner, op. cit., p. 240.
48Perry, op. cit., p. 90.
49Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 197.
50Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 288.
51Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 106.
plot,\textsuperscript{53} purpose,\textsuperscript{54} and character,\textsuperscript{55} a work which is both heavy reading and poor theater.\textsuperscript{56}

Because extended discussions of the play are rare, the essay of Herford and Simpson assumes unusual importance and value. The editors do not attempt to deny the play's dullness and artistic ineptitude, but they do suggest that some admirable elements save it from total worthlessness. For example, the brilliant character descriptions prefixed to the text show a mastery far surer than anything in the dialogue. The play is important also for having a more direct satiric purpose and "a more uncompromising and defiant originality of method" than its predecessor.\textsuperscript{57}

It is apparent from remarks in the play that Jonson composed this work as a model for Elizabethan drama.

The play embodies far-reaching innovations in structure and comic method; for here Jonson intended to compose a "comical satire," which means that he was deliberately extending the literary fashion of satire. The effect of this aim is apparent in every point of the dramatic plan. It affects the plot-structure, the choice of characters, the dramatic business, and the presentation of the entire piece. Jonson's technique and aim are like those of medieaval and sixteenth-century satire, but his anatomy of society is a specific and direct one of his own time and place.


\textsuperscript{54}Kneipp, op. cit., p. 59.

\textsuperscript{55}Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 143.

\textsuperscript{56}Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 136.

\textsuperscript{57}Op. cit., I, 375.
The play should not, however, be read as an example of personal satire. Revenge against individuals was beneath Jonson's serious purpose. No characters can be plausibly identified with Marston and Dekker. Instead, the characters chiefly represent "the foibles incident to jealously emphasized class distinctions, and fierce ambition for place and wealth."\(^{58}\)

Herford and Simpson suggest a number of reasons for the stagnant quality so many have found in the play. They agree with all who have complained that the characters are too generic, but they suggest too that these persons are individualized just enough so that their various activities "resist ready inclusion in any straightforward and coherent plot."\(^{59}\) No common business brings all the persons or even all the groups together. The only connection among the many miniature plots making up the play is that they lead to the exhibition and the cure of humours. Even though Jonson curbs his fondness for symbolic and allusive incident, the invention rarely produces the fresh atmosphere of *Every Man in His Humour*. The comic catastrophes show no complex or subtle psychology, and the cures are usually of a rough, practical kind. Only two catastrophes stand out as examples of high comedy, that of Delirio and his wife and the even better designed and executed discomfiture of Saviolina.

The editors conclude with several remarks about the characterization. Two of the humours, Buffone and Macilente, because they are the principal agents in the cure of the rest, are very important. They function in a double capacity: as objects of the dramatist's satire and as his exe- cutants. The double function invests Macilente with a certain ambiguity. The "cure" of both, when it does come, seems very superficial and external. \(^{58}\) *Ibid.*, p. 384. \(^{59}\) *Ibid.*
Asper is an especially interesting character, for in him Jonson delineated for the first time his ideal poet. When Jonson utters through him the passages of vehement and lofty scorn, he reveals one of the driving forces of his own art and one of the moods through which he himself most nearly approached poetry. As a character Asper is a notable creation, more human and sympathetic than any other figure in this drama of eccentrics, in which story interest is feeble, dispersed, and rudimentary.

Modern criticism, besides that already described which merely registers a general reaction, is sparse. The information provided by most contemporary scholarship is quite minor in nature and does nothing to qualify the traditionally unfavorable interpretation. It is noted that the play covers two and a half days, and thus exceeds the limits of the neo-classical rule for the unity of time. 60 One writer feels that Jonson's use of "Insula Fortunata" is significant, because the "fortunate island," a very fitting setting for the humourous butts, recalls the manner of Erasmus' The Praise of Folly. Presumably, Jonson was drawing upon a tradition and using a point that an alert Elizabethan would appreciate. 61 Another critic points out that the Italian names forewarn the audience about the characters, and are an ancient comic device of the allegorical poets. 62 The definitions in Florio's Italian-English dictionary echo Jonson's descriptions, and a knowledge of this likely source clarifies


his intention in characterization.


His scholarship is considerably emphasized, and such a profession means that he was wretchedly poverty-stricken. His scholarship is considerably emphasized, and such a profession means that he was wretchedly poverty-stricken. Jonson's picture of him may not be amiable, but he is, nevertheless, the most intelligent character in the play. Jonson's picture of him may not be amiable, but he is, nevertheless, the most intelligent character in the play. Curry distinguishes Macilente's function in the plot from Buffone's, thus disagreeing with the interpretation of Herford and Simpson. John V. Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955), pp. 21-23.

He points out that only Macilente is active in maneuvering the others into positions where they give the supreme exhibition of their folly and have their eyes opened at the same time. Buffone himself undergoes ignominious treatment through the double-dealing of Macilente. Macilente's motivation is the envy in him which is a dynamic humour, and not only "issues forth in lip-curling censure of the other characters but drives him into corrective action against them." Enck's study, like that of Herford and Simpson, finds merit in the individual

65 John V. Curry, Deception in Elizabethan Comedy (Chicago, 1955), pp. 21-23.
66 Ibid., p. 23.
67 Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, pp. 44-58.
elements, particularly the language and the vital dialogue, but he feels that the finished work fails to combine effectively its fine parts and high standards. There is evidence here of superior work and intelligence, but the play cannot be accepted as being coherent. It is seriously and hopelessly disunified. Jonson wished to be both learned and popular, and his play, consequently, has qualities pulling it in opposite directions. The humours provide no focus, for Jonson is here exploiting the concept in all possible senses. The only conclusion Beck can offer is that this is no play, but a series of superior vaudeville skits by comedians improvising on any theme.

The most important modern critic of the play, Oscar Campbell, differs fundamentally from all the critics so far considered by finding in the work both coherence and unity. 68 Campbell approaches the play historically, places it in an important literary development, and, incidentally, explains many things about it which have disturbed or dismayed other critics. He accepts the play as the first attempt to dramatize satire and thus circumvent the official ban on formal satire. In order fully to understand the work and its achievement, Campbell feels a knowledge of the immediate historical background and the special assumptions about Renaissance satire is necessary.

This play attempted more than a circumvention of the forbidden satire. Campbell is convinced that Jonson composed Every Man out of His Humour as a sixteenth-century equivalent of the Greek vetus comoedia. His

68 Oscar J. Campbell, Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida (San Marino, 1938).
following this general model, Campbell suggests, means that we must accept Jonson's disclaimers of unrestrained personal satire seriously. The sixteenth-century English critics felt that New Comedy, the fountainhead of all Renaissance comedy, was distinguished from Old Comedy by its substitution of good-natured correction of faults common to large numbers of men for rough, impudent attacks on individuals. Ridicule was acceptable only as a method to dissuade men from vice and to encourage them to virtue. Jonson in his critical writings makes clear that he accepted all of these ideas. His comical satire is most clearly understood when regarded as an original synthesis of the practice of the ancients in old comedy and the theories of the Renaissance based on classical precept and example.

A knowledge of the state of English satire in the late sixteenth century Campbell considers necessary for a proper understanding of the play, for it was from late sixteenth-century English satire that Jonson derived his immediate inspiration. Satire in Jonson's time was partly the result of conscious imitation of the Latin satirists and partly the natural reaction to a changing social world. The disordered economic structure stimulated writers of all sorts to a zealous reformation of the world in which they lived, a world in which "social abuses were not the result of laws operating independently of man, but the work of wicked individuals." Satiric protest took two forms: prose works fashioned on the various sorts of mediæval and early Renaissance models, and formal verse fashioned on the work of the Latin satirists. The social

69 Ibid., p. 15.
pamphleteers introduced the influential personal lampoon, and the method of classical satire suggested a manner of anatomizing, mirroring, and scourging fools and knaves which appealed to the cultivated. The widely held belief that satire and the satyr play were closely related is responsible for satire's "harshness and license." Of the contributions made by early writers of English satire, Barclay's insistence on complete realism was to become an important article of faith in the satirist's credo. Besides formal satirists, an almost equally large group of writers of satiric epigrams flourished during the same decade, and dealt, not with sins, but with minor social absurdities.

That Jonson was determined to incorporate so many of the distinguishing characteristics of the prohibited satire explains most of the unusual features of his comedy. In planning his drama, he sought guidance in the traditions of literary criticism from the ancients to his own day, and from contemporary dramatic practice. By tradition, Jonson had to force his characters to assume forms of exaggeration familiar to caricature, to pursue them with hostile comment, and either to dramatize their reformation or scornfully to eject them from the play. Most importantly, he had to invent figures who could naturally assume the important functions of derision and censure exercised by the authors of formal satire. Without the presence of a character to establish the ethical and social standards and to mark deviations from them, the intent of the author's ridicule and correction would remain obscure.

Jonson's first problem was the invention of an effective repre-

70 Ibid., p. 29.
sentative of the author in formal satire, one who would have to fill "the indispensable post of commentator."\textsuperscript{71} The invention of two characters was suggested to him by some of the cardinal principles of comic theory found in the Aristotelian tradition. In assigning Macilente the dominant passion of envy, Jonson was choosing the emotion most likely to stimulate effective criticism of vice and folly. Asper-Macilente is a type who is obviously an agent of didactic reflection and ethical exposition. As long as he remains Asper, the mood is like that of the formal satirists in the 1590's. His boldness and recklessness of consequences show him to be a "reincarnation of the spirit of the recently defunct formal satire."\textsuperscript{72} But the comment and action of the envious Macilente make him quite different from the ordinary "humour" melancholies. The audience would expect his utterances to be of two sorts: first, the occasional indulgence in vituperation, and second, philosophical pessimism. He performs the office of expositor and forces the fools to expose themselves. When the characters have been purged of their follies, Macilente's mood completely changes. In divesting the objects of his envy of their desirable possessions, he has successfully followed the course suggested by Aristotle and completely rids himself of his own predominant humour.

Buffone, the other agent of satire, uses unrestrained detraction, and is animated by neither the reformatory zeal of Asper nor the envy of Macilente. It is probable that Jonson devised Carlo to serve as a conventional buffon rather than as a thinly disguised representative of one

\textsuperscript{71}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 56. \textsuperscript{72}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 58.
of his contemporaries. Carlo illustrated in his speech and in his deeds Jonson's ideas of a typical buffon, an improper agent of satire. Both he and Macilente represent Jonson's first attempt to invent dramatic figures capable of assuming the duties which were proper to the authors of formal satire, and yet both become in Jonson's hands human beings. Jonson's contribution may be suggested by the fact that the "inclusion of a representative of one or both of these figures in a comedy became a distinguishing mark of the new type."\textsuperscript{73}

The dialogue of Mitis and Cordatus shows Jonson's realization that he was working in an unfamiliar dramatic form and that he found it hard to give his play a sense of movement. Movement is especially impeded by the almost mechanical procession of fools, a device which was intended to show the affinity of the play with formal satire. Having to keep his stage filled with eccentrics resulted in another structural difficulty. When a principal character is given a scene in which to display his humour, he is surrounded by a number of fools posturing in their favorite attitudes. This device gives only pictorial coherence to the scenes. However, the sudden deflation of the humours represents Jonson's successful effort to unite at the crucial point in his comical satire a reversal of fortune appropriate to comedy with the harsh spirit of formal satire. Strongly reminiscent of the recently inhibited satire are the selection of characters and the cruel method of derision. "Almost every one of them represents some aspect of the social and economic revolution which was being wrought in contemporary England by the growing conquests of the

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., p. 70.
new capitalism."\(^{74}\)

Of great importance for the new genre of comical satire are the conventions of dramatic narrative which Jonson established in the play. The most distinctive convention was the presence of at least one commentator, and usually two. The function of both was to keep the spirit of hostile mockery alive in the audience. Jonson also established what was to be the typical career of the "humourous" figures in the new comical satire. Derisive exposition, exposure of their folly to the audience and to themselves, deflation, and, occasionally announced reform followed each other in rapid succession. The group movement of the characters serves as a more or less effective substitute for the coherent plot of traditional comedy. The complete deflation of the fools, one by one, realizes the joyous anticipation of the audience. But the state of mind is unlike that in which the audience finds itself at the close of an ordinary comedy. Jonson's professed aim was to arouse ethical satisfaction at the reform of knaves and relief at the disappearance of folly. However, these satiric comedies effect no real purgation; "they leave audience and reader in an aroused state of scorn at human folly and futility."\(^{75}\) Campbell's analysis establishes the fact that Jonson's play has theatrical weakness because of too mechanically close adherence to the conventions of formal satire. And yet, he notes that the play possesses many virtues, especially in giving a "structural and an intellectual unity to the dramatic careers of a very large number of creatures who deserve the derision which Jonson systematically directs against them."\(^{76}\)

\(^{74}\)Ibid., pp. 71-72. \(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 80. \(^{76}\)Ibid., p. 81.
This criticism of the play and its type is of the very first importance. For a sympathetic reader of Jonson it helps to reconcile this strange, rejected work and Jonson's great intelligence and art. The range and wealth of historical evidence give the play a significance and a literary respectability it lacks completely in the appraisal of other critics. Judged purely as criticism, Campbell's theory is perhaps a bit too all-encompassing, too perfect an account of a troublesome type of drama, and other critics have not been hesitant to enter their objections. Helena Baum typifies those who present a particular rebuttal.77 The plot, characters, and other elements, she points out, are those Jonson had used before, although here the satiric material is embodied in the main characters of the play. Miss Baum, substituting her own theory for Campbell's, asserts that the play is an example of Jonson's desire to include solid and serious material in his work, without having the ability to incorporate it skillfully. She thinks it doubtful that at the time of this play he had a definite theory of composition or that the theory of satiric comedy was very well formulated. Others feel that Campbell makes a too cavalier dismissal of personal satire78 or find it hard to believe that drama was a less censured form than satire.79

But most critics who review the work accept it without question. Approval is voiced at the closeness of the investigation and Campbell's giving a satisfactory unity to two genres in this perceptive study.80 It


79F. P. Wilson, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

80Alice Walker, RES, XVI (January, 1940), 90-92.
is suggested that more than any previous study, this appraisal relates the play objectively and significantly to the dramatic and theatrical realities of the day and is important because Campbell reduces to reasonable proportions the personal satirical elements in comical satire.81 Tucker Brooke praises Campbell's study as a learned and original work. He points out that if the comical satires are judged by the usual standards, we received only a vague sense of them, but Campbell offers valuable clues to their elucidation, and his formula most successfully explains *Every Man out of His Humour*.

5.

The most important fact in the twentieth-century criticism of *Cynthia's Revels* is the sudden shift toward a rehabilitation in the most recent criticism. Up to a certain point in contemporary criticism, scholarly response to the play has been, at best, tepid. The angry and harsh disappointment expressed toward the preceding play here gives way to an indifferent summary of the play's many and obvious faults. For most critics the over-elaborate decorations of the play merely expose its lack of unity and lack of artistic purpose. But several recent studies depart sharply from this traditional view and insist that in *Cynthia's Revels* Jonson composed a very coherent play and one containing much ethical and dramatic worth.

of Herford and Simpson. They find here no coherency and no indication of artistic advance. From whatever angle they view the play, they consider it a failure. Seen even as a document in Jonson's biography, as his attempt to exploit recent events and thus to advance his own fortunes with the Queen, the play fails dismally, revealing only the innate tactlessness of the dramatist. The editors allude, of course, to the references to Elizabeth's treatment of Essex and Jonson's defense of the Queen. Although Jonson intended this play as a symbol of the justice of the Queen's act, her resentment can be easily understood. Elizabeth was not likely to enjoy such an apology for her faults which reminded her that they were current gossip. Nor would she have relished the apologist's being a plebian playwright, nor Cynthia's being overshadowed in the play itself.

As they commence their literary analysis, the editors announce that to even the most sympathetic student of Jonson this play is an enigma. The note of apology, which softened the criticism of *Every Man out of His Humour*, is absent in this undisguisedly harsh summary of its successor. The editors see *Cynthia's Revels* as a prime example of the satiric, moralizing, and abstract elements of Jonson's mind dominating his characteristic dramatic instinct and destroying the action of the play. Another explanation of the play is Jonson's struggle to fit into a dramatic context the new and popular modes of satirical expression. But the struggle is unsuccessful, Herford and Simpson decide, for the play lacks coherence; it consists of a "number of embryonic or fragmentary actions, very loosely and inorganically connected."83

Much of the rest of the discussion concerns sources and models for the play. The editors find at least three distinct story-types making up the work: classic myth, moral allegory, and the intrigues and pastimes of Elizabeth's Court. The myth element centers chiefly on the Aristophanic Fountain of Self-Love. This fundamental device, a brilliant satiric development of the mythical fountain by which Narcissus perished, "seems designed to play a much more decisive part in the action than it ultimately proves to do." As it stands, the masque, which is the principal contribution of Court life to the plot, emerges as the cardinal incident of the piece. Jonson's satire on the courtly follies leading up to the masque produces scenes to which he devoted very careful writing, but they are among the most tedious he ever composed. Because he included the Court and the Queen, Jonson committed himself to symbolism, a device foreign to what was strongest in his art and a dangerous appeal to the scholastic and abstract side of his intellect.

In their discussion of the literary precedents for the play these critics see affinities with the morality tradition. The plot exhibits the conflict between good and evil, and its psychologically convincing humour characters tend to become a collection of personified faults corresponding to the evil powers of the morality play. The contrast between the Queen's virtues and the follies of her Court still further adds to the morality effect, and sets up a sharp moral cleavage. The adoption by the vicious characters of names of virtues was a very familiar motive of the morality. The aim of reform and the use of a mythic Court play

84 Ibid., p. 399.
also certainly follow the example of Iyly. But despite the many reminders of older modes in details and in single characters, Jonson shows himself still the greatest realist painter in Elizabethan London. The most congenial and convincing scenes are those involving the revellers, when "the true Jonsonian world of the London streets" comes bursting in.  

Discussion of the characterization brings in the troublesome problem of personal identification. Herford and Simpson minimize both the presence and importance of personal satire in this play. They accept the fact of Jonson's principle of "sparing the persons and dealing only with faults."  

Far more important than the resemblance of Hedon and Anaides to Marston and Dekker is their resemblance to general types previously used by Jonson. Hedon is another Fastidious Brisk and Anaides strongly resembles Buffone. Personal traits of Jonson's contemporaries may qualify the characters, but they do not destroy their typical quality. The most interesting character of the play is Crites, because he helps make the work an impressive document in the history of Jonson's intellectual idealism. He is Jonson's champion of wisdom and virtue at war with vice and folly and has the most dramatic and significant part in the play. Not a little of Jonson's character is present in this ideal embodiment of his cause. "If the inner mind of Jonson, his intellectual ascendancy, ever finds full utterance, it is in some of these Critean invectives."  

Enough evidence could be easily assembled to show the agreement of later critics with Herford and Simpson that the play is an almost total  

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 402.} \]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 407.} \]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 412.} \]
failure. But more significant is the modern critical search for those elements in the play which might mitigate the usual condemnation that this is a "sad spectacle of wasted genius." Although the tendency is too slight to amount to a reversal, it does foreshadow the later rehabilitation of the play, and is interesting on that account. Wheeler assigns the play a certain negative value in Jonson's development as an artist. Writing Cynthia's Revels taught Jonson that myth lacks the vitality essential for even the shallowest of plots. But Wheeler also asserts that the abundance of fable, the satirical movement, the lyric loveliness, and the judicious moralizations "munificently compensate every reader." Edward LeCompte touches briefly on the play as a successful exploitation of the Cynthia myth to cover events at Court, and accepts the fact that Jonson in this play uses the figures of Actaeon to suggest Essex's intrusion on Elizabeth. For others the brilliant dialogue compensates for the play's other faults.

Although such comments as these brighten the critical picture somewhat, they rest on the assumption that the play is a partial failure at best. Several recent studies which concentrate on particular problems arrive at conclusions so different that we seem to be contemplating a different play entirely. Among these valuable reappraisals is Campbell's,

88 Kitchin, op. cit., p. 52.


which discusses the work as a dramatized satire and contains much perceptive comment on its purpose and effect. Campbell's major contention is that Jonson was again attempting to construct a dramatic equivalent of formal satire in which he once more ignores the classical rules and the conventions of pure comedy. To conceal the satiric scaffolding, which he had previously emphasized, he borrowed the progresses, pageants, and other forms of Court shows. In filling almost half of the play with mythological and allegorical devices, Jonson was obviously making his satire palatable to an aristocratic audience.

Crites represents the author's satiric point of view, and keeps the temper of Cynthia's Revels consistently derisive and corrective. He functions as a guide through the comedy's complex ways, but he should not automatically be equated with Jonson. It is sounder, Campbell feels, to recognize his conventional dramatic function. He is Jonson's notion of an ideal critic of manners and morals. "An understanding of this simple fact enables us to rescue the play from the region of mere pique and personal irritation and to elevate it into one of conscious art and of permanent satirical and ethical value."92 Because Crites views the humours as unmistakable symptoms which provoke him to moral indignation, he shares the spirit of castigation which animated the writers of formal satire. Other links with the mode of satire are the use of Mercury and Cupid, who keep the audience's attitude toward the humourous figures hostile and derisive. Jonson's use of the Fountain of Self-Love maintains the traditional horatory temper of formal satire.

92 Comicall Satyre, p. 86.
Campbell's analysis of the final scene is especially important. Jonson utilizes the familiar principle that the moment when the gulls attain the highest point of their fatuity is the time when their correction can be most effectively initiated. The idea of moral and social reform is infinitely more sound than that of the angry satirists who preceded Jonson. It becomes an expression of noble stoicism. Though philosophically more profound, it does not easily express itself in comic action as does the simpler and more facile type of derision that he had used in the final scenes of Every Man out of His Humour. In the last act Jonson adapts almost all of the masque conventions to his satiric purpose. If a modern reader considers the last act ineffective and anti-climatic, Jonson must have believed that it clarified and dignified the ethical importance of his social satire, and an Elizabethan audience would have understood and appreciated Jonson's purpose. Satire here becomes an instrument for profound social and individual reform. But also evident in this second attempt to create effective dramatic satire was the modification of severity. Jonson elevated harsh comical satire to a sort of court entertainment enriched with all the traditional peculiarities of the masque.

Other scholars who contemplate Jonson's purpose, theme, and manipulation of devices in the play discover a recognizable function and unity. While two of these studies occur rather late in the period of modern criticism, a general comment on the play's unifying purpose had been suggested by Miss Dunn in 1925.\(^{93}\) Part of her study relates this play to Jonson's

interest in the Court as one of the shaping forces of society. He was interested in the ideal and practice of the courtier's life, and he was also intent on punishing deviations from the norm of greatness. While the shrewdness and savagery of the attack on courtly faults, foibles, and fashions is very apparent, the play also reflects Jonson's tremendous admiration of the great profession of statesmanship. No one worshipped more the ideal of a true aristocracy based on nobility of feeling and a sense of obligation rather than external position. Virtue should be the basis for preferment in public life. In this play Jonson "differentiates the outstanding weaknesses of the Court and exaggerates them with delicacy of touch, to open the eyes of a too thoughtless group to its own importance and the neglect of its splendid opportunities." 94

An even more important and original discussion of the play's serious purpose is Talbert's analysis of the mythology and structure of the play. 95 He feels it is important to recognize the Renaissance tendency to consider mythology as allegory, and feels that the play's mythological elements cannot be dismissed as merely decorative. Behind many speeches in Cynthia's Revels stand moral expositions which unify the mythological elements, and are closely related to the ethical maxims Jonson attempts to inculcate. An understanding of the Renaissance interpretation of mythology extenuates the severe criticism of the construction of the play. Talbert concentrates on the myths of Echo, Narcissus, Niobe, and Actaeon. Echo, the traditional symbol of a repre-

94_Ibid., p. 17.

hensible talkativeness, is clearly important in the play, but subordi-
nated to the plans for Diana's appearance and linked to the myth of
Actaeon. At the start of the play, in spite of Mercury's attempt to
silence her, Echo is the one who derides Cynthia, accusing her of harsh-
ness and of self-love. As for Narcissus, the tragic result of his self-
love was considered a warning to those who delight in the transitory
glories of the world. Narcissus may also symbolize those who think their
ignorance to be wisdom. It is natural that the moralizers should see in
Niobe a divine punishment of pride and temerity and would appreciate
Jonson's linking her fate with the Fountain of Self-Love. Most im-
portant is Talbert's interpretation of the Actaeon myth. The tragedy of
Actaeon, like that of all the mythological characters, results from igno-
rant presumption. Talbert rejects the idea that the Actaeon material
symbolizes Essex's bursting into the Queen's chambers. A little known
version of the myth by Diodorus of Sicily quoted in Stephanus' Thesaurus
is unquestionably the source of Jonson's lines. Here the Actaeon study
symbolizes the dangers of prying into and judging the secrets of great
men, princes, and gods.

Since all the mythological figures represent an unwarranted pre-
sumption, the mythological elements are consequently unified. Before the
play ends, the courtiers, whose vices are satirized throughout the play,
are punished by Cynthia because their self-love has led to a presumption
equal to that of Niobe and Actaeon. The courtiers are guilty of compar-
ing themselves favorably to Cynthia. Like Niobe, they have considered
themselves to be better than gods, and, like Actaeon, they have attempted
to penetrate to the secrets of the state. It seems very likely that the
myth of Niobe and particularly this interpretation of the myth of Actaeon as expounded by Renaissance commentaries were in Jonson's mind when he composed this portion of the drama, which brings about the catastrophe.

Talbert sees as another sustained theme which unifies the play the necessity to bestow benefits upon the worthy. This interpretation is also to be found in Comes and Charles Stephanus, who use the myth of Actaeon to inculcate the maxim that benefits should be bestowed upon good men and not upon the unworthy who wrong the bounty done them. The rewarding of good men is the conclusion toward which the entire comical satire leads. With Jonson's predilection for stoicism and for the particular theme of the bestowal of benefits, it would be surprising if he did not remember the kindred mythological interpretations appearing in the standard reference works.

Jonson was attempting to inculcate the practice of Stoic virtue and suggesting the gods, like the best of rulers, will not waste their bounty by conferring it upon the unworthy. The play develops toward a situation in which Cynthia, coming to justify her action toward Actaeon, is confronted on the one hand by courtiers, whose vices are of the same nature as those of Niobe and Actaeon himself, and on the other hand by the Stoic wise man, who has been despised by the fatuous courtiers, but who is rewarded by Cynthia because of her love for virtue. The moral of the catastrophe, consequently, is closely related to the ethical maxims which interpreters of classical mythology would expound through the moralizations of the Actaeon myth. Thus, when the moralizations of the classic myths Jonson used are understood by the reader, so are his basic design and principle of composition.
Allan Gilbert accepts the Talbert reading completely, and adds an interpretation of the masque. The function of the masque, he feels, was part of Jonson's serious interest in reform. Among the ideas he tried to develop are that the virtues represented in the masque are not the fundamental ones of noble character, but rather the secondary ones of good manners. The sterner virtues are found in Crites, who is rather like the ideal courtier defined by Castiglione. The virtues and vices in disguise follow the well-known stage device and represent a theme going back to Plutarch. The idea that the flatterer makes virtues into vices was widely circulated, and the device had political suggestions for the early seventeenth century. Its mere presence in Cynthia's Revels is an indication that the prince is being cautioned against the insidious enemies pretending to be friends. Since Elizabeth is a perfect ruler, Jonson could not show her being injured by flattery, but can only suggest that vices present at Court are accepted as virtues by persons other than the Queen. Still, the presentation is a veiled exhortation to her to be wary. The Vices Unmasked is marked by Cynthia's noting her own personal responsibility at the unmasking. The dramatist's purpose is indicated by the end of the play, which "goes far toward being a section from a work de regimine principum." The play, however, is a comedy, and represents revels and sports dealing, not with the cardinal virtues, but with those qualities necessary to "complement," that is, the amenities of the courteous life, graces rather than fundamental virtues.


97Ibid., p. 227.
The main purpose of the play is the reformation of the manners of the courtier, the same purpose which is touched upon in the other two comical satires. Jonson wished earnestly for courtiers with harmonious voices and wits able to appreciate the best that the poet could write. The unity of Cynthia's Revels arises from the satirical attempt to attack the vapidness of Court life, and to show how high and noble, and yet pleasing and graceful, a Court should be. The action is not that of a play of adventure or intrigue, and the construction is suitable to the nature of comical satire, the court being a support to the poet, a stage for the exact courtier, and a mirror to a gentleman of Cynthia's realm.

6.

Modern criticism of The Poetaster, like that for Cynthia's Revels, shows a sharp division between the early and the more recent scholarship. The earlier criticism is mostly interested in the play as an historical document--its significance as Jonson's portrait of ancient Rome, and, of course, for its place in the War of the Theaters. Biographical discussion absorbs so much interest that little remains for the literary quality of the play beyond a blanket condemnation as an example of everything inferior and inexplicable in Jonson's art. More recent criticism reacts quite differently, for it is easily able to find many important and admirable elements in this work, which, by many critics, is now accepted as one of the most important statements Jonson ever made on art and ethics, and a statement embodied in a form well suited to his purpose.

Little of the recent approval of the play is foreshadowed by Herford and Simpson, whose essay on the play is a rather disjointed discussion
of several problems. Much of their attention is directed toward the play's achievement as dramatized history and Jonson's use of the Roman setting. Jonson, they suggest, was better qualified than any other contemporary to describe Augustan Rome, and was justified in pointing out resemblances to his own time and status. The situation of Horace, while no perfect parallel, does lend itself effectively to his special purpose. If he did not yet have strong connections with the rich and powerful, "in the number and bitterness of his literary assailants" Jonson's situation did bear a striking resemblance to that of Horace.98 The Augustan setting especially suited Jonson because it supplied a stark satirical comparison, humiliating to his assailants and glorious to himself. The episode reassured him because it was one in which the united illustrious poets triumphed over the malignity to which they were exposed. Especially fascinating for him was the opportunity to compose a learned description of a fragment of Roman history. Unfortunately, he indulged in all of these purposes, and, as a result, produced the least well-made of all his works.

The editors accept the play as an important statement in the War of the Theaters, but they insist that even in this context the play stands for much more than a personal attack or retaliation on hostile playwrights. The Stage Quarrel itself meant more than personal animosities. Jonson battled "as much for the honour of poetry and the discomfiture of bad poets as in vindication of his own character."99 The really important thing about Marston and Dekker is not their professional quarrel

with Jonson, but that they stand for no literary principles. Dekker, particularly, represents a type of blatant ignorance against which Jonson waged eternal war.

Because his intention is larger and loftier than just a literary quarrel, Jonson was forced to give at least a broadly recognizable picture of the great poets and their detractors as historic figures, not merely as satiric symbols. He was too angry to develop fully this larger scheme, but it is never forgotten in the play. Virgil and Ovid are treated with unmistakable care, although neither is successfully related to the action of the drama itself. Both play roles that suggest their historical importance. Virgil's shows the rare event—recognition and appreciation by a supreme authority; Ovid's life illustrates the ordinary hard fate of poetry in an unsympathetic world. Jonson was incapable, however, of exploiting the romantic possibilities of Ovid and Julia. Their dialogue is heavy; their romance is "uninteresting and even grotesque in itself,...a mere disturbing incongruity."100

Such comment the editors include on dramatic method explores its resemblances to Jonson's earlier plays. They see the dramatic technique marking no advance whatever on its predecessors. The plot is little more than a hurried amalgam of more or less effective motives; and its technique, a term the editors use with apology, is interesting only because it is a recapitulation of the methods used in the previous comedies. In general scheme this play stands nearest to Cynthia's Revels, but the characters, if inclined toward humour types, are human beings, not personifications.

100 Ibid., p. 431.
Whenever Jonson enlarges on or embroiders his classical or topical material, reminiscences of the other humour plays come into the work. Albius and Chloe are variations on the theme of the meek husband and the well-born, ambitious wife. Tucca belongs to the generic character of bragging and cowardly old soldiers, and recalls Bobadill and Shift. Ovid's resistance to his father's choice of profession recalls the similar struggles of Edward Knowell. But despite these many interesting echoes of earlier devices, the play is at best a mixed achievement which everywhere reflects its hurried and disorderly composition.

A great deal of the quick and rather crude evaluation of the play which appeared after Herford and Simpson represents an almost total rejection of the work. The play is often contemptuously swept away as a mere example of Jonson's weakness for personal satire, or it is allowed importance only as an episode in the War of the Theaters. When viewed from the latter angle, interpretation varies considerably. It has been stated that the play was written "for the sole purpose of ridiculing Marston and Dekker," that it is proof of Jonson's inability "of generalizing his antipathies, of transforming them into broad lessons on politics and morality," and that all we find here is Jonson's arrogance "at full length." But critics have discovered purposes in addition


102 Shotwell, *op. cit.*, p. 16.


to personal attack. Castigation of hostile dramatists is one clear purpose, they say, but Jonson was also attempting an extension of comedy on Aristophanic lines, a satirical allegory, and praise of himself. One recent critic finds a deeper meaning in the quarrel and in the play itself. The poet's war, according to this source, resolved itself into an attempt to define the poet and to establish his superiority to his employers, the players. The quarrel between the two satirists, Jonson and Marston, was personal, but The Poetaster is more than a mere lampoon. "The three-tiered structure of the play is complete and self-consistent at each level separately."106

Criticism considered to this point, however diverse in content and interest, is unified in viewing the play as a partial or total failure. The remaining studies reverse this attitude dramatically, because they see much to admire in the play either historically or intrinsically. Certainly, King's detailed study of the play's language is a powerful rebuttal of the tradition that The Poetaster was negligently composed.107

King considers Jonson an inevitable choice for a study of Elizabethan language because he maintained a constant linguistic attitude and presented

105Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 18.

106Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 111. Comment which does not place the work in an historical context seems very scattered and impressionistic. Complaint is made of the clumsy construction of the play and its "strange quality of indecision" (Perry, op. cit., p. 96). Others find it one of Jonson's most amusing plays (C. F. Tucker Brooke, "The Renaissance (1500-1600), A Literary History of England, ed. A. C. Baugh [New York, 1948], p. 561) or feel that the work is dignified with noble rhetoric (Gassner, op. cit., p. 242). But more characteristic is the adamant assertion that not even the warmest admirer of Jonson can call The Poetaster a good play (Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 137).

107Arthur H. King, The Language of Satirized Characters in 'Poetaster.' (Lund, 1941).
all his characters in terms of language rather than action. This play is about language, and is, linguistically, the most varied of all his works. It is useful in an analysis of language because Jonson's notions of right and wrong are clear and constant. "The characters in an early Jonson play can be divided into two groups according as Jonson approves or disapproves of their language." Linguistic and moral condemnation tend to coincide, and there is usually no doubt which characters Jonson condemns or approves morally.

The language of Crispinus involves the problem of how far he is Marston, and what else he is. Crispinus' language reveals him as a pedant with a courtly, sometimes vulgar jargon in talk and a crude diction in verse. He shares with Marston exclusively a crude poetic diction; with Marston and others pedantry and sometimes courtly jargon. In Crispinus' crude diction, Jonson is especially condemning some expressions of the new satire. Among the terms of Crispinus not peculiar to Marston which are satirized are the courtly affectations which had begun to filter down the social scale. Crispinus is no variation on a type, but is a new type put together of familiar elements in unfamiliar combination. He is neither a pedantic courtier, nor a gallant-courtier, nor a gull, but he resembles them all. Jonson's reason for disliking Crispinisms is that most of them were neologisms, and the pedantic terms are condemned for inkhornism or Latinity. Jonson's satire of Crispinus also shows how deeply in touch he was with the fundamental tendency of English style. The satire of Crispinus is no mere episode in the Stage Quarrel;

108 Ibid., p. xvi.
it is one of the important steps toward the establishment of standard literary English.

The satire of the language of Julia's clique shows Jonson's belief that in affected, self-conscious language we can detect the lack of morals and social standards. The most important member of this clique is Ovid, and there is an ambiguity in his speech which is normal at times and affected at others. His complimentary language is magniloquent, hyperbolical, and expletive. The hyperbole of his addresses to Julia is improper in its extremity, and is a symbol of the immorality and extremity of his love itself. Ovid's amatory diction is that of the sonneteers of the Petrarchan tradition, and either hyperbolical or affectedly figurative. The language of the entire clique resembles that of the cliques in Every Man out of His Humour and Cynthia's Revels. In condemning such language, Jonson's norm is the norm of the time, and here he was more constant than his contemporaries. When Jonson changes his attitude toward some expression, the change is chronologically consistent.

The most extended and most interesting analysis in this study is that of Tucca and his group. Tucca's own speech is taken in part from Captain Hannam, who, like Tucca, was an outcast, one who would have been a retainer before the collapse of the feudal system. Socially classless, Tucca's speech is anarchic. Another factor in his literary ancestry is that he is a military parasite. Three main aspects of Tucca, therefore, have to be kept in mind: the individual, the social outcast, the literary type. Tucca may choose to talk courtly sometimes out of parasitic ends, and, most importantly, sometimes just for fun. The complement and
colloquialism of his speech resemble those of other Poetaster characters, but, essentially, Tucca stands out, partly because he combines the elements in an original way. He is an excellent illustration of Elizabethan English, the English of the places where the vulgarians and the courtlings mixed. Because Tucca is an outcast and a parasite, he has to be ready to switch between the bully and the wheedler in a moment. To overwhelm, Tucca must be copious; but to surprise, he must be elliptical. He freely moves about in language, and his expressions do not usually come from any particular social group. He has no linguistic inhibitions, and he has no linguistic norm.

King concludes that his analysis of the language reveals a linguistic construction corresponding on the whole with the moral construction described by Campbell, with one important modification. Tucca, not Ovid, is the most important character, the center of energy, in The Poetaster. He is a caricature of the Elizabethan anarchic vitality, as dubious in language as in morals. He is the main object of satire to which the satire of the poetaster and the Court clique are subordinated. Tucca is the greatest character creation in Jonson's early period. His energy shows that his creator put something of a potential self into him. The play itself emerges as a "philological document of the first importance."\(^{109}\)

Insisting on Ovid as the center of the play is but one of the points made by Oscar Campbell. In both his study of the comical satire as a form and in an earlier article describing the structure of the play,\(^{110}\)

\(^{109}\)Ibid., p. 218.

Campbell develops an interpretation which has generated much important later criticism. He asserts that Jonson under the cover of historical fiction is satirically attacking the dissolute society of his own day. Jonson's interests as an antiquarian and satirist as well as the complicated satiric edifice make the play a difficult one to decipher, but once the structural principles are grasped, the play is seen to possess a firm intellectual and dramatic unity. Ovid, because he sets the tone for the dissolute courtly society, is the key to a true understanding of the play. Ovid's corrupt world prefigures the profligate Court of Jonson's own day. The choice of character is wise, since the Elizabethans recognized Ovid as a symbol of licentiousness. That the dangerous eroticism of Ovid's group contaminates the class directly beneath is seen in the imitation of Chloe and Albius. Crispinus and Demetrius, who comply with the ideals of this degenerate group, have prostituted art and perverted the poet's sacred social function. The banquet scene is an important revelation of the immoral foundations of this society.

Although Campbell discovers a unity of purpose and theme, he also finds here a far less coherent structure than in the preceding comical satires. He sees Jonson losing himself in a world of minor characters in the third act and only returning to the real plot in the fourth act. Also, since Campbell finds the play to be a social satire with Ovid's story as the essential plot, he considers the final act a kind of appendage, "loosely attached to the main action." The speeches of Virgil are proof that the last act is supplementary to the play, which really

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111 *Comicall Satyre*, p. 128.
ends with the fourth act. However, the play is a satire and not designed to tell a narrative, and therefore the audience interest is maintained to the end. The scene of the trial and punishment, Jonson's rough but effective judgment of his two adversaries, makes the comedy satirically cogent.

Campbell's analysis is the most important event in the play's modern critical history. Although he will not grant it an integrated structure, his insistence on its serious moral theme elevates the whole work far above the standard interpretations. Also it is the one appraisal which has opened up a whole new field inquiry and thus established a new critical tradition for the play. It is Campbell's theories of the importance of Ovid and the intermittent plot which have evoked the most important and most probing responses by other critics.

Talbert rejects Campbell's interpretation. He argues that Ovid figures too slightly in the action to be considered the protagonist. Furthermore, the first audiences would not have automatically accepted Ovid as a symbol of licentiousness. The sixteenth century probably first thought of the moral Metamorphoses when his name was mentioned. Nor was there much agreement among Renaissance critics about the poet's relationship with Julia or the reasons for his exile. The alleged reason might have been the immorality of Ars Amandi, but Renaissance commentators suspected the real motive for his banishment was for some other offense which was not known. To the detractors of poetry he might be utilized as a concrete example of Plato's banishment of the poet. Talbert feels

that Campbell's theory about Ovid will not do because the "result of such an interpretation is that one is again forced to conclude that Jonson failed to write a well-knit play, or that we do not as yet fully understand him."\textsuperscript{113}

Talbert himself insists that, as the title implies, the play is primarily a dramatic defense of poetry, a theatrical and effective \textit{ars poetica}. If the play is looked upon as a defense of poetry against all base, ignorant, and malicious detractors, the place of the Ovidian material in the structure becomes clear, and the play develops directly and effectively. Both prologues state the confident belief that poetry is strong and immortal. Other themes are the necessity for distinguishing between good and bad poetry, and the equation between poetry, true learning, and virtue. The first scene is designed to make the audience sympathize with the poet, and the theme is developed throughout the remaining scenes of the play. Jonson's principal method is to manipulate his butts so that the laughter is aroused at the various facets of their absurd wit and the barbarism of the age. The purpose of the drama is primarily revealed, not by the story of the play, but by Jonson's development of individual situations and lines. Ovid's banishment not only illustrates Jonson's poetic credo but also effects a comic catastrophe which reverses the general outcome of the fourth act. The exile is always subordinated to the development of Jonson's \textit{ars poetica} and to his exposing the barbaric follies, the lack of intellectual discipline, which his poetic credo attacked. The Ovidian material merges with the Renaissance dis-

\textsuperscript{113}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 226.
cussion of the poet's banishment from the Commonwealth and is so handled that what is particularly emphasized is that which again pertains to Jonson's theme. He used the misfortunes of Ovid, not to attack the moral laxness of his age, but to produce a theatrical about-face that would accord with both poetic justice and justice to poetry.

In the catastrophe of the play the immortality of poetry finally comes into its own at the court of Caesar. That the court should be the magnet for action is understandable considering Jonson's idealization of a virtuous court. With the poet's eulogy of Virgil there appears upon the stage a detailed example of the true evaluation of poetry. After Virgil's entrance the theme of the matchless power and worth of poetry is continually repeated. In the concluding act Jonson rounds out the play with explicit and detailed defenses of the art which made Augustus' reign immortal. By complicating the act with new material, he effects a reversal of fortune for Lupus and the other detractors of poetry and, at the same time, contrasts the purging of the pseudo-poets with the supreme glorification of the great poet. The fifth act, therefore, is no appendage, but "a logical termination of the preceding action." The play shows neither the hurried and disorderly composition that traditional criticism believes nor an irrelevant third act and dangling fifth as Campbell suggests. When the play is read as a defense of poetry, it clearly reveals, in both the serious and the comic materials, the careful and original invention that Jonson exercised in developing his particular variations upon Renaissance thought and portraiture.

Two other significant contributions to an understanding of this play

\[114\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 250.\]
also revolve around the problem of Ovid's function in the play. Eugene Waith concentrates on the poet's morals.\textsuperscript{115} He acknowledges that the parting scene of Ovid and Julia is perplexing, and notes that several conflicting interpretations have been made. While accepting many of Talbert's ideas, Waith notes that Caesar's condemnation of Ovid is most compelling and that Horace's defense does not clear him of Caesar's serious accusation. Because Jonson places so much stress at this point on Horace's disinterestedness and concern for the general welfare, the portrait of Ovid tends to become blurred.

Analysis of Jonson's ideas about the morals of the poet helps explain both the function of Ovid and the unity of the play. "Properly understood, \textit{Poetaster} is a more coherent work than has generally been recognized, and the poetry in which its cardinal ideas are expressed... is in Jonson's best vein."\textsuperscript{116} Caesar himself expresses the ideas that the poet must be a good man, a favorite idea of Jonson himself. Ovid represents the case of the morally irresponsible poet, who cannot be included among the good poets. Banishment shows that he is not worthy of being classed with Horace and Virgil, who are true exemplars of the good poet. The ridiculous behavior of the parting scene demonstrates his inadequacy. In all his scenes with Julia he is more enthusiastic than prudent, and his enthusiasm suggests dangerous blindness. He does not recognize the conflict between virtue and Julia's love. Ovid in the fourth act shows his judgment is lost in infatuation. The imagery of


\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p. 15.
his speech does not support Talbert's belief that Ovid was a great but misunderstood poet. While Julia's concept of virtue is questionable, Ovid's is consistently eccentric and unsubstantial. For him virtue is imaginary and vice real. The fourth act completes the contrast between Ovid and Horace and makes clear Ovid's tragic inadequacy, but the point is obscured by the complexity of Jonson's design.

The fifth act lives chiefly in the poetry of the long speeches. The punishment of Crispinus is a dramatic necessity, but "secondary in importance to the final expression of the theme of the good poet as a bulwark of society." The episode of the punishment of Crispinus "attracted so much attention from certain critics that they were willing to make the entire play a satire on Marston's vocabulary." Actually, the punishment of the poetaster as a type is more important here. The essence of the denouement is not the punishment of Crispinus but the final vindication of Horace. The moral obligations of the poets are brought out here and throughout the play. In the latter half of the play it becomes progressively clear that the noble sentiment of Ovid's defense of poetry in the first act is inadequate because it is not accompanied by any recognition of responsibility. We cannot look to Ovid for that virtue which poetry should teach and the poet possess.

Ralph Nash's recent study scrutinizes the parting scene as a possible key to the play's purpose. The scene, which has puzzled many critics because of its tone and relation to the rest of the comedy, is,

\[117\text{Ibid., p. 18.}\]
\[118\text{Ibid., p. 19.}\]
\[119\text{Ralph Nash, "The Parting Scene in Jonson's Poetaster (IV, ix)," PQ, XXI (January, 1952), 54-62.}\]
Nash insists, a necessary part of the dramatic structure. Thanks to Talbert’s clarification of the general nature of the play, Nash points out, we can now see how the parting scene fits into the whole design by centering attention on the locale of the important fifth act and by raising and answering questions central to the intellectual themes of the play. The purpose of the scene becomes clearer when it is seen to be closely related in imagery and ideas to the passages preceding and following it. Significant is Jonson’s choice of the legend of mismatched love. The problem is his attitude toward the lovers, and the general truths he draws from their particular situation. The rhetoric is exaggerated, but the situation is not treated as merely comic. Ovid’s praise of the court echoes similar treatment in the masques and poems. The possibility of suicide also weighs against our taking the parting scene merely as comedy. Jonson seems most concerned here with the nature of true virtue, virtuous love, and the perogative of place.

In the court of Caesar, a model king in his patronage of good poets, the inequalities of birth and station are ignored, and true virtue is honored for its own sake. Jonson apparently wanted to dramatize the contrast of Virgil, who is raised above his normal station, and Ovid, who is punished for presuming to love a woman of too high status. Virtue transcends the order of society; the love of Ovid and Julia, by them termed virtuous, does not. Obviously, a definition of virtue is at issue here. The parallel may suggest that it is regrettable that Caesar, willing to overlook the rules of place and station in one case, should be so adamant about them elsewhere; and this is a view that seems justified by the general tenor of the play.
The issue of the respective definitions of virtue brings on further complexity, for they are interwoven with much of the action and the language of the play. Ovid accepts the verdict of ignorance, even of madness, in rejecting the rule of reason. He prefers his own kind of ignorance to Caesar's wisdom. Julia is also reluctant to love only in the mind, and, far from being comforted, feels that the pursuit of invisible objects is regrettably unworthy of virtue. Ovid and Julia refuse to accept the pursuit of the invisible ideal as the only function of virtue, and they refuse to disparage the life of the senses. Therefore, the two lovers in some degree reply to Caesar's earlier charges that virtue is a great comfort for those who comprehend her unseen being and excellence. With skillfully ironic imagery, Jonson shows that when Ovid follows Julia and kneels to worship her, he is worshipping nothing but air; only when he acknowledges the vanity of this can he find comfort in worshipping her in his own heart; as Caesar would have the poet worship true virtue's unseen being. Ultimately then, Caesar is right. Yet the lovers are sincere and serious, and there is some suggestion that Caesar might have done well to listen to Horace's recommendation of mercy.

The parting scene clarifies Ovid's position in the play. He represents the man enamoured of worldly beauty but incapable as yet of loving the beauty of the Ideas. On his way up the ladder of perfection, he has not yet arrived at Virgil's exalted position. Thus the parting scene is functional in that it clarifies Ovid's position, midway between mere libertine or hedonist and the exalted Virgilian singer of ideal virtue and beauty.
Jonson's problem in the play is that envy must harm a good poet, yet good poets and good patrons must be generally superior to envy's machinations. Harm cannot be shown to be the result of blind authority, and harm cannot be the fault of good poetry. The solution to the interpretation of Ovid is that the flaw is in his character as a man, not as a poet. But it is better that the man who suffers from the activity of envious detractors should not be completely guilty. "Hence the parting scene shows us the lovers too much enslaved by their passions, yet capable of ideal love and convinced that they have acted virtuously."  

The criticism of the last three plays which revaluates them completely and raises them from the traditional neglect and contempt is the most important development in the scholarship concerning all six of the early comedies. Criticism of the first three plays merely explores attitudes and beliefs quite acceptable to traditional criticism, and no really sharp break exists between older and modern interpretation. The critical status of the first three plays, therefore, remains relatively unchanged during the modern period. Not enough scholarly interested has been generated by A Tale of a Tub and The Case is Altered to change the traditional approach to either. Although much more has been written about Every Man in His Humour, the criticism rarely strays beyond the borders outlined in the Herford and Simpson evaluation. The distinct change in attitude toward the next three humour plays, however, constitutes an important and dramatic shift in Jonson criticism. Here the stirring of new ideas and

120 Ibid., p. 61.
attitudes toward Jonson are most definitely to be found, and result in, if not a complete acceptance, at least a marked raising of literary respectability for these formerly despised plays. Several characteristics of this small but valuable body of criticism are noteworthy. It is significant that the most interesting and successful of these studies subordinate or ignore the biographical or historical elements and approach the plays as works of art, not as documents in the history of Jonson's famous quarrels with other dramatists. Instead of judging the plays according to absolute aesthetic standards, the critics judge them through Jonson's probable purpose, his ethical system, or through the developments in literary or dramatic history. Also significant are the thoroughness of logic, the wealth of reference, and the stress on the plays as units. This criticism reflects the tendency already seen in broader analyses to appreciate and to accept Jonson's artistic purpose according to its own terms. This criticism is important too for suggesting valuable approaches to all of Jonson's work and for suggesting further investigation of the plays in question. The new approaches to the comical satires not only provide a totally different meaning for the individual works, but, if justified, solve one outstanding critical mystery, Jonson's lamentable artistic degeneration between Every Man in His Humour and Volpone. Modern criticism sees not a degeneration, but a steady and inventive advance, a growing ability to marshall and control difficult materials in a series of coherent satiric commentaries. By revising the total picture of Jonson's purpose and by establishing the achievement of these plays, Jonson criticism here unmistakably moves forward.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MATURE COMEDIES

The differences between the criticism of the mature comedies and that of the earlier works are immediately apparent. The four plays which contain Jonson's greatest achievement, naturally, have attracted far more commentary and one which makes up a richer, more complicated, and more detailed body of scholarship. There is a wider variety of critical topics and a more evenly balanced discussion, but there are also fewer attempts to establish completely new approaches. The traditional approaches to these plays have been long established, and they continue to guide modern criticism. Those aspects of the plays which were considered most important in 1925 have continued to guide later criticism. Most attempts to move outside the accepted critical topics seem more eccentric than original. But, if a strong sense of continuity marks this scholarship, it is far from being merely repetitive. It is more conservative and slow-moving than other areas in Jonson criticism, but at its best, evaluation of the major comedies involves a meticulous examination of the traditional assumptions, a clarification of the major problems, and a suggestion of very persuasive solutions. It is in the resolution of many critical problems that this scholarship makes its greatest contribution and reveals much about the nature of Jonson's artistic achievement.
Herford and Simpson's typically sound evaluation of *Volpone* is an excellent introduction to the modern criticism of the play. Many of the critical themes of the next three decades are clearly indicated in this first important appraisal. One very tenacious problem for the editors and for most subsequent critics is the classification—the play's right to be called a comedy at all. The editors do not attempt to resolve the problem, but indicate its existence and its importance, pointing out that the catastrophe approaches tragedy and that the plot generates a lurid atmosphere which pervades the entire work.

The general influences on the play are discussed at length. One obvious influence, Herford and Simpson feel, was the recently composed *Sejanus* in which Jonson learned the dramatic possibilities of the history and legends of ancient Rome such as legacy-hunting. Jonson could have found specific details of legacy-hunting in Horace, Juvenal, and Pliny. Extended and witty episodes on the subject occur in Petronius' *Satyricon* and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Without questioning his essential originality, Herford and Simpson do emphasize Jonson's debt to Petronius and Lucian for the fundamental situation of the legator who makes game of the legacy-hunters.

While Jonson adapts many sources with his usual brilliance, the play is a departure from his ideals of comedy. For one thing, this is not a realistic play, and Jonson had always insisted that realism was the essential aim in comedy. When he transferred his scene from ancient Rome to modern Venice, he was gaining for his play the advantages of the
latter city's sinister reputation; but he does not present Venicé in the literal and realistic sense. "He had merely transferred to a modern milieu a situation imagined in the spirit of imperial Rome." A more serious violation of his own comic ideal concerns the kind of comedy found in this play. Jonson had insisted that comedy should "sport with human follies," not with crimes. Folly is present in Volpone, but obscured almost by the powerful spectacle of amoral men of great and unscrupulous resource for evil. The moral repulsion engendered by most of the persons and actions affects the tone of the play, for the "air is heavy and fetid with moral disease."

The character analysis of Volpone and the others is done with typical thoroughness. The most important clue to Volpone's character, according to these authorities, lies in the Venetian setting and in his social status. Volpone is no mere imposter, for he starts from a foundation of assured respectability. His traits of subtle craft and calculated cruelty are traits for which the Venetians were famous. But, besides reflecting the stereotype of the crafty Venetian, Volpone is clearly no amateur in rogery. He is a professional virtuoso, reveling in the tricks he plays for the sheer pleasure of deception. He is also a consummate actor, whose misfortune is a tendency to be carried away by zest for his part. His final ruin comes less from rash unmaskings than from the audacious adventures he undertakes with the mask on. His passion for taking part, as it were, in his own play, and moving it on towards the consummation he desires is the mainspring by which the whole

1 Op. cit., II, 54. 2 Ibid., p. 55. 3 Ibid.
action is brought to the disastrous climax. Volpone's collapse at the moment of his greatest triumph injects in the play an irony far more Greek than Elizabethan.

The conception of Mosca owes much more to Jonson's most recent play than to classical comedy. With certain obvious qualifications, Mosca is a Sejanus of private life. Jonson's realization of the character's originality is seen in Mosca's incisive soliloquy when he distinguishes himself from the ordinary parasite. Like Volpone, Mosca takes artistic pleasure in his schemes, and he too is carried away by the zest of the game. The similarity is especially apparent when Mosca, elated with success, falls into the blunder which involves the final ruin of both. The editors insist that his telling Bonario of his father's design is credible because it is in Mosca's character to take great risks. Also, because Mosca is determined to prevent Corbaccio from balking at disinheriting Bonario, he takes the course which he expects will promptly and violently alienate father and son.

The dupes are incisively drawn, but are not nearly as individualized as Volpone and Mosca. Their circumstances differ, but not their aim, and their unrelieved, monotonous corruption contrasts with the picturesque variety of the clients in The Alchemist. In no other Jonson comedy is the distinction between bad and good persons so sharply made. The rank and uniform depravity of the rogues and dupes is set off by the insipid innocence of Celia and Bonario. Of the expected type of comic characterization, the extravagant and the absurd, there is nothing in the main plot except a rather vague approach through the misshapen creatures of Volpone's household. The only exception to the unbroken predominance of
dull virtue and revolting vice is Sir Politic, who brings in a more wholesome type of comedy from the old humour plays. But this intrusion is alien to the spirit of the play, and Politic's humour has no bearing upon the main theme.

Most later scholarship on the possible sources of the play merely rephrases the editors' suggestion of certain classical analogies. That Jonson was motivated by both Petronius and Lucian is the consensus of opinion, but, with one exception the problem is unexplored. The exception is Barbara Gottschalk's comprehensive investigation of all possible classical sources. After closely comparing the episodes in the play which strongly resemble those in Latin literature, Miss Gottschalk offers several valuable conclusions as to the source and the extent of Jonson's indebtedness. She carefully weighs and discards the possibility of his reliance on Horace, Pliny, Juvenal, Petronius, and Erasmus, but decides that the case for Lucian presents the strongest evidence. The Dialogues of the Dead, V-IX, center around the main theme of legacy hunting which is described in detail. Like Volpone, Polystratus takes advantage of the avarice of his suitors as a profitable sport; he too despises them and is anxious to get the better of them in the end by disappointing their hopes. Both old men look as if they were on the verge of death. As in the Dialogues, Volpone is younger than he makes himself appear. Mosca's suggestion to Corbaccio that he make a will in Volpone's favor is very similar to the incident in Dialogue VIII. Corbaccio's plan to use poison

on Volpone is also derived from Lucian. As in the Dialogues, the first scene of the play sets the plot of a huge joke, and the reader is prepared to enjoy the consequences. Each work immediately starts with the introduction of the individual legacy-hunters, commencing with the least extraordinary.

Each dialogue contains a dramatic scene in itself contributing to the larger dramatic whole. There is room for development with suggestions as to what that further development should be. The hints contained in the Dialogues would not only kindle a dramatic imagination, but the entire situation would seem to be a proper subject for comedy. Lucian contains the suggestion for such expansion as we find in the play. His ideas acted as a catalyst, drawing to itself the background and particulars given in other classical works. That many authors have contributed to Volpone is acknowledged, but The Dialogues of the Dead, V-IX, Miss Gottschalk concludes, is the primary source of the plot and should be mentioned if but one source is given for the play.5

A discussion of a special contemporary influence is made by Richard Perkinson in his valuable discussion of the play's choice of setting.6

5Critics often assign the play to literary traditions other than the classical, but none examines the problem at the length Miss Gottschalk does. Gassner places the work in the morality tradition (op. cit., p. 244). Brooke and Paradise link it with The Praise of Folly (op. cit., p. 478). D. A. Scheve examines the relation of the work to the beast fable tradition. He points out that Jonson intermingles the fox's proverbial ability to catch birds by feigning death with the theme of legacy hunting. Scheve is convinced that Jonson expected his audiences to recognize the fox device and its parallels to legacy hunting ("Jonson's Volpone and Traditional Fox Lore," RES, New Series, I [July, 1950], 242-244).

He finds the choice of Venice is more than a matter of topography and suggests that Jonson may have been directly influenced by *The Merchant of Venice*, which had been revived in 1605. Even more fundamental is the contribution the setting makes to the play's realism. The daring schemes and amazing denouement of *Volpone* required a locale where the monstrous plans would seem plausible, and, more importantly, one which possessed a legal code disinterested enough to make Volpone's punishment credible enough and rigorous enough for Jonson's own stern moral sense. In the early seventeenth century Venice's reputation was sinister, but it was famous also for the integrity and severity of its republican courts. The climactic nature of the trial scenes of Jonson's and Shakespeare's plays was made possible by the strictly judicial reputation of the Venetian tribunals. The law of Venice alone is allowed to determine the outcome of both comedies. The severity of the sentence is in keeping with the city's traditional reputation. Jonson draws a picture of a society which is decadent morally, yet subjected to a rigorous judicial code. "The collision of these two forces, of Italian renaissance state and society, gives *Volpone* its superb climax. For this conclusion the use of Venice as a locale was almost inevitable."7

Comment on the plot and structure of *Volpone* reflects a serious division of opinion. According to one point of view, Jonson in this play has created a perfect structure, and the play is described as "the most brilliantly executed comedy in English."8 While an impressive number of

7Ibid., p. 18.

critics share an admiration for the play's remarkable structure, there is little agreement when they attempt a specific description or analysis of the structure. The structural excellence has been ascribed to Jonson's observation of the unities and his arrangement of scenes according to classical precedence. Others see the play as an original creation and a vast improvement over the earlier work, noting the impressive pace of the action, which, after a swift advance, is checked and then recovers to end in a powerful, almost tragic catastrophe. One scholar asserts that the structure is formed on the devices of satire. For him the procession of the suitors specifically recalls the model of satire as does the carefully evoked attitude of moral repulsion. Still another describes the play as a stylized representation of life, preaching a specific lesson and unfolding as an allegory in which Jonson conventionalized his episodes in order to show their meaning until they are "almost a mathematical demonstration of that meaning." Volpone's listening to the calls of the flatterers is a scientific demonstration of deception and greed which is so distorted from reality that it becomes an allegory. The play is, in essence, "a sophisticated reminiscence of that earlier fiction which explained reality in terms of allegory and symbol."

9Brooke and Paradise, op. cit., p. 478.

10Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 139. See also Una Ellis-Fermor's comment on the pacing of the play (op. cit., p. 35).

11Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire, p. 181.


13Ibid., p. 263.
A much greater unity of opinion exists among those who feel that the sub-plot destroys the unity of the play. These critics may attempt an explanation of Jonson's intention; but none will admit the sub-plot's having a justifiable function in the play. Schelling and Black suggest that possibly the sub-plot represents the remnants of an original plan where a comedy of variously contrasted "humours" was intended. Hazleton Spencer commends the structure of the entire play, which "owes its structural vigor and its beauty of his union of the commanding literary powers with first-rate dramatic genius," but he can only assume that the "architecturally inharmonious" Would-be plot is an attempt to keep the play as a comedy. For Parks and Beatty also the Would-be's are comic and nothing more in this otherwise complex, intricate, but perfectly organic plot. Most commentators do not explain the reason for Jonson's inclusion of the sub-plot, they merely condemn it as an inexplicable flaw.

The most important single discussion of the problem completely reverses the tradition that the sub-plot is a meaningless and distracting element in the play. Barish asserts that if we examine the play from vantage points other than that of physical action, we find how perfectly the Would-be's fit into the play in which they appear. On the thematic

15 Elizabethan Plays, p. 300.
17 See, for example, Oliphant, op. cit., I, p. 1114 and Kronenberger, op. cit., p. 28.
level the presence of the Would-be's can be justified, and their peculiar antics clearly touch the major motifs of the play. Like the chattering poll parrot in the beast-fable tradition, Sir Pol imitates his environment and travesties the action of the main characters. He is a comic distortion of Volpone and his get-rich-quick schemes; Lady Would-be is a caricature of the legacy hunters. Like her husband, she is incapable of doing anything to the purpose. An additional function of this couple is to contrast with the Corvinos, a contrast which is initiated early and sustained throughout the play.

Other evidence suggests the close connection between the sub-plot and the main action. In the initial scene between Peregrine and Sir Pol, three chief ideas, monstrosity, folly, and mimicry are developed. All are of cardinal importance to the play; all are interrelated. The mountebank scene intends to confront the archknave and the complete gull, and here Sir Pol remains the unconscious mimic and the unconscious fool. Lady Would-be's arrival in Volpone's chamber serves partly as a burlesque of earlier scenes between Volpone and the other dupes. The essential ingredients of the quest for the legacy are here, but scrambled and topsy-turvy. The whole episode provides comic justice, and is a comic distortion of the scene between Volpone and Celia. The encounter of Sir Pol and Lady Would-be parodies the earlier altercation of Corvino and Celia, and stresses through the reversal of the sex roles a reemphasis of the mimicry and monstrosity in the play. Pol in the tortoise shell is acting after the fashion of Volpone, who has feigned death in the foregoing scene. Here the theme of mimicry reaches its literary climax in an episode of farce where the most imitative of the characters puts on the physical
garb of an animal. Disillusioned, Pol has become a victim of the kind of curiosity he himself has exhibited and suffers the humours' purge. Pol's punishment closely resembles that of Volpene, who is also given an opportunity to acquire the diseases he has mimicked and leisure to ponder the accuracy of his own text: to be a fool born is a disease incurable. Thus on successive levels of low comedy and high justice the monster of folly and the monsters of vice suffer purgation and are exposed as the short of misshapen marvels they themselves have chattered about so freely. There are enough parallels, Barish is confident, to justify the conclusion that "the subplot adds a fresher dimension and a profounder insight" and has an essential function in the play.20

Critical response to the characterization is sharply contradictory. The personages, considered individually, receive the most enthusiastic praise to be found in the whole range of modern Jonson criticism. When

19 Ibid., p. 92.

20 None of the other commentary on various sections of the work results in so thoroughgoing a reappraisal of the entire play as does Barish's study. But this miscellaneous collection of criticism often illuminates key passages or problematical ones. Douglas Bush sees the dedication as the "broadest and noblest statement of the ethical and didactic function of poetry" (English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, p. 109). F. W. Bradbrook suggests that the opening of the play was written with Donne's "The Sunne Rising" in mind and intends a sardonic contrast between the sterile wealth of Volpone and the human passion celebrated in Donne's poem ("John Donne and Ben Jonson," NQ, New Series, IV [April, 1957], 146-147). R. P. Draper thinks that the Golden Age tradition makes an important contribution to Volpone's opening address to his gold. The innocence of the Golden Age exposes the corruption of Volpone and strengthens the irony of his use of religious terms ("The Golden Age and Volpone's Address to His Gold," NQ, New Series, III [May, 1956], 191-192). Harry Levin discovers in the entertainment provided by Volpone's deformed household creatures a possible clue to the entire play. Levin is convinced that the play-within-the-play presents the point of view from which the play itself is about to launch its satirical attack. ("Jonson's Metempsychosis," FG, XXII [July, 1943], 231-239).
they are considered as a group, however, the reaction is highly unfavorable. Critics complain that the characters are "too black and one longs for a little humourous relief,"\textsuperscript{21} or dismiss them as inhuman monsters. Scholars are dissatisfied with what they consider Jonson's confusion of purpose regarding his characters. The difficulties in understanding the entire play, it is said, can be related to the ambiguous function of the characters; they neither dominate the action nor are they changed by it, even though the central purpose of the play is satire on basic human faults and vices.\textsuperscript{22} One critic recognizes the fierce satiric humor of the portraits, but cannot find the complexity of real humanity.\textsuperscript{23} For others the humor of Jonson's exposing his characters through action and language does little to deflect the horror they produce. It is charged that the only value of the characters is their proof of Jonson's weakness in the characterization in all his works. The characters are types who do not develop, reveal themselves, change, or grow under the stress of circumstances.\textsuperscript{24} They exhibit unrelieved human meanness and are less people than beasts.\textsuperscript{25}

A markedly different response is recorded by critics who study the characters individually. The commentary on Volpone himself is most prevalent and most important. The energy and splendor of Volpone's imagination

\textsuperscript{21}Buchan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{22}Schelling and Black, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 451.
\textsuperscript{23}Oliphant, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 1114.
\textsuperscript{24}N. Scarlyn Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{25}Thorndike, \textit{CHEL}, VI, 21.
have evoked much appreciation. He has been described as embodying the
typical Renaissance will to power with a sustained brilliance of charac-
terization reminiscent of Marlowe.26 The heroic qualities of Volpone
also suggest resemblances to Sejanus and Tiberius, since he combines the
qualities of both, and emerges as a "colossal figure of vice portrayed
with a Renaissance zest."27 One critic detects that rare occurrence in
Jonson, his being passionately obsessed by a figure of his own creation,
for Volpone shows the hold that this "magnificent insolence has laid upon
Jonson's imagination."28 He is described as possessing the magnitude
of a great tragic figure29 and as being "sublime" in his monstrosity.30
Kronenberger is typical in his enthusiasm for the greatness of this
caracter, who possesses "something not at all un-Miltonic,"31 and who
is no mere sordid criminal, "but a grand-scale evildoer."32

These warm reactions are a pleasant countretrend to the criticism
which sweeps away the characterization entirely as monotonous and in-
credible. And yet, one feels such an exaltation of Volpone is a serious
misreading of the character and the play. Considering Jonson's very moral
and very controlled art, it is difficult to believe that he was enthrall-
ed by the arch-villain of his play or allowed him to go beyond the bounds

26 Schelling and Black, op. cit., p. 453.
27 Perry, op. cit., p. 98.
28 Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 113.
29 Drew, op. cit., p. 150.
32 Ibid., p. 27.
of his purpose. One reads with greater confidence that detailed criticism of Volpone which tempers this extravagant appraisal and provides a sounder understanding of his function in the work. Curry feels that Volpone's function is that of a deceiver and that the whole play is built around deception. We can see in Volpone a love of deception for its own sake, which "seems to be even more operative than greed or lechery as a motive force." Volpone is best viewed as a clever but malicious character. Robert Ornstein reduces even further the proportions of Volpone. He notes that many readers find Volpone too heroic a figure for laughter, particularly at the close of the play, because they do not realize that Jonson's audience saw in him the conventional vices and vanities of the rich man. Volpone's grandiose sensuality and egoism spring directly from the wealth which he seems to possess but to which he is actually enslaved. He is an "avaricious knave who forgets the primary, tangible felicity of wealth in the lesser, ephemeral pleasures of coney catching," and is a charlatan who has "played upon and sneered at other men's vicious desires, and becomes the last comic victim of the corrupted appetites which make extravagance and luxury the 'necessities' of life."

According to D. J. Enright the correct way to judge Volpone as well as Mosca is through the positive and moral standards provided by Jonson


36Ibid.
himself in the play. Jonson reveals character to us in two ways. There are, first of all, the explicitly critical speeches, such as Volpone's reflection on avarice or Mosca's brutal summary of the characters of the suitors. More effective is the second method, the juxtaposition of the "birds of prey" against Volpone and Mosca, with the stress on the suitors' utter poverty of spirit compared to that of the two rogues.

Enright is convinced that the real key to Volpone's character lies in his own lines which involve more than simple irony. Volpone, the only person powerful enough in the play to condemn himself, does so when he makes such remarks as avarice being self-destroying. The portrait of Volpone created by Jonson shows many examples of the dramatist's mastery, particularly in the special "control" he exerts through imagery and rhythm, which show satire at its finest. The opening speech of the play reveals how skillfully Jonson manipulates religious terminology and the language of worship to reveal the character of Volpone. The blasphemous use of the language, the exaggeration of the metaphor, the repetitions, and the unctuous rhythms show, not the evil, but the corruption, the inward weakness, of a man incapable of worshipping anything that is not tangible. The phoenix reference in his plea to Celia shows a kind of blasphemy and absurdity in his empty threat to destroy a natural species for the sake of a titillation. Enright thinks that there is a lack of passion and sexual vitality in the grand catalogue speeches to Celia. In these speeches and in the opening lines, Volpone is judged

and found deficient. His behavior in the rest of the play confirms the judgment Jonson implies at the start. Volpone's desperate, hectic state of mind is obvious from the bedroom scene onwards. The need for continuous violent stimulants proves his undoing. To display the inferiority of others by swindling or hoaxing them is the palliative for his own sense of inferiority. Throughout, Volpone, in a dramatic sense, is a great character who is guided and controlled subtly but unmistakably by Jonson.

Perhaps the most persistent and crucial problem connected with this play is its classification. The total effect of Volpone has troubled many critics throughout the modern period, and an uneasiness as to the comic intent and method is noticeable. For many reasons one group of critics places this work beyond the circle of comedy, or, at most, on its periphery. They feel that the subject matter of the play is too serious for comedy, and they complain that in sporting with crimes and vices and in its stern catastrophe the play abandons comedy. It is said that Jonson displays here a too passionate awareness of political and moral corruption and there is such a "terrible revelation of the depths of evil in man that the play takes on some of the overtones of tragedy." Another explanation is that the play has no definite artistic category. Although its underlying unity of conception compensates for its defiance of the "formal rules of comic procedure," it does not

38 Parks and Beatty, op. cit., p. 783.

purge the audience by either emotion or laughter. Some of the decisions about the play's category seem very hesitant and inconclusive. Kronenberger, for example, admits that while Volpone does burst the mold of comedy, it fits no other mold even so well, and must, therefore, be accepted as a comedy which both gains and loses from its size and intensity.

Other critics confess a similar perplexity, but resolve it differently. Schelling and Black admit that the play is difficult to classify, but they suggest that Jonson's obvious enjoyment of mental cleverness and the spectacle he provides of rascals duping fools remove the play from any semi-tragic category. Their suggestion is that perhaps the play "should be described as a universal satire dramatized in the form of a beast fable." They note, as others have, that reading and viewing the play provide different responses, for when the play is staged, the effect of gleeful absorption carries the audience completely away and confounds the charge that the play is "heavy." Curry has little patience with the whole approach which assumes that there are tragic overtones in the play. Such a view, he says, is untenable. It is hard to see how anything approaching a tragic atmosphere could develop in a work so full of laughter. And this laughter is the expression of the pleasure, pervasive and eruptive, taken by Volpone and Mosca in the pursuit of their schemes. One favorite critical solution is to point

40 Perry, op. cit., p. 99.
out that the play is not intended as comedy. It contains little mirth, and, because of its vigorous exposure of greed and iniquity, the purpose is not amusement but satire. But this interpretation has been challenged with the assertion that the play "can hardly be described as satire." One critic feels that the problem is insoluble—none of the categories will fit Volpone—it is in a class of its own.

Citations could be multiplied to show the wide-spread indecision about the essential purpose and quality of the play which makes the attempts to describe the play in its entirety so important. Ralph Nash considers the existence of the problem a critical paradox which raises the question of whether Jonson stands corrected by his critics or whether they stand corrected by the play itself. Nash suggests critical emphasis on the avarice of Volpone and Mosca obscures their delight in comedy and intrigue. For both, enjoyment of delusion ranks above gain. Both are aware that they and Peregrine are the only intelligent people in the play. Their activity and delight in activity are connected with the didactic purpose of the play and may aid us in understanding Jonson's intention.

The didactic intent and the catastrophe are admittedly not congenial to modern notions of comic propriety. But from Jonson's point of view the catastrophe is not the necessary culmination of a severe and gloomy

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44Thornidike, CHEL, VI, 21. See also Chait, op. cit., p. 191.
45M. C. Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, p. 145.
46Oliophant, op. cit., I, l115.
action, but rather a concession to the Puritans and one which might easily be withdrawn. Another explanation of the seemingly anti-climactic nature of the closing scenes is to be understood through the knowledge that Volpone and Mosca are fulfilling two roles. First, they carry the didactic burden of the play as is seen in such episodes as Mosca's covert ridicule of the legacy hunters. But because the master and the parasite have to be punished, this must be effected through their other roles of clever men infatuated and betrayed through their own cleverness. Volpone is the clearer example of this, for he sees his faults himself, and his cleverness, having confounded stupidity, eventually confounds itself. Thus the play contains a second didactic close, a situation not found in the earlier comedies, although certain traces are discernible at the end of Every Man out of His Humour.

The scenes which Nash examines in detail reveal the inevitable conclusion that they were designed for and do contribute to the comic effect. Everything suggests that the effect of the play up to at least the second trial scene should be far from that of tragic foreboding. Elizabethan audiences would simply assume that the right side would triumph in a comedy and would concentrate their attention on the ridiculous folly of the wrong side. Punishment of the wrong-doers would not bother them much, unless it were insufficient, and their main requirement was amusement.

John Weld does not hesitate to categorize the play as a comedy, but of a special variety—Christian comedy. He insists that the play's

subject is the folly of worldliness and worldly wisdom. Worldly folly is essentially "an inversion or misdirection of love toward the vain and fleeting delights of this earth instead of toward the only lasting and truly enjoyable object, God."49

In the action of the play the deceiver is deceived and the wisdom of the world is made foolish. The opening scene announces this theme and establishes the character of Volpone as a foolish worldling. The worship of gold is the ultimate metaphor for worldly stupidity, and here in act as well as in speech we have visible worship. This gesture establishes the symbolic nature of the action and recalls, by parody, the worship that Volpone so sensationally inverts. This misapplication of the religious act and the misapplication of religious terms is reinforced by rhetoric. The "sublimity" of the speech is undercut by the recurrent sudden sinking to colloquialism and to matters of fact which delicately mock the superficial sweep and soar of exalted admiration. Thus Jonson further emphasizes the illusory nature of Volpone's values and reminds the audience of what is to be the theme: the worldling is a fool.

Weld feels an acceptance of this function of the opening speech gives the play a unity difficult to find through other interpretations. But, he realizes, to establish the structural unity of this play is not to solve the main problem: is it comedy at all? To appreciate the farce and slapstick elements leaves unanswered the question of their relation to the moralistic element. Here again, understanding of the underlying theme, the folly of worldliness, explains much. Weld suggests that

49 Ibid., p. 173.
folly seems a more inclusive concern of the play than avarice. Such an aim injects a sustained note of irony into the play. According to Renaissance and medieval thought, the worldling has not only made a fool's bargain because he loses Paradise, but he fails, in their view, to obtain even the earthly happiness he sought. Since he was unable to satisfy his desires fully, he gained no real happiness. Therefore, the worldling turns restlessly to a variety of pleasures and falls into a tempestuous rage of discontented passions. In short, the worldling is deceived and irrational in the fullest sense. Although he could reason acutely, he was not using right reason.

The plot of Volpone illustrates this theme with an almost fable-like clarity. All the main characters are worldlings. They are swollen with self-love and almost blinded by it. Without exception they are shown as dupes deceived by each other and by appearances. It is useful to view the play as a structure of scenes and episodes which, although sometimes tenuously related to each other, all embody the same theme. To this series of thematically similar episodes, with their lines of action for the second time entangled, the fifth act is the denouement. Criticism that the last act does not proceed naturally from the earlier acts and that Volpone's actions are inconsistent with his former cleverness is valid only if the play is interpreted on one level. But if Volpone is considered a fool, all his actions and final folly are coherent and necessary. Having been blinded by his own self-love and his own inordinate passions, he must, like the others, be revealed as a dupe. Even if one examines the structure alone, he can discover the primary theme, the folly of worldliness. The individual episodes are built into a structure which
makes the theme clear to the reader, especially the Jacobean reader, for whom the theme was an old truism.

Weld is convinced that his interpretation sufficiently indicates the way in which the play was supposed to have "worked." Jonson constructed the play with easily recognized character types toward whom the audience could assume familiar moral attitudes. His general intention seems demonstrable with a high degree of probability. If the play is interpreted according to the moral truisms of the times it becomes a structurally unified whole. "That the play should be more meaningful, richer, and better constructed when interpreted in accordance with them" is, Weld concludes, scarcely coincidental.51

Modern critics have displayed less interest in Epicoene than in any of the other mature comedies. The play is seldom anthologized and is frequently overlooked in the brief surveys of Jonson's drama. The various aspects of the play have attracted a certain amount of interest, but the entire commentary does not compare in amount and complexity to that

50 Ibid., p. 193.

51 The final matter to be considered, or perhaps disposed of, is the criticism connected with Stefan Zweig's version of the play which appeared in 1927. Greeted with a certain amount of praise by newspaper and magazine reviewers at the time of its first appearance, Zweig's version has since been justly condemned by more scholarly critics as a distortion and a debasement of Jonson's original work. Zweig evades the complexity of Jonson's design, the splendor of his language, the subtlety of his characters. He replaces a serious comedy with a light and vulgar farce. Almost all the criticism evoked by the various performances of this adaptation are worthless for any serious study of Jonson's modern literary reputation.
for *Volpone* or *The Alchemist*. Those critics who touch on the play very lightly in a quick description of Jonson's work assume that the play contains no problems at all, and they usually approve of it without qualification as a happy and light comedy which avoids the faults of the earlier work. But the most significant criticism of *Epicoene* has modified this total and automatic approval. Far from assuming that *Epicoene* is merely a gay and genial farce, critics in increasing number question both the category and the judgment, for they find a bleak and harsh tone overlooked by traditional criticism. The most important single study of the play solidifies this critical discontent and adds that *Epicoene* is far from being a perfectly balanced play, because it contains fundamental disharmonies which it never succeeds in reconciling.

The appraisal of Herford and Simpson introduces both attitudes toward the play. They are generally favorable in their reaction to separate aspects, but, at the same time, express serious reservations about its total effect. In plot and use of unities of time and place they find *Epicoene* just as orderly as *Volpone*. In coherence and compactness it surpasses its predecessor. The editors suggest that the great and lasting success of *Volpone* may have softened Jonson's stern attitude toward the world, for this play presents him in a relaxed, less censorious mood. "He no longer hectores his audience; he hardly even instructs them."\(^5\)

The play is one in which Jonson evidently wished to please as well as instruct, for he fully indulges the disposition for pure fun he had shown in *Every Man in His Humour*. It is notable that in the later

play the triumph of youth over middle-aged timidity is more decisive than before.

The main plot, according to Herford and Simpson, is an adroit combination of two Greek jests. The first is a declamation of Libanus on the surly man, a quiet-loving recluse, who is led to marry an extremely loquacious woman under the pretense that she is silent. The second trick is taken from the *Casina* of Plautus, and concerns an old voluptuary who is proxy-wedded to a boy. This second source is the more important, for it provided a genuine dramatic intrigue. Jonson's adaptation imparts a gaiety and humour which the *Casina* exhibits only incidentally. Even so, Jonson's mingling slight with more substantial material creates a basic discordance. The inconsistency which the editors find in the play is a fundamental one, for it mirrors the conflicting impulses in Jonson's own artistic nature where the bent of a great realist never overcame the satirist's weakness for fantastic caricature.

Disparity of aim is particularly apparent in the handling of Morose. Because the whole plot hinges on his character, Jonson attempts to give it great substance and credibility. By emphasizing that the old man is motivated by spite against his nephew, Jonson is able to obscure the weakest part of the plot—the marriage undertaken by a man who hates noise. Credibility is maintained by making Morose marry in a sudden access of fury, which blinds him to the extreme hazard of marriage for a man with his obsession. But the skillful handling of the story does not obscure the defects in this characterization. Morose possesses too much of the malignity of Volpone to be quite at ease in a comedy. He may be one of the "men" Jonson felt proper for comedy, and not one of the forbidden
"monsters," but the division is at times quite indistinct.

The handling of the action is adroit. Morose's farcical impatience for release and Dauphine's well-founded eagerness to secure the ransom before Morose discovers the nature of his marriage are admirably fitted in with one another. But the united strength of both motives is needed to make plausible the prodigious rapidity with which the solution is brought about. Quite disturbing to Herford and Simpson is the whole nature of the denouement. They feel that a secret vital to the action of the play should not be kept from the audience. Jonson could claim little precedence in Elizabethan comic technique, but to play tricks with his audience, to cheat and baffle them, was very much in keeping with his temper. He always preferred to hold his catastrophe in suspense. "But even he never before or afterwards devised a cheat so colossal and so perfectly sustained."53 Since the problem was not fairly proposed, the pleasure at its solution is crossed with a certain mortification. The denouement would, in fact, be more effective if it were less surprising.

The profusely comic characterization, the editors feel, compensates in part for the inherent defects which the plot never overcomes. Scarcely a person in the play is insignificant, and the art by which they are all drawn into the main plot and made willing or involuntary instruments in its consummation marks an advance in technique. Each character has an independent dramatic value. While all are loquacious, their loquacity is of different kinds. The two gulls are only less excellent specimens

53 Ibid., p. 80.
of the species than are Stephen and Matthew. Truewit is a Brainworm with a greater virtuosity of speech, and a subtler irony is manifested in his fate. The comic action of Truewit is finer than that of Brainworm, for the former, after playing a brilliant game with his friends as pawns, discovers at the close that he himself has been a pawn in a yet deeper game played by his friend. Jonson always succeeds better with bold than with modest women, and the three Collegiates are vigorously drawn. As so often, however, he discriminates merely by external traits the members of a group who have the same general function in a play.

Many admirable features insure Epicoene a high place among the comedies. But Herford and Simpson will not grant that it is a masterpiece of comedy. Its main motive is objectionable, not so much because it is absurd, but because it is insignificant. To call the motive farcical expresses only part of the truth. Furthermore, Jonson does not successfully humanize his characters, and he does not create illusive reality. The extravagant Morose motive is distinctly unassimilated, despite the wealth of comic matter in which it is embedded. Morose with his petty egoism and vulgar spite is too mean to be laughable. His dis-temper merely gives occasion to comedy without being comedy itself at all.

Two subsequent articles on Jonson's sources for the play significantly qualify the theories of Herford and Simpson. Oscar Campbell challenges the traditional view that the major source is the disguised marriage of Casina. The similarities between the two stories are not at all close,

54Oscar J. Campbell, "The Relation of Epicoene to Aretino's Il Marescalco," PMLA, XLVI (September, 1931), 752-762.
and the trick is used in each for a quite different dramatic purpose. In Casina the aim is to discomfort the old man, and the disguise doesn't occupy a pivotal place; it is only one of a number of tricks. The only resemblance is the device of making a mature eccentric accept for his bride a man or boy disguised as a woman. Aretino's Il Marescalco, however, contains a much stronger parallel to the play with its joke intended to deceive a gentleman usher who is an hysterical misogynist. The whole play is a diversified exhibition of Marescalco's humour. Dramatic continuity is achieved through the exhibition of an eccentric man in a series of situations in which his grotesque despair steadily assumes more and more ridiculous aspects. Epicoene is based on an almost identical trick, which is made to yield the same sort of humourous effect. Another close similarity is the catalogue of the tortures a wife can inflict on her husband. There are similar cries of anguish interrupting the recital from Morose and Marescalco. The cruel comic temper of Il Marescalco, imported into Epicoene, may be seen in the successive assaults on Morose, which produce a crescendo in the exhibition of his desperation. The comic use of the boy in Epicoene more closely resembles in three important respects that in Il Marescalco than it does the man similarly disguised in Casina. First, in Aretino and Jonson the woman is impersonated by a boy, with humour arising from his ability to mimic a lady. In Casina the disguise is capable only of farce. Second, the dramatic trick used by Jonson and Aretino is the same. The jest occupies the central position in the comedy; it does not in Plautus. Third, in Aretino's and Jonson's versions the eagerness of the bridegroom makes him willing to heap abject humiliation on himself, that is, both men make
shameful confessions before large crowds.

Daniel Boughner agrees entirely with Campbell in rejecting Casina as a source for the play. He does not, however, accept Il Marescalco as the source for all the action of Epicoene. He thinks Aretino a less likely source for certain episodes of an epicene nature than Machiavelli's Clizia. Machiavelli's plot contains elements which would not have escaped Jonson's notice. The outcome of Clizia pivots on the disguise of the youth as a girl, and this does not occupy a central place in Casina. Many themes and situations are remarkably similar in Machiavelli and Jonson. Particularly significant are the resemblances between the leading characters in each work. The character of Morose probably owes less to Aretino's Marescalco than to Machiavelli's brilliant and acute study of Nicomaco, a model for the portrayal of crotchety old age. Neither Jonson's nor Machiavelli's protagonist discovers until afterwards he has been duped by a boy. Also the deception of the old men in both Machiavelli and Jonson results in a financial gain for younger men. That both old men become progressively more wretched distinguishes them from the dupe in Aretino's comedy. The evidence, then, is that although Jonson relied chiefly on Aretino, he also used suggestions from Machiavelli for the epicene elements of his play. The device of the feigned marriage in Il Marescalco particularly may have come from Clizia. The latter, certainly, appears to be a more immediate source of Epicoene than the Casina of Plautus.

Most brief general discussion evinces little interest in Jonson's

55Daniel C. Boughner, "Clizia and Epicoene," PQ, XIX (January, 1940), 89-91.
adaptation of his sources and less awareness of any disturbance in the plan or execution. Most incidental criticism dwells on problems of classification, comic tone, and influence on later drama. The play is often described as the merriest and lightest of Jonson's works,\textsuperscript{56} one in which scenes of "pure clowning" dominate.\textsuperscript{57} The choice of a London setting proves to one commentator Jonson's fundamental drive toward realism,\textsuperscript{58} while others see in the careful use of the unities proof of his deep bias toward classical art.\textsuperscript{59} The play is often cited as an important advance in Jonson's ability to construct a well-integrated plot.\textsuperscript{60} It is frequently mentioned as an important foreshadowing of Restoration comedy, particularly because of its juxtaposition of true and false wits. Such interpretations as these are staples in the brief modern criticism of the play, but the most frequently encountered evaluation touches on the play's category, and the assertion is made over and over that the play is a farce.\textsuperscript{61}

A reaction against this last assumption is the most noticeable development in the modern criticism of Epicoene. In most cases the reaction is too brief and incidental to constitute a critical debate as deep and as important as that involving Volpone's proper category. But there is

\textsuperscript{56}Thorndike, \textit{CHEL}, VI, 22.

\textsuperscript{57}Legouis and Cazamian, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{58}William S. Clark, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 326.

\textsuperscript{59}Brooke and Paradise, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 528 and Enck, \textit{Jonson and the Comic Truth}, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{60}Perry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 102.

\textsuperscript{61}See Patterson, \textit{op. cit.}, II, p. 250 and Kneipp, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 100.
more than sufficient evidence of a growing critical disturbance and dissatisfaction with the term "farce." Wells discerns a serious and strong undercurrent of intellectuality which makes the play a critical study as well as a farce. He feels there is more mental acumen introduced into the play than in any of the others. Parrott and Ball also decide that *Epicoene* is much more than a farce. It is, instead, a unique combination of the comedy of humours and the comedy of manners. Harry Levin considers the play the "most brittle of Jonson's comedies," one which stands at an interesting half-way point between Plautine and Restoration comedy. He adds that if it were not farce, it would be pathology, and there is more than a touch of sadism in this "comedy of affliction." Miss Bradbrook complains that since the play embodies no vision, its technical competence cannot compensate for the lack of a theme, an observation also made by Esther Dunn. Kronenberger feels that the play marks a passage from Jacobean to later comedy. Jonson prefigures the Restoration in his efforts to be light, and the play links with the Restoration also in the use of the London scene and the great concern with sex in terms of intrigue and gallantry. But the play as a whole has no inner unity, "no characterizing pigmentation."

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62 *Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights*, p. 203.
64 *Ben Jonson*, p. 20.
of the fault lies with Morose, who ought to be more human or more inhuman, more victim or villain.

The most important modern judgment of the play as a work whose antagonisms are never resolved has been made by Jonas Barish. Disagreement among other critics convinces Barish that, as time passes, the intention, classification, and tone of *Epicoene* have become more enigmatic. He himself considers it a play of transition in which the early stern morality and the later geniality are both included, but "not always in the happiest fashion." The gaiety approaches sadism, and Morose is treated so harshly that we sympathize with him. Truewit's victory over Morose may symbolize Jonson's asserting the values of the world over the consolations of philosophy, but what Jonson attempts to affirm on one level, he denies on another. "The effort to substitute an indulgent, 'realistic' account of the world in the place of his more habitual and more deeply felt satirical view produces ambiguities of tone which trouble the whole structure of the play." 

Barish proceeds to prove his thesis by exploring Jonson's treatment of the two chief poetic sources for the play, Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Juvenal's *Sixth Satire against Women*. The sources take drastically opposing views of the same subject. For Ovid nature is improved by art, and the whole ritual of cosmetics is harmless and admirable. Juvenal, however, sees not beautification, but falsification. Every gesture toward


69 Ibid., p. 213.

70 Ibid.
improvement supplies further proof of woman's inner hollowness and further evidence of degeneracy. Jonson allows Ovid to triumph because he represents Truewit, while Juvenal is Morose, but the victory of realism over satire is not achieved without cost. The total view of life fluctuates uneasily between the two extremes, creating a discord which is never fully resolved.

Jonson's is no "straight" translation of Ovid, for he is perpetually adding or excising details, with a decided alteration in tone. For example, Jonson turns Ovid's description of the finished work of artificial beauty "into a catalogue of grotesque appliances." 71 He ignores the final effect and leaves us with nothing but the props. Ovid's dissection of the artifices of beauty shows an attitude of loving interest, but Jonson describes them in terms as ugly as possible, and even the rhythm of the lines contributes to this effect. Jonson's usual method is to compress, to recast the thought in his own characteristically tense manner. But here, significantly, he lingers over one of Ovid's negative passages--where women are urged to conceal their physical defects. He stresses the defects and "prefers to insist on the disagreeable reality behind the attractive appearance." 72 Ovid does not view love merely as lust, but Jonson has the whole subject scaled down to brute sexuality. Ovid's treatise envisages a whole code of manners and refinement. Jonson discards the myth and keeps only the bald advice couched in the baldest fashion.

The puzzling question is, is this satire? And if so, what is the

71 Ibid., p. 215.  
72 Ibid., p. 216.
satiric target? If the satire is directed against Truewit himself the situation becomes very peculiar, since it places Truewit in the position of Amorphus in Cynthia's Revels. The difference between Truewit the Stoic moralizer, Truewit the fashionable gallant, and Truewit the dupe of fashion becomes impossible to reconcile. "One is forced to conclude that Truewit is really too many things at once and not an adequate fusion of them, that the irresolutions of tone in his speeches reflect irresolution in the play itself, which struggles toward a fully defined attitude without ever quite achieving it." 73

The relentless way in which Truewit's speeches veer away from the Ovidian and toward the Juvenalian mode shows how deeply Jonson's sympathies are still with the latter. The Juvenal paraphrases do not produce discords and uncertainties in their new context. To Juvenal's scourging of learned ladies and of cosmetics Jonson adds details in paraphrase which emphasize similarity of feeling. Juvenal's vision of a corrupt society rather than Ovid's delight in being in a sophisticated milieu strikes the responsive chord with Jonson. But Jonson's views are even gloomier than Juvenal's, for he suggests that the corruption is not the fault of the age but is something ingrained in human nature. Jonson's textbook of self-slaughter is an example of how Jonson imitates and exaggerates Juvenal at the same time. Jonson adds irony by making the deaths beguiling, and Juvenal did not do this. Juvenal does not escape transformation of tone any more than Ovid did, but it is a willed, controlled, and fruitful transformation. Here Jonson is working with the

73 Ibid., p. 219.
ideas of a kindred spirit. The Ovidian attitude tends to break down. In the Ovidian scenes where Morose questions Epicoene to determine her fitness to become his wife, he pretends to admire social conditions he actually abhors, and his real feeling comes creeping in. He starts as Ovid and ends as a snarling Juvenal; in trying to be Ovid he succeeds in being Juvenal. In trying to be Truewit, he succeeds only in being himself. The difficulty symbolizes Jonson's difficulty throughout the play in preserving a consistent attitude toward his material. Jonson is trying to be "courtly" in the play, but the stern figure of the satirizing moralist breaks through, causing the roughness of tone and uncertainty of texture. It is too much against the grain of his own deeper instincts to produce a harmonious work of art. "The result is not the pattern of suspension and resolution most satisfying in comedy but a series of brilliant discords, which, whatever their vitality in detail, fail to fuse into a unified whole." 74

3.

The Alchemist is a play almost without flaw as far as modern criticism is concerned. The most vehement critics, who ruthlessly discard Jonson's other work and can see little evidence of any dramatic art elsewhere, become extravagant in their praise of this play. But other general characteristics besides admiration typify the criticism appearing since 1925. The scholarship for The Alchemist is both extensive and unusually stable. This play does not invite the total reappraisals which have

74 Ibid., p. 224.
been offered for *Volpone* and *Epicoene*. The critical approaches to the play remain much the same throughout the modern period. We start with criticism which assumes that the play represents a brilliant achievement, and most modern criticism is a detailed examination of those factors which contribute to the play's excellence. The significant and characteristic modern scholarship for *The Alchemist* strengthens a reputation already solidly established at the start of the period.

Herford and Simpson describe the play as the most complete triumph of Jonson's difficult and original art, and one which avoids the faults of the other mature comedies. *Volpone* had come too close to tragedy, and *Epicoene* had definitely crossed the threshold of farce. But the subject of this play remains consistently comic and encourages Jonson's strong drive toward realism. There is nothing unreal or alien in this treatment of Jacobean crime and folly, and alchemy was the best possible target Jonson could have chosen. Apart from its comic and satiric possibilities, alchemy touches on many of the activities of a complex epoch and suggests many of the brilliant Renaissance guesses about the nature of the physical world and of life at large. "The alchemist enjoyed the prestige simultaneously of the sacrosanct priest and the philosophic discoverer."\(^{75}\) The literary treatment of the alchemist, however, habitually represented him as an imposter of the grossest kind. Jonson's *Subtle*, although by far the most elaborate and powerful of the dramatic alchemists, does have a well-established tradition behind him.

The existence of a long and powerful tradition, notwithstanding,

\(^{75}\) *op. cit.*, II, 92.
Jonson's play is original. The editors dismiss Ariosto and Lyly as possible models, and, while Bruno's *Candelario* seems a more likely influence, this too must be discarded. Not only is Jonson's motto evidence that he had never heard of an earlier play similar to his own, but also his way of handling certain features is completely Jonsonian. Bruno's comedy may have provided a suggestion for some episodes, but it is no model for Jonson's work. Nor can any other play or literary tradition be accepted as the source. Resemblances to such specific works as Erasmus' dialogue *De Alcumista* exist, and clear affinities to Plautus are seen in Jonson's having his rogues carrying on their schemes in another person's house without his knowledge and using an unexpected return for an effective and legitimate *deus ex machina*. But the many suggestions of other works do not detract from the essential originality.76

The realism of the play makes it outstanding among Jonson's works. The complete unities of time and place contribute especially to the realism. Also very notable is Jonson's exploiting for the purposes of realism the calamity of the plague which had closed the theaters. The same insistent realism, with the one significant exception of Mammon, marks the treatment of the characters throughout. Subtle may contain traces

76 Later comment on the possible sources for the play completely agrees with the editors that the work is fundamentally original. See Brooke and Paradise, *op. cit.*, p. 574; Spencer, *Elizabethan Plays*, p. 354; Edwin J. Howard, ed. *Ten Elizabethan Plays* (New York, 1931), p. 161. R. G. Howarth detects some slight resemblances between Jonson's play and the sub-plot of Dekker and Webster's *Northward Ho*, acted in 1605. Both plays have a courtesan named Dol who sets up house and cozen by disguising as a lady. There are also rather similar dupes and gulls in each. But the only conclusion to be derived from this evidence, according to Howarth, is that Jonson may have seen the rich possibilities of such a plot (*The Alchemist* and *Epicoene,* TLS, May 3, 1934, p. 322).
of Volpone, but he is, basically, far more credible. He is not tied to
the society he preys upon, and his operations are far more deeply in-
grained with sham. Especially convincing is Subtle's always having the
benefit of the best answer which alchemy could provide. His philosophy,
his phrases, and his arguments are not, in any intimate sense, his own,
but merely the common property of the bogus science. Face suggests Mosca,
but he is far from being a replica. His ability at playing a number of
roles places him immediately in the class of London rascals, and he is
always true to type. Dol recalls Livia, but, unlike her, has a function-
al part in the play; she is an indispensable member of the house. Vari-
ation, as well as realism, marks the dupes of the play. Here Jonson was
drawing from the life of the London he thoroughly knew and not from a
Venice constructed from scholarly acquaintance. Moral indignation in-
forms the play, but it is qualified by lively observation and a flexible
comic spirit. The Puritan dupes are an important departure in Jonson's
method. This is his first undisguised exposure of the Puritans, who,
like the alchemists, are represented as social pests, offensive because
of their hypocritical pretensions. The similarities of their aims and
Subtle's are insidiously exhibited through their debates. The one charac-
ter who is apart from the others is Sir Epicure; his is a different order
of imagination. His magnificent dreams show him to be a Faustus of the
senses, captivated by the dreams of exploring the utmost possibilities
of unusual and exquisite sensation. The personality and actions of Lovewit
have a very apparent function in the play. As in his earliest comedy,
Jonson places the direction of the catastrophe in the hands of a man who
loves jest. The mildness of Lovewit's judgment as far as Face is concerned
is no problem, the editors contend. Subtle, not Face, is the subject of the comedy and the target of the satire.

Alchemy is, of course, the most important source for this play—giving direction and substance to its plot, its satire, and its criticism of contemporary social abuses. To understand precisely Jonson's use of the pseudo-science gives us a clear idea of his scholarship and his dramatic method. For a proper knowledge we depend on expert evaluation, and this has been provided in the modern period by the original and valuable research of Edgar Duncan. Duncan makes an important distinction between the play and the masque *Mercury Vindicated*. One is a satire on the subject for a popular audience; the masque, written for the Court, involves a thoroughgoing knowledge which confirmed the general opinion of alchemy. Jonson may not have a complete knowledge of all the alchemical lore he describes in both works, but there is no doubt that the range of his actual knowledge is impressive.

Much of Duncan's study traces the probable sources for Jonson's references. He believes that the chief immediate source for Jonson was Paracelsus, whose writings were a culmination of the entire alchemical tradition. Also, because of the many close parallels in the play, Duncan assumes the *Rosarium* of Arnald is Jonson's chief source for much of the play. Certain details, such as Surly's discussion of remote or primary matter and the natural generation of metals are not to be found completely

77Edgar H. Duncan, "Alchemy in the Writings of Chaucer, Jonson, and Donne" (unpubl. diss., Vanderbilt, 1940); "Jonson's Use of Arnald of Villa Nova's Rosarium," *PQ*, XXI (October, 1942), 435-438; "Jonson's Alchemist and the Literature of Alchemy," *PMLA*, LXI (September, 1946), 699-710.
in any one alchemical treatise, but must have been pieced together from several authorities: Aristotle, Nicholas Flamel, Hortulanus, and Paracelsus. The motivation for the explosion could also have been extracted from a number of sources.

That Jonson was widely read in the subject is apparent from a close study of his alchemical episodes. The illustrations of his alchemical references require the citations of a number of treatises, representative productions of the whole field of alchemy from the thirteenth century to Jonson's own day and continental ones as well as English. Some of Jonson's citations are literally translated from a variety of sources: Villa Nova's Rosarium, the pseudo-Baconian Speculum Alchemiae, Ripley's Compound, and, more than any other source, Paracelsus. And yet these direct quotations represent but a small part of the total references, the sum of which indicates the massive reading which preceded the writing of The Alchemist.

The accuracy of Jonson's references to alchemy is as remarkable as his extensive knowledge. Duncan's research shows that, with a few exceptions, the vocabulary of Jonson's alchemist, his helper, and his dupes is truly alchemical; the "terms of art" they employ can be illustrated and defined with the aid of alchemical dictionaries, and Jonson's characters use them correctly. His employment of alchemical ideas, of theories, of technical processes, whether directly in expository conversations or indirectly in an elaborate figure of speech are no less exact, accurate, and in accordance with the writings of the alchemical masters.

Discussion of the ways in which Jonson's knowledge directly affected his dramatic method is the most interesting section of this very thorough
and valuable study. The effect of alchemy is, as Duncan demonstrates, both profound and various. Alchemical terms and devices form the basis for the figurative language. Ideas obtained from alchemical treatises are exploited in the action of the play. The belief that success in alchemical experimentation is bestowed on the chaste, frugal, and pious character is used as a motive in the play, and is the important concept of the disastrous effects of haste. Alchemical lore gives shape to the character Subtle assumes when he first appears before Mammon. The pseudo-science is also probably the determining factor in the whole conception of Mammon's character and action. Of the many uses of alchemy, the expository bulks largest. Having decided to present alchemy as the chief accomplishment of the rogues he was to satirize, Jonson has to arrange dramatic opportunities for exposing the theories, activities, and claims of the alchemists.

Despite the accuracy of his report, Jonson is not primarily satirizing alchemy. His main satiric purpose is to hold up for disapprobation and ridicule the tricksters, such as Subtle, Face, and Dol, who used alchemy and any other means for the purpose of cheating. Jonson is equally sardonic about the dupes and gulls of these tricksters. The alchemical scenes are only incidental to this larger purpose. Although his references are extensive and precise, Jonson's approach to alchemy in The Alchemist is academic and theoretical. Little or no indication is given in the play that the author had ever visited an alchemist's laboratory. His grasp of the subject is intellectual rather than emotional. Never does the reader of The Alchemist imaginatively enter into the laboratory "to smell the brimstone, to watch the blazing fire, the eddying smoke,
the alembic and stills with their boiling or simmering contents, to note the changing colors—*in short, to get the feel of the place.*"\(^{78}\)

While the comment on alchemy by other scholars does not intend to survey the problem as thoroughly as Duncan, it does corroborate many of his conclusions. John Reed, for example, recognizes the effectiveness of Jonson's description of the alchemists, their way of life, and their speech; but he notes that these are subordinated to a satiric purpose, Jonson's "vehement and most successful attack on the atmosphere of imposture and fraud prevailing in early Jacobean London."\(^{79}\) Reed agrees with Duncan that Jonson's command of alchemical technicalities was consummate, but he is convinced, where Duncan was not, that the play proves more than an academic acquaintance with the subject. Jonson seems to have had more than a superficial acquaintance with the practical operations of an alchemical laboratory.

Cyrus Hoy examines the ironic implications of alchemy as it affects Epicure Mammon.\(^{80}\) The legends found in the play that the creator and possessor of the philosopher's stone must be pious are derived from widely known theories, all of which show how unlikely a contender Epicure is. The belief is the perfect pretext for the rogues' disabusing Mammon's expectations and introduces "the most shamelessly brilliant of the conceits dared by Subtle and Face"\(^{81}\) and a travesty on the idea of

\(^{78}\)"Alchemy in the Writings of Chaucer, Jonson, and Donne," p. 288.


\(^{81}\)Ibid., p. 17.
the true judge and true penitent. The episode as a whole is a tissue of ironies. Nothing there is what it appears to be, least of all the seemingly righteous wrath of Subtle. But the ironic implications are dramatically contrasted with significant truths. "By this means we are made to see clearly enough the extraordinary falling-off from the serious concept as it exists in itself to the commonplace, trivial, sometimes vulgar use too often made of it."\(^8\) The scramble for the philosopher's stone is a sorry descent from a lofty ideal, but not a surprising one, granted the corrupt and corrupting nature of man as revealed in this play.

Johnstone Parr examines the non-alchemical pseudo-sciences in the play and decides that an analysis of the remarks on physiognomy, chiro­mancy, metoscopy, and astrology, in the light of contemporary texts on those subjects, reveals that Subtle was usually, but not always, technically correct when "he threw together impressively various bits of pseudo-scientific lore."\(^3\) It is evident that Jonson was familiar with some of the tomes of arcana, and that Subtle, in uttering this material, was contemptuously dallying with the gulls brought before him.

Almost all commentators who touch upon the structure and plot of the play join with Herford and Simpson in praising its "consummate technique."\(^4\) The praise is constant, and many reasons are suggested for Jonson's accomplishment. A sampling of contemporary critical opinion

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 18.


will reveal the universal admiration and the current assumptions about Jonson's technique. Jonson's harmonizing the ingenious plot, lively action, and delineation of manners results in a perfect example of his special type of comedy, according to one critic.\textsuperscript{85} The closeness of construction and the vigor of comic invention also earn applause.\textsuperscript{86} The play is called a "masterpiece of design"\textsuperscript{87} and a "marvel of ingenuity."\textsuperscript{88} Its pace of action and suspense are considered notable,\textsuperscript{89} and \textit{The Alchemist} has been described as Jonson's "most perfectly adjusted play," one which reveals the strength of planned analytic organization.\textsuperscript{90}

Detailed studies of the structure bear out the high praise. Studying the play from the special interest in deception, Curry considers \textit{The Alchemist} as perhaps "the most masterful employment on the Elizabethan stage of trickery as the very framework and fabric of a comedy."\textsuperscript{91} Much of the interest and suspense is aroused by the exhibition of the parties who are involved in the separate intrigues following each other in an accelerating rate. Una Ellis-Fermor perceives an even more intricate pattern. She sees the play as an example of simultaneous structure of an inner and outer form, "and one in which the pace is particularly fascinating."\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{85}Thorndike, \textit{CHEL}, VI, 23.
\textsuperscript{86}Thorndike, \textit{English Comedy}, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{87}Boas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{88}Parrott and Ball, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{89}Baskerville and others, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 830.
\textsuperscript{90}M. C. Bradbrook, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{92}\textit{Op. cit.}, p. 44.
She notes that "the steadily increasing tempo of the play suggests to many readers nothing so much as the increasing concentration and tension of a series of helical spirals described by moving bodies where each curve of the helix is not only more closely wound than the last but more rapidly described."93 From the purposely leisurely start there is a quickening action, and by the third act we realize how nearly symbolic the design is. "As a piece of almost geometrical form, the play appears to be without a companion in the drama with which I am acquainted."94 The exquisite proportioning of acceleration is an "unfailing source of aesthetic delight."95 The speeches of Mammon and Tribulation, which seem to be a slowing down of the action, have the function of "deliberately introduced parts of a colour design...like slabs of pure colour standing apart from and independent of the line pattern in a picture."96

Paul Goodman provides the most exhaustive and the most technical appraisal of the structure.97 He does not, however, construct a point by point analysis, but, in viewing the structure from a number of angles, presents his conclusions as a series of only loosely related ideas. Scattered though the appraisal may be, the individual comments are incisive and provide a valuable understanding of this factor. He describes the comic intrigue as a combination or series of accidental but probable relations growing out of this collection of wits, dupes, and humours. Because such an intrigue is naturally divergent and expansive,

93Ibid., pp. 44-45. 94Ibid., p. 46. 95Ibid., p. 47.
96Ibid., pp. 47-48.
one may best diagram the action as a kind of expanding balloon. As the strands of the action become more numerous, the probability becomes more heady and tenuous. In plays like The Alchemist, the humours and dupes are subject to the continual comic reversals; but the alchemist himself is the agent of the reversals. Face and Lovewit, the witty and the urbane, are not subject to the deflation of either the dupes or the alchemist. The play may be viewed also as the dramatist's allowing a special license for the compounding of errors in a special place and for a limited time. Normalcy returns to the play after the comic license has been revoked. When the period of comic license begins, the agents who generate the intrigue are not subject to comic reversals, but they are subject to the revoking of the license. Comedy such as this is expansive, and its effect depends on the continual expansion of the possibilities of accident. In the middle of the play the intrigue is enlarged, first, by the introduction of new humours and, second, by the combination of the previous combinations. The expansion of such a comedy is not limitless. The compounding of accidents cannot be indefinitely comic; the probable return to normalcy sets a limit to the comic expansion. As the intrigue becomes too tenuous and absurd, the characters must return to normalcy. The response to the deflation of the humours is malicious laughter because the audience does not identify with such characters but with the world outside. The urbane resolution of The Alchemist contains no romantic nonsense. Poetic justice is given to intelligence and skill, and Jonson works this out in the nicest detail at the end where, "following the conventions of Roman comedy, we see in The Alchemist the contrast of Inside the House, where there is comic license, and Outside, normalcy
pounding at the door." 98

There is less criticism of character for this play than there was for Volpone, or even for Epicoene, and the critical discussion is not so sharply defined. The only persistent problem, and that is a minor one, concerns the character of Lovewit, or, more accurately, the morality of his actions at the end of the play. Kronenberger speaks for many when he suggests that Lovewit's decision is "morally open to question." 99 Here we do not have virtue raising vice from its knees, but indifference patting knavery on the back. 100

Otherwise, critics are well pleased with the characterization. Oliphant is typical in asserting that the characters are admirable for their purpose and in noting that the play abounds in contrasting paired characters. He is typical too in singling out for special praise Mammon, "one of the great personages of the drama, worthy of a place beside the greatest comic conceptions of Shakespeare and Molière." 101 He feels that the raptures of Mammon when talking to Dol, which are truly a revelation of the imagination of a full-blooded man, disprove the charges that Jonson had no imagination. Mammon has also been described as "one of the most fully realized characters in Elizabethan drama," 102 as the character in whose sensuous robustness Jonson transmuted his own gluttonous

98 Ibid., p. 97.
100 See also Chute, op. cit., p. 186; Downer, op. cit., p. 155; Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 159; Bacon, p. 145.
102 Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 142.
relish for words, and one in whom philistinism is raised to the level of poetry.

Only one extended of the characterization of this play has been attempted in modern criticism, and it is too ill-organized and all-inclusive to be considered definitive. Hussey's title seems to promise a study of character, but he drifts through many other topics before settling down to the promised one. Many of the ideas are interesting in their own right, but only of incidental help in an understanding of character. Hussey complains that critics who touch on the religious and moral elements in Jonson's drama ought to show the relation of these elements to his comic art, but they do not. He himself proposes to examine Jonson's work as didactic drama and to define the religious standards to which Jonson himself stood loyal. He considers it improbable that Jonson produced villainy merely to evoke the audience's laughter. While tradition suggests that Puritan ideas were repugnant to Jonson, he must have known that all Puritans were not odd and deranged fanatics, and he may possibly have enjoyed dealings with sober and upright Tudor Puritans even though all of his dramatized ones are offensive, money-grasping hypocrites.

The presence of the Puritan in The Alchemist is ambivalent. He is a figure of fun and a hypocrite. But he is also a morally dangerous person whose sin may cause the loss of many Christian souls, for he symbolizes the official guide to Christian thought. Ananias is not a simple

103 M. C. Bradbrook, _op. cit._, p. 146.
104 Kronenberger, _op. cit._, p. 20.
reminder of the gross lapses, he also constitutes a special standard of reference: if these presumably righteous men are corruptible, what of lesser men? The presence of the Puritans in Subtle's laboratory is essential to the didactic scheme of the play. Jonson's views on vanities and frivolities is no less exacting than any of the Puritan divines, but he must have known that the true Church-Puritan had no temporal ambitions.

The Alchemist, as Hussey views it, is really a morality play on covetousness and licentiousness. Consequently, the central character is Mammon. The reader could not fail to detect the wickedness of Mammon's aspirations under the cloak of the rhetoric. The Puritans are insignificant compared to Mammon. A number of their speeches are largely comic without tragic undertones. They represent the weakness of the servants of God who lack essential knowledge of the priesthood and are able largely to mislead their flocks. Jonson is expressing concern for those who are misled, aware that his characters are doubly culpable. In his awareness of these standards of behavior and in attempting to formulate them, Jonson produced plays of a moral power second only to Shakespeare. We must allow his didacticism all sincerity if we are ever to appreciate his art and to assess the greatness of his contribution to dramatic literature.

The meaningful appraisal of the language of The Alchemist is embodied in the special studies already described. Briefer comment reveals how solidly entrenched is the reaction of pleasure and appreciation of the play's "varied, idiomatic, and precise" language and its extra-

106 See above, pp. 162-182.
107 Thorndike, CHELI, VI, 23.
ordinary supple and flexible quality. The only dissent here, and that only occasional and mild, concerns the vocabulary. Most critics are impressed with Jonson's knowledge and use of cant terms. For Perry the vocabulary of alchemy, both for itself and for the state of mind which it symptomizes, is exactly suited to the purpose of the comic dramatist. Ashton feels that part of the humour for Jonson's audience undoubtedly came from the glib rattling off of technical terms, which only experts in the "science" would be expected to know. But Kronenberger is one critic who feels that the topicality of the satire diminishes the effect of the play, and even he grants that a modern reader can enjoy the sheer virtuosity of the unintelligible speech.

Specific contributions to our knowledge of the language include Hope Allen's note that in the play is to be found "the most complete and clear account of the use of fly in the Elizabethan period." This is in reference to the fly sold to Dapper, and reveals Jonson's grasp of the fundamental principles of witchcraft in his referring to the need for a fly to feed on blood. Maurice Hussey indicates an unnoticed passage in the play which is an alert commentary on the censorship of oaths and a tribute to the complexity of response on the part of the original audience. Face's convincing Dapper of his fairy ancestry and using "By Gad"

108 Boas, op. cit., p. 113.
is an evasion of the law against oaths and a hit at the Puritans, which
the lawyers in the audience would appreciate. 113 M. A. Shaaber elucidates
the reference by Ananias to the "unclean birds" in his tirade on Surly's
Spanish costume. 114 Earlier commentators suggest a reference to a
Spanish invasion in the Lowlands, and some have felt that there is a real
ornithological reference here. Shaaber agrees that the reference is to
birds—a species with ruffs who were considered monstrous and interpret-
ed as a warning against the sin of pride. The allusion is illustrated
by a 1586 pamphlet which interprets the birds as devils. Shaaber does
not offer this as a source, but as the sort of thing Jonson might have
had in mind. Perhaps he was referring to an established form of cre-
dulity, and we have in Ananias a reaction to the gaudy dress which is
not only characteristic, but characteristically expressed.

The remaining criticism of The Alchemist touches upon a number of
heterogeneous problems: the classification of the play, its relation
to Jonson's other comedies, and its special quality or tone. Parrott
and Ball consider the play a distinct development in Jonson's art. It
is objective and impersonal and marked a stage when he had outgrown doctri-
naire conceptions of humours comedy. 115 Ashton considers it an example
of "true realistic comedy," showing Jonson's critical attitude with re-
spect to society and literary art. 116 Thorndike, however, considers

113Maurice Hussey, "An Oath in The Alchemist," NO, CXCVI, (September 29,
1951), 433-434.
114M. A. Shaaber, "The 'Uncleane Birds' in The Alchemist," MLN, LXV
(February, 1950), 106-109.
the classical element strong in this play. It is the culmination of a long imitation of Plautus and Terence, but surpasses all rivals, and is, in essence, a happy union of English manners and Roman plot.\textsuperscript{117} For Brooke also this is a play in which the fusion of classical method and English scene is complete and could go no further.\textsuperscript{118} But Spencer describes the same play as one in which Jonson agains turns to the high and yet racy comedy of manners, "his gift to the English theatre."\textsuperscript{119} For Bridges-Adams the play is "something that Shakespeare never succeed-ed in writing: a plain farce."\textsuperscript{120} To induce belief is no part of its aim. Oliphant thinks there is no greater comedy in English than this. It is unlike Jonson's other comedies; it is scarcely flawed at all by that verbosity and love of detail which were his besetting sins. If he makes a display of learning, it is not at his usually wearisome length. The drama reeks with irony, with satire, with humour. "It is full of the true comic spirit."\textsuperscript{121} For Kronenberger, also, "this is always comedy—unsparing and satirical—but pure of its kind and as rich as constant intention and undepletable rhetoric can make it."\textsuperscript{122}

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Compared to the criticism of the other mature comedies, that of

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{English Comedy,} p. 183.
\textsuperscript{118}"The Renaissance (1500-1660)," p. 562.
\textsuperscript{119}\textit{Elizabethan Plays,} p. 354.
Bartholomew Fair seems somewhat incidental and formless. Much has been written on the play, but the total critical discussion seems a rather blurred one, in which any pattern or structure can be only dimly perceived. Very few problems are considered important enough to receive special attention, and they are seldom discussed with the sharpness found in the scholarship for the other great comedies. The typical critical approach to this play is not a close analysis of a single aspect but a broad and rather amorphous appraisal of the entire work. As a result, the modern criticism of Bartholomew Fair always seems thinner and more tentative than does that of the other major comedies.

Herford and Simpson's approval of the play is offered with a certain hesitation. Although they are impressed with much in the construction and characterization, they also feel that the entire play does not quite measure up to the best comedies. For example, they find an unmistakable relaxation in dramatic technique, a step backward from the organized and coherent intricacy of Volpone and The Alchemist toward the loose multiplicity of Every Man out of His Humour and Cynthia's Revels. But they admit that in many ways the play is a remarkable achievement. It is the most complete concession Jonson makes to the taste of his audience and lacks the impersonal severity and the censorious sternness of the other comedies. And yet, relaxation and geniality do not mean Jonson deserted his fundamental principles. Of Jonson's great art in the play there is no question, and in certain ways that art reaches its apex. Unlike the earlier plays, here the shaping hand is unobtrusive. Even in the greatest of his plots, Volpone and The Alchemist, the method, however superior, is perhaps too easily found and formulated. Here,
however, the lines of cleavage between the tricksters and the dupes, which determine the structure of Jonsonian comedy, are unusually complicated. Also, the comic events come about inevitably, as natural incidents of the Fair, without intervention of a professional contriver. The Fair is the true subject of the play, the one fact to which "all the bewildering multiplicity of persons and interests have relation." There is no hero, no dominant character, no well-defined plot, only the Fair, which brings this diverse assemblage together. Like the laboratory of Subtle, the Fair brings all sorts and conditions of men under its spell.

Appraisal of the characters takes the form of a rather long series of comments on each, with occasional brief discussion of Jonson's method in general. The editors note that the characters impress one at first as a group, because they are not warped or eccentric individuals like the humours. A closer scrutiny quickly reveals distinctions of character among them; there are grades of cunning, or rapacity, of malice. Besides the primary importance of the group as a rich segment of the classes and types of seventeenth-century London life, certain characters stand out as variations of Jonson's technique. Cokes is a more successful country gull than Stephen. The freshness and zest of Waspe's portrait may possibly result from Jonson's acute personal experiences with young Raleigh. The "gentles," as usual, are drawn with slight and ineffective touches. Grace is intended to have charm, but is without it. "Jonson from first to last never succeeded in drawing a woman at once fascinating, young, and modest." The Littlewits are rich in the germs of drama.

124 Ibid., p. 143.
but are too unequivocally silly to be in any degree amusing. Busy, however, is highly successful. He is the finished portrait of which Ananias is the lively sketch. He is drawn "with enormous vivacity and vigour of invention." Jonson commands the Puritan jargon with his usual scholarly virtuosity, but his satire does not touch the deeper strata of Puritan thought. Like Jonson's hypocrites in general, Busy is not profoundly plausible or significant—he makes no dupes. Overdo is a character like Cokes; Busy is a caricature like Stephen. For all his virtuosity in creating vivid types, Jonson here reveals his fundamental limitations. The characters are too simplified, show too sharp a division between the wise and the foolish, and never reveal the complexity of real persons. Furthermore, the comedy is too deeply rooted in the seventeenth century. It is a great satiric comedy and an amazing example of exuberant comic genius and of original, effective technique. But it is, more emphatically than any of Jonson's other great plays, "of an age, and not for all time."  

Stress on the topical nature of the play gives focus to one rather frequent type of commentary. The play is often described as one in which "the image of the time predominates." For some the greatest compensation in this "excessively coarse" play is, by far, its "most vivid and striking picture of the life of the period." This is a compensation too for those critics who find the play technically less skillful than

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., p. 145.
127 M. C. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 114.
128 Oliphant, op. cit., II, 736.
its predecessor but attractively "rich in details taken from life."\(^{129}\)

For another critic the realistic picture of the times is the only successful feature of the play, which, otherwise, shows less evidence of artistic control than *The Alchemist*.\(^{130}\) He finds the triumph of the rascals monotonous, the fable confused, the characters too numerous, the material non-selective; but, the "pageant of a varied and active communal life is fully realized."\(^{131}\)

When critics attempt to place the play in a category, they suggest many types of comedy. It is seen as one more variation on the comedy of humours and as a work of "pure realism."\(^{132}\) Harry Levin accepts the work as an example of realistic comedy, for here "the demands of realism are most fully satisfied."\(^{133}\) According to Boas the play is designed to contrast the old and new theatrical artificiality, but its chief effect is a "broad, ebullient presentation of a characteristic slice of London life."\(^{134}\) Although it is the most meticulously local of Jonson's plays, it is also the most broadly universal. For Spencer, however, Jonson is here "everything...that the dramatist of manners ought to be."\(^{135}\) The problem of classification especially occupies Oliphant, who considers the play at one point as "the finest farce in the language,"\(^{136}\) but

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\(^{129}\) Legouis and Cazamian, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

\(^{130}\) Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., p. 106.

\(^{132}\) Thorndike, *English Comedy*, p. 185.

\(^{133}\) *Ben Jonson*, p. 21.


\(^{135}\) *Elizabethan Plays*, p. 412.

proceeds to question his own classification and finally decides that the characters are the most real Jonson has created. He concludes that the "play should, then, be considered rather as boisterous comedy than as farce." For Muriel Bradbrook, however, the traditional judgment scene at the end is a complete farce, and in the entire play, "the genial mixture of farce and irony is...almost Chaucerian." Wells describes the play as a serious study of the lower orders of London designed to instruct and to entertain. The bitter tone of reality and the sharp satire result in a representation of a curious Jonsonian compound of censoriousness and burlesque, the sharpest satire and the broadest mirth.

The most elaborate attempt to place the play in its proper category is made by Julian Symons, but, as is usual with extended criticism of the play, the article touches on many other problems. For example, he is determined to distinguish between the function of humours and realism in Jonson's work, being convinced that those who read and admire the play do not fully understand the nature of Jonson's peculiar genius, but are overwhelmed by his skill in realistic portrayal. Regarding Bartholomew Fair, the critic selects it as Jonson's most interesting but most neglected play. It shows his prodigious power in realistic writing which may be clearly seen through comparing it with Shadwell's best plays.

137 Ibid.
139 Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, pp. 204-206.
Bury Fair and A True Widow. These reveal Shadwell's extreme ignorance of the method of dramatic realism. A lack of taste leads him to attempt a mingling of comedy of humours and comedy of manners. Jonson's skill is revealed in Bartholomew Fair where he wisely discards plot and stresses the Fair rather than individuals. Reality itself, a Fair, is brought onto the stage, and the induction makes the realistic intention clear. The means by which Jonson obtains his effects are not intricate. The play is cast upon a broad and loose pattern. There is no central character, no strict continuity of action, because "he attempted, quite consciously, to create dramatic fictions which make unnecessary a complicated or ingenious plot, and he avoided an underplot whenever possible."141 The result of Jonson's scrupulously careful construction is this "astonishing, overweighed, magnificent play," in which "he achieved the first, and perhaps the only triumph of social realism upon the English stage."142 Jonson was first a dramatist, but he was passionately interested in society, in the way people around him lived and moved. Jonson was concerned as a playwright with the dramatic possibilities of a news office or a fair, rather than primarily with reform. Only through several readings of the play and by a deliberate effort of the imagination in placing oneself almost inside the Fair is it possible to catch the particular breath of reality that rises from this play, which makes it an unequalled performance of its kind. In Jonson, the dramatist who was also a social realist, this is a notable feat of skill and sensitiveness. The achievement is of great intrinsic value in a kind of drama strikingly

141 Ibid., p. 381. 142 Ibid., p. 382.
original and markedly opposed to the dramatic tendencies of Jonson's day.

A more successful attempt to place the play in a proper category is Perkinson's contention that the work is the first example of topographical comedy. Few comedies, he points out, utilize locale quite so extensively as *Bartholomew Fair*, which is an example of a plot made to grow out of locale. *Bartholomew Fair* is not a comedy of manners, but it does demonstrate what could be made of locale or what locale could be made to contribute to drama. To insist that the play is a transcript of real life is to impose a standard alien to the aim of the seventeenth-century dramatist and to forget that this is comedy. The Fair actually motivates the plot in drawing two groups of characters to a particular locale, which is then set in conflict with the characters, thus motivating the resulting action. Perkinson points out that the procedure Jonson adopts, showing in successive scenes the two groups of improbable Puritans and city people moving through the actual Fair and continually in conflict with it, makes the Fair itself the cause of comic misadventures and thus integrates locale into the plot. The Fair ceases to be merely terrain and becomes itself the protagonist. In this play Jonson writes a topical comedy that is not personal, but topographical; that does not treat of historical personalities, but an historical scene. The Fair is not merely a label, nor a backdrop. Perkinson concludes that the spectacle of *Bartholomew Fair* displays the proportions, the grotesqueness, the startling contrasts, the deft craftsmanship, the gusto and vigor that the baroque spirit puts on canvas. It combines the subjects of the Flemish Brueghel

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and the manner and imagination of the Italian muralists.

The general criticism of the structure of the play is most often unfavorable. Many critics are irritated by what they consider a play "over-crowded with persons and incidents." Even a critic who is an enthusiastic advocate of the play is forced to concede that the plot sometimes sinks out of sight, and another, while discerning a repeated pattern in the acts, feels that too much of an effort is involved in following this complicated action. The general reaction of many contemporary scholars to this element of the play is annoyance at a "confused and overloaded" comedy.

Criticism of the characterization is rather attenuated and inconclusive. As is so often the case with appraisals of Jonson, a tendency toward the prescriptive is discernible. One authority says Jonson should not have worked out every character in such great detail, but should have discarded or subordinated. Complaint is also registered at the lack of realism in the portraits of the women. Other critics will admit no blemish, however; one feels that Jonson's Busy makes Molière's

144 Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 23.
145 Spencer, Elizabethan Plays, p. 412.
146 Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, pp. 204-205.
148 Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 23.
149 Oliphant, op. cit., II, 737.
Tartuffe a pale abstraction and considers the gallery of "Hogarthian" portraits unsurpassed, if indeed equalled, in all dramatic literature. Criticism of individual characters abounds in modern scholarship, but it does not develop into a coherent or meaningful critical pattern. Throughout the modern period both Busy and Overdo have exercised greater fascination than the other persons, although some critics point out that Troubleall is not only an excellent portrait of a madman, but that an understanding of his character is essential for a proper interpretation of the play.

Two critics may be noted, finally, for their general remarks on the play. Hays suggests that the play is more ambitious than either Volpone or The Alchemist, and, because of the artificial devices and the diffuse plot, it is difficult reading. As a realist Jonson brought onto the stage the stenches both physical and moral of Elizabethan London and set a standard of naturalism which was not restated until Zola. The play may also be considered a precursor of Joyce's Ulysses. Hays ventures a "few rash suggestions" concerning the hidden symbolism of the play. The Fair, he decides, symbolizes the world, and Overdo, Jonson. The outcome of the action shows an important change in Jonson's astringent view of life. This play, in its entirety, amounts to Jonson's gaining

150Spencer, Elizabethan Plays, p. 412.
151Reed, Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage, p. 56.
152Ray L. Heffner, for example, thinks that the central and controlling theme is Troubleall's search for the "warrant" men have or pretend to have for their actions ("Unifying Symbols in the Comedy of Ben Jonson," p. 89).
philosophical tolerance.

John Enck makes some useful suggestions on the achievement and significance of the play. This work, he feels, "stands alone in English literature, perhaps in world literature, and is purely Jonsonian."\(^{154}\) There are many links with the great comedies as well as several important new experiments. For the first time since *Every Man in His Humour* family relationships help motivate characters. But the structure is slight and the episodes "digress at many points."\(^{155}\) Although cause and effect help determine the arrangement of episodes, the construction does not seek tightness; everything depends upon the prevailing atmosphere which "partakes of the strong, disorganized, amorphous, and amoral arena which the Fair itself is."\(^{156}\) In *Bartholomew Fair* the matter of dress spreads almost to become a subject in itself, for the play signifies a later investigation by Jonson into the problem of appearance and reality, which had appeared in the earlier plays. The efforts to disentangle the true from the deceptive necessitated various compromises until here the appearance is the reality, and appearances have the last word. Notable, in this connection, is the defeat of those visitors to the Fair who misinterpret its appearance or spy to uncover its reality.

Enck feels that Jonson's total acceptance of the physical aspects of life is clear in the play and that this acceptance may have forced him to select as the main target of satire the Puritans. In contrast with the noisy affirmation of the Fair are the zealots' destructive

\(^{154}\) *Jonson and the Comic Truth*, p. 189.


\(^{156}\) *Ibid.*
negations because they emptily deny everything except their own hypo-
critical asceticism. Paradoxically, many of Jonson's habitual traits
have a moralizing, nearly Calvanistic aspect. Smithfield represents all
the world the stage contains, and it surpasses the Puritans' narrow
preaching. The Fair, set within its special context, emerges less repre-
hensible than Busy. The play accepts all conditions as they are, and
even hints that a slight improvement in human conduct is possible.

Criticism of the major comedies includes the most extensive and
thorough appraisals in modern Jonson scholarship. For the most part
this is a clearly outlined body of criticism in which the scholarly ef-
forts devoted to various aspects of the plays solve many problems of in-
terpretation. Much of the criticism is a reaffirmation of traditional
assumptions. The scholarly reputation of these plays rests on two
centuries of criticism, and the tendency toward scholarly conservatism
is strong. There is far less occasion for the total reappraisals that
occur in the criticism of the comical satires. Consequently, criticism
of the mature comedies is marked by a strong sense of continuity and
often by the very slightest adjustments within a familiar critical context.
But the more significant criticism is that which works out new answers
to the familiar problems and, by suggesting convincing answers, provides
a new and more satisfying understanding of the plays. Many of the so-
lutions to the old problems are skillful and perceptive. Because of
them the efforts of modern critics have changed fundamentally certain
readings of the plays. It is in such criticism as this that modern scholar-
ship has made its most valuable contribution.
The effect of this criticism varies for each of the major comedies. *Volpone* receives the most thorough-going reappraisal. The solution of the structural problem restores unity to the play; the suggestions about Jonson's general purpose raise the dignity and significance of the work and weaken the traditional argument that it is too savage for comic pleasure. The most important criticism of *Epicoene* has concerned its sources. Part of the investigation corrects the traditional assumptions without changing the usual interpretation. Far more important is that evaluation which refuses to accept the standard explanation that this is a light-hearted, almost perfect farce in which Jonson manipulates the familiar elements of his comedy with ease and success. The current view that the play only lightly covers an unresolved struggle within Jonson's mind gives us a totally new reading and changes the picture of Jonson's dramatic and ethical progress. This is the play which marks a turning-point from the earlier, more astringent point of view to the later crowd-pleasing one. The critical status of *The Alchemist* remains unchanged in contemporary scholarship. The reputation of the play's excellence which we find in 1925 is reaffirmed throughout the period. Modern criticism has given stronger meaning and justification to the assumption that here we have Jonson's drama at its best. For *Batholomew Fair* the pattern of criticism is less clear and the critical conclusion less incisive. The reputation of the play hovers between the assumption that it is truly one of the great plays and the suggestion that inherent faults not only foreshadow the later failures in comedy, but perhaps the play should be classed with the dotages instead of with his greatest work. The admiration that the play has earned in special studies of
Jonson's plot, characterization, and language does not always carry over into the type of criticism which has been described in this chapter. Here is a case of a play of Jonson's whose literary reputation is still in the stage of formation.
CHAPTER SIX

THE FINAL COMEDIES

Dryden's generic description of the final comedies as "dotages" provides a term and suggests an attitude which is still very much current. The attitude of modern criticism toward the concluding works is one of almost total indifference. The usual summary appraisal dismisses all of these plays as complete failures in comedy and explains the failure in a very brief and all-inclusive fashion. The common explanation in literary histories is that in these plays Jonson's comedy has petrified. He is accused of listlessly and automatically repeating his regular method in comedy by reverting to the old pattern of the comedy of humours, where the main purpose of the plot was to display humour characters.¹ These are called the "products of a mind increasingly secluded, ever more firmly set in its methods, applying a process from habit rather than inspiration."² It is said that Jonson's dramatic pattern, never remarkably flexible, hardened into allegory or into a form so schematized as to be lifeless.³ The plays, according to some authorities, show Jonson's failure to realize the change in temper and taste.⁴ Others will allow

¹Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 145.
²Palmer, op. cit., p. 279.
³Edward B. Partridge, op. cit., p. 179.
⁴Walley and Wilson, op. cit., p. 24.

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these works only a dim interest for the antiquarian.\textsuperscript{5}

The prevalent assumption of total failure colors the modern literary reputation of the plays. Such an approach is unsatisfactory, however. It is too brief, too lacking in analysis, and too indiscriminate a condemnation. But the modern period has also produced criticism which is a far more valuable and thoughtful explanation than the brief dismissals already mentioned. While much of this criticism is an extension of the generalized disapproval, it is a more convincing statement of the argument because we are provided with reasons and proof instead of dogmatic assertion. These evaluations are interesting also because, at the very least, they distinguish among the four plays and attempt to give us some sense of the distinct quality of each instead of lumping them together indiscriminately. But most important, these studies show us that the final plays are not the total failures they are so complacently assumed to be by traditional criticism. It is proven that in certain elements Jonson reveals his usual skill, that certain episodes do contain a comic effect, and that his intention, whatever the results, was certainly praiseworthy.

1.

As was the case with the very first plays, the criticism of Herford and Simpson is the most extensive for each of the final comedies, and yet even they do not give us an appraisal which is really comprehensive.

In connection with The Devil is an Ass, for example, although they touch on such aspects of the play as its satire of specific social abuses and its clear renewal of the old Jonsonian duel of gull and exploiter, the editors restrict most of their commentary to the play as a type and to its characterization.

Herford and Simpson feel that everything in the play, its exposure of bogus speculation, of bogus settlement of quarrels by the laws of duelling, and of sham demonaic possession is subordinated to a dominant purpose, the theme that "the devil is an ass." This prevailing interest gives the play its individual character, and constitutes its chief interest in any survey of Jonson's art. For one thing, the play marks a significant change of front. Jonson, who had been moving toward greater accommodation to popular taste, has now largely forgotten his earlier contempt and offers his own version of the still extremely popular devil play.

Of the specific works using the devil theme, Dekker's hasty If it be not Good the Divell is In't anticipates Jonson in several points; especially in the idea that the modern devil is outdone in wit and wickedness by contemporary society. However, Jonson applies to this familiar story his own great analytic and constructive power. One particular contribution is the logical catastrophe. Also the old savage horror, which touches Dekker's play, has wholly vanished in Jonson's. "It was only as 'an Ass,' only as a stupid devil, that the devil could be in a Jonsonian play at all." In fact, the comic tradition of the stupid

devil, like the comedy of the gull, culminates in Jonson. Just as he made sheer fatuity laughable in Master Matthew and Master Stephen, so he was the first to really exploit the simple incompetence of the stupid devil. But Jonson succeeds too well in making Pug a stupid nonentity. His nullity is overdone; when he is out of sight he is forgotten, and one wonders why such an insignificant character should be in the play at all.

The editors believe that the most significant characters are Fitzdottrel and Merecraft. Compared to similar types of gulls observed in the earlier plays, Fitzdottrell seems both artificial and incomplete. His folly is made up of many elements which do not always cohere successfully. It is only when he appears as the dupe of Merecraft, and thus falls back into the most familiar category of Jonson's art, that he acquires distinct personality. Merecraft, the principal agent in exploiting credulity, acts the Mephistopheles of the play, and outdoes even Subtle in the fertility of his language and his schemes. Both Fitzdottrell and Merecraft remind us that Jonson’s gulls are at bottom beyond cure; his rogues beyond conversion. In the Jonsonian view, the game of cheating and being cheated can never come to a natural end.

Other characters merely betray Jonson's weakness when he attempted to draw upright persons. Mrs Fitzdottrell and her admirer Wellbred are apparently intended as champions of honesty, but they are drawn with less power and consistency than many less worthy persons. The violent changes wrought in both characters in the fourth act is especially incredible. Up to that point Jonson appears to have intended Mrs. Fitzdottrell as an honest woman who justly resented her foolish husband and
was willing to go to some lengths in submitting to the passion of her admirer. In the fourth act she is transformed without notice into a woman of lofty ethical power and impressive eloquence. Herford and Simpson consider this as further proof of Jonson's want of imaginative sympathy with his creations, which is especially manifest when he attempts to exhibit them in growth and movement, to become their historian instead of their portrait painter.

The editors conclude that much in this play removes it from the category of the "dotages," although it is by no means without blemish. It shows an undiminished freshness of invention and an unexpected capacity for varying the apparently rigid limits of his comedy. However, it does betray "a more than incipient decadence of constructive power; a decadence accompanied, however, by no corresponding decay of the power of style which was to cast a fitful splendour over even the worst of his 'dotages,' and destined to be interrupted by at least one energetic rally of his virile genius." 8

The comment of most other scholars is not as extended as Herford and Simpson's nor does it contain as much attempt to balance the damning with even the faintest praise. Most of those who contemplate the various aspects of the play easily discover reasons for its failure, and rarely find a compensating feature. There is no preference of topic, and the only real unity in this criticism is the steady disapproval of the entire work. Typical is the reaction to the play as one showing Jonson's "flagging invention," his inability to invest Pug with any

8Ibid., p. 165.
dramatic interest, and his failure to prevent the other characters from being mere repetitions of earlier Jonsonian types. Despite the lively satire, this critic insists that the comic entanglements are cumbersome and the play moves heavily.\(^9\) Another critic agrees that the play is a drastic weakening of Jonson's dramatic art, for much in it is clumsy and unnatural, and the entire work is an indication of Jonson losing his grip structurally.\(^{10}\) Additional note is made of the weak integration of character and setting, the considerable decline in dramatic structure,\(^{11}\) the inability to maintain the various levels of the action, or even to work out the single lines of the plot.\(^{12}\) Although Fitzdottrell may be recognized as an excellent example of Jonson's humour characterization, he is also seen as one whose cure is artificially forced and unconvincing.\(^{13}\) All the characters are stereotyped according to one writer,\(^{14}\) and another adds that the entire play lacks unity of tone, for the plot is complicated and loosely constructed.\(^{15}\)

Only when the play is viewed as a development within a specialized literary tradition does it receive any favorable comment. Potter examines the work as a type of devil play and reaffirms the judgment of


\(^{10}\)Perry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 109.

\(^{11}\)Bacon, pp. 148-149.

\(^{12}\)Enck, \textit{Jonson and the Comic Truth}, p. 212.

\(^{13}\)Snuggs, "The Humorous Character," p. 168.

\(^{14}\)Kneipp, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 129.

\(^{15}\)Chute, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 227.
of Herford and Simpson. Analysis reveals that Jonson was using the stage conventions of the contemporary devil plays. While the comedy certainly adds nothing to his fame, Potter suggests that it does show Jonson not content to rework an old legend. Instead, he was determined to seize the opportunity to flay the vices and follies of his time. Jonson's play in itself may be a poor thing, but it is one of the best that Potter examines, and Jonson's satire, as might be expected, is found to be the most trenchant.

Two other critics also attach a certain historical importance to the play. Reed's criticism attempts to impart a value to the play by discovering the historical significance in the "well-defined sentimentalism of the sub-plot." Reed feels the play should not be neglected by those examining the origin of Restoration sentimental comedy. Jonson makes a far more distinctive use of sentimentalism than Shadwell, for example. He anticipates the familiar sentimental formula later used by Cibber in both the bargain between Fitzdottrell and Wellbred of the exchange of the cloak for an interview with Mrs. Fitzdottrell and the final solution of a Platonic relationship. The concluding lines of the play also show Jonson consciously expressing what is now called sentimentalism. His use of the reform of a would-be seducer through an appeal to his subconscious sense of moral goodness is the popular motif picked up by Shirley and passed on to Caroline comedy. Cecil Seronsy:

16 Russell Potter, "Three Jacobean Devil Plays," SP, XXVIII (October, 1931), 198-204.

suggests John Skelton as a source for Iniquity's forcasting Pug's triumphal procession to Tyburn (V.vi.25ff.), a passage which strongly resembles "Elinour Rumming." Skelton's poem frequently breaks up the somewhat monotonous series of realistically descriptive adjectives with certain ejaculatory lines. The same refrain-like variation is found in Jonson's lines. This and the realistic description in his pairs of adjectives seem to be another instance of the Skeltonic element in Jonson's work.

2.

The Staple of News enjoys slightly greater respect among modern critics who study the plays at any length. According to Herford and Simpson, it is, beyond question, a greater and stronger drama than its predecessor, and one which shows strong affinities to other aspects of Jonson's work. Particularly influential is the masque-writing of the immediately preceding years. The specific idea of a "Staple of News" with such humours as the printer and factor had already been sketched in News from the New World. The other plot element, the story of the prodigal and the miser, has no such direct connection with any masque, but its allegoric abstraction and obtrusive moral symbolism recall typical themes of the masques in general. Not since Cynthia's Revels had Jonson so lavishly used characters who have a symbolic as well as a strictly human value. While no art could completely fuse these discrepant elements, Jonson's efforts are commendable. His play, it must be admitted, shows

often an astonishing talent for giving abstractions the semblance of life, and, in its greatest scenes, falls nothing short of anything he had done before.

The editors discover many links between this play and the Jonsonian comic tradition. The business of the Staple is a variation on the sick chamber of Volpone, Subtle's laboratory, and the great Fair itself. The Staple scenes, however, depart from Jonson's regular usage by closely reflecting topical events, particularly in the amble references to the familiar enterprises of Nathaniel Butter and the "Captain." While caricature of actual events is apparent, one should not suppose the Staple itself was an actual institution. Herford and Simpson remind us that all evidence points to its being mainly derived from Jonson's own vivid imagination. It is simply a satirical device, an imaginary idea conceived by the poet, and deliberately made ridiculous "in order to compel the infatuated public to recognize the folly of its blind hunger and thirst for news by a concrete reductio ad absurdum."¹⁹ The Staple office is simply a variant of the alchemist's laboratory and an invention made plausible by a variety of devices.

The editors caution that the brilliant success of the Staple scenes should not obscure the fact that they form only an episode in the play. The main plot concerns the adventures of the spendthrift Peniboy and Lady Pecunia, a story of inferior quality and interest, in which money and its various uses and abuses are the primary theme. The concerns of this principal group develop along lines with which the Staple has very

little to do. Young Peniboy as a Jonsonian character and as a figure in the history of English drama has a complex ancestry. He is no mere type of prodigality, but a genuine specimen of the dramatic Prodigal. Features of Jonson's play may have been suggested by The London Prodigal, but the points of resemblance, although suggesting Jonson's knowledge of the older play, do not go very deep. Because Jonson's concern was with the satire and comedy, not with pathos, the story of Peniboy and his bride is unusually poor in human interest. Lady Pecunia is primarily a symbol, and the fact that she is an abstraction, which is never wholly forgotten, exerts a paralyzing influence upon all the action in which she has a part. She is a depressing reminder of the abstract nature of Jonson's comic scheme.

Jonson's achievement with other characters is more successful. Even though he does not labor to vitalize Pecunia's attendants, Mistress Band, Mistress Statute, and Rose Wax, they seem far more alive. Old Peniboy, the miser, is one of Jonson's best usurers. The idea of his trial of the dogs was doubtlessly suggested by Aristophanes, but Jonson developed it in his own way. However, the originality did not result in an amusing or functional episode. The play utilizes many of the old humour types, who may be recognized in the Court politician, the astrologer, and the military poltroon. The old Canter is a powerful reminder of Jonson's own role of prophet of an ideal order founded upon measure and truth. It is against this ideal order that the buffoonery of the Jeerers and the organized lying of the Staple scenes are presented as very grave and rampant offences.

Much of the later critical reputation of the play rests on the very
brief estimates of a very small number of critics. There is a measure of unity in general attitude and in content. As did Herford and Simpson, later critics concentrate on certain elements in the play, and, like the editors, find occasional evidence of artistic strength, but conclude generally that the play is an inferior example of Jonsonian comedy.

There is general agreement that Jonson is following the model of Aristophanes, that he was exploiting the devices of allegory, and the techniques of the moralities. This last influence explains for some critics what is wrong with the play, for it is difficult to know whether to read it as a comedy or as a formal morality. The morality influence, it is suggested, results in a too sharp cleavage between the two main elements of the play—the Staple plot and the Pecunia episodes. Of the two sections of the play, the Staple scenes are clearly preferred, for in these we find Jonson's dramatic fertility as well as excellent satire and fun. The main allegory, the Pecunia plot, is dismissed as tiresome, being too still, lifeless, and obvious. It revolves too allegorically around the subject of money. An even more persistent and

20Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 25.
22Boas, op. cit., p. 119.
23Palmer, op. cit., p. 284.
25Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 25.
26Edward B. Partridge, op. cit., p. 189; Perry, op. cit., p. 110.
27Townsend, "Jonson and His Critics," p. 213.
serious charge against the structure of the entire play is its lack of movement, verisimilitude, and, above all, its lack of unity.28

The unremitting displeasure continues as the critics consider other elements. The characters are scored as being insufficiently differentiated and for failing to come to life.29 Pecunia is considered too allegorical, too abstract a personification of money and wealth.30 Some critics, however, detect a certain power in the satiric intention and theme, and find in Jonson's comments on the use and abuse of riches a great deal of dramatic worth.31 There is suggestion also that the play is of slightly superior dramatic power to The Devil is an Ass,32 but most critics consider it an unmistakable stage marking the decline in Jonson's art,33 a play providing difficult reading "for any but a disciplined admirer."34

The only specialized study of the play worth noting is that of Edward Partridge, who attempts to decipher the meaning of this play and The New Inn by studying the symbolism of the clothes.35 Jonson, he notes, was,

28Thorndike, CHEL, VI, p. 25; Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 213.
29Townsend, "Jonson and His Critics," p. 212.
31Kneipp, op. cit., p. 143.
33Perry, op. cit., p. 111.
34Palmer, op. cit., p. 284.
from his earliest plays, unusually sensitive to the symbolic value of clothes. The most interesting aesthetic use of the idea occurs in the final plays, where allusion to dress is a central way of dramatizing the life of the characters. In The Staple of News the clothes symbolism is present at the start when Peniboy Jr. throws off his gown on the hour of his twenty-first birthday. The power of clothes is suggested immediately when Peniboy Jr. decides a new suit of clothes makes him wittier. Man's reputation for intelligence and reputation, according to this symbol, is based on sight, not reason. "Since there is such an absolute identification of what one wears with what one is mentally, something as unfashionable as virtue appears in rags."36 The metaphysics of the upside-down world is miraculously illogical. It is significant that neither Peniboy the Canter nor Peniboy Senior share this reverence for fine dress. Canter takes the position of the rational and liberal philosopher who rejects both prodigality and parsimony. Partridge points out that in Peniboy Senior's arraignment of the times he makes an important connection between clothes, food, and sex. Important too are the comments of the other characters on the change of clothes and status. The climactic scenes especially dramatize the interest in clothes.

3.

If, for some critics, The Staple of News marks a slight recovery of comic powers, The New Inn, by almost all accounts, is the lowest point of Jonson's art. The critical disapproval is overwhelming, and criticism

36 Ibid., p. 398.
treating the play at any length is indeed rare. Rare too is the attempt to evaluate the play from a purely literary point of view. Most critics are less interested in the play as a play than as a biographical episode. Even Herford and Simpson's account dwells overlong on the history of the disastrous first performance before moving on to a critical appraisal which, more than any other of their introductions, reads like an attempt to salvage some worth from an unfortunate drama. They point out that the elucidation and comment Jonson included with the play show a recognizable anxiety, but the justice of its first reception can hardly be disputed. The editors can only offer some few reservations which may qualify the general condemnation. They freely admit the inadequacies: lifeless drama, poor writing, and, in short, "the mere rotten debris of Jonson's genius."37 Little pleasure can be derived from the characters, mere pathological specimens who show the gropings of Jonson's exhausted imagination. His rich humour comedy now becomes either weary travesties of the well-known types, or unsuccessful variations of them.

But the play, the editors claim, is not all on this level. The ingenious fancy and the sustained power of style are as impressive as ever. Jonson's reserve of romantic poetry, which the masterpieces of maturity had obscured, emerged here, "attenuated and impoverished, but capable at moments, of a fitful and uncertain splendour and offering, at other moments, alluring glimpses of effects beyond the actual reach of the palsied hand."38 The romantic plot shows extravagant and even monstrous invention. But some of it is noble and beautiful; and where it fails,

38Ibid., p. 194.
it is by pushing to an extreme the characteristic motives of romance. Despite the total failure, parts of the play have a considerable measure of freshness and charm.

Particularly interesting, according to the editors, is the conception of the character of Lovel. The circumstances and ingredients of his melancholy are of a kind unfamiliar and novel in Jonson's art, for it is neither an affectation nor a natural quality of temperament, but the outward expression of a passion renounced but inextinguishable. He is presented as an ideal, almost heroic character, a romantic type rarely treated sympathetically by Jonson. In him Jonson does not fail, though doubtless he is less a product of dramatic imagination than of elaborating intellect. What coherence and appeal the play has comes through his character. Even the somewhat pointless repetition of the Court of Love in the fourth act does not fail completely, but is partially redeemed by Lovel's credible and finely written speeches.

No complete discussion of the play can be pieced together from the critical fragments which have appeared occasionally since 1925. This criticism usually restricts itself to defining the type of play this is or to conjectures as to Jonson's purpose. Many consider this a rare and doomed excursion into the alien field of romance, and feel that he failed because he departed from his usual aim. Several scholars note that the Platonism of the play is an obvious attempt to exploit the current interest in the topic, but they dismiss Jonson's treatment as too

39Brooke, "The Renaissance (1500-1660)," p. 563; Kneipp, op. cit., p. 144; Chait, op. cit., p. 278.

40Perry, op. cit., p. 111.
orthodox, or too dull, or too alien to the spirit of comedy to have much effect. Only one critic considers the Platonism presented with such exaggeration that it is a target of satire and a source of comedy. If this random criticism focuses on any element it is the plot, which almost all critics contemplate with dismay. The descriptions vary. It is called a reversion to Greek romance, a Fletcherian comedy of romance, an attempt to expiate on ideas of love and valor, an exhibition of the diversity of customer, and an approach to tragedy. However sympathetic a critic may be, there is little attempt to defend Jonson against the charge of incoherence, improbability, immobility, and an action so preposterous and so entangled that it is a "supreme example of a 'dotage' in construction."

The occasional reminder that the structure shows

41 Leech, op. cit., p. 196.
42 Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 25.
43 Perry, op. cit., p. 112.
44 Partridge, The Broken Compass, p. 196.
45 Bacon, p. 150.
47 Hunt, op. cit., p. 190.
49 Kneipp, op. cit., p. 144.
50 Bacon, p. 151.
51 Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 25.
52 Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 220.
53 Palmer, op. cit., p. 289.
little evidence of mental decay\textsuperscript{54} or carelessness\textsuperscript{55} does little to mitigate the severe criticism.

General appraisal of the characterization is also unfavorable. Critics find here a lack of the usual force and directness, and suggest that in this play the humour vein dribbles out in travesties of the well-known Jonson types. One critic further detects an attitude of boredom on Jonson's part toward the subordinate characters.\textsuperscript{56} A certain degree of admiration, however, has been expressed for at least one character—Lovel. Just as Herford and Simpson had singled out this character for special attention, so have later critics. It is noted that his speeches on love and valor are finely wrought, deliberate pieces of writing, which show a concern "only to see the physical as an image of the spiritual."\textsuperscript{57} It is noted that he comes closer to being a psychological humour than do any of the others.\textsuperscript{58} Lawrence Babb sees Lovel as an intelligent and rather eloquent variation of the melancholy type unfamiliar and novel in Jonson's art.\textsuperscript{59} Babb echoes Herford and Simpson in assigning the little coherence and appeal the play has to the character of Lovel and his credible and finely expressed speeches. The appraisal of this sort is an interesting exception to the usual total condemnation, but it is

\textsuperscript{54}Hunt, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{55}Townsend, "Jonson and His Critics," p. 215.

\textsuperscript{56}Perry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{57}Leech, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 196.

\textsuperscript{58}Snuggs, "The Humourous Character," p. 177.

scarcely enough to qualify the overwhelmingly unfavorable decision on this play, which "falls unhappily among the dotages." 60

Edward Partridge, who studies the imagery of the play, is the only modern critic to seriously suggest a new and more favorable reading, for he finds here a consistent comic tone and a central, controlling theme concerned with the true relationship of understanding and the senses, or of reality and appearance. 61 He insists that only in terms of such a theme does the play make much sense. He notes that the comparison of what love and valor are and what they should be contributes to the theme, which is reinforced always by the idea that underneath the visible face and clothes exists the invisible understanding. But, unfortunately, differences between reality and appearance are talked about, they are not dramatically embodied. The only scene really dramatizing the difference is the episode in which Nick Stuffe and his wife figure. Clothes are so important to the tailor and his wife that they compel a complete reorganization of their lives and reshape their moral code. The nature of the moral change appears as soon as the Stuffe's true status is revealed and the wife shamelessly explains their actions. This is the most extraordinary example in all the final plays of the way people worship appearances.

The reactions of the other characters to this revelation are important. People in high life are as convinced as the tailor and his wife that to put on a person's clothes is to appropriate his name and reputation.

60 Palmer, op. cit., p. 287.
Although the Stuffes might seem pathological curiosities, they do not really differ very much from the people who scorn them. All seem to believe in clothes' magical power to enable or degrade; they believe also that if a gown can be polluted by one woman, it can be redeemed by another. "The appearance of things are so much their reality to the fashionable visitors of the inn that they demand an iron decorum in respect to clothes."62

Partridge also finds a quality in the language overlooked by other commentators. He perceives a control of the allusiveness here by which Jonson subtly draws attention to the several follies he wishes to satirize. In minute and endless detail Jonson's diction emphasizes the target of his satire and works his themes into even the most casual lines of the play. The symbol of clothes underscores his social ideals. Clothes are related to the presumption on the part of the lower classes elevating themselves beyond their destined stations in life. And clothes are emblematic or symbolize undue attention to the outer and the visible. Throughout Jonson's work runs the polarity of the outer and the inner, the "case" versus the soul. Man's body and the clothes that cover it are necessary to materialize his spirit, but to rest in them is to remain immersed in instrumentalities.63

62 Ibid., p. 405.

63 In an earlier article Partridge had examined the theme of clothes in order to elucidate a troublesome passage in the play (V.ii.15-16). As the problem of purifying the clothes that the tailor's wife had soiled is considered, the characters reveal a number of peculiar ideas, all of which show the obsession clothes have over their imagination. Lady Frampul believes that if Lovel could rescue the soiled clothes this might revive his love for her. The reasoning is comic in its perversion. The assumption is that clothes are like forlorn maidens who need to be rescued.
Criticism of *The Magnetic Lady* is slightly more favorable. The play's less labyrinthine plot and its obvious relation to the whole scheme of Jonson's comic program secure for it a somewhat less forbidding critical reception. It is the play's reflection of the whole body of Jonson's work which is particularly stressed in the only modern evaluation of any importance, that of Herford and Simpson. They view the work as a frank, even ostentatious reversion to the methods and devices of his earlier comedies. The play is the work of Jonson's old age, and rather pathetically shows him struggling, unsuccessfully, to recover the secret of his early comic achievement.

*The Magnetic Lady* is contrived to suggest a circle in the scheme of its plot. Aside from the plan of geometrical and magnetic allusion, the editors point out that the device indicated no radical novelty of plan even among Jonson's own plots. His most artful plot-structures might have been described in precisely similar terms. But they do admit that the intrigue which is built upon this quasi-geometric plan is of a kind virtually new in Jonson's art. It may be lacking in freshness and execution, but it does have powers of ingenious combination which he had never surpassed. The humours of courtship and match-making were, like the graver passion and pathos of love, virtually unexplored in the

by a knight errant. Also significant here is the amount of word play of a physical and sexual nature. This betrays the hope of Lady Frampul that the worn gown may prove an aphrodisiac miraculous enough to arouse Lovel to his old passion. As comedy the passage is in the traditional Jonsonian vein—witty in a sly semantic way—but too learned to be popular (*"A Crux in Jonson's The New Inne,"* MLN, LXXI [March, 1956], 168-170).
earlier plays. Having before, at most, made only a casual incursion into this fruitful field of satire, Jonson now tries to take complete possession of it.

Compared with any of the earlier humour plays, even with Every Man in His Humour, Hefford and Simpson feel the plot of this last play is singularly compact and well-organized. Also, while few of the characters fully realize the lively expectations aroused by the preliminary descriptions of them in the first act, some of these analyses are as forcible as any that Jonson has left. Notable in the play are the women, who both figure in unusual numbers among the characters and play an unusually important part in the action. In The Magnetic Lady the dramatic capacities of feminine intrigue are among the more successful portions of the play. If the heroines, Placentia and Pleasance, are little more than lay figures, "the below stairs women have all touches of vivacity."#6

Polish is perhaps the best woman Jonson ever drew. His intimate understanding of this type with her sinister blend of gossiping volubility and callous heart is remarkable. The dramatic vitality of the entire comedy is intermittent, but the decisive moment, when the game of concealment is finally over, is effective. In logical vigor at least the denouement of this play falls nothing short of that in Volpone and Epicoene.

Evaluation of the play by other critics is far more brusque and summary. Even for one of Jonson's final comedies the critical harvest is meager, consisting of a few incidental remarks on the purpose, plot, characterization, and general effect. A few critics point out Jonson's

obvious intention of appropriately rounding out the series of comedies begun thirty-five years before, but generally dismiss the effort as having "no life or wit." One critic sees in the theme of the play a belief that the crookedness of human nature could be straightened out if serious attention were paid to the affairs of the heart, and he notes that this is a novelty for Jonson. Almost every comment on the plot voices dissatisfaction at its mechanical effect and its illustration of a formal method taken to extremes. It is described as a plot which defies paraphrase and one in which the idea of the circle operates everywhere, but nowhere to the advantage of the action, for there is no central attraction to draw the characters together. Another critic complains that the scheme of reconciling the humours is not convincingly carried out.

The chief complaint about the characters is that they are mere repetitions and that we have met them all before. "These late characters of Jonson are ghosts at a banquet." It is said that Jonson spends too much time describing and too little displaying his humours and that he

65 See Hunt, op. cit., p. 203; Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 223; Partridge, The Broken Compass, p. 205.
66 Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 26.
67 Perry, op. cit., p. 112.
69 Palmer, op. cit., p. 289.
70 Enck, Jonson and the Comic Truth, pp. 222-223.
71 Kneipp, op. cit., p. 156.
72 Palmer, op. cit., p. 292.
repeats types already used. Some individual characters manage to survive this critical barrage, however. Polish, especially, is singled out as both an excellent piece of characterization and an example of Jonson's unflagging ability, for she is a character individualized beyond a mere ruling bias or eccentricity and important for showing that neither disease nor age obliterated his dramatic inventiveness and ingenuity. But the final critical topic, the general effect of the play, has produced an almost completely negative report. According to one source, the play is weak, because it lacks vigor, not because it lacks intelligence. Another says the hardened pattern and the obvious symbolism squeeze any life out of the play, and the imagery is too predictable. Efforts to ameliorate the harsh verdict by discovering remnants of the early vigor are cancelled out by comments that Jonson's talent exists in the play, but in a pathetic state of decadence and disintegration. Most critics place this work with The New Inn as one of his worst two comedies, a play which bewilders and frustrates any attempt to decipher the playwright's intention.

74Chute, op. cit., p. 329.
75Boas, op. cit., p. 130.
76Chute, op. cit., p. 329.
77Partridge, The Broken Compass, p. 299.
78Perry, op. cit., p. 313.
79Kneipp, op. cit., p. 152.
5.

It is curious that the critical enthusiasm withheld from the laborious and carefully wrought final comedies should be expended without stint on Jonson's non-typical pastoral fragment, *The Sad Shepherd*. The entire commentary provided by the modern period is slight, for *The Sad Shepherd* has evoked less analysis than even the most neglected of the last comedies, but, because appraisal is without exception approving, it provides a dramatic change in this whole dispirited area of modern Jonson criticism.

As with the criticism of the other plays considered in this chapter, once again only the remarks of Herford and Simpson are extended enough to be of any significance. They outline clearly and convincingly Jonson's purpose in this pastoral fragment. He wished to create an original English version of the pastoral, as rich and varied as the classical, but with native character and atmosphere. Considering the harshness of the real English pastoral life, and Jonson's penchant for realism, the problem was by no means simple. "English shepherd life...was not, like the Greek, a soil in which poetry sprang spontaneously into flower and fruit." 80

Jonson's success in appropriating the pastoral traditions of the English stage and in launching original experiments is striking. *The Sad Shepherd* surpasses all its predecessors. "Where he moves within the pastoral tradition he redeems its conventionality by enchanting grace; where he breaks away from it he abounds in the life and truth that pastoral

art so long had lacked." Jonson's pastoral is the first English example to be completely emancipated from the symbolical and satirical applications of pastoralism which had been part of the tradition. Looking at the play's relation to sources in another way, the editors point out that without slavishly imitating him, Jonson's conception and handling of his pastoral subject owes much to Theocritus. Most importantly, the veracity of the Greek helped Jonson to be truly English, and guided his choice of Sherwood Forest, the best equivalent Jonson's England could provide for the classic tradition.

Part of Jonson's remarkable achievement is the utilizing of traditions distinct in origin and character. The worlds of Robin Hood and the more ethereal Aeglamour remain distinct in the play, but they do not clash. Jonson's verse does much to modulate and harmonize the two elements, and his handling of these contrasted traditions was largely determined by his pronounced predilections as a dramatist. He satisfies decorum completely in his characters, who range from the fanciful to the most patiently observed, and he provides them with modes of expression which move from the most ethereal lyric to the homeliest and most ordinary speech. The treatment of Maudlin and her family shows at once Jonson's ability to fuse a number of traditions and to create characters who provide a strong and sinister contrast to the rest.

The only later study specifically devoted to The Sad Shepherd is Thomas Harrison's investigation of the possible Spenserian influence.82

81 Ibid., p. 222.

82 Thomas P. Harrison, Jr., "Jonson's The Sad Shepherd and Spenser," MLN, LVIII (April, 1943), 257-262.
Harrison claims Jonson owed at least a modest debt to Spenser for several features of his play. The treatment of the lustful and very life-like Lorel, who clumsily woos Earine, is a commonplace situation and goes back to Theocritus, but when Lorel boasts of his possession of the girl, Jonson seems to be paraphrasing Spenser's "February," (ll. 1303 ff.). He also uses plot devices which may be derived from the Florimel story in The Fairy Queen. Plan and poem both use three motives: the primitive wooing, the magic girdle, and the disguise. The final Jonsonian blast at the Puritans may also derive from the earlier poet. The comment on the repressive Puritans, which comes in as a brief digression when Robin Hood is chronicling the rustic delights of the June season, is in manner and matter strongly reminiscent of Spenser's satire, especially in "May." Spenser's palinode corresponds to Robin's recounting the joys of the season. Thus, Harrison concludes, the evidence seems to show that Spenser contributed hints to The Sad Shepherd.

Miscellaneous comment on the fragment is certainly that—a collection of stray remarks which dimly outline the rudiments of a critical approach. Certain ideas are worth noting either because they are interesting in themselves or because they persist throughout the years. The essential originality of the play is frequently stressed, but critics also recognize specific Theocritan echoes especially in Jonson's introducing freshness and real life. It is pointed out that he subordinates or ignores the conventional devices of the pastoral. Baskervill and others suggest the fragment reflects Jonson's dramatic intention and method continuing to

83 Baskervill and others, op. cit., p. 830.
the end in such familiar techniques as the five-act structure. It is noted that as Jonson grew older he became more Elizabethan, a tendency which culminates in *The Sad Shepherd*. For others, however, the play marks Jonson's complete concession to forces always present but previously repressed in his imagination, the spirit "he had so ruthlessly excluded from most of his work—all the lyric gifts that he normally suppressed came to the surface." But the usual reaction is not one of analysis but merely of pleasure and acceptance of this lovely pastoral fragment, which proves to even a hostile critic that Jonson displayed a touch of the poet. The play is described as "marvellous," as "the finest pastoral in the language," as Jonson's "most diversified achievement," as a "masterpiece," and as the one work of Jonson's which can be read from beginning to end with genuine enjoyment.

Aside from the pleasant reception afforded *The Sad Shepherd*, there

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84 Hunt, op. cit., p. 209.
85 Brooke, "The Renaissance (1500-1660)," p. 563.
86 Chute, op. cit., p. 344.
87 Legous, op. cit., p. 138.
88 Patterson, op. cit., II, 251.
89 Oliphant, op. cit., I, 54.
92 Thorndike, *CHEL*, VI, 12.
is little favorable comment to be found in this criticism of the final plays, and almost nothing to mitigate the traditional coldness and distaste. The remarks of Herford and Simpson, Partridge, and the other critics who occasionally wander into this deserted field of Jonson studies make valuable suggestions about the plays, but they create hardly a stir in their critical reputations. Modern criticism at its most thorough and most reflective hardly dispels the general attitude of indifference and boredom. The only value we derive from this criticism is a clearer view of the quality of each play—its intention, the characteristics which distinguish each from the other, and some sense of the relationship of each to the whole Jonsonian comic program. But not enough critics participate in this commentary, and there is not enough substance in the criticism undertaken to form a complete and interrelated body of scholarship. Instead we find a disjoined, formless discussion which is clearly the most unrewarding and the most discouraging in the whole area of modern Jonson studies.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE TRAGEDIES

With the criticism of Jonson’s tragedies we return to a body of commentary which is satisfying in variety, complexity, and importance. As with the criticism of the early and the mature comedies, several critical traditions appear and show significant developments during the modern period. Many of the comments convincingly reaffirm standard interpretations; other suggest important new approaches. Very often we are reminded by this criticism, as we never are by that of the final comedies, of the renewed and steady interest in the art of Jonson, and of a movement toward revaluation which often results in rehabilitation.

1.

Herford and Simpson discuss the same elements in Sejanus that had attracted them in most of the comedies: the degree of classicism, Jonson’s adaptation of sources, his plot, and characterization. Concerning the first of these items, they insist that to view the play as an attempt at classical tragedy must be severely modified. The theme itself, the fall of a favorite, does not lend itself easily to classical treatment. For one thing, it is not a subject easily reconciled with the strict law of time. Also much in the work Jonson produced shows only a partial dependence on classical guidance. Although Sejanus relies more on classical learning than did any previous English play, it is
only dimly attached to classical technique. A prodigious crowd of characters is involved, and Sejanus himself might have been modelled by a rebel against the classical drama, so sharply does he depart from the tragic hero of classical tradition. We are on safer ground in searching for influences to turn from classical to contemporary tragedy. In certain matters of instinctive taste, Jonson was a true Elizabethan, exploiting the crowded incident as well as the complex and intricate plot-economy of the popular drama. A very powerful contemporary influence was Julius Caesar, which counted for much more than Jonson would have acknowledged, or was probably aware of, when he composed his own play. For Jonson's work is one of conscious and rather disdainful emulation. "Jonson meant to show what could be made of another Roman conspiracy by a poet who had access to the greatest of Roman historians and could render Tacitus in language as authentic and hardly less sinewy."¹

In their thorough examination of Jonson's adaptation of his sources, the editors decide that the principal source of the play is the narrative of Tacitus in the Fourth and Fifth Books of the Annals. Subsidiary sources include Dion's Roman History, Suetonius, and Juvenal's Tenth Satire on mob violence. Jonson's treatment reveals both the scholar's respect and the dramatist's instinct. The extent and value of his creative work on the sources have never received critical justice, his editors observe, and they themselves make several commendatory statements about his actual adaptation. The insist, first of all, that to call the play an "ancient mosaic" is inaccurate; translated or closely paraphrased

material amounts to only a quarter of the whole. Jonson contributed
dialogue based on mere hints of action and character in his sources.
He also modified the historical sequence of events. His additions are
never arbitrary, and always show the keenest insight into the situ-
ation. His most important addition is Arruntius, who functions as the
critic and censor in Jonson himself and as a replacement for the classi-
cal chorus which Jonson had banished. Some of the sensational incidents
which Jonson selects and develops show both his originality and his af-
finity with Elizabethan drama. Allowing the suicide of Silius to take
place in the open Court is one example of a Jonsonian touch which great-
ly vivifies the play.

The plot, with a few trifling exceptions, strictly conforms to the
historical record. And yet, despite its dense and accurate historical
background, none of Jonson's dramas is more Jonsonian in conception and
execution. The play, which is more coherent than the humour plays,
signals his entering upon a new phase of his art. The immense con-
structive control and the dramatic situation in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*
are anticipated in *Sejanus*. Very typical of Jonson's method, accord-
ing to Herford and Simpson, is the catastrophe, which is overwhelming
but not long prepared for and foreseen. Instead the climax is a sudden
fall brought about by a light disturbance of the equilibrium of huge
opposed forces. The swift and complete fall dramatically contrasts the
earlier lengthy and undecisive poise of the characters' fates. Such a
pattern of action was congenial to Jonson's imagination, for the fall
satisfied his love for sudden, complete, and irrevocable catastrophes.

Although they admire such satirical characters as the Court ladies
and the professional charlatans. and justify their presence in a tragedy, for many reasons the editors are displeased with the leading persons. Neither Sejanus nor Tiberius is intended to arouse pity, for they are criminals with no complexity of moral nature; they are like beasts of prey. Jonson's Sejanus is such an artist in crime and so ambitious of reknown for unheard-of prodigies of wickedness that he recalls the Tamburlaine phase of tragedy. Two points in Sejanus' story seem chiefly to have captured Jonson's imagination: the sudden fall and the blind arrogance. The circumstances of his overthrow may seem cruel, but the fall is merely a due requital for his misdeeds. The fall also shows how ironically conceived is Sejanus' character. Although he appears astute, he is finally completely overmatched in cunning. But neither Sejanus nor Tiberius is a genuinely tragic figure. Tiberius belongs to the tragedy only because of the dooms he inflicts and the terrors he excites. He is an even more externalized character than Sejanus because Jonson omits the inward torment which makes the historical Tiberius pitiable. Characteristically, Jonson found no place in his minutely studied portraiture of Tiberius for this poignant touch of nature. His Tiberius is displayed rather than revealed. What he fundamentally was, Jonson does not show us.

Sejanus can never be a popular play, the editors conclude. Despite lavish and accurate details, Jonson failed to make his Rome as lucid and expressive as his London. The great cast of characters is imperfectly grouped and organized; most of them are too slightly drawn. On the whole, this is the tragedy of a satirist, one who felt and saw more intensely the vices and follies of men than their sorrows. Jonson, with his
boundless power of scorn, was poorly endowed in pity. In short, "Jonsonian tragic suffers from an inner poverty in the humanities of the heart."  

Many of the conclusions of Herford and Simpson are repeated in a significant proportion of later criticism. That the play shows a remarkably accurate adherence to historical fact is so often stated that it is almost a critical commonplace. The only really original discussion of the play's conception of history is Joseph Bryant's examination of Jonson's promise that he will adhere to the "truth of argument." Bryant inquires into the many possible meanings of this first, and presumably most important requirement, which is embedded in a phrase, "ambiguous and in need of amplification." Understanding the phrase, Bryant feels, may help us ultimately to see the tragedies themselves in a different and more favorable light, perhaps even to "accord them some of that admiration which Jonson felt they so richly deserved."  

The first obvious interpretation means simply "historicity of argument." Generally, Jonson is scrupulously faithful to his sources. He dramatized history as it had been written or reported and gives his plays the "appeal of scholarly reconstructions." The historicity of Sejanus must represent Jonson's contribution to the meaning of the phrase. As to Jonson's requiring his audience to accept his representation as true,  

2 Ibid., p. 27.  


5 Ibid., p. 196.  

6 Ibid., p. 197.  

7 Ibid.
his position is unmistakable, and is essentially that of Scaliger. He never seriously expected his audience to mistake his stage for the actual place represented. He aimed at a limitation of the action represented to that which might plausibly take place within the bounds of the Jacobean stage. Part of the reason for excluding many scenes of violence is that they could not be represented on the contemporary stage with any degree of verisimilitude.

Jonson's view of tragedy included the traditional belief that history taught valuable lessons for conduct in practical affairs. Everything we know about him indicates that Jonson granted history a high place in the ranks of literature. History's one quality making it superior to poetry was its "truth of argument." Jonson also had a practical reason for his unusual insistence on the truth of argument: the Puritan attack on the stage. Perhaps he considered Sejanus an answer to the Puritan claims that drama was a species of lying. He seems to have thought the play an especially apt lesson in obedience to princes.

Ironically, the "truth of argument" has proven an impediment to interpretation and appreciation alike. Readers find Sejanus dull because they miss the significance of about half of the references, and, having missed the significance, they find no excuse for that half except as a display of rhetoric. Criticism would be different if people read the sources, an effort which is eminently worthwhile, according to Bryant. "What we do find in these initially somewhat forbidding plays, if we take the trouble to read them properly, is serious, significant, and thoroughly English drama, and, as an additional prize, a great poet's
illumination of two important segments of Roman history."\(^8\)

One of the most significant areas of scholarship on *Sejanus* is that which examines the sources. Agnes Boswell's discussion of Jonson's use of the classics in both tragedies is a rather generalized introduction to the problem.\(^9\) Classical history, she notes, supplied the facts and filled up the background, and she states that Jonson closely adhered to his sources. She concludes that he is Latin by temperament and more Latin certainly than Greek. But he is also "English to the core\(^{10}\) and a genuinely enlightened and disciplined scholar of the classics.

Vivian McClain studies the historical background of the play more closely, and assumes that practically all the material is taken from classical sources.\(^{11}\) She separates the sources into two kinds: those which supplied the facts and those which gave more solidity to the characters or more detail to the historical background. Jonson adheres to sources of the first kind with great fidelity, although he does construct some conversations for which he has no warrant. He also compresses time. However, every character has some kind of historical existence, however shadowy it may be. Whenever possible Jonson employs the language of the characters as history records it. After a detailed comparison of Jonson's play and the specific classical sources, Miss McClain concludes

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 213.


\(^{10}\)Ibid., p. 6.

\(^{11}\)Vivian McClain, "The Historical Background of Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*" (unpubl. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1929).
that Jonson's own citations are not always correct, especially when they refer to Tacitus. He often makes one reference when he means another. This critic charitably suggests that Jonson probably had various historical accounts so well in mind that he did not remember the exact book and page. Usually he is correct as to the book, but not the page. As a whole, all of his references to Juvenal and Seneca are more nearly correct than those to his main source, Tacitus.

A special scrutiny of Jonson's method disposes of one problem broached by Miss McClain. Ellen Duffy feels that Jonson's critics and editors have not allowed for his use of intermediary sources, the Renaissance classical scholarship to which he was obviously indebted. For Sejanus he had recourse to the work of Lipsius. The imposing array of references in the notes not only shows a knowledge of the classics but also reveals that he knew how to use a commentary on the text. Jonson often acknowledges that he uses Lipsius, but usually he borrows without acknowledgement. The fact that he used contemporary aids to the study of the classics does not detract from his scholarship, but probably arises from his desire for accuracy and truth of argument.

A later critic reaffirms and extends the conclusions of Miss Duffy. Daniel Boughner, in the most recent commentary on Jonson's use of his sources, insists that the best way to study Jonson is through the way Jonson himself studied: through the Lipsius edition of Tacitus.


Critics have, without justification, assumed Jonson copied Tacitus because he appreciated his somber character. But Tacitus, Boughner insists, was essentially uncongenial to Jonson, a fact he substantiates by listing many specific differences between the two. On the other hand, Jonson's indebtedness to Lipsius is apparent from a glance at the marginal and footnote citations. Jonson derived from this intermediate source many ideas, phrases, and the arrangement of the plot. The dependence is very close, but, as does any commentator who discusses Jonson's use of sources, Boughner insists that the dependence never reaches the point of servility.

Enough appraisal has been made of such topics as structure, characterization, and language to show clear and consistent critical attitudes. While this commentary is seldom extensive and never results in the detailed, interesting arguments found in the criticism of the comedies, statements on the dramatic technique of Sejanus occur often enough to constitute an important feature of its modern reputation.

The comment on the structure is persistent but quite generalized. One encounters many brief, casual statements, usually complimentary, on this "stately, well-constructed" piece of work.14 Some critics will balance praise and blame. Jonson's seeming love of crowded stages is considered a distraction and an example of his "besetting theatrical vice," proximity, but, it is pointed out, he never loses the grasp of the argument in this tragedy, and all parts fit into the design which implies more creative energy than appears on the surface.15 Other comment

14N. Scarlyn Wilson, op. cit., p. 55.

15Boas, op. cit., p. 74.
suggests that holding the issue in doubt until the end gives the play a sense of immediacy. The fast and exciting action has evoked favorable comment. Muriel Bradbrook notes that Jonson uses the mobs as foils to the heroic characters and that the play depends very largely on the working out of "policy" in the narrative. She suggests that it depends also on simulation and dissimulation and on disguising of intentions behind masks of all kinds.

Certain critical attitudes toward the characterization are noteworthy. We are told by one authority that Jonson's interest lay largely in character and that therein lies the merits of both his tragedies. His method, unlike that of Shakespeare, was one of exposition with each character illustrating and emphasizing some trait, but seldom conveying much illusion of life. The chief characters are thoughtfully conceived and faithfully represented, but the minor characters also show care and veracity. Other critics complain that the play shows Jonson's inability of plumbing the depths of human psychology. Even among those who find most of the characters too fixed and simple, Sejanus will be distinguished as a "magnificent monster." Henry Wells considers both

16Parks and Beatty, op. cit., p. 690.
17Bridges-Adams, op. cit., p. 247.
19Thomdike, CHEL, VI, 20.
20Gassner, op. cit., p. 242. See also Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 292 and Baskerville and others, op. cit., p. 829.
21Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions, p. 131.
Sejanus and Catiline to be Senecan in their isolation and height and to owe something to the Senecan concept of a supreme focus of power within an individual. However, Leicester Bradner considers the tragedies of Jonson as well as those of Shakespeare examples of how far and how effectively English tragedy had moved away from the hampering Senecan conventions. Especially in characterization and in the use of mixed motives was tragedy moving toward convincing realism. Jonson's protagonist, Bradner says, is a study in political corruption, and the play is intensely real, so that we cannot brush it aside as a monstrous imagining which never had a counterpart in real life.

With the exception of one lengthy comment, criticism of the style is incidental. The most extended and most interesting analysis is provided by Moody Prior. Prior sees the play as an example of Jonson's careful planning, attention to detail, and scholarly restraint. Paradoxically, in some ways the play is a reversion to earlier English tragedy. The line is not controlled by any devices of patterning, which typify all tragedies after Tamburlaine. Jonson's blank verse is designed with the rhythms of well-phrased, rather formal discourse as its basis. This shows to best advantage in the Senate scenes where the blank verse seems


24 See as an example of the complaint that Jonson's style is too oratorical or too complicated for tragic emotion: Thorndike, CHEL, VI, 20; Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 53; George W. Cottrell, Jr. and Hoxie N. Fairchild, Critical Guide (New York, 1930), p. 217.

brilliantly adapted. Unfortunately, the play enjoys few such occasions. More often one encounters many long speeches in which more seems to be said than the purpose demands. Any dullness in the play does not come through lack of technical skill in writing, and certainly not because of ascetic plainness in diction. "It may surprise the casual reader of this play that Jonson shows the same zest in the use of figurative language and the same fecundity in the creation of striking images which is characteristic of the Elizabethan dramatists generally." To a limited degree, some of these figures develop into a consistent scheme of suggestions such as have been noticed in the plays of Shakespeare. For example, the animal imagery is largely used to characterize the faction of Sejanus, and the images of sparks and flames are made to suggest the virtues of the old Roman character in opposition to the decadent times. Usually, the images serve a rhetorical function, or are employed to express the indignation of the virtuous Romans and to contrast the dignity of the true ancient Roman ideals with the cheap political and personal decadence of Tiberius and Sejanus. A secondary function is to glance at the magnitude of the prodigious events which take place. What is remarkable is that, despite the elaborate and profuse development, the imagery does not add up to a great deal in the end. The reason is the nature of the action and the manner in which it is organized. The whole action is separate from the characters upholding the traditional virtues of political freedom and personal decency. Such speeches of exhortation are dull, and because they merely repeat what is obvious in

26 Ibid., p. 115.
the play, they are in no way dramatically effective. None of the spokes-
men for the Roman virtues are active in the play. Since none of these
persons opposes Sejanus or influences his rise or fall very directly,
their "long harrangues seem largely beside the point." So much of
the elaborate development in the diction occurs in the speech of passive
characters that the imagery cannot very readily be made integral to the
play. Under these conditions any attempt to fit the action to associ-
atations of grandeur and magnitude is bound to be largely mechanical. Be-
cause Jonson chooses logical clarity and sharpness, he loses an "ampli-
tude and largeness" characteristic of other Elizabethan dramatists.

One staple in the criticism of Sejanus is comparison between it and
the tragedies of Shakespeare. Too much of this commentary is so brief
that its only value is in showing the predictable preference for Shake-
peare by making Sejanus a foil to his superior achievement. Two com-
parisons, however, seem particularly apt and of value as far as an under-
standing of Jonson's work is concerned. W. J. Olive is convinced that
Sejanus, in which Shakespeare acted, may have had a strong influence on
Hamlet. The most pervasive influence is the prevalent satiric tone
which dominates each play. In both the sense of human depravity is ex-
treme, and in both the most bitter ideas are expressed satirically. In
Jonson's play Livia and Eudemus contribute strongly to the satiric atmos-
phere. The cosmetics process is not intended to relieve the tragic action

27 Ibid., p. 118.  
28 Ibid., p. 119.  
29 See, for example, Bridges-Adams, op. cit., p. 247.  
but to contribute to the satire and to the moral atmosphere of tragedy. Olive feels that Jonson's usage penetrated Shakespeare's consciousness and explains his obsession with cosmetics in Hamlet. Jonson's seriousness of critical purpose in Sejanus and Hamlet's advice to the players suggest another apparent resemblance. "Nowhere else is Shakespeare so interested in dramatic criticism, and his point of view is essentially Jonson's, indeed in almost all his words." Jonson's constant contempt for popular judgment, usually foreign to Shakespeare's attitude, is reflected in Hamlet's speech to the players, which may be describing the reception of Sejanus.

Edwin Honig compares Sejanus and Coriolanus as studies in alienation. He is convinced that in these plays both Shakespeare and Jonson were attempting to develop a new type of dramatic invention, tragical satire; and both were preoccupied with the moral question of authority in the stage. Because of this concern and because each here reveals the "disruption of the old order in the anarchy prevailing under a weakened or merely negative authority," Coriolanus is closer to Sejanus than is any other Shakespeare hero. The doctrine both characters embody is that tyranny and social chaos are inevitable where the dispositions, functions, and responsibilities of authority have been dislodged from the traditional sources. In Coriolanus the question is mainly focussed on the alienation of a "natural" leader from the fickle populace. In Sejanus a dramatization

31 Ibid., p. 182.


33 Ibid., p. 407.
of the same problem is structurally more complex. The emphasis on the fickleness of the mobs in each tragedy may be an attack on Puritan zealots. Jonson, in particular, had two personal grievances. The audience had been indifferent to his didactic comedies, and he resented the popular success of such faulty historical renditions as *Julius Caesar*. Honig notes, in conclusion, that Jonson's play contains no abatement of moral revulsion expressed toward Sejanus. The dehumanizing of character is the strength of Jonson's unique dramatic intensity. The characters may be too intensely monomaniacal for variety, but they are certainly no mere didactic puppets. The extent to which the power and genius for evil in *Sejanus* are made real depends originally on a recognition of these potentialities universally in man.

Perhaps the most interesting and most vital approach to *Sejanus* in modern scholarship is that which overlooks its resemblance to the play of any other dramatist and avoids measuring it against the standards of classical or Elizabethan tragedy. Instead, by postulating an original category for the play, several scholars attempt to discern Jonson's purpose and accomplishment according to that. One frequently mentioned category is satirical tragedy. T. S. Eliot has considered the tragedy from the viewpoint of satire and takes issue with the tradition that Jonson failed as a tragic dramatist because his genius was for satire and because pedantic learning overburdened his two tragedies. Eliot rejects both interpretations and scores the first as too crude to be accepted. "To say that he failed because his genius was unsuited to tragedy is to tell us nothing at all."34 The general category of tragedy is

wide enough to include Jonson's type, and sharp distinctions between tragedy and comedy are inadequate for such a varied drama as the Elizabethan. Harry Levin examines the problem from the same point of view. He feels that it would be rash to conclude that the satiric spirit is hostile to tragedy. In Jonson's case, the tragedies come most to life when his courtiers are fawning, or his women are gossipping.  

Wells also accepts the classification and feels that in his tragedies Jonson created powerful satires on the disintegration of Roman morals. He was one of the most important writers cultivating the essentially satiric vein of tragedy, and his most popular works show a harmony of comedy, satire, farce, and earnestness which is unduplicated. His tragedies are a unique development of the satirical vein. Oscar Campbell discerns many satiric features in this play, which is the natural creation of a mind steeped in satire. First, there is the derisive exposition of the principal characters and the unfavorable painting of the social and political situation. Commentators are very important in the early part of the play. Sejanus' villainy becomes monstrous and grotesque as the play progresses, and his death produces neither pity nor terror. Campbell concludes that in "this strange play, Ben Jonson's originality flowered again. By filling the mould of a typical Senecan drama with the materials and spirit of satire, he created...a kind of

35 Ben Jonson, p. 15.
36 Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 10.
tragical satire, which was a new kind of play. Even more thought-provoking are those analyses which consider the play a political tragedy. K. M. Burton notes that the tragedies of Jonson, like those of Chapman, are frequently misjudged. Both are concerned primarily with a flaw in the social order, not within the individual. Both present a dilemma in which society as a whole is involved. Both are interested in the problem of social decadence and its political implications. Their separate conceptions of the immediate causes of corruption in society control, to a large extent, the tragic situations they imagine and the dramatic structure they evolve.

Sejanus is the most complete dramatic embodiment of Jonson's social theory and also his most successful political tragedy. His theory that evil originates from within the social structure more thoroughly permeates his plays than Chapman's, but it seldom appears as an explicit statement. Clearly he felt the citizens in general were responsible for Rome's decadence, for most have succumbed to luxury and have lost pride in their rights and duties as citizens. Jonson does not explicitly state his theme, but implies it by holding up the earlier heroes as standards of reference for their descendents. It is difficult for anything but vice to flourish in such an atmosphere, and Sejanus, Tiberius, and Catiline are the legitimate offspring of this society. Society as

38 Ibid., p. 181.

39 See also Parks and Beatty, op. cit., p. 690; Culmsee, "The Classicism of Ben Jonson," p. 69; and Chait, op. cit., p. 175.

a whole is considered responsible for its own corruption, and Jonson
does not maintain that one sphere of society is inherently more danger-
ous than another. Power and high place did not corrupt Sejanus; he
was corrupted before he began to rise. In Sejanus, Jonson did not want
"to give a realistic picture of a vicious man but to present a dramatic
symbol of the monstrosity which is born when a society degenerates."41
Jonson's tragic conception differs from Chapman's because his tragic
dilemma involves the whole city of Rome. The tragedy lies in the vicious
spiral of deterioration caused by a degenerate society—a spiral from
which in Sejanus there is no escape. When Sejanus is overthrown by the
combined forces of the abominable Tiberius and his new parasite Macro,
one monster has gone, but two remain. Rome itself becomes monstrous as
it takes part in Sejanus' overthrow.

Jonson was content to define the problem in terms of tragedy; but
there was, inevitably, no solution to present. The fact of evil surviv-
ing is stressed at the end. In Sejanus general social corruption gives
birth to a monster, who opportunely seizes power, rouses the whole city
to a pitch of hatred against him, and reduces almost all Rome to bestial
savagery in his overthrow. There is no prospect of anything but evil
to come. The pattern arises naturally out of the dramatist's conception
of the manner in which evil penetrates the political structure.

Bryant provides an even more thorough revaluation of the play.42
He objects to the traditional assumption that the play fails as a tragedy,

41 Ibid., p. 404.

42 Joseph A. Bryant, Jr., "The Nature of the Conflict in Jonson's
because such an assumption is based on too simple an interpretation of a presumably uncomplicated action. Any interpretation which views the play as a clear struggle for power between Sejanus and Tiberius is fallacious, for it must discard altogether too much else in the play as nonessential. Bryant himself insists that if we take into account all that the play contains, we realize that the basic conflict is a broad one between the forces of good and evil, an assumption justified by the structure of the play and a knowledge of its sources.

Bryant notes that all the good characters are related to Germanicus, a symbol of ancient Roman virtues. All the good people are distinct and have a clear function in the play. The several villains are more impressive for the similarities of their drives and actions than for any opposition. Sejanus almost always acts with his master's knowledge and permission. Therefore, we cannot "justly regard the central conflict as a valid struggle between these two."43 Looking at the sequence of Roman history we see a recurrent pattern of tyrants paving the way for their own downfall. But tyranny or lust for political power is not the primary concern of the play, and, therefore, Jonson provides no analysis of an inner struggle.

The real problem in Sejanus is why the tyrant should exist at all. The major subject here is not Sejanus, but Rome itself. The play shows us the body politic in the grip of a disease which threatens to become mortal. It attempts to answer two questions: how was the disease contracted, and how should it be combatted? Jonson's answers are that the

disease of tyranny is but the symptom of a greater disease that comes whenever the people in a state have so completely ceased to love virtue that they forget even what it is. Jonson's solution to the problem is to endure it. The tyrant must be tolerated no matter how wicked. There is always the hope that God will reform wickedness into virtue, and there is always the certainty that God had a purpose in permitting such wickedness to exist. The basic conflict in this play is the perennial one between unadulterated evil and the imperfect good, which is all that most mortals can hope to attain to. The only chance for good to survive is through submitting to correction.

Silius' last speech is "without question the high point of the play." His speech and suicide are the perfect summary of Stoic virtue, and a realization that life is to be endured rather than enjoyed. The climactic scene gives us a clear picture of the conflict, indicating the only terms on which a desirable solution may be effected and foreshadowing the ultimate justification of goodness and right. The play does show us good's potentiality for survival and offers a hope that it will ultimately survive. The ending may show that there is more evil than good in the world, but good does exist and it is growing. The theme of the play is the struggle for survival by the small remnant of virtue in the Roman commonwealth, which can survive only through the Stoic concept of virtue.

The prevalence of such admiring comment is a measure of the critical advance that this play has made since the rather ambivalent appraisal

44Ibid., p. 215.
by Herford and Simpson in 1925. This favorable strain is also in dramatic contrast to the brief surveys with their persistent emphasis on the play as an inferior work. The complaints often sound like a thoughtless reiteration of decades of older Jonson criticism as they score the overabundance of scholarship and oratory, the play's violating the artistic spirit of the age, the cold classicism and immobility, and the fact that so much of the action seems a direct translation from Cicero and Sallust. But as one moves through the extended modern criticism of the play he finds a more enthusiastic acceptance of Jonson's first and, according to modern taste, most successful tragedy. John Enck's appraisal is characteristic of this changed attitude as he weighs and accepts each element of the play to conclude that Sejanus is "a purer work than the English stage deserves."  

2.

Catiline has not received the attention and acceptance its predecessor has in modern criticism. The scholarship is neither as extensive nor as interesting. Catiline is, without a single doubt, the less preferred of the two Jonsonian tragedies for the modern reader and critic alike.

45 Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 331.
46 Schelling, Elizabethan Playwrights, p. 166.
47 N. Scarlyn Wilson, op. cit., p. 55.
48 Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 148.
49 Jonson and the Comic Truth, p. 109.
Herford and Simpson's introduction, which sets the tone for much later criticism, is comprehensive enough, but it seems primarily an extension of the criticism of Sejanus in selection and emphasis. Again one of the primary interests is Jonson's sources and influences on the play. The editors note that Jonson's only source was ancient authorities and his only precedent was Sejanus. Like its predecessor, the design of Catiline shows how far removed Jonson's ideal of tragedy was from ancient models. This play also is crowded with characters, incidents, and intricate movement. Jonson constructs his scenes so that tragic dignity and pathos are replaced by satire and genre painting, additional proof that the tenacious Elizabethan in him resisted the demands of classical simplicity. In some respects though, Catiline unmistakably mirrors classical models. For example, Jonson reverted to a classical or Senecan technique by using a chorus and prologue, neither of which, however, adds appreciably to the play's achievement.

As in Sejanus, Jonson sought to present an historical event with as much fidelity, subject to the conditions of tragic drama, as his materials would allow. Again, he cannot be charged with producing a play which is a "mosaic," for only a small part of the original material is even vaguely in dramatic form. He cannot be said to have abused his command of the classical sources, for the "poet in him steps without effort into the place of the translator." Jonson's method of dramatic rewriting exempts him from any charge of slavishly following his sources. Viewing his Cato and his Catiline as dramatic personages shows how much

more forcibly and vividly they are presented than in Sallust. Nor do Sallust's sketches approach the brilliant delineation of Sempronia in Jonson's play. Another admirable creation is the coarse, strong, Jonsonian portrait of Fulvia, which is worked up from very slight materials. Whether Catiline is better or worse than Sejanus is a subject for debate, but that it is constructed from identical principles and exhibits the same characteristics and peculiar conception of tragic art is obvious, Herford and Simpson conclude. Once again in giving dramatic shape to this material, he selected only those sources which enhanced the spectacle of boundless wickedness armed with formidable power. In Catiline, as in Sejanus, Jonson appears indifferent to the attraction of the profound humanity and psychology found in Shakespearean tragedy.

Catiline, the editors continue, ostensibly the central figure, is not a tragic character. He is less terrible than Tiberius, less profoundly and subtly drawn. His rhetorically powerful speeches only exhibit a hard monotony of mood. He has no conflict, no light and shade. His only aim is to assert the claim of the have-nots against the haves. Unfortunately, through Jonson's dramatic plan, Catiline, after the first act, ceases to be the principal person in the drama in which he should be the hero. Cicero scores a personal triumph over Catiline by half-effacing him in Jonson's play. When Catiline withdraws from Rome, he is still further removed from the center of interest. This second tragedy is substantially a duel between Cicero and Catiline, as the first was a duel between Tiberius and Sejanus. The combat is inferior to that of the earlier play in psychological interest, but Catiline has a richer social and political import. In this play too, both sides gain impressive-
ness and aesthetic value because they stand for significant philosophi-

cal attitudes. Catiline himself is not tragic, but he does arouse some-

thing akin to the pity of tragedy as we watch his momentous and signifi-

cant ruin.

Except for a single group, none of the other characters are indi-

vidualized with much power. The women, however, particularly Fulvia and

Sempronia, are among Jonson's best achievements in this kind. His insight

into certain types of womanhood was extraordinarily keen, and yet it was

the insight of an intellectual analysis and satirical observer. The

cosmetics scene fits naturally into the play. "Every line of these vi-

vacious dialogues has its purpose and value in the evolution of the plot."\(^5^1\)

The temper of Jonson's comedy is close enough to the temper of his trage-

dy so that the transition from one to the other in Catiline is not diffi-
cult nor startling.

If Jonsonian comedy is poor in laughter, his tragedy is poor in

passion. There runs through both his tragedies a vein of cruelty, of

scorn, vindictive and retributive, inflicting upon follies and upon crimes

a Nemesis which differs only in degree. The tragedies are relieved by

scarcely a single note of pity or by a spiritual figure. The characters

oppress us by the monotonous prevalence of evil, but they do not appal

us. Perhaps this results from Jonson's way of dealing with his criminals,

which indicates a possible philosophical stand that sense and judgment

will in the long run prevail over savagery and fanaticism.

The only area of later criticism of Catiline which approaches the

\(^5^1\)Ibid., p. 127.
thoroughness of the scholarship on Sejanus is that which concerns sources. Agnes Boswell considers the play a stronger example of Senecan influence than Sejanus, although the tragic theme and fundamental structure of both are similar. But both also have many links with the contemporary historical drama, and Jonson's technique follows Seneca no more closely than does that of any other Elizabethan dramatist. Ellen Duffy is convinced that in Catiline Jonson made extensive use of Durantinus' Historia, which provided him with what he needed for his play, proving once more that he did not always use his classical sources at first hand. Jonson seems to have derived ideas on the sequence and combination of certain episodes from this intermediary source. Jonson is following Durantinus when he appears to deviate from Sallust's story in, for example, the story of the killing of the slave. Other episodes and details of character and crimes reflect this overlooked source. William Blissett notes that the conception of Caesar's character strongly resembles the conception in the Phrasalia by Lucan. The play abounds in echoes from Lucan, but the echoes are less impressive than the central parallel between the protagonists.

Mary Hackett studies the sources of the play at much greater length and with greater care than do any of these other critics. She collects and arranges those classical sources which furnished Jonson facts, back-

\(^{52}\text{Op. cit., p. 6.}\)

\(^{53}\text{P. 24.}\)

\(^{54}\text{William Blissett, "Lucan's Caesar and the Elizabethan Villain," SP, LIII (October, 1956), 553-575.}\)
ground, and dialogue for his play. Her study reinforces several tra-
ditions about Jonson's procedure in tragedy. It shows that he remained
true to the belief that tragedy was for serious subjects and comedy for
more everyday affairs. His long speeches are monotonous and slow the
action of the play; most of them are direct translations from classic
authors. However, he is original in rearranging source material. Jonson
shapes the history to fit the drama and the drama to fit the history.

Miss Hackett concludes that the chief source of the play is Sallust's
The Conspiracy of Catiline, which supplied more material for the plot
than any other source. There is a strong correspondence in the order
of the events in both Sallust and Jonson. Several long speeches are
taken directly from Sallust, who must, therefore, be considered the basis
for the background and the dialogue of the tragedy. The characterization
also reflects Sallust, although that of Cicero is drawn from his own
writings. Cicero is a life-like character, true to the representation
found in his lengthy oration. Cicero, the source of second importance,
is significant especially for his Oration against Catiline. Other sources
are discernible, but none is as influential as Sallust or Cicero. Some
are used to take the reader as far back as possible into the spirit and
environment of the world of Cicero and Catiline. Euripides and especially
Seneca gave Jonson suggestions for his ghost scenes and dialogue. What-
ever his sources, Jonson always remains true to the facts of history.
Miss Hackett concludes by swelling the popular chorus that Catiline will
always be appreciated by the scholar rather than by the ordinary reader

55 Mary Hackett, "The Sources of Ben Jonson's Catiline (unpubl. thesis,
University of Oklahoma, 1933).
because one must have a thorough knowledge of classical literature to understand it. Jonson's solicitude and diligence in abstracting minute details from his authorities is revealed only to the student who is interested in the background of the play and who is well read in the classical authorities. Jonson makes the dead material of the printed page bring out the characters of living men in living language.

Most modern commentary unites in condemning the play and either rephrases the traditional explanations or announces new reasons for dislike. The generalized nature of these objections is noticeable, and one feels that the critical assumption of Catiline's inferiority is a self-evident truth for most critics. Legouis and Cazamian admit the second act is as successful as anything Jonson ever wrote, but they consider the entire play too determinedly "classical" and quite inferior to Sejanus in its less vigorous and clear characters. For John Gassner, the play is simply a second-rate effort. Boas thinks the work shows more of Sejanus' failings and less of its merits; its subject seems even more remote from audience interest. Miss Ellis-Fermor detects the presence here of a satirist or moralist but not a tragic poet, and Wells considers the play a translation from oratory.

Perhaps the persistent modern decision that the play is a failure

60 Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights, p. 54.
stems from T. S. Eliot's essay on Jonson. Certainly, those who dislike Catiline may draw much support from this powerful source. The reasons Eliot gives for the failure are surprising, for they reverse the traditional explanations completely. The play fails, Eliot believes, not because it is too labored and conscious, but because it is not conscious enough; because Jonson in this play is not alert to his own idiom, not clear in his mind as to what his temperament wanted him to do. Jonson here conforms, or attempts to conform to the conventions, not of antiquity, "which he had exquisitely under control;"\textsuperscript{61} but to the conventions of the tragico-historical drama of his own time. The play represents an application of erudition to a form which was not the proper vehicle for the mind which had amassed the erudition.

Eliot considers certain aspects of the play successful. The soliloquy of Sylla's ghost is characteristically successful in content and versification. The learned and the creative Jonson makes Sylla's ghost a living and terrible force. But the best scene in the play is one which cannot be squeezed into a tragic frame for it appears to be satiric comment or comedy. This is the scene involving Fulvia, Galla, and Sempronia, a "living scene in a wilderness of oratory."\textsuperscript{62} It has a suggestion of the Collegiates of Epicoene. It looks like a comedy scene and appears to be satire. The scene, however, is no more comedy than it is tragedy, and yet it is not satire in that it does not find as its source any precise intellectual criticism of the actual world. Such occasionally interesting features, however, do not save the play from being, in Eliot's

\textsuperscript{61}Op. cit., p. 129. \textsuperscript{62}Ibid., p. 131.
famous and damning phrase, "that dreary Pyrrhic victory of tragedy."^63

A close reflection of the views of Eliot is found in the only other extensive appraisal which attempts to be a general survey of the play. John Enck touches on many aspects of the play, and in dealing with each almost always displays the intensity of the existing dislike. He feels that Jonson's respect for his sources betrayed him and that the effort to attain classical unity breaks down. Jonson had decided exactly what a tragedy ought to be and what effects he intended to stress when he composed one. *Catiline* often becomes devious when it should be forthright. The match between the two contestants is fitful and weak. A similar lethargy dominates almost everywhere. The preoccupation with impersonal plotting robs the characters of credible motivation. In *Sejanus* the characters at least behaved as if they believed in and frequently relished their mischief. Part of the lassitude of the second tragedy may be blamed on the total disappearance of the psychology of the humours with a concurrent lack of any substitute to implement and explain the action.

Enck finds in Catiline a familiar type, a man of one idea who will push himself to any extreme in obedience to his passion. Cicero, on the other hand, is a complete enigma. He emerges not just weakly, but badly. Because all rests on Catiline's acts, Cicero's is the weaker position. Catiline is potentially a criminal traitor and Cicero a detective bent on forestalling violence. Jonson is taking the stand that in the orations Cicero gave a true account of both his own activities

and Catiline's. The effect of the play depends wholly on the triumph of rhetoric, but rhetoric, by its very definition here, cannot yield such an overwhelming victory. The sources explain part of the difficulties, but the trouble lies really in the author himself. The play predicts the dotages.

Bryant's study of Catiline stands apart from the other individual evaluations, for it is the only attempt to present the play as a genuine and successful tragedy. The fault, Bryant is convinced, lies not with the play but with criticism which centers on such peripheral matters as the use of Senecan devices, the portrayal of characters, the reconstruction of the Roman scene, and the rhetoric. Few scholars recognize the essential question of whether any real importance attaches to the use Jonson made of his sources. His manipulation of his sources is most important and, rightly understood, gives the clue to why and how he expected his plays to be staged as tragedies rather than merely as serious history plays.

One must remember here that his "basic and distinctive" tragic fable depends upon a verifiable context. The principal source for Catiline is Sallust's Bellum Catilinae. Jonson derives his plot, characters, and background details from this source and absorbs Sallust's theme, a sermon on the pitfalls of prosperity and power. Sallust's philosophy of history is that everything man achieves, institutions, cities, and states, partakes of the corrupt nature of man's physical body and shows the consequences of man's willful depravity and inability to live by reason.

Most notable are Jonson's departures from Sallust. His most significant changes are those additions dealing with the supposed complicity of Julius Caesar in Catiline's plot. These ideas come from sources other than Sallust, and result in a quite different account of the conspiracy than any that had preceded it. In Jonson's play Caesar is an unsympathetic character, envious and devious. The conspiracy is not Catiline's but Caesar's. As history, Jonson goes too far, beyond even what the hostile Plutarch had portrayed. Here we have an example of Jonson's essential dramatic instincts in handling his sources. "Where reliable sources disagree, he exercises the dramatist's perogative"\(^6^5\) to act as judge.

The significance of all of this for the play is that it sets Caesar and Catiline on one hand versus Cato and Cicero on the other, and results in a more complex story and plot. To determine if this is tragedy, and which kind, one must return to the basic and distinctive fact about Jonson's tragedies—they require an historical context. "If we disappoint Jonson in his expectations, either through lack of learning or through failure to grasp what he is trying to do, we get from Catiline only the moderately interesting melodrama that so many have seen in it."\(^6^6\)

The state rather than the persons absorbs our attention in Catiline. To appreciate Jonsonian tragedy we must recognize the scene as historically accurate. The plays justify their claim to tragedy by virtue of the context to which the plays, as history, implicitly allude. The dramatist's function is to cast his light upon the segment of history and

\(^{6^5}\)Ibid., p. 271.  \(^{6^6}\)Ibid., p. 273.
reveal the broad movement, the larger action from which that segment should draw its full significance. In both his Roman plays, that larger action turns out to be a tragic action with the state itself taking the part of the tragic protagonist. Because the tragedy of an entire society is impossible to state, Jonson selected recognizable segments of a tragic pattern. What he gives us in Sejanus is a representative of that part of the pattern of civil tragedy in which the virtuous element of the commonwealth, in this case, the remnant of all that is essentially Rome, has been reduced to inactivity and near impotence as a consequence of its own complacence and blindness. This is not altogether depressing for it shows that evil freed from its restraint becomes, in time, its own punishment and destroyer. And something of the old Rome remains, having learned humility and patience. It can contemplate the future with hope. Catiline presents a different yet an equally recognizable selection of the pattern of tragedy. The state is at the peak of power and prosperity; it is capable of detecting, but not of interpreting a symptom, and takes, blindly, the first step toward disaster. The characters are carefully balanced so that the republic can stand clear as the protagonist. "Catiline the symptom, Caesar the disease, Cicero the will of the state, Cato its all but submerged conscience," all are important as elements in the body politic. The play is unique in presenting the tragedy of the whole state so movingly, so subtly, and yet with such terrifying clarity. It is remarkable for its dramatic accomplishment. The economy is amazing, there is no violence to fact save in the ana-

67 Ibid., p. 276.
chronistic representation of Caesar's character. It is futile to argue what Jonson might have done, what he tried to write was "an extension rather than a restriction of the scope of tragedy." 68

What is most interesting in this criticism of the tragedies is a pattern already seen in other areas of Jonson criticism. Certain traditional assumptions are reaffirmed by twentieth-century scholarship, notably the proof through a study of the sources of Jonson's wide knowledge and the basis of historical fact for the tragedies. The same scholarship reaffirms the tradition that Jonson's use of his sources, however faithful to the facts of history, is essentially original. His selection, emphasis, and shaping of the primary material is insurance that here we have no mere "mosaic." Such criticism as this continues and strengthens assumptions found from the very beginning of the modern period. The other and even more notable development in modern criticism, especially that dealing with Sejanus, is the sharp break with the traditional conclusions. By analyzing the play from Jonson's own apparent purpose and by assuming a special category of tragedy, this criticism arrives at quite different conclusions as to Sejanus' artistic quality and achievement. The earlier criticism, even that of Herford and Simpson, measures the play by rather absolute standards to find the tragedies deficient in almost every aspect. Subsequent criticism concerned with the totality of effect and intent finds here a scholarly tragedy which is a successful example of its special type. The revaluation is so complete.

68 Ibid., p. 277.
that we have almost the discovery of a new play. But it is the discovery of only one new play usually. It is curious that although both tragedies are similar in plan and execution, modern scholars have expressed interest only in Sejanus. The modern scholar has a greater sympathy for Jonson's aims in his first tragedy and is more easily convinced of his achievement. Although the critical pattern for Jonson's tragedies is uneven, it still represents one of the most vital and interesting areas in modern Jonson studies.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The period between 1925 and 1958 has been extremely important in the history of Ben Jonson's literary reputation. The introduction of important new concepts, the solution of many old problems, and the reaffirmation of many traditional assumptions have resulted in a significantly changed reputation. The period of modern Jonson studies is important enough to justify the discussion it has received here, and complicated enough to require it. Contemporary scholarship on Jonson is unusually extensive and unusually intricate, a fact which becomes immediately apparent as one examines the major divisions of modern Jonson criticism: biographical criticism, general studies of the entire drama, and studies of the individual plays.

The extensive biographical literature concerning Jonson which has appeared in the twentieth century not only proves the permanent appeal of his personality, but also reveals the durable image he has impressed on the scholarly imagination. The modern period has produced five major biographies, each of which attempts a different approach to the subject. Herford and Simpson are interested primarily in authenticating the record. Steegmuller's semi-fictional version exploits the melodramatic possibilities in Jonson's life. Linklater's pleasant, readable account shows increased respect and enthusiasm for Jonson, and Palmer elevates him to the level of symbol—the Renaissance man fighting off the moral and ar-
tistic repressions of the Puritans. Marchette Chute discovers a classical reformer and a man who fits in perfectly with every important ideal of his age. While the various angles of presentation suggest the wide latitude possible in any presentation of this life, much more significant is the remarkable similarity of almost every biography. Except in Steegmuller's florid account, the sequence of the life, the solutions to most problems, and the general conclusions are very much the same in each. Differences of approach or interpretation seem almost indistinguishable—a very minor variation on a major theme.

While there are no sharp, dramatic changes dividing each life-study, a succession of shifts in emphasis and attitude gradually gives clearer shape and solidity to the twentieth-century interpretation of this life and personality. In each biography we find a progressively stronger sense of the continuity and pattern of the life, which is never presented as a mere collection of disjointed episodes. More important is the growth in sympathy and respect on the part of the biographers. No longer is Jonson introduced as a vain, eccentric, and intensely jealous man, who could plunge the world of the Elizabethan theater into the turmoil of literary war in order to assuage personal resentment. His modern biographers avoid the garish caricature, and they play down the notion of Jonson's brutality and churlishness; they emphasize instead his qualities as an intellectual, a serious scholar, and a dedicated artist. He is seen as a man of remarkable intelligence and sensitivity, one more memorable for kind acts and sturdy friendships than for a quick temper, harsh tongue, and bitter reaction to his contemporaries. In each biography there is a greater insistence that Jonson cannot be viewed as the
lonely classicist adrift in a romantic age, for he was a man highly representative of the seventeenth century. It is through such assumptions as these that the twentieth-century biographers have transformed a cartoon into a portrait of a complicated but coherent and very attractive human personality.

Additional biographical commentary contained in periodicals and other sources expands the record with facts about Jonson's family life uncovered by Mark Eccles and suggestions made by C. J. Sisson about certain hitherto vague portions of his career. A tendency to minimize the personal significance of the War of the Theaters and the other famous quarrels is noticeable, particularly in the studies of Berringer and D. J. Gordon. But the most important fact about the shorter biographical commentary is that so large a portion of it is occupied with attacking or defending the orthodox version of the life. Almost every episode, fact, date, or relationship whose authenticity might be doubted has been thoroughly scrutinized and has formed the subject for a critical debate. We can, as a result, accept with much greater assurance the legends of Jonson's tavern life, the identity of his friends and enemies at Court, the genuineness of the Works and the Conversations, and the true reading of his epitaph. Because so many critical efforts are absorbed by defense and reiteration, this section of Jonson scholarship seems unusually conservative and almost static. But the circumstantial discussion of the many problems also means that the record of Jonson's life, thanks to the laborious work of many twentieth-century scholars, is now much more defensible and solid that it was in 1925.

Conservatism is also very characteristic of the general approaches
to Jonson's art. Changes do occur in the several most important approaches, but they occur slowly, almost reluctantly. Two of the most tenacious approaches are those which explain the drama through Jonson's personality or through his relationship to his times. Both have been frequently utilized by such critics as Edmund Wilson and L. C. Potts, and both contain developments of a certain interest. But neither, as practiced in the modern period, is a satisfactory or practical approach to the drama. Appraising the drama through the personality is the more disappointing. Regardless of whether the personality is seen as an attractive or a crippling influence on the plays, the argument is seldom convincing, and one notes with approval the recent tendency, reflected in Harry Levin and Douglas Bush, to minimize or even discard the approach. Attempts to show the connection between Jonson's plays and the spirit of the times are more successful and reflect an interesting shift in point of view. At the start of the period most critics assumed that Jonson was fundamentally alienated from his times; but the attitude has been reversed almost completely by later critics, and Jonson is now accepted as thoroughly representative of his age. Besides working toward this more convincing conclusion, the modern period has been important for defining and limiting the problem, but the whole approach is really remote from the drama itself. Too often, even when the discussion is conducted with skill and perception, we remain in the area of social or historical—not literary—analysis.

While the other frequently employed approaches to Jonson's drama are more specifically literary, their value as an introduction to the work varies greatly. Jonson's classicism is a topic so frequently
discussed that the modern period has produced a very comprehensive commentary embracing every aspect of the problem. The discussion is given unity and direction by centering on a dominant theme. Twentieth-century scholarship assumes that classicism was only a part of Jonson's artistic impulse and intention, and modifies the image of Jonson as the complete classicist by examining the topic from every possible angle: specific classical models and sources, Jonson's entire dramatic program, and his actual practice. In this way modern criticism demolishes the traditional fallacy that in intention and in every particular Jonson's plays follow classical precedence, thus clearing the way for a sounder understanding of the plays. But the entire discussion seems rather stale and fruitless. The conclusion made by such commentators as F. R. Leavis that Jonson's classicism is only partial is essentially a negative report; the point is made quickly and convincingly at the start of the modern period, and subsequent criticism merely repeats the idea without adding much depth or interest to the argument. The amount of writing devoted to Jonson's classicism makes the whole discussion undeniably important, but it is, nevertheless, undeniably tedious.

Comment on Jonson's scholarship forms the smallest body of criticism among all the general approaches. It is also the most unanimously favorable. Almost every critic agrees that Jonson's knowledge was both extensive and thorough, and contends that his learning has an important function in the plays. It is never a pedantic or extraneous display. Investigation into separate aspects of Jonson's scholarship made by Esther Dunn, Hardin Craig, and DeWitt Starnes both illuminates the thesis and adds further proof of the extraordinary range and richness of his
intellectual interests.

The realism of Jonson is so difficult to apprehend and define that one would excuse a vague and aimless discussion. Yet modern treatment of the subject is the most satisfactory of all the general approaches. This is not to say that the discussion is flawless. It is broad and sprawling, and far from successful in every attempt. The brief reference especially are repetitive, advancing a handful of obvious ideas and a superabundance of citations. Relating the personality to the realism and attempting to describe the exact amount of realism in Jonson's work are usually too clumsily done to convey much useful information.

But much in modern criticism is of a finer order than this, and in the studies of Richard Perkinson and Madeleine Doran, for example, we are presented with a sound appraisal of whole program of Jonson's realism as well as the intelligence and selection which control it. Critics have gradually worked out a complete and detailed definition of the realism through increasingly subtle and sophisticated studies. The discussion has the special advantage of culminating in L. O. Knights' distinguished *Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson*, one of the most influential single studies to appear since 1925. Knights' book presents convincing proof that the realism was no simple matter of automatically recording the contemporary scene, but was a profound interpretation and condemnation of seventeenth-century social abuses.

Modern criticism of Jonson's satire contains the same elements as the other general approaches. Specific aspects of the satire and certain problems are stressed. Information is gathered about Jonson's particular classical models, his satiric program, the evolution of his technique,
and the effect of the satire on his entire drama. Modern critics have produced long, comprehensive surveys of the satire, including Helena Baum's reliable introduction to the whole subject, The Satiric & the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy. Other individually valuable contributions are made by Kathryn McEuen, George Kitchin, and Oscar Campbell. But the various items never add up to a really coherent discussion. One cannot, with confidence, present a description of the modern opinion of Jonson's satire. At best he can only describe those highlights and repeated ideas which give some semblance of order and structure to an otherwise formless and miscellaneous body of commentary.

The importance of all these general approaches in shaping Jonson's literary reputation is unquestionable. The frequency with which they are utilized suggests that consideration of the classicism, scholarship, realism, and satire is basic to any true understanding of the drama. Within these various traditions criticism has effected significant changes. It has prohibited a view of Jonson as a complete adherent of any single literary ideal. He cannot be viewed as a "pure" classicist, realist, or satirist; his practice is far too complicated and discriminating to be summarized in so careless and easy a fashion. The more accurate appraisal of each factor and the many excellent individual reports justify the continuation of these traditional approaches. The various themes and advances in each category, which have been described in this dissertation, give force and point to the several discussions, but, unfortunately, one must detach these from a body of criticism which is too broad, too tradition-bound, too sluggish. Far too many discussions merely shuffle abstractions about, and make little reference to the plays themselves.
This often pedestrian criticism must be read for a real understanding of Jonson's reputation, but too much of it does not provide a real preparation for the brilliant comedy which Jonson at his best created.

The brilliance of Jonson's accomplishment in drama is more directly and fully conveyed through another large area of general criticism, the appraisal of his dramatic method. A certain amount of this criticism extends or modifies established traditions, but more often it strikes out in directions overlooked or unsuspected by traditional criticism. The absence of hampering traditions results in a very fresh body of scholarship and a sense of discovery not typical of many other areas of modern Jonson studies.

Discussion of Jonson's plot and structure seems particularly modern, for the only significant appraisals have been made since 1925. Since the inception of the discussion in 1929 by Edgar Knowlton's formula for Jonson's plot, modern scholarship has explored the problem and searched for basic assumptions about this feature of the drama. Each major opinion differs so markedly from its predecessor that the whole discussion remains suggestive rather than definitive. Freda Townsend claims that Jonson's method in construction exploited complexity and profusion in order to create, not a classical line, but a fabric or web. Effie Hunt is equally convinced that Jonson everywhere is following a linear design and that each of his plays reveals an increasing control over the mechanics of the five-act structure. Later criticism describes Jonson's structure through even more ingenious formulas. Ray L. Heffner feels that plot and structure in a Jonson play are insignificant, for he organized his work around unifying comic conceits. Wallace A. Bacon finds the essential
structure of a Jonson play in the operation of a magnetic field. The real significance of this criticism is not the obvious lack of agreement nor the inconclusive status of the whole argument, but its representing a discovery and exploration of a new area of Jonson studies. Significant also is the dissatisfaction of most of these critics with the earlier brief summaries of the structure and their realization that Jonson's work is original, even unique, one to be understood only through new critical formulations.

Modern criticism of Jonson's characterization must contend against a number of adverse and prejudiced traditions, which regard Jonson's people as too limited, too inhuman, too closely and obviously tied to the humours theory. Contemporary scholarship rejects this negative report and invalidates many of the reasons for condemning Jonson's character portrayal. Most important are the thorough studies of the humours theory and practice made by Snuggs and Bauer. Through the work of both we now possess an accurate knowledge of Jonson's intention and practice as well as proof that the theory is but one of many techniques in his characterization. Jonson's basic originality and remarkable achievement are emphasized by those who discuss the character according to types or historical development, two of the most frequently undertaken approaches to the entire subject. The admiration and enthusiasm accorded Jonson by the scholars who examine his characters closely diminish the earlier hostile criticism, but do not dissipate it. The emotional reaction to Jonson's characters as repellent, rapacious, heartless creatures, lacking in humanity and charm, is still voiced with discouraging frequency, but this seems more and more a response to the people as people, a response
beyond the reach—and bounds—of criticism. Berating Jonson for lack of intelligence, variety, and skill in character portrayal seems much less tenable now as a result of modern criticism.

Appraisal of Jonson's language is the most valuable of all the general discussions of his method and one which is especially modern. It is only since 1925 that the discussion has gained any real momentum. The period has seen the comprehensive extension of the topic and a valuable gain in knowledge. Scholars such as Pennanen and Neumann provide us with reliable analyses of the constituents of the language and its basic quality. Their study of the vocabulary reveals its scope and precision as well as Jonson's clearly conservative bent. Modern criticism concludes that Jonson's diction is too solidly and unmistakably English to be fairly described as "Latinate."

The capacity of Jonson's language for wonderfully dramatic and poetic effects is proven by three recent full-length studies. Alexander Sackton's study of the jargon and hyperbole shows how thoroughly self-conscious and rhetorical Jonson's drama was. Instead of obscuring them as he perfected his dramatic technique, Jonson emphasized rhetorical devices even more boldly, intending thereby to remind his alert, literate audience of the moral judgment they must make against the exaggerated dupes and rogues. Edward Partridge discovers that the pattern of Jonson's imagery creates a world of inverted values, one in which lust and greed are the normal values. Partridge also proves that much of the special Jonson comical effect comes from a violation of decorum, principally through the clash between mean tenors and lofty vehicles. He agrees with Sackton that Jonson's comedy was deeply moral and involved the
audience's arraignment and condemnation of the host of fools and cheaters. The most technical and brilliant of all these studies is Jonas Barish's discussion of Jonson's prose style. Barish defines the characteristic features of the prose, describes its historical significance as part of the reaction against outmoded, florid styles, and proves that Jonson was everywhere striving for an irregular and natural effect. Analysis of the plays shows that Jonson's prose became very rapidly a sophisticated and subtle medium. Close study of the great prose comedies also uncovers much regarding Jonson's intention in theme and character, discovering thereby incontrovertible proof of the great intricacy and care informing his drama.

Criticism of the individual plays follows a pattern roughly similar to the broad evaluation of the dramatic art. Certain approaches, strongly established at the start of the period, continue to flourish and gather strength. On the other hand, many new concepts and assumptions about a number of the plays have revitalized their critical status and have contributed to the increased respect Jonson now enjoys. The combination of the traditional and the new is very clearly seen in the criticism of Jonson's early works. The reputation of the first three remains unchanged in contemporary criticism, indeed, the first two, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Case is Altered*, are usually untouched. A great deal has been written about *Every Man in His Humour* without in any way changing its status. At the end of the period as at the start this play is considered an excellent example of Jonsonian comedy—one which so deftly manipulates its classical sources and its various elements of plot, character, and language that it is a perfect example of Jonson's genius for creating
an original fusion of many derivative parts. The point is so often re-
iterated that *Every Man in His Humour* has enjoyed one of the most unani-
mously favorable reputations of a Jonson play in the twentieth century. 
It is a reputation, however, with little variation or surprise. Only 
in discussion of literary influences does criticism stray beyond the 
boundaries found in 1925, and such discussion is far too speculative to 
have much effect on the play's reputation. Evaluation of the three comi-
cal satires, *Every Man out of His Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *The 
Postater*, shows a definite division between traditional approaches and 
the newer. A substantial proportion of critics throughout the period 
voice complete disapproval of all three plays. They are considered to 
fail in every possible way and in every single element: plot, story, 
character, comic intention, and unity. Traditional criticism concludes 
that these incoherent, inexplicable plays possess only a dim value for 
their biographical or historical content. However, modern criticism 
has seen a dramatic shift in attitude. Oscar Campbell defends *Every 
Man out of His Humour* as a coherent, intelligible dramatic equivalent 
of the forbidden formal satire, and thus gives the play a dignity and 
literary respectability lacking in the traditional appraisals. Campbell 
remains the only champion of the first comical satire, but he is joined 
by many defenders and admirers of the next two. According to many critics, 
*Cynthia's Revels* is no clumsy, self-seeking compliment to Elizabeth, nor 
is it a maladroit apology for her punishment of Essex. Instead, the 
play is taken at Jonson's own evaluation as a lofty, serious, and skill-
fully wrought discussion of the ideal court, an important statement, as 
Talbert declares, *de regimen principi*. The critical rehabilitation of
The Poetaster is even more complete. It is now seen not as a hasty, awkward revenge on Marston and Dekker, but as a serious and noble statement of Jonson's views on the poet, poetry, and the artist's rewards. Debate over the function of certain episodes and characters, especially Ovid, results in convincing proof of the play's unity, its functional and highly effective structure. The status of The Poetaster especially, and, to a varying degree, those of the other two comical satires have enjoyed a remarkable restoration in the twentieth century.

No one pattern can describe the various critical fortunes of the great comedies. Traditional interpretations still dominate certain areas, but the twentieth century has also invented new approaches, solved several old, troublesome problems, and thereby changed fundamentally the reading of these great works. Volpone has undergone the most thorough revaluation. At the beginning of the period, typical critical reaction questioned the propriety of a comic category for this work, feeling the harsh satire and repellent characters imparted a severe, almost tragic tone. It was assumed also that Jonson's constructive powers failed him in places, especially in his ill-advised attempts to force the light, pointless sub-plot into this most somber of plays. Every important appraisal since 1925 has contradicted and corrected this earlier view. The general opinion now is that Volpone, serious and moral drama though it be, is a genuine comedy and one in which the various characters and episodes are intelligently subordinated to a controlling purpose. The play is seen as one in which Jonson expects us to make devastating judgments on most of the activities and persons. To assign heroic qualities to either Volpone or Mosca is to seriously misread the play. Besides
restoring Volpone to the sphere of comedy, contemporary criticism has also restored its structural integrity by demonstrating that in every important particular the Would-be story ties in with, illuminates, and parodies the main action. By insisting that the play is coherent and that it is a genuine comedy modern criticism has not only corrected the earlier misreading, it has also raised Volpone to an eminence almost equal to that of The Alchemist.

Recent criticism strengthens the reputation of Volpone considerably, but it assigns Epicoene a far more ambiguous status than it had enjoyed earlier. Critics, at the start of the period, saw in the play a light, deft farce which skillfully combined its many elements into a beautifully proportioned work. Certain later scholarship in the play's sources supersedes earlier assumptions completely. Campbell and Boughner argue convincingly that Aretino and Machiavelli—not Plautus—provided Jonson with the primary ideas for the play. Such discoveries are highly significant, but they do not disturb the reassuring traditional view of the play. Much more important is that criticism which refuses to read the play as a happy fusion of comic intention and technique. According to this point of view, Epicoene is a discordant play in which Jonson's bent toward harsh satire contends with a genial acceptance of the world. As Jonas Barish proves, the contention is never resolved, and the play must stand as a symbol of the deep division between Jonson's earlier and later points of view. Although the criticism of Epicoene is far less extensive than for any of the other great comedies, that which has appeared has affected its literary status profoundly.

The reputation of The Alchemist remains secure as the most illustrious
example of Jonson's comedy. Assuming the play's brilliant achievement, modern critics proceed to strengthen the reputation through an examination of its various elements. The most original and rewarding scholarship has been Edgar Duncan's analysis of Jonson's use of alchemy. His research uncovers the enormous erudition behind the play and easily proves that Jonson adapted his knowledge perfectly to his dramatic and satiric purpose. Other critics who examine at any length the characterization, language, and structure inevitably conclude that in The Alchemist we find Jonson's dramatic art at its best.

The modern reputation of Bartholomew Fair is far less precise and unified than those of the other great comedies. When viewed according to a specialized study of Jonson's method in plot, character, and language, the play is accepted as a masterpiece of comedy and praised in terms most critics reserve for Volpone or The Alchemist. Admirers of the play, among whom we find Jonas Barish, John Enck, and Freda Townsend, insist that in Bartholomew Fair Jonson has resolved all of his intellectual and literary tensions. But the reaction found in incidental comments, which make up such a large proportion of the critical literature on the play, is indecisive. Condemnation usually outweighs praise, particularly in discussion of the structure. An unremitting critical chorus declares that Jonson is clumsy and unwieldy, incapable of controlling the ambitious and intricate comedy he introduces. A similar complaint may be lodged against the modern criticism of Bartholomew Fair. It lacks focus. There is no concentration on particular problems and very little similarity among the many points of view. This profuse, restless body of criticism reveals no pattern and follows no direction. The critical reputation
of *Bartholomew Fair* is clearly still in the process of formation. Criticism of the final comedies is the most discouraging area in all of modern Jonson studies, and their reputation remains hopelessly low during the entire period. Most critics dismiss all four plays out of hand as negligible failures, important only as proof that Jonson's method in comedy was severely limited. Many critics feel that the total failure is so apparent that proof need not be added. Others point out that such flaws as the inane characterization of *The Devil is an Ass*, the deadly allegory in *The Staple of News*, the wildly convoluted plot in *The New Inn*, and the rigid structure of *The Magnetic Lady* justify the complete rejection of these plays. The lengthy appraisals of Herford and Simpson and the specialized studies by Edward Partridge manage to retrieve at least one redeeming feature from each play: a richly comic episode here and there, a powerful satiric theme, or an excellent piece of characterization. Such efforts, however, are too infrequent and isolated to qualify the majority view that in his last comedies Jonson failed dismally.

The critical fortunes of Jonson's tragedies in contemporary scholarship have varied sharply. One has undergone a remarkable rehabilitation; the other is still considered an absolute failure. Almost every extended analysis of *Sejanus* since 1925 has enhanced its reputation. Study of Jonson's use of source material made by Agnes Boswell, Vivian McClain, and Ellen Duffy reveals not only the vast scholarship employed in composing the tragedy, but destroys the tradition that this is a mere transcript of history. Although he was faithful to his sources, Jonson's selection, arrangement, and emphasis mean that his first tragedy was truly
original and that it cannot be accurately described as an "ancient mosaic." Character, structure, and language have been scrutinized by such critics as Muriel Bradbrook, Ashley Thorndike, and Moody E. Prior, but it is when critics attempt to place *Sejanus* in a proper tragic category that its reputation is most revitalized. Many modern critics follow T. S. Eliot's suggestion and accept the play as a satirical tragedy, a type justified by the powerful work Jonson created in *Sejanus*. Even more favorable is the verdict of those like K. M. Burton and Joseph A. Bryant, who find here a political tragedy and one which contains a significant commentary, not merely on the Roman action, but on the nature of politics and history themselves. Judged by either category, the play emerges as a concentrated, integrated work, in which all elements are fused by a basic, controlling design. The rereading has been so complete that it amounts to almost the discovery of a new play. *Catiline* does not share in this rehabilitation. It is usually overlooked, and most critics who contemplate it momentarily merely rephrase traditional condemnations. Almost without exception, modern discussion swells the critical clamor against the lack of interest, the sluggish action, and the dull characterization. Although Mary Hackett's study of Jonson's use of sources reveals the same creativity found in *Sejanus*, rehabilitation seldom moves beyond this point. The most characteristic modern description of the play continues to be T. S. Eliot's dismissal of it as "that dreary Pyrrhic victory of tragedy."¹

What has happened to Jonson's reputation under the various headings

described in this dissertation is easily seen, but to apprehend the reputation in its entirety is much more difficult. Comprehending entirely the critical reputation of any dramatist presents problems, and this is especially so in the case of Jonson. His work is too extensive and complicated to ever invite a clear-cut and neatly described critical reaction. The intention and scope of individual criticism vary considerably, ranging from close analysis of individual episodes and lines to sweeping appraisals of the entire drama. The prevalence of traditional assumptions in such areas as Jonson's classicism and satire has inhibited a thorough-going revaluation; the absence of much prior scholarship on such problems as language and structure has resulted in swift advances into new concepts and conclusions. The total pattern of contemporary Jonson criticism is, therefore, very uneven and so divergent that it is difficult to synthesize all the views or to reconcile the many claims. What pattern this scholarship does possess comes from the presence of both traditional and new criticism, sometimes complementing each other, often contending against each other. An understanding of both broad approaches to the drama is required in order to understand the impression Jonson has made on his twentieth-century critics.

Many features of Jonson's contemporary reputation were strongly established in 1925 and reaffirmed by later criticism. The strength, one might almost say the indestructibility, of certain traditions is one of the most important strains in his present reputation. Excessive reliance on the traditional criticism undeniably obstructs a reliable knowledge of the drama: it deadens the critical imagination, it invites thoughtless, dogmatic repetition, in short, it embalms the reputation.
But traditional criticism has played a far from negative role in modern Jonson studies. The conclusions of earlier generations of conservatism has imposed a healthy sobriety on contemporary scholarship. By inhibiting or exposing the untenable, extreme evaluation, it has protected Jonson from the eccentric, irresponsible critic. The great amount of work done with those approaches which see Jonson as a classicist, a realist, a scholar, and a satirist reveals not only the popularity but the validity of these traditions. The tenacity and worth of traditional criticism is also found in the comment for each play, and, for some, *Every Man in His Humour* and *The Alchemist* notably, modern criticism is merely an extension of strongly entrenched traditions. Finally, the stature of the many critics of Jonson, including Herford and Simpson, Stoll, Schelling, and Thorndike, who may be classified as traditional or conservative, compels us to accord this whole viewpoint a respectful hearing.

As a total, final explanation of Jonson's drama, however, traditional criticism is far from satisfactory. It has disregarded too much in Jonson's structure, characterization, and language which later critics consider essential, and the oversight has elicited sharp complaint from such commentators as Levin, Eliot, and Barish. That the traditional approaches are limited is seen in the number of modern critics who avoid them or qualify them extensively. As a result, change in approach and conclusion is the most important fact in the history of Jonson's modern reputation. Innovation and discovery during the modern period are far more consequential than the ideas which have survived or have been reaffirmed. The changes may be minute, the adjustment of the reading of a single
scene or character, or may involve a total reappraisal of Jonson's art, but their frequency and significance insure that the literary reputation of Ben Jonson has been given new contours and greater depth between 1925 and 1958.

Change has been accomplished frequently by invalidating or severely limiting certain traditional approaches. In most cases these changes bring us closer to a more genuinely literary appraisal. Notable is the increasingly sharp distinction made between biographical and dramatic criticism. The tempting but critically fruitless by-path of identification of personal satire is avoided now, and the critics tend to judge the plays as plays, not as history. The tendency to examine the work as a direct expression of a simple, flamboyant personality has been diminished to the vanishing point. Most significant is the refusal of modern critics to use Jonson as a foil, an example of everything that Shakespeare and the other, more "typical" Elizabethan dramatists were not. Modern criticism sees Jonson's drama as one of independent value and interest, and, furthermore, one which is highly representative of the age in which it occurs. Finally, twentieth-century criticism is reluctant to accept any simple and extreme view of the dramatist. Jonson is not viewed now as a pure classicist, realist, or satirist, nor as an unmixed specimen of any single, simple artistic impulse except the constant striving for excellence and perfection.

Many new avenues of approach to Jonson have been opened in the modern period, and almost without exception they have resulted in a sounder, more complete understanding of the drama. Instead of judging the work according to absolute standards, the ideal classical comedy, which
throws into relief the ineptitude and weakness of Jonson's efforts, modern critics afford the plays a more sympathetic hearing by judging according to Jonson's own purpose and intended effect. When read in this way, the plays emerge as remarkably intricate, rich, and coherent creations. What this has meant for the critical status of the individual plays is to be seen in the changed reputation of *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*, now viewed as serious statements of morality and poetry, and the acceptance of *Volpone* as a true comedy and a highly moral work. Perhaps the most important new approach to the entire drama is that which examines it from the standpoint of audience or reader response. According to the most persuasive modern interpretations provided by L. C. Knights and many others, Jonson's plays are much more than skilfully moulded comedies. They are works demanding a complicated reaction, the simultaneous recognition of the various seductive appeals and a firm moral rejection of them. Such a reading has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the achievement of the individual plays and Jonson's purpose in his entire dramatic program.

Besides discarding or adapting various approaches to the plays, modern scholarship has wrought a profound change in Jonson studies by discovering and exploring new topics for study. Particularly important is the opening up of such completely new fields of study as Jonson's structure and language. When one recalls the status of these topics in 1925, he can easily see what this discussion has meant in the total picture of Jonson's reputation. Earlier, these subjects, if mentioned at all, would be summarily treated in a sentence or two. As the period proceeds, only through a severe limitation of the topic can a scholar
restrain his thesis to a book-length study. The discovery of these new subjects for appraisal and the discovery of many new topics concerning the individual plays have meant a vast extension of the boundaries of Jonson criticism.

From whichever critical position the scholar speaks, the traditional or the new, certain general characteristics seem to mark the most successful Jonson criticism of the last thirty-three years. Jonson is a careful and intricate artist, who requires similar qualities in his scholars. Those who explain him best are those who are thoroughly familiar with his work, for Jonson is no refuge for the uninformed or the indolent. He is ill-served by the casual, brief, intuitive comment, which almost always results in a muddled or contradictory appraisal. Also, the most illustrious contemporary scholarship suggests that Jonson studies are the province of the specialist, the scholar who exhaustively develops a severely demarcated topic. One need only compare the excellent, solid, and detailed studies of Barish and King to the vague, impressionistic wanderings of Symons and Hussey to recognize the dangers of the broad, all-encompassing study, the attempt to explain all of Jonson within a short space. Finally, the most successful criticism is that which is open-minded, which proceeds from the fewest preconceptions, and examines the evidence of the plays before arriving at general conclusions. Of far less worth is the criticism which starts with general laws or assumptions and forces the plays into a conformity with the pre-judgment. The critical record since 1925 shows that too often distortion and suppression is the only result.

Because so much of contemporary scholarship is successful according
to these standards, it has effected important and permanent changes in
the modern reputation of Jonson. His status in 1958 makes that of 1925
seem very fragmentary and limited, for in the interim Jonson has at-
tracted a remarkably comprehensive and thorough revaluation. The criti-
cism has destroyed many traditional obstacles to a sympathetic under-
standing of the drama; it has swept away the debris of generations of
critical prejudice. In the process there has been a remarkable lessening
of emotional approaches to the man and his work and a consequent
gain in intellectual and logical criteria. Modern criticism substi-
tutes a careful, complicated analysis of the drama for the earlier, over-
simplified explanation. As a result, the modern period presents us with
a much more reliable knowledge of the whole development of Jonson's
drama—its inception, advance, and decline. Modern criticism has pro-
vided a finer and more valuable definition of Jonson's art than existed
before, a clearer sense of its flaws and a sounder sense of its achieve-
ment, subtlety, power, and morality.

The period between 1925 and 1958 has not been the millenium in
Jonson scholarship. The criticism does not treat of every aspect of
each play equally. It is a body of criticism uncertain, indecisive, and
immobile in far too many places. It is a criticism remarkably serious,
even somber, for one which is evaluating a comic drama. We are more
often moved to an admiration than an enjoyment of the plays. But, de-
spite all of its flaws, the criticism described in this dissertation is
one of the most vital in the whole long history of Jonson's literary repu-
tation. Modern criticism has made a remarkable advance in understanding
the drama, it has provided a serious reappraisal of and has given new
direction and substance to the reputation. By contemplating from many angles the art of Jonson with admiration and approval, contemporary criticism has enhanced greatly Jonson's literary status. The rehabilitation of Jonson in the twentieth century comes from a body of careful, solid, impressive scholarship, which is certainly a worthy tribute to this most scholarly of dramatists.
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This dissertation analyzes Ben Jonson's literary reputation among English and American critics from 1925 to 1958 by examining biographical scholarship, general studies of Jonson's drama, and criticism of the individual plays. It discusses the most important contributions of modern scholarship and describes the major traditions and conclusions constituting Jonson's contemporary reputation.

The extensive biographical study shows a growing admiration for Jonson as man and writer. The Herford and Simpson, Palmer, and Chute biographies subordinate the traditional flamboyant gestures, fiery temperament, personal and professional discontent to a sober, solid portrait of a complex, attractive human being—one thoroughly representative of the English Renaissance. The most important shorter commentary authenticates key episodes in the life record.

Modern appraisal of the general literary ideals Jonson followed is comprehensive and often illuminating. It concludes that Jonson's allegiance to classical drama was only partial and never slavish, and it proves that his enormous scholarship, far from being a pedantic display, had a dramatic function in his work. L. C. Knights and many others show that Jonson's artistry and his mordant social comment enrich his realism and raise it from the level of a photographic report. Critics such as Helena Baum discover an increasingly sophisticated manipulation of the satire in the plays.

Study of Jonson's method concentrates on structure, characterization,
and language. The inconclusive discussion of structure describes it variously as completely Renaissance, unmistakably classical, made up of unifying comic conceits, or the approximation of a magnetic field. Snuggs and Bauer diminish the importance of the humours in Jonson's characterization; other critics, evaluating the characterization according to historical development, type, or individual, demonstrate its subtlety and originality. Modern scholarship establishes the precision, richness, and basically English nature of Jonson's language. Lengthy analysis by Barish, Sackton, and Partridge shows its dramatic effectiveness and discovers that the powerful irony inherent in the rhetoric and imagery demands a complicated moral judgment from the reader.

The modern report on the individual plays differs for each. Critics continue to praise Every Man in His Humour for traditional reasons. The entrenched critical displeasure over the three comical satires is no longer unanimous, for Campbell, Talbert, Gilbert, and others argue convincingly that Jonson has here created coherent and effective satirical comedy.

The most significant modern critics of Volpone, Barish, Nash, and Weld, enhance its status by proving that its structure is integrated and that it is a genuine but deeply moral comedy. Epicoene, because of its unreconcilable tones of savage and light comedy, has declined in critical favor. Every important study of every aspect of The Alchemist reaffirms its reputation for excellence. The status of Bartholomew Fair, however, is ambiguous. Critics fluctuate between admiration for its rich topical comedy and annoyance over the confusing plot and clumsy structure.
James G. Sweeney, the son of Leo A. and Sarah J. Sweeney, was born in Andover, Massachusetts on March 5, 1923. He was educated at Saint Augustine's School, South Boston, and graduated from Boston English High School in 1940. At Boston University he earned an A.B. in 1951 and an M.A. in 1952. From 1955 to 1957 he taught English at West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia. Since 1957 he has been a member of the English Department, George Washington University, Washington, D. C., where he is an Assistant Professor.