THE WAY OF BEN JONSON'S
DRAMATIC WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

The Way of Ben Jonson's Dramatic World

This thesis is a study of Ben Jonson's point of view. It attempts to determine that point of view by evaluating two of his critical theories, that of the humours and classical unity of action, and by examining their relationship to a selected number of his plays - The Case Is Altered, The Alchemist, Every Man In His Humour, Every Man Out Of His Humour, and Volpone.

Just as his plays are a reflection of the times through his eyes, so too are these two critical theories his reflection of general ideas current in the age. The theory of humours derives from an Elizabethan concept of order in the universe and in man, and unity of action from a classical idea of unity and coherence. No attempt is made to re-examine the 'Elizabethan World Picture' or the classical world view except in so far as they relate to Jonson's particular views.

Chapter I, "Historical and Philosophical Perspective", deals with some of the main influences of Jonson's own time which appear most pertinent to his point of view. Chapter II discusses relevant literary and critical theories, both Elizabethan and classical. Chapter III explores the imaginative connection made by Jonson between the theory of humours and unity of action; also it attempts to show how this connection enables Jonson to recreate interdependent character and action in spite of a loss to the
imagination of a spiritually unified cosmos. The remaining chapters use
the humour theory to examine Jonson's characters as illustrative of his
point of view and considers unity of action as a guide to his developing
technique. Although Jonson achieves finest technical expression in The
Alchemist, it is in Volpone that one finds the fullest realization of his
point of view, and for this reason Volpone is the play most closely studied.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of how Jonson's point of view influences his art form: in particular it tries to understand this point of view by examining his idea of unity of action and the theory of humours and their effect on certain of his plays - The Case Is Altered, The Alchemist, Every Man In His Humour, Every Man Out Of His Humour, and Volpone. Jonson's definition of these two critical theories are in turn derived from general ideas current in the age. These general ideas are those summed up in the phrase, 'the Elizabethan world picture'. An effort is made to relate Jonson's particular ideas to these general ones, but the concept of the 'Elizabethan World Picture' itself will not be re-examined here.

Chapter I, "Historical and Philosophical Perspective", deals with some of the main influences of Jonson's time which appear most relevant to his point of view. In Chapter II pertinent literary and critical influences, both Elizabethan and classical, are discussed. Chapter III attempts to examine more closely the imaginative link made by Jonson between the theory of humours and unity of action and in the following chapters, concerning the plays themselves, the humour theory is suggested as the barometer of his developing point of view, unity of action as the guide to his developing technique. As Jonson's art transcends his theories, it becomes increasingly difficult sharply to distinguish these two theories. Although the fullest technical expression is achieved in The Alchemist, it is in Volpone, that the ultimate and logical realization of the world
which he chooses as his representation of reality is found, and for this reason that play is most closely studied.

Every age has certain beliefs about the nature of man and his universe; these beliefs are the support of the spiritual self, that self which often seeks realization through poetry. Although the full implications of these beliefs are to varying degrees denied to characters within the plays, they nevertheless exist as a penumbra within which the play as a whole has its being. An examination of the characters as embodiments of the humour theory and their actions as expressions of the unity of action theory will help to demonstrate the nature of these beliefs. It is possible to do so, for just as these beliefs are ways of looking at the universe, so too these plays and the theories which help to form them are imaginative and critical expressions of a point of view about the world. Jonson's ideas must be considered in relation to those of the age.

In the age man's place was definite and assured and his portion was neither small nor isolated. The humour theory is Jonson's view of man's portion or share of the world, but it is a small plot of earth upon which the humour character stands. Man's portion had always been less than the whole, but it had not been dissociated from the whole, and when he cultivated his own garden he was cultivating the world's garden. His character was still his destiny, and this meaning of character related him to the gods and carried him through the full cycle of human existence from birth to death to birth again. But the humour character stands isolated and dissociated,
not only from the invisible world of the spirit but from his fellow man as well. Often it seems that he fails to stimulate or respond with any feeling and when he acts he does so as a partial human being.

Jonson's age was deciding that it should discover the facts; in so deciding, it began to give itself over to a purely quantitative universe and to lose its sense of the "mystery of things". Jonson himself does not reject universals or the idea of the "mystery of things"; the mystery, however, comes to exist as an idea only, an abstraction disconnected from intuitive roots. The sense of a spiritual reality enveloping the universe wavers before the developing image of rationalism. Jonson attempts to retain this reality, yet he cannot allow it to constitute the major theme of his own world view: instead it is heard as a troubled, recurring echo, suggesting a harmony no longer fully realized.
CHAPTER I
Historical and Philosophical Perspective

Una Ellis-Fermor in *The Jacobean Drama* points out that most dramatists of any stature succeed in making for themselves a form which mirrors their thoughts. With some reservations, Miss Ellis-Fermor grants Jonson this accomplishment,¹ as does T. S. Eliot when he says "... he not unnaturally laid down in abstract theory what is in reality a personal point of view."² For Jonson, however, certain important elements of thought remain always in the realm of abstract theory and never enter fully into the imaginative life of his plays.

The dramatist's point of view is important in determining the boundaries of the world which he creates, and this world reveals his commitments to the nature of reality. One feels that Johnson, in making his commitment to certain ideals and ideologies, has left one part of his emotional equipment, his more susceptible feelings, safely encased in tradition's tomb. The remainder, although concerned only with man the social creature, are

¹Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama. An Interpretation*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 117. Her assessment is that Jonson probably cripples himself as an artist by his moral imposition. "Certainly," she says, "one of the results is a deeply divided mind; though it is half concealed by the unified surface of purpose that he presents to us, it is this fundamental division that is responsible for our inability to conceive of his work as a whole."

still powerful despite certain limitations. Certainly, his characters are restricted in their natures; nevertheless, they are artistically conceived.

Jonson deliberately chooses to harness his inspiration to expressing only that to which he can give perfect technical expression. His conscious artistry recalls the controlled and exclusive tone achieved by the classical dramatists of antiquity. Usually, he does not pursue the mysterious forces of life and not until *Volpone* does he create a world of magically interdependent realities. In general it is the business of the artist to tear away the veil that hides the essence of things; Jonson tears away one of the false faces which hide man from a knowledge of himself. His artistic endeavor is one of integrity; it is not a facile use of rootless emotions, but a strong, tough-fibered growth, rooted in the rich earth of Elizabethan and classical tradition, and firmly controlled by an unwavering intellect. This intellect compensates for his inability to move freely in two worlds at once, his failure to reconcile the world of the spirit with that of the external and the material.

The drama of the Elizabethan age proper, of Kyd, Peele, Marlowe, Greene, and the early Shakespeare, is characterized by its faith in the glorious potentialities of man, in the security of his position in the universe, and in the richness and rightness of his prosperous, expanding society. There is no spiritual uncertainty, and the dramatists encompass with confidence and with exhilaration the bloodshed, murder and mutilation of war on the one hand, and, on the other, the romantic land of fairy tale adventure,
of myth, of legend, and of love. And it is not just a literature of escape; it is a literature which demonstrates a sincere belief in the vital relationship between things seen and things unseen, a belief in the intimate connection between spiritual significance and the world of actual fact and event.

Towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, however, the mood of the age begins to change, and the drama soon reflects this change. The size of its universe shrinks: man the social, sophisticated, non-spiritual creature takes the center of the stage, and the critical, satirical temper prevails. The Elizabethan age proper is passing, an age when "all the Muses still were in their prime," an age which reflects in its external world of everyday occurrence more nearly the aspirations of mankind than does the age which is to follow.

Drama had reached a stage where criticism and self assessment were almost inevitable; this state, however, coincides with one wherein the world it reflects is also undergoing a period of questioning and disillusionment. The unity of medieval Christianity made possible by Aquinas' reconciliation of Platonic and Aristotelian thought was perhaps best expressed for the Renaissance by Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. But this unity was beginning to disappear, and despite the retention for a time of its cosmic ethical wealth, it was not long before there appeared a reliance on rationalism and empiricism and an absolutist ordering of society. In addition to the dissolution of medieval Christianity, the political future of England in the nineties was another
source of fear and uncertainty. Despite the successes of Elizabeth's reign, such as the victory over the Armada in 1588, the order dependent on her person was endangered by the absence of a definite heir to the throne. There was the ever present threat of uprisings, such as that led by Essex in 1601, and a crowd of claimants to the throne foreshadowed civil war on her death. Yet when she did die in 1603, James VI of Scotland succeeded quietly. A period of relief followed, but James' personal characteristics and clumsy political machinations soon displeased. His efforts to reduce the Spanish threat were often construed as a merely dangerous placation of the Spaniards. Indeed his attitude towards Catholicism and religious matters generally was ambiguous and managed to offend both religious groups. His insistence upon divine right received some support, but this insistence contributed to the ideal of order no longer being invested so completely in the ruling monarch. Somehow the Tudors had fitted quite easily into the medieval concept of order, but the authoritarian reign of James hastened a disillusionment with this concept. The idea of the ruler as divine delegate continued to lose force. Natural law ceased to be closely allied with divine law and became primarily a truth of science made knowable by the reason. In Bacon revelation and intuition were disengaged from the fabric of nature; by the time of John Locke in the late seventeenth century, they had become purely rational concepts; and later in the eighteenth century reason became the ruler of reality.
Jonson could not, of course, live in London and remain unaffected by these matters. Nor could his temperament and position allow him to be uninvolved. He served in the army for a time and in matters of religion he accepted "on trust" in 1598 Roman Catholicism, only to abjure it twelve years later "on conviction". Generally he moved in loyalist circles. Providing courtly entertainments, chiefly masques, drew him ever closer into court circles and earned him the offer of a knighthood, which he declined. As a leading playwright, critic, and controversialist in London he was at the center of intellectual activities, holding his own high court in the Apollo Room of the Devil Tavern. He lived life fully, remaining mentally alert even during his last years when paralysis confined him to his bed.

Tillyard judges the eminence of Elizabethan writers by the passion with "which they surveyed the range of the universe." He judges the most eminent to be Spenser, Sidney, Raleigh, Hooker, Shakespeare, and Jonson, and finds that "all these are united in holding with earnestness, passion and assurance to the main outlines of the medieval world picture ...." Jonson does hold to the main outlines of the medieval world picture but with dogmatic tenacity rather than passion and assurance. For him it


no longer affords a body of spiritual and imaginative truth. His attitude is closer to the authoritarian one assumed by James for his protection when he discovers the authority is no longer there.

Jonson discovers this loss of a spiritual imperative in other levels of society. In *Every Man In His Humour* Knowell complains to Brainworm:

> But, now we all are fall'n; youth, from their feare:
> And age, from that, which bred it, good example.
> Nay, would our selues were not the first, euen parents,
> That did destroy the hopes, in our owne children:

> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

> When it vice is gone into the bone alreadie.
> No, no: This die goes deeper then the coate,
> Or shirt, or skin. It staines, vnto the liuer,
> And heart, in some.

(II, v, 12-15; 28-31)

In *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, the realization of man's loss of divinity and his inevitable degradation is a bitterly imaginative one, far less objectively set forth than Knowell's complaint to Brainworm. Carlo Buffone addresses Macilente:

> Now nothing in
> flesh, and entrails, assimulates or resembles man more,
> then a hog, or swine --

> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

> Mary, I say, nothing resembling man more then
> a swine, it followes, nothing can be more nourishing: for indeed (but that it abhorres from our nice nature) if we fed one vpon another, we should shoot vp a great deale faster,
> and thrive much better: I referre mee to your vsurous
> Cannibals, or such like: but since it is so contrary, porke,
> porke, is your only feed.
Macilente makes the fall complete and points the moral:

I take it, your deuill be of the same diet; he
would ne're ha' desir'd to beene incorporated into swine else.

(V, v, 62-64; 69-77).

Jonson stands a monument to his age - the spiritual ravages of the
times deeply engraved on his morosely impressive intellect and art. Despite
the strength of this intellect, the firm realism of his art, and his
resolute concern with the immediate, his reflecting critical eye is
troubled still by the unseen world of the spirit. One can speak of his
moral seriousness, his objectivity, his scientific realism, but what of
the emotional convictions of the man himself? The importance of his moral
seriousness, so often alluded to, lies not so much in his humility before
his God, the strength of his character, the firmness with which he held and
expounded certain ideals, but in the brooding and tragic awareness of a
world which he can only tentatively explore. No classical doctrine, no
moral dictum can disguise his imagination's grasp of his fellow men and of
the age in general. In the theory of humours is his intuitive assessment,
in all the rest his conscious art.

The humour in Jonson's work is not a flaw in character but character
itself. It is the inner structure of man and not something which rains down
upon his head from the heavens, as it does upon the humorous characters in
Chapman's plays. Jonson's humorous man is a negative creature struggling
still in the form and shape of a man, or what man in the past has conceived
himself to be - and what Jonson's moral seriousness demands but will not allow that he be. Now his is the emptiness which the collapse of the Elizabethan world picture has left as man's spiritual heritage.

As man's spiritual world shrinks, he shrinks, and his emotional range becomes limited to what he can see directly before him. For a while he holds with intellectual tenacity to a code which has had a spiritual birth, and he wonders why knowing certain things to be so, he cannot act as if they were so; but he no longer believes them to be so. The reason, to which Jonson partially commits himself, cannot always motivate the spirit. The new rationalism which proposes to free man from superstition and fear and to control the forces of nature does not free him from the destructiveness of his own nature. As the spiritual bases for an ethical code vanish, the code itself weakens, and in Jonson's own world Volpone bursts upon the stage with an intense poetic reality unwitnessed heretofore in Jonson's work. In the realm of comedy Volpone stands a strange and impressive creation, with a stature of almost tragic proportions. Some critics have judged his punishment to be incompatible with the necessary happy conclusion of comedy, but this is no longer a comic world; it is rather a satanic one. And for once Jonson is not critically detached. One perceives in this play an admiration for the intensity of Volpone's desire to live. Jonson's imagination has transcended absolute moral imperatives. He withdraws from this vision of evil which looms at the edge of the tragic chasm, and, after Volpone, the spirit which animates his plays is more truly in the nature of comic. In The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair there is a less troubled
acceptance and a genuine liking for the rogues of his worldly gallery.

Beneath the polished surface of Jonson's early comedy flows a tragic undercurrent, of which *Volpone* is a product. Both tragedy and comedy are art forms descended from ritual, a ritual marking off man's progress through the whole cycle of life. That one begins in the cycle where the other leaves off does not ensure echoes of one will not be heard in the other. It is not surprising then, to find the tragic presence on a comic stage, but it is surprising to find it on Jonson's whose avowed purpose was to "sport with follies, not with crimes." The follies, however, too often "stain, unto the liver" and assume more serious proportions. His plays reveal an intelligence whose deeper animating spirit stops short this side of the tragic chasm and whose reason escapes into critical theory, moral seriousness, and vigorous humor.

Jonsonian characters rarely move freely on all planes of the Elizabethan spiritual hierarchy. The phantom shapes of this hierarchy nevertheless stalk the outer boundaries of Jonson's world, their one-time presence is remembered in their absence, although they are not always denied entrance. But they enter not with the same flexibility and ease as in Elizabethan days; instead they make their entrance like the abstractions of the old morality plays - stately, with dignity, but more stiffly. Something within them speaks of a faded glory, and they enrich, ennoble, and elevate, but they have become creations of the reason not realities of the imagination.
The appearances of the Queen in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, though epilogal, demonstrate the nature of these abstract realities. Rather similar in function is another symbol of authority and order, Justice Clement, of *Every Man In His Humour*, who, although he has had little to do with the action heretofore, helps to disperse the humours and bring the characters to their happy resolution. It is noteworthy that the "Queenes Iustice," who on the one hand bears an affinity with the rogue Brainworm and on the other is the crown's dispenser of justice, has his existence in the play by means of a few brief appearances (III, vii; V, i) and by dint of hints and allusions from the other characters. Generally he appears when he can act primarily in his official capacity. That pale tribunal of justice, the Avocatori of *Volpone*, plays a similar role in helping to disentangle the knotted thread of actions and their engendering humours.

In other respects Jonson often approaches those vaster realms of the imagination associated with the "great chain of being." In his dramatic language he achieves both "gravity and height of elocution," and nowhere is it more formal and more elevated than in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. It is, however, a formal elegance, not constituting a natural extension of loftiness of character but drained of fullness and variety of feeling, so that "All his effects, his spirits, and his powers,/ In their confluctions,"

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are drawn "all to runne one way." Sir Epicure Mammon's wooing of Doll Common is filled with an Elizabethan richness of imagery:

Wee'll therefore goe with all, my girle, and liue
In a free state; where we will eate our mullets,
Sous'd in high-countrey wines, sup phesants egges,
And haue our cockles, boild in siluer shells,
Our shrimps to swim againe, as when they liu'd,
In a rare butter, made of dolphins milke,
Whose creame do's looke like opalls: and, with these
Delicate meats, set our selues high for pleasure,
And take vs downe againe, and then renew
Our youth, and strength, with drinking the elixir,
Of life, and lust.

(IV, i, 155-166)

Here is passion, but a mean passion which, when it is contained in such lofty speech, points its own ironic contrast, and it is intended that it should do so. It betrays him to the audience, not only because of the dramatic situation itself, that is, the fact that the "lady" is simply Doll Common, but also because he would disrupt nature and invert the system of order and of values: he would adorn her with jewels whose light should strike out the stars, he would place lust - his "high-countrey wines" and "phesants egges" - above life, life above Nature, and Nature above Art:

And, thou salt ha' thy wardrobe,
Richer than Nature, still to change thy selfe,
And vare oftener, for thy pride, then shee:
Or Art, her wise, and almost-equall servant.

(IV, i, 166-169)

Like Volpone, who longs for "vertue, fame, honour," to be "noble, valiant, honest, wise," Mammon would aspire to a high seriousness, but it is a seriousness based on an inversion of the moral order. The language
which he uses in his flights serves to indulge and feed his humour so that eventually it exceeds its boundaries; in running all one way, it begins to "smell of sinne" and swells to a boil of excess which must be pricked. He would aspire, but it is aspiration turned in upon itself, and there instead grows a humour. One is left only with man's infinitesimal lowliness. His lust for divinity and his appetite for life have become objects of satire and condemnation.

Jonson focuses on one-half of man's nature - the dark, the perverse, the unenlightened, an emphasis not out of keeping with his own time. Elizabethan moral philosophy had long been concerned with the "passions," the "perturbations" of the human soul. "They are the 'motions of the mind', not necessarily evil in themselves, which may produce disorder in man's spiritual constitution, and they are often conceived to have a connection with the humours of the body, so that their consideration may be medical as well as moral."\(^6\) These passions are conceived of as existing in pairs, such as love and hatred, desire and aversion, joy and sadness, hope and despair, courage and fear: the members of each pair balance one another. In Jonson's conception of the humours there is no balance. The humour is not just a perversion of potential wherein all powers are drawn "to runne one way," but of the basic self. One feels that his characters could never be otherwise, although both reason and divinity are appealed to as guides. The

humour in Jonson's work is not a flaw which grows through an error in judgment in a situation demanding action and thus making the flaw crucial at a particular moment. It is already exaggerated at the soul's core.

The humour assumes even graver proportions when one realizes there is no redemptive god present as there was in comic ritual, nor is there the lightness of a genuinely sophisticated detachment. As Jonson continues to write, and Volpone draws closer, the comic tone of his plays becomes consistently more impaired. In Every Man In His Humour and Every Man Out Of His Humour, Jonson is a forceful writer, in Volpone he is a powerful writer. The redemptive god of ritual, preserved in both tragedy and comedy, has retreated far beyond man's grasp, but the humour character is reminded always of that god's presence. In classical times his presence within the framework of tragedy and comedy had made genuine participation possible. Many thinkers had realized its importance. Pythagoras, in his search for intellectual truth as opposed to religious doctrine, retains the mystical content of theoria, or participation. Plato relates the One to the Many by means of methexis, or participation, and Aristotle equates methexis with mimesis. In much of Elizabethan drama this participation is likewise possible, but it becomes less so as the age draws to a close. In Jonson's time the humour theory still has currency, and in his plays it is the well-spring of life or "passion"; it retains its imaginative life in his work partially because of the spirit of the times and partially because he is a poet capable of expressing the spirit which still exists.
Although Elizabethan moral philosophy shows a great variety of opinion, rationalism continues to grow stronger among the Elizabethans, and a greater emphasis is put upon the classical golden mean. The Renaissance encourages greater versatility and autonomy in art, and the classics provide both subjects and rules for the writers of the period. Jonson, the Elizabethan and medieval moralist, already confirmed in his convictions concerning men and manners, turns to the classics as the conscious intellectual for general guidance in the principles of art and specific insight to the construction of action.
CHAPTER II

Literary Perspective

The artist's point of view, which is his own peculiar possession in intimate relationship with his times, generally escapes the formulae which anyone, including the artist himself, can propose. Certain elements of form, such as recurring dramatic devices and conventions turned to the artist's personal use, do, however, proceed from more easily recognizable sources and can be more readily traced. Jonson, perhaps more than others of the age, is conscious of form and literary precedent. In addition, the drama, whose growth heretofore had been largely spontaneous and unreflecting, begins, by Jonson's day, to attain to a certain sophistication and to acquire a more definite shape. Form and the formal now begins to be considered more seriously in general practice as well as in theory. Jonson is the heir of the drama's period of unreflecting growth and from it he takes many elements of his form; he turns then to concentrate upon technical and aesthetic perfection, upon giving more perfect artistic expression to elements which already fall within the general category of form.

The principal lines of influence are, of course, classical and Elizabethan, the second of which extends back into medieval times. Jonson's connection with this latter tradition is evidenced by the kinship of his characters to the abstract vices and virtues of the old morality plays. In depicting the vices he is most competent and can always imbue them with earthy realism. Most of the vitality in his plays, however, springs directly from the Elizabethan tradition, and it is from this source that the element
of character receives its principal impetus and ultimate resolution in the theory of the humours. From the classical tradition Jonson abstracts most of his ideas about the purpose of art, the form of drama, the mechanics of construction. It is here that he discovers finally a key to the creation of action, action which is not always constructed in intimate relationship with his characters.

Despite Jonson's classical learning, it seems unreasonable to assume that he was unaffected by a native tradition to which he was closer in time. From the early drama of his own country come echoes of a host of abstract virtues and vices. Among these, it is the vices which find, through farce and burlesque, the most lifelike expression in the vivacity of rogues and knaves. It is often through broad farcical treatment that Jonson succeeds in drawing most adeptly characters from the lower strata of society. His ability to do so is one which later strengthens both his conception and presentation of the humour character. Juniper and Onion of The Case Is Altered retain a sense of earthy jollity. Brainworm of Every Man In His Humour, in addition to his classical sophistication, recalls the untrammelled versatility of the medieval vice. Most of Jonson's credible women are drawn with a bold and indelicate stroke – Tib of Every Man In His Humour, Ursula of Bartholomew Fair, Lady Politick Would-Be of Volpone, all recall the coarse and natural vitality of medieval realism. Jonson's virtuous characters also remain close to their medieval heritage but in a rather different way. They retain their abstract nature, but, unlike her roguish counterpart, a virtuous woman, such as Rachel in The Case Is Altered, is usually a shallow, faintly drawn, and ineffectual human character. If she
is to be a more effective dramatic agent, she may become the apotheosis of virtue like the Queen in Cynthia's Revels, who moves about in the manner of an ever-present dea ex machina resolving the problems created by her subjects. Virtuous characters who do possess realistic qualities, like Justice Clement of Every Man In His Humour and Bonario of Volpone, may assume their roles only for a brief moment in the play's life when they frustrate an evil intention or resolve a foolish action, but they do little acting themselves. These characters are not generally labelled as abstractions, but frequently they remain such. A character, on the other hand, who is labelled as a vice, such as Macilente in Every Man Out Of His Humour, may emerge as the prime mover of the play's world and seethe with a life which cannot find its own boundaries.

From the medieval tradition Jonson also inherits a serious moral tone. A serious concern with moral values pervaded the entire sixteenth century and continued well beyond it. It was the legacy of early Christianity, later reinforced by classical authors and critics, and by the English literary critics as well. From this tradition likewise comes Jonson's

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1 Jonson himself deprecates the undisguised use of the deus ex machina. In the Prologue to Every Man In His Humour he lists the "ill customs of the age," and points to his own play as one such "as other plays should be,"

Where neither Chorus wafts you ore the seas;  
Nor creaking throne comes downe, the boyes to please;"

(11. 15-16)

tendency to allegorize, and to utilize action on a symbolical level (the allegory of money in Cynthia's Revels and The Staple of News, the compass of The Magnetic Lady, and the Prodigal Son motif of Eastward Hoe). In Cynthia's Revels one finds a bold mixture of mythological and allegorical characters as well as characters from real life, a mixture which was not new to the Elizabethan mind, for Lyly's mythological play had already succeeded the allegorical play.

In trying to measure the influence of the Elizabethan tradition on Jonson's drama, it is difficult to dissociate it from the classical tradition, a tradition with which Jonson is perhaps more familiar than others. In addition to Jonson's own literary acquaintance with the classical tradition, there is, of course, the evident similarity in the origins and development of English drama and classical drama. Both sprang from religious rituals intimately connected with the life and beliefs of the populace; both in successive stages attempted to make more and more explicit an interchange which at the beginning had been only implicit, to raise emotional participation to a high level of conscious awareness. What had been secret in ritual must in the drama be explained. When Jonson makes a move in this direction, he is attempting what the classical drama had succeeded in doing and what the Elizabethan drama was in the process of doing.

3 Jonson shared the authorship of this play with Chapman and Marston. Without attempting to assign specific parts to specific authors, one can consider the play in its totality as resulting from the collaboration of three men, each one of whom is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the entire life of the play. Jonson himself must have considered it so when he insisted on joining his fellow authors in prison.

In the Greek drama the chorus was drawn from the citizens or audience, not from the actors. This practice meant the continuation of a popular involvement in ritual which marked the beginnings of the drama. It was a structural means by which the classical dramatists acknowledged and evoked conscious participation in an activity which was becoming less a result of the popular will and more the product of an individual effort. In the beginnings of English religious drama and in folk dramatic activity, there had likewise been a more direct audience participation. Elizabethan drama also retains formal means of keeping its audience involved. An active involvement becomes a more purely empathetic one; with Jonson it becomes primarily a critical one. The chorus, the critic-character, the prologue, the induction, are formal means by which the spectators are expected to participate in Jonson's plays. But they must respond critically as well as emotionally, a demand which Jonson makes because he wants his audience to accept the thought of his art as though it were reality, to feel action directly in the realm of thought and to know quickly the thought of the action. To accomplish this, he is forced to cut out a great deal of the world that is usually the province of drama and of art generally where comprehension needs to be intuitive. Because he allows little intuitive comprehension of the reality which he creates, its boundaries can be more precisely marked by the limits he imposes on his form. Spiritual realities are implicit in this form, but they have become intellectualized abstractions not vitally available to his characters.

The humour theory is a good example of a development in which both indigenous and classical influences became intertwined. The Renaissance evaluation of the passions, their relationship to sin, and their proper
control attempted to combine the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, Christ, Galen, and Hippocrates. The result was a curious mingling of all, with many derivatives. The Stoic attitude towards passion was that of complete rejection. The Peripatetics taught that passions were evil if they were not governed by reason. Since the Scriptures attributed certain passions to Christ and to God himself, Christian authority usually upheld the Peripatetic doctrine. Although the clearly unified thinking of Thomas Aquinas was gone, his summary of the problem was still generally accepted:

The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to the order of reason, incline us to sin; but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue.\(^5\)

On the surface Jonson's theory of the humours would seem in accord with this generally accepted theoretical evaluation by Aquinas. It is the hard, polished surface of his plays which Jonson intends his audience to heed. Below this level, however, there is an emotional source, and at this emotional source all passions would appear to be destructive and the reason ineffectual. In *Every Man In His Humour* Kitley describes his brain as an "hour-glass for the running sands of barren suspicion" and he laments his loss of "the mindes erection". The real question, rather than any concern with the passions or the reason, seems to be, "Is it possible for anything to redeem man from himself?" The answer seems to be, "No". Both God and the reason prove powerless and ineffective. In Jonson there is not really a Stoic contempt of the world, nor does the Peripatetic

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\(^5\) *Summa Theologica*, vol. VI, p. 296, in Campbell, p. 97.
idea of balance seem important. His theory of the humours is closer to the Christian concept of original sin, unbalanced by other Christian teachings, a tendency not unknown in the annals of Christianity. Original sin is in full bloom, a voracious plant in control of man and his world. The difficulty which Jonson has in coordinating character and action, particularly in his early plays, testifies to this particular view of mankind. An individual who is a mixture of "good" and "bad" is much more easily and convincingly imitated in action than an individual who possesses only one-half of life's portion.

In addition to the varying moral philosophies which helped to mold the humour theory, there were different types of literature which likewise contributed to its development. The humours had made their appearance in the drama of Lyly, in prose fiction, in satire, and in the character sketch, the last of which C. R. Baskervill, in his analysis of Jonson's early comedy, sees as a principal ingredient of Jonson's own theory of the humours. Closely related to and affecting the character sketch and the theory of humours was the Renaissance theory of decorum, an idea which helped to draw more definite outlines of character and to regulate the style in which that character fulfilled his limits. This further development of form owed much to examples from classical literature. In both the Theophrastan character sketch and in Latin comedy there were types which

6Charles R. Baskervill, English Elements in Jonson's Early Comedy, Bulletin of the University of Texas, No. 178, Humanistic Series, No. 12, Studies in English, No. 1 (Austin: University of Texas, 1911), p. 27.
illustrated one peculiar quality. Its contribution, however, was not simply in the realm of aesthetic theory; it was a law of moral philosophy as well, and a popular concern of the age. Many works treated it as a matter of great moral significance. Perhaps the best known was Cicero's De Officiis. In one passage on the subject of decorum, the author asserted that "it is inseparable from moral goodness; for what is proper is morally right, and what is morally right is proper". He continued with a discussion of propriety as it was concerned with duty and the individual; finally and most important, he related it to the temperament.

The conception of the humours also owed a debt to the abstractions of early English allegorical drama and literature. C. R. Baskervill sees these abstractions as directly antecedent to Jonson's theory of the humours:

... before the conception of humour became prevalent, the closer approach of these abstractions of allegory, and especially of the morality, to real life had been leading directly toward a treatment of character that was substantially the same thing as Jonson's treatment of humour.


Cicero, De Officiis, trans. Professor Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library, Bk. 1, xxvii ff., in Campbell, p. 98.

Some of Jonson's characters, especially the virtuous ones or those without humours, are closer to abstractions than to real characters. The humour type, however, does not remain an abstraction in Jonson's hands. The humour may be organic or inorganic. It may be deeply rooted in the character's being or it may float near the surface in extraneous traits' but Jonson brings him to life with the verve and vigor of the English types which he finds around him. This lifelike existence of characters owes much to Jonson's own Elizabethan passion for the spectacle of life, together with his acute observation of it, and something to the new desire for verisimilitude, a desire awakened by the new humanism of the Renaissance and its interest in the analysis of individuals from Life.

The humanists, probably as a result of their studies of Vitruvius, were beginning to realize that Roman drama had been acted in much the same manner as the farces and miracle plays. It is not quite clear when the knowledge came, but towards the end of the fifteenth century there were performances in Italy of both classical plays and neo-Latin imitations. The practice soon spread to other countries, and in the early part of the sixteenth century there was an outburst of dramatic activity in the English schools. In 1527 and 1528 there were performances at Wolsey's house of the Menaechmi and the Phormio by the boys of St. Pauls. Others followed and soon there began a long series of English translations of classical plays.  

The drama flourished, and as the Elizabethan age progressed, there was more and more interplay between native and classical forces. One trend interacted with another. Popular demand and the popular drama influenced and were influenced by the academic and the classical. The playwrights succeeded in training public taste to a certain extent, but the audience forced upon its writers more liberal application of the rules which the writers themselves not too unwillingly abjured.

To the observation of successful dramatic practices over the years and to the relative silence of the ancients concerning comedy, Jonson may owe in some measure the liberal and independent nature of his precepts and practice. Even concerning art in general Jonson accepts the dicta of the ancients in a rather broad way: he adopts the guiding principle that form is important as a concept and that to proceed towards form one should use "election and a meane." For "men, who alwaies seeks to doe more then inough, may some time happen on something that is good, and great; but very seldome: And when it comes it doth not recompence the rest of their ill."¹¹ Beyond this principle of exercizing the critical faculty sensibly Jonson does not proceed to evolve a careful, precise, and original theory of the drama, or more specifically of comedy: his 'Discoveries made upon men and matter' are mostly translations from the works of others: Scaliger, Quintilian, Cicero, Horace, Aristotle, Seneca, Plato, Martial, Juvenal, Patricius, Possevino, Velleius Paterculus, Heinsius, J. L. Vives, etc.

¹¹ The Alchemist, "To The Reader", 11. 21-24. This is perhaps no more than another aspect of the old struggle between the classical and the romantic points of view. In each case, the proponents of the two methods or attitudes may theoretically emphasize one method to the exclusion of the other, yet in practice combine the two.
Bacon, Sidney, and many others. He collects, rearranges and adopts what he thinks best for practical guidance. From his collection he takes certain specific signposts for the construction of good drama. When he finds them difficult or impossible of application, he makes a momentary withdrawal but never a permanent renunciation. His critical intelligence always finds it necessary to justify his deviation and re-emphasize the rule.

Jonson's preoccupation with rules, with finding a right way of doing things, testifies to his serious attitude towards the drama. He is equally insistent upon the moral nature of art and is inclined towards the belief that there is a right way of making it moral. In directing his efforts primarily towards comedy, he must have been aware of one of the common dilemmas of the day; how does one reconcile high moral purpose with a form which imitates the common "evils" of humanity? In his exploration of the classics, he finds that tragedy, by implication, is allowed to be the superior muse: it possesses a more definite form and it has attained to a higher morality.

The basis for this higher morality and this more definite form seemed to rest upon some kind of literal truth. J. S. Scaliger, whose Poetice Sidney used so freely, was one of the most influential critics of the Renaissance. One of his pronouncements on the subject was "We are pleased with jests as in comedy, or with things serious, if rightly ordered.

12 For a listing of researches made on Jonson's sources for this work, see Herford and Simpson, XI, 212.
Disregard of truth is hateful to any man." Implicit in this statement is the belief that things "rightly ordered" are the requisite of tragedy but not of comedy. For Scaliger, tragedy was most likely to be rightly ordered if it possessed "truth of argument", that is an historical argument capable of being presented with verisimilitude. He is echoed by many of Jonson's fellow countrymen, by Sidney and by Sir William Alexander, who thought that tragedy, because of its gravity, should be founded on true history, "when the Greatness of a Known person, urging Regard, doth work the more powerfully upon the Affection." Samual Daniel in his "Apology" to Philotas says, "I thought so true a History, in the ancient forme of a Tragedy, could not but have had an unreproveable passage with the time, and the better sort of men, seeing with what idel fiction and grosse follies the Stage at this day abused mens recreations." These men all equate tragedy with things "rightly ordered" and with historical truth. The danger lay in regarding something which was historically true as something which was rightly ordered - a distortion of Aristotle's idea of the known fable forming the core of the tragic tale. This danger was perhaps intensified by the desire of the age for a new kind of reality, a reality based on accurate knowledge and productive of concrete results.


14 Bryant, p. 200.

15 Bryant, p. 200.
Tragedy might easily become history accurately reproduced and not as Bacon evaluated the drama, like history made visible. Comedy, on the other hand, might be denied dignity and order, since it was not closely linked with history and with things serious. Jonson falls heir to the first mistake but not to the second. If tragedy could be equated with history, it would approach closer to that Baconian palace of the mind in which reason and history, by bowing and buckling man's mind to the nature of things, helped to restore his sovereignty in the universe. But as Jonson is to discover with Seianus, it could easily lose that touch of divinity, which Bacon by implication sets outside the bounds of history and reason. In the creation of Seianus, "truth of argument" becomes an "historically verifiable argument", and Jonson, forgetting that the playwright does not look for truth based upon fact alone, produces a play that gives no indication of the poet's imagination having penetrated the veil of the past.16

16 There are of course other reasons for its failure to "preserve popular delight." One, posited by Herford and Simpson, is Jonson's neglect of the unity of time and thus the lack of a concentrated action. Another is his own emotional makeup, which despite his protestations of

Leave me. There's something come into my thought,
That must, and shall be sung, high, and aloofe,
Safe from the wolues black iaw, and the dull asses hoofe,
(The Poetaster, "Apologetical Dialogue," 236-239)

could not allow him, because of his adopted point of view, to give himself up completely to the tragical dramatic world. For further comment on the failure of Seianus, see Herford and Simpson, II, 27.
Although less had been said about comedy than about tragedy, particularly by Aristotle, there was a general attitude towards it and some attempt had been made to define it. But it was defined in terms antithetical to those of tragedy and it was granted only a negative morality. Despite the current "Ciceronian" definition of comedy, as "an imitation of life, a mirror of manners and an image of truth," comedy was generally construed to be something which by implication it should not be. Even Sidney in his Apologie for Poetrie, echoes this same strain:

Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and most scornful sort that may be; so that it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one. Now, as in Geometry, the oblique must bee knowne as well as the right, and in Arithmetick the odd as well as the even, so in the actions of our life who seeth not the filthines of euil wanteth a great foile to perceiue the beauty of vertue.\(^\text{17}\)

Comedy should teach the moral nature of things, but it can do so in an oblique and negative way only. It lacks an inherent morality because it casts an image of a truth which should not be.

Jonson is closely allied with this tradition of moral criticism and he so declares himself in the dedicatory epistle to Volpone:

For, if men will impartially, and not a-squint, looke toward the offices, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselves, the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man.

(Vol. V, p. 17, ll. 20-23)

In the same epistle there is a recognition of a conflict between the "strict rigour of comick law", that is, the *tranquilla ultima* requisite for comedy, and the final catastrophe of his own play. It is an ultimate morality which emerges as triumphant:

... my speciall ayme being to put the snaffle in their mouths, that crie out, we neuer punish vice in our enterludes, & c. I tooke the more liberty; though not without some lines of example, drawne euen in the ancients themselves, the goings out of whose comedies are not alwaies joyfull, but oft-times, the bawdes, the seruants, the riuals, yea, and the masters are mulcted:

and fitly, it being the office of a comick-Poet, to imitate iustice, and instruct to life, as well as puritie of language, or stirre up gentle affections.

(Vol. V., p. 20, 11. 115-123)

Jonson asserts the morality and divinity of poetry in general. He thereby reasserts the dignity of comedy, and it is to comedy that he devotes his practical efforts. For him the comic poet has as high and positive a purpose as does the tragic: his aim is to "imitate iustice and instruct to life." He is not to give the populace the "ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all licence of offence" and "such foule, and unwash'd b'audr'y, as is now made the foode of the scene," all of which the popular taste demanded but had much difficulty in justifying; he is to stir up gentle affections as well. When he proposes to strip Poesie of those base rags with which the times have clothed her for so long, it is again in preface to a comedy that he is speaking.
... I shall raise the despis'd head of poetrie againe, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags, wherewith the Times have adulterated her form, restore her to her primitive habit, feature, and majesty, and render her worthy to be imbraced, and kist, of all the great and masterspirits of our world.

(Volpone, Vol. V, p. 21, ll. 129-134)

Jonson is keenly aware of classical precept, but he always boldly asserts his right to independent practice:

I see not then, but we should enjoy the same licence, or free power, to illustrate and heighten our inuentions as they [the ancients] did; and not bee tyed to those strict and regular formes which the nicenesse of a few (who are nothing but forme) would thrust vpon vs.

(EMOH, 2nd Sounding, 266-270)

The speech by Cordatus which immediately precedes the above conclusion concerning the freedom of the artist outlines the development of Greek comic form. In it Jonson shows an acute and vivid sense of the evolution of comedy. He not only realizes that this was in another time and in another place, but that these "lawes were not delivered ab initio". Even when he proposes the so-called "Ciceronian" definition of comedy, the one which is so often cited as the basis of Jonson's dramatic theory, he allows himself again wide latitude in the rather negative nature of its presentation. It is offered to those who have not proposed a better.
You say well, but I would faine heare one of these autumnne-judgements define once, Quid sit Comoedia? if he cannot, let him content himselfe with CICEROS definition (till hee haue strength to propose to himselfe a better) who would have a Comoedie to be Imitatio vitae, Speculum consuetudinis, Imago veritatis; a thing throughout pleasant, and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of manners: ....

(EMOH, III, vi, 202-210)

Jonson, however, remains a respector of rules of form and standards of morality. With comedy Jonson finds a sphere in which rules and precepts are less operative: comedy has been allowed abasic immorality and it has been less subject to an accumulation of classical dogma. It is not surprising that Jonson, with his respect for classical injunction, should attempt to apply to comedy certain standards of dramatic construction which had been more directly related to tragedy. He cannot apply to comedy the principle of "truth of argument" and, as its corollary, the treatment of the lives of great men; he can insist that it treat of things "rightly ordered" and he can make of it a serious business, a way of looking at life

18 This conception of the drama as a mirror was certainly not uncommon to the day, and one may compare the above statement by Jonson with Hamlet's advice to the players:

the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(III, ii. 24-29)
with a legitimate claim to truth, a claim reinforced by the perfection of its form. He can give it an honorable style, if not a lofty one, he can declare its right to imitate justice and life, he can reduce the absurdities which bedevil its production, and he can assert its nature of stirring the gentle affections to profit and delight. He can divide a comic play into the requisite number of scenes and acts "according to the Terentian manner", he can on occasion provide it with a Chorus, and he can apply the unities of time and place. For unity of action he has his own interpretation: a Jonsonian play is not a plot in imitation of one action unified in all its parts, but the imitation of many actions, each created in accordance with an individual character and shaped with intellectual tenacity into an aesthetically pleasing whole.
CHAPTER III

The Marriage of Two Literary Theories: the Theory of Humours and Classical Unity of Action

Jonson stands at the peak of his age, at a time when the growth of the greater Elizabethan and Jacobean comedies is dependent on conditions essentially transient, on the fusion of converging traditions which are not permanently compatible. Muriel Bradbrook characterizes this fusion concisely in her study of Elizabethan comedy:

Out of this tension, the greater Elizabethan and Jacobean comedies were bred. Theatrical and rhetorical, organized and spontaneous, artificial and natural, they reflected a way of life and of speech which were likewise of the hour. Formal manners and violent passions, gravity and brutality, jest and dignity might be exemplified in the lives of the great from Sir Thomas More to Sir Walter Ralegh; these virtues did not equally belong to the generation of Strafford and Laud, Pym and Milton.1

It is this peculiar spiritual moment of the times which Jonson succeeds in arresting in a seemingly unified and polished form. He weds native literary growth to classical ideals. He pushes his inheritance to the point where technique is exactly level with the thought expressed and brings it to its fullest technical expression. After him comes the decadence. "The 'Chinese wall' which he built against barbarism remained to divide Elizabethan from all subsequent drama; after Jonson nothing was quite the same again."2

1 Bradbrook, Elizabethan Comedy, p. 7.
2 Bradbrook, p. 6.
One of the specific ways in which he marries the native tradition to the classical one, and which reflects the tension of disparate elements held in solution, is the subject of the following chapters. It shows him again crossing the boundaries between tragedy and comedy, of applying to comedy those rules intended for the construction of tragedy.

In comedy the inner being of a character is less important than his outer mode of being. Man the social creature is generally more important, and there is less effort to discern and depict his inner structure. Action takes precedence: what matters most is what he does, not what he is.¹ Jonson's comedy differs, for his is not simply a comedy of manners, a vehicle for expressing witty, incisive views on social men and manners. Despite the ironic detachment which he forces upon his audience and the delight which this detachment enables them to experience, his more earnest concern is with man and his character. This concern brings him close to the spirit

³ Action, of course, is most important to the dramatic mode in general. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, points up the importance of action to tragedy:

The most important of these is the putting together of the separate actions, for tragedy is an imitation not of men but of actions and life. And happiness and unhappiness reside in action, and the end is some sort of action, not a quality, for according to their actions they are happy or the reverse. They do not, then, act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are; so in the actions and the plot is found the end of tragedy, and the end is more important than anything else.

of tragedy and to the tragic mode as well. In tragedy the protagonist must have a strongly realized character, for he himself aids in the subtle alchemy of his own misery. In contrast to the more accidental world of comedy, there exists between character and action a strong causal relationship. Jonson, in his drama, likewise works to establish a strong character-action nexus.

Jonson, along with other Renaissance critics and with the neo-classicists, has been accused of entirely neglecting the most essential and most important unity of all: the unity of action, primarily, it is said, because it is the one most difficult to understand and to apply, coming only to those naturally endowed as dramatists. But Jonson does in fact comprehend Aristotle's notion of the unity of action. In his Discoveries the section on action is among the most lengthy and the most lucidly written. More important still he sees the organic nature of its relationship to his theory of humours. A passage from the Discoveries will illustrate the way in which he makes the connection. From the fourth chapter of the Dutch scholar Daniel Heinsius' De tragoediae constitutione, published in Leyden in 1611, Jonson takes the whole of his final essay "Of the Magnitude and Compass of Any Fable." In the section on "What [is meant] by one and entire" concerning the madness of Sophocles' Ajax, Heinsius' text reads thus:

Exempli gratia, Sophoclis Aiacem videamus: Aiax armis priuatus, indignatur, & sic erat contumalie impatiens, rabit ac furit. Ergo, quod pro tali est, haud pausa sine mente agit, & postramo pro Ulysse pecudes insanus mactat.

Jonson translates this passage in the following Manner:

For example, in a tragedy, look upon Sophocles his Ajax: Ajax, deprived of Achilles' armor, which he hoped from suffrage of the Greeks, disdains, and growing impatient of the injury, rageth, and turns mad. In that humor he doth many senseless things, and at last falls upon the Grecian flock and kills a great ram for Ulysses:5

He sees the necessary correlation between the humour, as a key to character, and the humour as an organizing source of action. He understands Aristotle's observation on the nature of tragic action and the way in which it grows out of a flaw in the nature of a man essentially good. What Aristotle lays out in formal analysis, and what Jonson rediscovers, is rather aptly illustrated by a work of literature which helped to mold Greek drama and which, like the Elizabethan drama, had connections with popular tradition and with legend - the Iliad, the subject of which is rather explicitly stated as "the wrath of Achilles." It not only deals with one action, it deals primarily with one mood, one emotion, whose source is attributed to an "unknown" quantity - âte - and which engenders a central line of action. The Iliad, in contrast to the Odyssey, has the refinement of an art growing out of the personal and oral bardic tradition and developing beyond it in sophistication of form. The Odyssey, on the other hand, is more closely allied to the older tradition in possessing a loose, informal

5 Spingarn, p. 458.
narrative thread whose winding path of action is similar to the organization a bard might adopt in sitting down to his harp. To it belongs the search motif, involving many moods and many incidents that comprise the making of a better man, the shaping of a better character.

The character of Achilles is already formed at the beginning of the Iliad. The problem is to find within the character a mood or emotion of sufficient momentum to carry it into action. Jonson faces this same problem, and it is a problem more crucial to the drama than to the epic. Achilles' one dominant emotion makes him stand out on the vast stage set for the Trojan War. In order to appear lifelike, he must loom larger than life. An image of man is caught from the fast, swift-flowing stream of life. Jonson, in restricting his imagination, cannot allow his characters, save for one, to flow with great passion, but they are not mere ripples in a stream. They do stand out with vigor and with force. Often they have been labelled as mere caricatures. A better word, perhaps, considering the derogatory connotations which have been attached to the former, is conceits, elaborate conceits imbued with their own peculiar life. Jonson's reason and "scientific" realism do not thwart his poetic gift.

Achilles, however, is not just a man with a flaw, or with one mood. He also acts in other ways. Hamartia in Greek tragedy was an "error in

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judgment", a kind of catalyst between character and action. Conflict, the interplay between good and bad, positive and negative, love and hate, is, in terms of character delineation, a lifelike source of action. For Jonson one-half of this conflict is relegated to a theoretical realm, and this theoretical realm, even though not dramatized, still plays a prominent part in the life of his characters and the structure of his plays. This omission from the life of his stage makes it more difficult for him to achieve the strong character-action relationship which he seeks. He has some difficulty in defining the limits of his characters. Too often in his early plays he simply displays character, but one sees him working towards a general conception of character. After Every Man Out Of His Humour, he has thought and written enough about his theory of humours to accept it in theory without too much further contention. Once he has accepted the humour in theory and grafted it to the unity of action, a growth does take place.

Aristotle defines plot as the imitation of an action and states that it "should be concerned with one thing and that a whole." Plot, however, is something more than the imitation of an action; it is a synthesis of individual acts and it is given a separate and distinct designation when he further says the thing imitated consists of plot, character, and action. During the Renaissance, certain elements were abstracted from Aristotle's Poetics and made critical entities in themselves. The unities of time and place and, to a lesser extent, that of action, partially created and greatly emphasized by the Italian critics, soon found their way into English literature. Although Jonson's translation of Heinsius preserves the idea
of the plot, or fable, as something more than an imitation of action, it would appear from his application of "truth of argument" to Sejanus, discussed in the preceding chapter, that he fails to grasp the total significance of each part of the imitation.

Imitation, as Aristotle and the Greeks understood it, was an organic conception, and it was a process during which natural growth occurred; once this growth had occurred, no one part could be disentangled from another without there being damage to the whole. Action was but one of these parts. This was not to say that the process involved no conscious control:

... for it is necessary that poems produce not any pleasure they happen to but such as I have spoken of.7

A poem must have beauty, and beauty consisted of both magnitude and order. A poem must be well-ordered and it must imitate life.

The Greeks perceived, or had perceived, order in the universe. This order was continually reaffirmed through religious ritual and imbedded itself in both legend and myth, on which Aristotle observed the best tragedies to have been based. The ritual embodied an universal experience with an order not that of historical time. The existence of ritual, both in Greek and in Elizabethan times, proved important to the birth of the drama as significant art form. When it lost its force, eventually the

7 Gilbert, Literary Criticism, p. 115.
drama died as well. Now, Aristotle says, the poet need not use the
traditional myths, though they "please everybody". He may make his own
plots; indeed he must be a maker of plots, rather than meters. The indi-
vidual poet is now the creator and interpreter.

Heretofore, this perception of a fourth dimension, embodied in ritual,
myth, and legend, had been created, not feigned, from out of the being and
experience of the people. The dream, as some would choose to call it,
was real. That dream, a living force, now elusive, now intensely present,
could never be logically formulated and defined by the discriminating
intellect. It was expressible only in the metaphor of poetry or the abstract
language of philosophy; and Plato, the first to formulate the problem of
its existence, resorts finally to a metaphor to convey the fullness of his
meaning. It was through a continual pursuit of this dream that man, the
Greeks in particular, emerged into fuller awareness on the plot of earth
which he did occupy. Through it there came into being thought or reason,
science, mathematics, philosophy, and religion as a mode of thought.
Without it thought would have found no spatial and temporal rhythm in which
it could move, and without it science today would have no idea upon which
to base a "factual" or "objective" pursuit of the atom.

Greek ritual, and the ritual of preceding civilizations, aligned man
with all forces of the universe, in an horizontal and cyclical movement
within the order of nature and in a vertical and transcendent movement
towards an absolute. The mythos of medieval Christianity, with its
correspondences seeking to penetrate and incorporate every corner of the
universe, did likewise. The Greeks' first philosophical statement of order
had been a statement of moral order as well. The medieval world picture also reflected a moral order, and this morality was one aspect of nature, but not a substitute for nature itself. Morality was primarily the function of the reason, that attribute of man which set him apart from his fellow creatures, making him less perfect than they and at the same time divinely perfectible above them. The reason was opposed neither to nature nor to faith, and evil was not the god of nature. As the Renaissance progressed, however, and man walked farther away from his spiritual heritage, there grew a narrow and constricting interpretation of nature, particularly man's spiritual nature, of god and morality, of good and evil, and of sin. As man achieved greater freedom in scientific thought, in politics, and in society, he became the greater bondsman in spirit. Everything contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, as well as the seeds of rebirth, and Christianity grew steadily towards a harvest of weeds.

That Elizabethan world picture from which Jonson abstracts the teleological implications of its frame of reference leads one to expect a fuller representation of what was possible within this frame. That morality towards which man might aspire with the fullness of his senses becomes, however, only something which he should obey. Between morality and reason, the senses lose their rightful place in the scheme of things. Knowledge and awareness of the senses are keenly present in Jonson's plays, but they have become that which leads man only to the ridiculous or the depraved. And so the dream is lost too. When his characters seek to abide by or aspire to an absolute, as he impels them to do, they are doomed to failure, not because man is an imperfect, earthbound, creature, but because man is
blind, and that blindness in Jonson's world view is evil. Jonson gives them this blindness. He chastises, and castigates, them for not being able to see, but he shows them no positive world that is poetically visible.

T. S. Eliot says of Jonson that "he employs immense dramatic constructive skill: it is not so much skill in plot as skill in doing without a plot." With reference to the individual plots of Volpone, The Silent Woman, and The Alchemist, he says "it is rather an 'action' than a plot." Generally, the action in Jonson's plays does not comprise distinctively different and individual actions which add up to one body of action or plot. It is rather an infinite number of variations on the same, or a similar, action. Instead of a plot or fable, one finds a magnificently ordered and highly wrought design in which each scrap of material is made to fit and cohere in a definite way.

In the richly colored tapestry of Jonson's work there is no network of universal experience. The characters have no threads of infinity to help sustain them. Nor do they have assistance from the concept, "A man's character is his destiny," a philosophical statement not born of a constricting world view. In Jonson, a man's humour is his destiny, and that humour has only one plane of existence. The nature of that humour, which is likewise a world view, disallows any real "change" or transformation for his characters, for all is firmly predetermined before the play begins.

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It also limits the nature and the extent of the action: the action does not grow as the character unfolds; it spirals with masterly inventiveness in accordance with the organizing principle of the humour. By a persistent narrowing and limiting of the humour character Jonson finds a suitable channel for his particular poetic inspiration and thereby sufficient energy to infuse his characters with the emotional intensity required for action.

After *The Case Is Altered*, Jonson abandons the borrowing, refurbishing and re-organization of old plots. He diverges to experiment and finds in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* a more completely individualistic synthesis. The following chapters make an attempt to discover the nature of his point of view as it grows out of his plays and to show the careful and conscious artistry with which he weaves into his work the two strands of the humour theory and unity of action, the former symptomatic of his point of view, the latter indicative of his deliberate art.
CHAPTER IV

The Case Is Altered and The Alchemist

The Case Is Altered, first published in 1609, is dated by Herford and Simpson at 1597-98. It is Jonson's only known attempt at using the double plot so much in vogue in the Elizabethan drama and at borrowing readymade plots to tailor to his own uses. Jonson takes his stories from two contrasting plays of Plautus, the Captives and the Aulularia - the one a serious romance with comic relief, the other a satirical comic treatment of avarice with serious moments. Although both lend themselves to the Elizabethan love of mingling grave and gay, neither satisfies the same taste for a plot filled with incidents and crowded with persons. In addition, both, more or less strictly, adhere to the classical unities of time and place.

Jonson attempts, with no great success, to satisfy both his Elizabethan taste and his regard for classical strictures. He multiplies the characters, adds abundance of detail, and makes variations on the theme; he maintains the unity of place and to a lesser extent the unity of time; he does not yet have control of his characters nor does he achieve unity of action.

Herford and Simpson state in their introduction to this work that Jonson multiplies the motives as he never does in his mature plays, wherein he uses a fundamental motive and multiplies the circumstances. Of The Case Is Altered it would perhaps be truer to say that Jonson has

1 Herford and Simpson, I, 305-306.

not decided whether to depict men as acting from base motives or from pure motives; he has not really determined what the motives are to be, at least not in strong enough lines for him to manipulate dramatically; and, in the early phases of his career, Jonson does need strongly outlined boundaries before he can see how to move within them. His failure to find these boundaries may result from the borrowed double plot. At any rate, it remains a borrowed one, even after it has passed through his hands. Jonson, due to his inexperience in handling and his uncertainty at viewing the material, fails to make of it a creation peculiarly his own. Since he has already before him the main lines of his two plots, he is not forced to develop the strong character, strong, that is, in terms of one trait or one motive, which, when it becomes a humour, can express itself with passion — a passion of sufficient strength to give momentum to a feasible line of action.

In this play Jonson experiments with the passion of love, but one feels this is entirely alien ground for him, because he imbues it with little sentiment, and with less passion. It is a theme, shifting and superficial, anchored only in its concentration on the one person of Rachel de Prie. It is used to multiply action, but it never possesses sufficient motivation in any terms, either logical or illogical, to produce a coherent plot. Onion who would, to satisfy his love, have a "prety Paradox or some Aligory" made, is easily turned aside from his wooing by the discovery of Jaques' treasure. One does not learn of Christophero's love until Onion has sought his help in wooing Rachel. His prime consideration in the matter seems to be only the possibility of an altered relationship with his master the Count who, immediately upon hearing of his servant's
suit, expresses his own desire for the beggar maid:

I spide her, lately, at her fathers doore,
And if I did not see in her sweet face
Gentry and nobleness, nere trust me more:
But this perswasion, fancie wrought in me,
That facie being created with her lookes,
For where loue is he thinkes his basest obiect
Gentle and noble: I am farre in loue.

(II, vi, 37-43)

He analyses the basis of his emotion and then coolly discards it. If the involvement of Onion and Christophero in the circle of love can, to some extent, be explained, but not so easily justified, on the structural bases of comic parody and parallelism of scene, the action of Count Ferneze is not so easily accounted for. If it is only, as Herford and Simpson suggest, for the purpose of feeding Jaques' fear, the effect, revealed in the actions of Jaques, may be dramatic, but the cause, contained in the actions of the Count, is neither dramatic or believable.

If one, on the other hand, sees love-betrayal, and the resulting entanglements, as the true comic motive, one can only say that the betrayals are committed most casually and without any real conviction. Angelo, perhaps because his treachery is greater, seems to make a better case for his betrayal:

He is an asse that will keepe promise stricktly
In any thing that checkes his priuate pleasure;
Chiefly in loue. S'bloud am not I a man?
Haue I not eyes that are as free to looke?
And bloud to be enflam'd as well as his?

(III, i, 9-13)

Still, in his vehemence, he can offer no better motive than "am not I a man?" and the nature of his character is only thinly prepared for by Paulo's wondering hesitation at trusting his friend and the Count's allusion to Angelo's fourteen mistresses.
The passions of love for these characters do not exist. It is love by every other name save that of love. Paulo would seem to be representative of the passion in its purity, but the importance of his relationship with Rachel is usurped on the stage, in his absence, by the rather more base connivings of his fellows. The love between him and Rachel provides the touchstone by which that of others is judged, judged either as black or white. Again, the choice for Jonson seems to be, "Do men act from base motives or pure ones?" He does not seem able to draw the character capable of encompassing both convincingly. When he does make the choice, he attacks the problem with more certainty, with more verve, and it is always the rogues who act most convincingly.

Since the character motivation and delineation are diffuse, one would expect the action to be likewise. Perhaps because of the already existing lines of action from the borrowed plots and the symmetry achieved in the parallelism of the multiplied scenes, the result is not the same. Instead, as J. J. Enck describes it in his article on this play,

The plot and language both have a thoroughgoing stratification which includes almost all the principal characters and, furthermore, furnishes them their main motivation. These elements rarely infuse one another; rather they are parallel lines. Such perpendicularity contributes something to the effect of puppets which it is claimed Jonson's characters often convey. They respond less to each other than to their own natures, which happen to be stimulated by other presences on the stage or just off it. At the same time the cause of their problems is an incompleteness as human beings, a deficiency either of knowledge or of the will to determine it; a lack either of the
information to round out sensitivity or of the sensitivity to give meaning to information. In The Case Is Altered, as in all early Jonsonian drama, the conflicts arise from a lack (a negative) which with practice breaks into a positive excess.

This stratification arises, as suggested above, from the incomplete fusion of the two plot lines, which in turn arises from his failure to move his characters convincingly across these lines.

The perpendicular motion which the action describes in this play is an imposed one, for it does not proceed easily or straightly from the characters. Too often, character and action are sustained separately. In later plays the action proceeds more logically from character, but it still retains the nature of the perpendicular: the characters are still responding more to their own natures than to each other, they are speaking still at cross purposes, they are yet acting from an incompleteness, a lack, an insufficiency of sensitivity and information. Now, however, they act upon these negatives in a more positive way, and in The Alchemist, when Jonson frees them completely from the abstract spectre of justice and morality, they act with the gay abandon and the complete control of their negatively conceived (that is, based on insufficient knowledge, wrong assumptions, and insensitivity), but positively fulfilled convictions.

Miss Una Ellis-Fermo apparently discerns a similar perpendicularity in The Alchemist and she likewise attributes to this play a stratification.

of action and character. She describes the characteristics of the structure of *The Alchemist* in terms of a modernistic, non-representational painting:

If we choose as our starting-point a picture that consists of spirals and related curves forming one design and underlying them or superimposed, two-dimensional blocks of colour forming another and apparently independent design—as in the manner of Picasso—we have a convenient starting-point for describing some of the characteristics of the structure of the *Alchemist.*

She sees the interactions of the plot, the "spirals and related curves", as something existing quite separately from the characters and their moods, the "two-dimensional blocks of colour". The reason for this effect she determines to be the occurrence of passages, such as the dialogue of Subtle and Face, the speeches of Sir Epicure Mammon, and the ravings of Dol (Act IV), which are "like slabs of pure colour standing apart from and independent of the line pattern in a picture."  

The gloriously sensual speeches of Mammon may stand out in massive color blacks, but they are not wholly isolated from the action to form a completely separate design. When Mammon, in anticipation of acquiring the wonder-working philosopher's stone, feeds his passion until it flows with poetic exaltation through perfumed mists, gossamer and roses, to ostrich fans and dishes of agate, emerald, sapphire, to pheasants' eggs and cockles boiled in silver shells, he is at one and the same time pouring out the

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4 Ellis-Fermor, p. 44.

5 Ellis-Fermor, pp 47-48.
substance of one of the "slabs of pure colour"; that is, he is fulfilling his mood and feeding his humour in the realm of poetic language, and he is also outlining graphic action in words, he is conveying the feeling of action on another level - a level that exists in the mind alone.

This action, although it takes place in the mind alone, does not do so in the manner of Shakespeare and other dramatists, by carrying the conflict to another level - the realm of conflicting ideas, for example - so that this realm in turn gives added dimension to the primary line of action (that actually taking place before the eyes of the audience on the stage). Instead, it uses action of the first kind (from the primary level) to form a lattice work on which the humour grows upward to excess. When Mammon can construct a little drama in which he sees himself walking naked between his succubae to lose himself in rooms vaporized and perfumed, to fall into baths of the enormity of pits, to emerge thence to dry in gossamer and roses, and all this action multiplied by glasses cut in subtle angles, he is outlining and feeding in projected action the abnormality which, when fed in this manner, will result in an act on the primary level of action.

The lack of conflict in the realm of ideas is the result of the framework which Jonson sets himself. There does exist a conflict between the true and the false, but for the characters themselves there is little conflict between the two. For them the false affords their principal reality, but the moral imposition of Jonson's frame of reference would suggest that the true is the reality. Within the frame, however, there is no equal externalization of the two ideas; instead the true stalks the outer boundaries
like a waiting actor deprived of his part. When an awareness of the two opposing ideas does occur in a character, the action seems to suffer. Although Kitely, in *Every Man In His Humour*, has reasonably strong motivation, he is somewhat inhibited by an awareness which transcends his humour and he cannot act with the ease of Subtle or Face or Volpone. Macilente usurps most of the action in *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, and his motivation, after his entry into the play, must take the name of humourous envy, rather than pure hatred. The frame of reference is important in that it provides something against which to measure the humour. But the characters may only move from one side of the frame to the other, being thrown from their course by the impact of having hit the opposite boundary of the constraining frame. In between these two points there has been no growth, no change, no development; there has been only acceleration along an already determined path. That which exists outside this frame is denied the characters; there is no place to which they can aspire and so they turn inward to feed upon themselves.

Speeches such as those referred to above (p. 52) help then to foreshadow and promote the action, or rather they help to bring the action into existence; Sir Epicure Mammon's speech outlines and indulges the abnormality and in indulging the abnormality it gives it added impetus. Thus the acceleration becomes greater, until only a head-on collision can meet the thrust with sufficient force to throw it off its ironbound track. The spirals of the line design then, to return to Miss Fermor's terms, are not independent of the slabs of color; they move with greater force because of them - with greater force and with a residue of their coloring. The action may not seem to grow out of the character, but
it does proceed in logical agreement with the terms of that character's existence.

The upward spiralling movement of action in *The Alchemist* is the fullest realization of this aspect of Jonson's art. Each individual character, because of the nature of his being, can never break out of this spiralling movement in the interaction with other characters which one ordinarily expects in the plot; he can only come back down to earth. In the meantime they can all ascend together as invention follows invention. Face almost always finds a way out. One may not be prepared for this in the logic of the plot, but it does conform to the logic of Face's character. The strict channelling of the humour within limits sharply defined permits Jonson to achieve this intensity of action which allows invention upon new invention in the turns of the action.

In *The Alchemist* the humours do not figure prominently, but Jonson has perfected a rhythm of action, hitherto generally a pattern of movement, most suitable to his type of character. In *Volpone* he taps the true depths of his stream of inspiration and he finds sufficient momentum for virile and related action. In *The Alchemist*, if there is not much talk of humours, there is much talk in humour. With the exception of *Volpone*, such richness of language is found nowhere else in Jonson.

During the first half of Jonson's career, up to and including *Volpone*, one can see him evolving strong, "logical" action in direct proportion to the strength with which he molds his characters, both of these artistic ingredients depending in turn on the firmness with which he holds a point of view and being the means by which he realizes that view in an artistic
creation. The point is not that the theory of humours affords a facile explanation of his technique but that he is only able to mold strong character in terms of one concentrated trait or motive.

In *The Case Is Altered* one can perceive the growth of the humour character and its enlivening effect on the action. The tempo of this play increases to a more sprightly and natural pace when a more strongly delineated character takes the center of the stage. When Count Ferneze enters for the first time, he does so in an impatient peremptory manner, illustrating his son's (Paulo's) description of him which precedes his entry:

You know my father's wayward and his humour
Must not receive a check, for then all objects,
Feede both his griefe and his impatience,
And those affections in him, are like powder,
Apt to enflame with every little sparke,
And blow vp reason, therefore Angelo, peace.

(I, vi, 85-90)

He fires a short quick dialogue and sends the servants flying about in search of his son Paulo, upon which he concludes,

Patience? a Saint would loose his patience to be crost,
As I am with a sort of motly braines
See, see, how like a nest of Rookes they stand,
Gaping on one another!

(I, vii, 17-20)

At this point there enters another character to whom there has also been attributed a humour:

O he is one as right of thy humour as may be,
a plaine simple Rascal, a true dunce, marry he hath bene
a notable vilaine in his time: he is in loue, sirrah, with
a wench, & I have preferd thee to him, . . .

(Juniper to Antony Balladino of Onion;
I, ii, 11-14)

Onion also possesses something of the Count's irascible nature and is capable of falling into a "prejudicate humour" which he does at this
moment. After having tried to deliver a message to the Count, only to be frustrated into speaking at cross purposes by the Count's humour, he exclaims,

Mary I say your Lordship were best to set me to schoole againe, to learne how to deliver a message.

(I, vii, 34-35)

Correct him [himself, Onion]? S'bloud come you and correct him and you have a minde to it. Correct him, that's a good iest I faith, the Steward and you both, come and correct him.

(I, vii, 45-47")

Whereupon Onion's threat is met and he is ejected from the scene.

In Act II another strongly outlined character from the second plot (of the Aulularia) makes his appearance. Having spied Paulo and Angelo haunting his abode, Jaques immediately delineates his moving passion, its effects upon him, and the object to which it is attached. He is presented boldly from the first:

What a could sweat
Flow'd on my browes, and over all my bosome!
Had I not reason? to behold my dore
Beset with vnthrifts, . . . .

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

That I might liue alone once with my gold.
O 'tis a sweet companion! kind & true!
A man may trust it when his father cheats him;
Brother, or friend, or wife! o wondrous pelfe,
"That which makes all men false, is true it selfe.

(II, i, 2-5, 27-31)

In considering the possible motives for his two visitations he also outlines possible convolutions of the action. Finally he decides that lechery is their motive, rather than gain, both of which motives are couched in pejorative terms, and that it is his daughter Rachel they seek. Immediately following this excessive fear is a vivid bit of dialogue in which Jaques outlines Rachel's actions for her during his absence:
Jaques. **Rachel** I must abroad.
Lock thy selfe in, but yet take out the key,
That whosoeuer peepes in at the key-hole,
May yet imagine there is none at home.

Rachel. I will sir.

Jaques. But harke thee **Rachel**: say a theefe should come,
And misse the key, he would resolue indeede
None were at home, and so breake in the rather:
Ope the doore **Rachel**, set it open daughter;
But sit in it thy selfe: and talke alowd,
As if there were some more in house with thee:
Put out the fire, kill the chimnies hart,
That it may breath no more then a dead man.
The more we spare my child, the more we gaine.

(II, i, 53-66)

He takes his leave, and the excitation of his humour has recreated life,
of a peculiar brand, upon the stage: he has been moved to an almost poetic
exaltation in protecting his gold and he has added measurably in a concen­
trated moment to the feeling that here is action being imitated and not
merely character alone. Jaques has for a moment begun to describe that
upward, helical spiral, but it is not sustained and he falls back into
the stratified limits of his own plot.
CHAPTER V

Every Man In His Humour

This play, first acted in 1598, was not printed until 1601 and was not again issued until the Folio edition of 1616, at which time, before being placed first in the edition of Jonson's works, it had undergone an elaborate revision. The revision, which probably took place about 1608-10, embraces an advance in technical and stylistic maturity; the general dramatic substance of plot and character, however, remains essentially the same. The most important change is made in a practical bow to the precept Truth to Life; the setting, formerly Italy, is now transferred to London. In relation to The Case Is Altered, some elements of Plautine comedy are still retained: "the pair of elderly citizens, deceived and outwitted by a pair of lively young men; the shrewd serving-man who plays their game - in the intervals of playing his own; and the bragging soldier."¹ Other literary influences, more distinctly Elizabethan, may have contributed to the nature of this play, which, nevertheless, owes little to the stimulus of previous literature. Chapman's Humourous Day's Mirth may have supplied some hints for the circle of gulls which Jonson introduces in his play. The gull is already a common literary type depicted often with the coarseness and cruelty of Roman satire.² Chapman's Labesha, however, although

¹Herford & Simpson, II, 345.

Possessing most of the traits of the witless pretender, is not yet touched by the acridity of the moral satirist, which first entered the drama with the Stage Quarrel at the end of the decade. In like manner, neither are Jonson's Stephen and Matthew of *Every Man In His Humour* inhibited by the harshness of the moral censor; both move freely in a purely comic world.

Influences aside, however, the important considerations in this play are the advances Jonson makes in character development, labelled by himself "the theory of humours," in the skilful manipulation of plot intrigue, and in the extent to which he brings the one into organic relationship with the other. Jonson sees humanity in broad, sharply defined outlines; for him the subtleties of human nature coalesce to form one animating trait or humour. While this attitude may simplify characterization by the mere fact of elimination, it nevertheless presents a problem of selection. That it constitutes a problem for Jonson is, I think, reflected in the imperfectly defined characters of his early plays. This ambiguity of being and the uncertainty of action result from Jonson's indecisive view of man's nature and his deficient technique imperfectly reflecting this blurred image. He has difficulty in developing an action which will appear organic and natural and at the same time reveal only what he wishes to reveal. Jonson must realize the deficiency, for in the early phases of his drama he continually explicates character by frequent repetition and elaboration of the humours. He has not only to develop in dramatically logical terms a theory inherited from medieval physiology and already enjoying considerable vogue, but he must also, despite the theory's vogue, gain acceptance for it in the dramatic context. For this he does not rely on his dramatic power; instead he buttresses himself uncertainly with the apparatus of
the critical theorist and the classical scholar.

In this play Jonson makes simultaneous advances in both the delineation of character and the manipulation of intrigue; the advances are not always intimately related. In the character of Kitely, however, one can see an intimate relationship between a humour and the growth of action. Kitely is the single dominating image on the stage; he is the character best illustrating the state wherein

... some one peculiar quality
Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluctions, all to runne one way;

(EMOH, 2nd Sounding, 105-108)

Although he sometimes does so with difficulty, Kitely does originate his own action. That action which swirls around him, from the machinations of Brainworm and Wellbred, although skilfully handled and freely moving, approaches closer to mere intrigue than to strongly motivated action. Kitely embodies the dominant trait which controls the direct action and foreshadows the dominant character which, in Jonson's later plays, provides a focus for synthesizing actions into an articulated plot.

Others in the play do of course possess humours, but theirs illustrate "the popular usage of the word" for the mere "apish, or phantasticke straine" which leads a coxcomb to don "a pyed feather" or a "three pild ruff." Their humours are of an evanescent quality. An exception to both these humour types is Bobadill, the braggart soldier, who stands caught somewhere between the strong, distinctively dressed humour character and the superficially beribboned gull. His is a more complex character, for, while his nature as a fraud and braggart leads him into ridiculous and
revealing action, Jonson at the same time allows him long set speeches in which he builds an image of himself which threatens that revealed in his actions. His self-projected image gains credence by the realistically detailed way in which he approaches its construction and by the feigned hesitation of his revelation of prowess - a hesitation overcome by the ironic queries of Edward Knowell and Wellbred. Bobadill does not quite fit in this play; he is not quite firmly imbedded in the satiric rationale or the comic mode. In him there is an element of aspiration which in the long set speeches unaccompanied by contradictory action almost escapes ridicule. The ambiguity of his being is not to be found in later characters, such as Sir Epicure Mammon of The Alchemist, where condemnation is inherent in each line of Sir Epicure's richly exotic and aspiring speeches.

The dominant trait which might for a Tamburlaine lift him towards divinity with a single-souled ardour is in Jonson paralleled and supplanted by the characteristic folly. One sees now, as the Elizabethans were themselves seeing, the other side of the coin, and the odor of cynicism drifts to the forefront. The same problem which arose in The Case Is Altered here presents itself again: do men act from base motives or good motives? Can men enjoy the fullness of their natures and act still in a morally sound way? In Every Man In His Humour there is still present the implication that if men but would, they could act in accordance with nature and seem as "perfect, proper, and possesst/ As breath, with life." Knowell gives good advice and so does Kitely; Knowell would have Stephen be wise and contain himself and to make not a false "blaze of gentrie" extinguishable by a "little puffe of scorne;" Kitely can see in Wellbred a course so
irregular, so loose, so affected that nothing he now does becomes "him as his owne." Both are displaying follies, which "by loving still" when they "know th'are ill" can become crimes.

Some of the characters then realize their own follies and they have sufficient insight to delineate the humours of others; they even have sufficient insight to delineate their own humours: Knowell can say that too much affection makes a father a fool and Kitely knows that his jealousy has turned his brain to a mere "houre-glasse" for the running sands of barren suspicion." But both seem unable to act upon this knowledge in a way which will change the course of action. Knowell Senior's "too much affection" leads him in suspicious pursuit of his son, and Kitely's jealousy continues to suspect and to scheme. Immediately after his wise advice to Stephen, Knowell is revealed as a "carefull Costar'monger" who "numbers his greene apricots, euening, and morning." Kitely, after his knowing delineation of Wellbred's "loss of grace," succeeds only in firing another humour as Downright explodes in "'Sdeath, he [Wellbred] mads me . . .;" and he then proceeds to reveal a knowledge of his own humour. That humour nevertheless reasserts itself. There is present in the play the wisdom of words, but it is to no effect, and the capacity for enlightenment which can lead to the attainment of wisdom and grace seems not to exist in the nature of the characters' being, and so not in the nature of their world. If wisdom or grace comes, it comes as a "miracle," as it does for Sordido in Every Man Out Of His Humour; it is an outside force having no particle of its existence in the nature of things or men and it shortly vanishes.
Kitely's description of his brain as an "houre-glasse,/ Wherein
my' imaginations runne, like sands," is a testament to the disintegration
of will and purpose. The humour growing and feeding on itself has brought
about a destruction of moral fiber, and of reason, but the humour itself
exists as the result of a sharply divided nature. Measured against the
dogmatic frame of Jonson's dramatic picture, that nature has become a
negative one, negative because the frame, but not the canvas, includes
the positive elements of man's nature. In the Elizabethan world view
these elements had been part of an organic whole – God and law and justice
had existed in nature, in society, and in men. No matter how imperfectly
realized, there had been reciprocity between man and the correspondences
of his world as he conceived it. Whereas Tamburlaine's single-souled
ardours are "lift upward and divine", Kitely lacks the mind's erection
to simply "shake the feauer off" and act:

Ah, but what miserie' is it, to know this?
Or, knowing it, to want the mindes erection,
In such extremes?
(II, iii, 70-72)

If Kitely cannot aspire in the same way as Tamburlaine, he is going to
spend his passion on something, and he spends it on a cannibalistic dissipa-
tion which leads him to the verge of collapse. That collapse is brought
about simply by a "little puffe of scorne" administered from without.

The attitude exemplified by Kitely, and pervading the play in general,
is negative in another way: if one disallows man his capacity for aspira-
tion towards divinity, one may too easily deny him his capacity for good
as well as bad. The tendency is to assume and to allow only the worst in
man, and the mind gives itself over to base thoughts and suspicions. In his speech in Act I, scene i, Kitely assumes that once the opportunity presents itself his wife will cuckold him and he would therefore be a fool to give her that opportunity. But he makes himself the greater fool by giving his jealousy the opportunity to construct an action which does not exist. The action does not exist in the world about him; it exists more intolerably in his mind.

In the scene with Cash (Act III, sc. iii) Kitely attempts to initiate a particular action. He wishes to have his wife watched, but he is torn between his jealous suspicions of his wife and his fear of Cash's betrayal, with the consequent loss of "fame" in the talk of "th' Exchange." His jealousy and his fear are indicative of a fundamental assumption about human nature. These two motives are the bases for his action, and if they are not "base", they are negative, negative when measured against positive values which have by the advent of this play retreated farther into the shadowy distance. In *The Case Is Altered* there was still a choice and the choice was a fairly evident one; now it occurs that a choice has been made, but a consciousness of the nature of that choice still remains. As a result, Kitely has difficulty in acting upon his negatively conceived principles. Both he and Knowell can still give seasonable, wise advice on "right" behavior and put some faith still in "the wit of humanitie." The accused characters are not guilty of their imagined sins, and the comic tone remains perfectly intact as the worldly-wise judge administers his shrewd, but humane justice.

The humour then is the result of a certain fundamental assumption about human nature. That assumption reveals itself in a particular way,
that is, the humour, which is dramatically embodied in character and
dramatically implemented through a specific outlet. The specific outlet,
such as jealousy, fear, or avarice, generates action and language revealing
the nature of the humour to the audience. The clearer, the stronger, and
the more unified the motive, or humour, the more direct, the more emphatic,
and the more certain is the line of action.

It is notable in this play that the general plot lines are still
not intimately connected with or controlled by the forceful humour character.
Unlike Volpone and Mosca, Kitely and Brainworm are not partners in mischief
or in crime. They do not make of evil a positive good and imbue their
cozening with the importance of an art or profession. Kitely and Brainworm
do not occupy within the play the same circle from which radiate the spokes
of action: Kitely gives birth to action in close relationship to his
humour, but it is Brainworm who, from the sheer love of mischief, sustains,
as did Juniper and Onion in a more diffuse way for the previous play, the
general strands of the plot. It is Brainworm who is the official and
self-appointed stage manager of the dance of life that whirls about him.

At the beginning of scene iv in Act II Brainworm appears to hold
the center of the stage in giving a summary of the action thus far and
in announcing the progress of future action:

Well, the troth is, my old master intends
to follow my yong, drie foot, ouer More-Fields, to London,
this morning: now I, knowing, of this hunting-match, or
rather conspiracie, and to insinuate with my: yong master
(for so must we that are blew-waiters, and men of hope
and servuice doe, or perhaps wee may weare motley at the
yeeres end, and who weares motley, you know) haue got
me afore, in this desguise, determining here to lye in
ambuscade, and intercept him, in the mid-way.

(II, iv, 8-16)
He reveals his function in the play as one, who, having been transformed from "a poore creature," a created character acted upon rather than acting, is now become a creator. But it is Brainworm who transforms himself into this role to insinuate himself with his young master. He, unlike Kitely, is relatively free of the magnetic field of humours and can act without a deeply engrained humour motivation. As a result, there is not the intimate connection between humour (or motivation) and action that is found in Kitely. Brainworm enjoys the role of creator, for he could well have chosen his old master in whose services to insinuate himself. He simply acts from a rather general love of mischief. Like the vices of the morality plays, who likewise act from a pure love of mischief, he is useful in getting the plot going with a minimum of motivation. In this sense he is a stage convention. Unlike Kitely, his character does not grow from the thought of the play, but he is a suitable and effective agent for comedy. His performance does in fact conform to the nature which he ascribes to himself: he does drift, anchorless and disembodied, about the plot, no longer "a poore creature," to materialize suddenly as "a poore soldiier," as Formall, and as an arresting officer. The nature of Brainworm's self-assumed role does not, however, require that he move in harmony with certain pre-determining or self-determining motives, as does Kitely. His whims, his fancies, allow him reasonably "free" movement. His is the necessary counterpoint to Kitely's spiralling, somewhat stilted, action. Jonson has not yet succeeded in combining motivated character begetting unified action with an overall synthesis of these actions. In other words Jonson has not achieved a completely coherent plot, a plot in which all
points touch on all other points either logically or intelligibly or naturally.³ Brainworm then holds up the general lines of the plot; he keeps the "unrelated" strands of action going when they threaten to collapse from lack of motivation. Through him, many of the characters are taken to where they must go; rather like the pawns in chess they are picked up, transported, and guided by the manipulator's intellect, an intellect which knows where they should be placed, but does not communicate to them the knowledge of why they should be placed there. As a result, they cannot possibly move there by themselves. Brainworm's position as detached manipulator of the plot makes him appear twice removed from the creative force. Through him other characters are moved in ways which seem three times removed from the informing power of their source. For instance, through Brainworm, Knowell, Bobadill, Matthew, and Downright all eventually find themselves before the Justice. Edmund Wilson describes transactions of this kind in a most unflattering manner:

Jonson also lacks natural invention, and his theatre has little organic life. His plots are incoherent and clumsy; his juxtapositions of elements are too often like the mechanical mixtures of chemistry that produce no molecular reactions. His chief artifices for making something happen are to introduce his characters in impossible disguises and to have them play incredible practical jokes.⁴

³One may refer here to Aristotle's definition of the plot: "the plot is the imitation of the action. By plot I mean the synthesis of the individual actions . . . ." Gilbert, p. 76.

Kitely, however, moves himself along, no matter how uncertainly, up until Act IV, scene viii, when he begins to be acted upon. Brainworm, in the disguise of Clement's man, lures Kitely away from his (Kitely's) house with a false message. Upon returning, he discovers his wife's absence. He is informed by Wellbred of her whereabouts; as a result of his previous attitudes and past actions and because of the false message, he goes to Cob's house with the preconceived certitude of his wife's guilt. Once there, despite the fact that the refutation of his fears is beginning to manifest itself, he still possesses enough of his blind humour to initiate the next action:

Well, good-wife BA'D, COBS wife; and you,
That make your husband such a hoddie-doddie;
And you, yong apple-squire; and old cuckold-maker;
Ile ha' you every one before a Justice:
Nay, you shall answere it, I charge you goe.

(IV, x, 55-59)

Here towards the end of the play, Wellbred assumes part of Brainworm's function and manipulates the movement of this portion of the plot. It is he who sends Dame Kitely off to Cob's and he again who is responsible for hurrying Kitely thence. He, together with Edward Knowell, has assisted in displaying for the audience the humours of Matthew, Stephen, and Bobadill. In doing so, he satisfies his own humour for a sport which sets off in opposition to the foppish humours of the three gulls his own fancied sophistication, a sophistication as false in its pretensions as those to which it opposes itself. At the beginning of the play he sets the stage for this movement by marshalling together his characters and by inviting a select audience - Edward Knowell, who brings with him another member of the dramatis personae (Stephen) to assist his friend and social mentor in the play business at hand.
The two principal manipulators, Wellbred and Brainworm, and as a result, the two movements, criss-cross at certain points. Although Brainworm himself decides to assume the role of a "creator" and to follow Knowell, it is Wellbred who tells him where Knowell is to go (Cob's house) and it is Wellbred again who is responsible for Brainworm's luring Kitely from his home. On the other hand, although Wellbred and Edward Knowell have assisted at the coursing of the humours of Bobadill and Matthew, it is Brainworm who causes their appearance at Clement's. He does so unwittingly, it seems, for by his physical presence alone and his sheer love of disguise, by his appearance to Matthew and Bobadill at no one's instigation, dressed as Formall, without reason or provocation, he fires off a series of actions which brings Matthew, Bobadill, and Downright to the court of Justice.

Kitely remains the most strongly and sharply defined character, He alone originates most exclusively his own action, albeit he does so with severe birth pangs. Others, Matthew, Stephen, and Bobadill, also suffer from humours, but theirs are of the surface, light and shifting; they can be easily played upon, and consequently displayed, by the slightest prompting. Of these three gulls it is Bobadill who is the most subtly and the most winningly drawn. Herford and Simpson in their introduction to this play attempt to describe the nature of his attraction:

... Bobadill is not the gull of pure breed any more than he is the bragging soldier of tradition. The gull was a witless pretender to accomplish­ments and valour. Bobadill, however empty his pretensions to valour, is not without a certain
order of accomplishment . . . There is talent in the design and handling of his camouflage.\(^5\)

He approaches two or three conventional types, but it is to Jonson's credit that he falls not within any one of them; instead, he stands unique—an independent and distinctive creation. Of him, one might say, as Well-bred and Edward Knowell say of Brainworm, he is an architect rather than a mere artificer:

Wellbred. Why, BRAYNE-WORME, who would haue thought thou hadst beene such an artificer?

E. Knowell. An artificer! An architect! (III, v, 24-26)

He constructs his own character, "the camouflage" of his character, with some overall design; he erects an edifice: he does not on the one hand suspend himself in mere filigree, nor does he on the other simply stack brick upon brick. Edward Knowell says again of Brainworm,

He had so writhen himselfe, into the habit of one of your poore Infanterie, . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Into the likenesse of one of these Reformado's had he moulded himselfe so perfectly, observering every tricke of their action, as varying the accent, swearing with an emphasis, indeed all, with so speciall, and exquisite a grace, that (hadst thou seene him) thou would'st haue sworne, he might haue beene Serieant-Maior, if not Lieutenant-Coronell to the Regiment. (III, v, 10-11, 17-23)

But this praise might more aptly be applied to Bobadill, for it is he who succeeds in the actual language and action of the play in constructing a many-faceted character for himself. One does not see Brainworm perform

\(^5\) Herford & Simpson, I, 352.
a similar feat, and there is only Edward Knowell's word for it that he has
done so. In the scene where Brainworm, in his newly-donned disguise,
accosts Edward and Stephen, it is not by means of language or "varying
the accent" but by a change in the habit of dress only. Brainworm is an
architect of the plot, a contriver weaving the strands of action into
something of an overall design, but he is only an artificer of character.
Babadill is an architect of character but only an artificer in action.
He does not manipulate himself; he is only manipulated. The moment he
moves into action the edifice of his being collapses and he is easy prey
to Downright's bastinado and Brainworm's tricks.

Babadill creates the image of himself, not as Brainworm does, in
terms of action to be performed in the plot (see Act II, scs. iv-v), but
in terms of fanciful past action and projected future action standing
completely outside the regular plot lines and having no possibility of
consummation within the play:

Babadill to Edward Knowell.

Why thus, sir. I would select nineteen, more, to
my selfe, throughout the land; gentlemen they should bee
of good spirit, strong, and able constitution, I would choose
them by an instinct, a character, that I have: and I would
 teach these nineteen, the speciall rules, as your Punto,
your Reuerso, your Stoccata, your Imbroccata, your Passada,
your Montanto: till they could all play very neare, or
altogether as well as my selfe. This done, say the enemie
were fourtie thousand strong, we twentie would come into
the field, the tenth of March, or thereabouts; and wee
would challenge twentie of the enemie; they could not,
in their honour, refuse vs, well, wee would kill them:
challenge twentie more, kill them; twentie more, kill them;
twentie more, kill them too: and thus, would we kill,
every man, his twentie a day, that's twentie score; twentie
score, that's two hundreth; two hundreth a day, fiue dayes
a thousand; fourtie thousand; fourtie times fiue, fiue times
fortie, two hundredth dayes kills them all vp, by computation. And this, will I venture my poore gentleman-like caracasse, to performe (provided, there bee no treason practis'd vpon us) by faire, and discreet manhood, that is ciuilly by the sword.

(IV, vii, 73-94)

This speech cannot be described as simply pathetic, in the sense of the merely transitory or fleeting emotion, for it adds strength to those permanent lineaments which make up his ethos. His is not a fanciful dream, transplanted from the soil of Elizabethan heroics, mounting "upward and sublime" without considering the concrete steps on which it must mount. He will ask how as well. He begins with an ingredient proper to Elizabethan heroics; he would choose his men by "an instinct, a character, that I have;" but he shifts in midstream to another method which in its presentation seems alien to the first: he will not spur his men into battle with unthinking, emotional Excelsiors; he will train them with scientific accuracy and their feats of bravery will be performed with a similar precision and control. For a moment he aspires and he does so not in full-bodied emotionalism but in a severely factual manner - a manner which underlines the extent of his own belief and makes him look all the more ridiculous when untoward events later reveal him a coward. With Bobadill's speeches, however, an actor can momentarily usurp the stage, and the action which follows does not measurably reduce the image which he can create.

6 The words pathos and ethos would seem, like so many other words, to possess their meanings in opposition one to the other. Pathos means the quality of the transient or emotional, whereas ethos refers to something of more permanence, that is, a person's character or characteristic spirit, his nature or disposition.
To sum up, at this early stage in the development of Jonson's drama, the relatively strong humour character still acts, but haltingly so, upon negatively conceived values. His action is halting because a consciousness of their positive counterparts still remains in the background; yet his actions, unlike the ever-shifting frivolities of the gulls, are more peculiarly his own. The gulls display their wares at the hint of an outside stimulus, but Kitely, although he too is acted upon, has an opportunity in the first part of the play to establish his own action, and he is acted upon primarily by his humour. In this play the strong humourist is not yet his own stage manager; Brainworm, who acts simply from the general love of mischief, is the "official" manipulator of the plot.

Later, with Volpone, the strong dominating character assumes direction of the play, although he possesses a more than competent "assistant" in the person of Mosca. There is no hesitation here and no uncertainty; Volpone, and later Mosca, can pull the strings of the plot with the complete relish of a man who has decided the way of the world. Negative values, negative when measured against positive ones, have here, in Volpone, become positive, positive when the prior set of positives has been forgotten - and the Fox has no difficulty in acting. Jonson cannot, however, let him escape, despite the fact that he has endowed him with the strength to do so. The abstract spectre of Justice is again introduced to derail the miscreant. In The Alchemist Jonson sets his rogues completely free. The sinister flavor of tragedy is not as strong here, as in Volpone, and
the spectre of Justice has completely disappeared. In *Every Man In His Humour* the comic tone is perfectly preserved: this is not yet a stricken society or an evil universe in which vice, animating the soul of things, can "Put motion in a stone, strike fire from ice:" the inhabitants are healthy and robust, full of zest, merriment, and hearty good fun - and withall quite harmless.
CHAPTER VI

Every Man Out Of His Humour

This play, first entered in the Stationer's Register on April 8, 1600, and published in that same year, was probably finished towards the end of 1599. With the advent of this play one witnesses in Jonson's dramatic world a development of the satiric spirit, a solidification of the dramatist's point of view, and a disintegration of dramatic form. Jonson is experimenting, but in traversing the traditional Elizabethan comic forms he does not, here at least, evolve a product sufficiently dramatic. In the experiment one sees him attempting to find a form adequate and appropriate to a point of view now becoming, as it discards insoluble and alien elements, tougher and stronger in its being, more passionate in its implementation.

The satirist is supposedly one who criticizes in hopes of bringing about a reformation; he therefore believes a reformation is possible. The mere fact of the creation of art would seem a testament to this belief. In the Prologue to Every Man In His Humour Jonson states that his purpose is to "sport with humane follies, not with crimes;" again in the Prologue to The Alchemist he reaffirms his purpose:

Though this pen
Did never aim to grieve, but better men

They are so natural follies, but so shown,
As even the doers may see, and yet not own.

(11-12, 23-24)

His stated purpose echoes the "Ciceronian" definition of comedy given by Cordatus in Every Man Out Of His Humour as being "a thing throughout pleasant, and ridiculous and accommodated to the correction of manners."
It would seem then that Jonson proposes to satirize those superficial, evanescent derangements which are relatively harmless and can be easily discarded, bad habits which arise when "all are fall'n", youth from their fear:/ And age, from that, which bred it, good example."\(^1\) In *Every Man In His Humour* the humours are superficial. Generally, they are not yet deeper "than the coate, or shirt, or skin;" they have not yet gone into the bone or stained unto the liver and heart. This may have happened, but it has done so only "in some" and it is still a "learn'd" thing. Youth learns its vices from the bad example of old age; in the cradle it sucks in with the mother's milk the "ill customs" of its inadequate moral mentors. In Knowell's analysis of the time's follies the burden of the blame rests with surrounding circumstances, with environment, but when he says "the die goes deeper then the coate" and "staines, unto the liver, and heart" he comes dangerously close to saying it is born in the heart and bred in the bone. In this play, however, the humour is still a folly which can be discarded like a coat or shirt befouled by ill use. In this sense a permanent change, in character is neither necessary nor possible. With the character of Kitely, the humour begins to assume a new intensity, but in general the follies remain superficial and permanent change is of little consequence. The comic world, with its comic resolution, emerges intact, its tone unimpaired by serious satire.

In *Every Man Out Of His Humour*, however, Asper condemns the superficial or affected folly; again the imagery is drawn from articles of clothing:

\(^1\) *Every Man In His Humour*, II, v, 12-13.
This may be truly said to be a Humour.
But that a rooke, in wearing a pyed feather,
The cable hat-band, or the three-pild ruffe,
A yard of shoetye, or the Swissers knot
On his French garters, should affect a Humour!
O, 'tis more than most ridiculous.
(2nd Sounding, 109-114)

Heretofore, characters have described the humour in terms analagous to
the physical, but in this play, the humour is given for the first time an
essential physical basis, and an analogy is then drawn between the physical
and the spiritual. The humour now begins to "smell of sinne", and Macilente's
"strict hand" is "made to ceaze on vice" and "crimes". He inveighs against

... such, whose faces are all zeale,
And with the words of HERCVLES invade
Such crimes as these! that will not smell of sinne,
But seeme as they were made of sanctitie!
Religion in their garments, and their haire
Cut shorter then their eye-browes!
(2nd Sounding, 38-43)

Cordatus tells him the way of the world:

Vnlesse your breath had power
To melt the world, and mould it new againe,
It is in vaine, to spend it in these moods.
(2nd Sounding, 47-50)

If he would have a change, there must be a new creation. In the meantime,
there is little which can offer assistance, except perhaps Poesy. Philosophy
may be true, but its theories are impractical guides in the actual world:

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

There is no taste in this Philosophie,

I looke into the world, and there I meet
With objects, that doe strike my bloud-shot eyes
Into my braine:
(I,i, 1-4, 8, 16-18)
Macilente must satisfy himself with being a scourge of the times, but he cannot give vent to the reforming spirit in purity of motive. He must partake of the corruption of the times and enter the dramatic world under the affliction of the "new disease".

When I see these [the fortunate ones] (I say) and view my selfe,
I wish the organs of my sight were crackt;
And that the engine of my griefe could cast
Mine eye-balls, like two globes of wild-fire forth,
To melt this vnproportion'd frame of nature.
(I, i, 24-28)

The point is re-emphasized by the Grex in its distinction between envy and hate. The transformation of Asper, a member of the chorus, into Macilente, a member of the humour characters, makes it possible for Jonson to greatly intensify the satire and yet remain within the comic mode. Macilente's exclaims against his fellows cannot be taken too seriously, for he shares their humourous world. In addition, his condemnations, uttered with great passion, seem supported not by the reality of the humour characterization but rather by the discussions of humour in the choral interludes, particularly at the beginning of the play. When Macilente utters his imprecations, one does not see a justifiable reaction to an outrageous humour; one is instead reminded of similar remarks by Asper and the theoretical discussions of humour. As a result of this failure of integration the scourge seems not in the nature of things; no moral order appears to pervade this universe.

Originally, this play ended with the appearance of the Queen, the sight of whom causes Macilente to exclaim,

Neuer till now did obiect greet mine eyes
With any light content: but in her graces,
All my malicious powers haue lost their stings.
Enuie is fled my soule, at sight of her,
And shee hath chac'd all black thoughts from my bosome,
Like as the sunne doth darkenesse from the world.
(V, xi, 1-5)

The representative of the moral order stands outside the play proper, and Jonson must have sensed its artificiality in removing it from the final version. The disappearance of Sordido's humour earlier in the play (III, viii) seems likewise to depend on some kind of moral framework not inherent to the play. Echoes of the medieval scheme of divine redemption are heard in Sordido's speech of repentance, and the rustics exclaim, "O miracle! see when a man ha's grace!" The conversion remains, however, an inorganic fixture in the play. The "knowledge" which leads to Sordido's repentance is not that of a divine law and a divine plan of the universe. Even though Sordido concludes that "No life is blest, that is not grac't with loue," there is no preparation for this enlightenment. The moment when love might have entered humanly or naturally immediately precedes this speech. Sordido receives a letter from his son. After having read it, he swears that "my son and daughter shall starue ere they touch it [his gold]."

This scene of Sordido's conversion does not emerge then with its suggested theological framework intact, nor is there sufficient motivation in the human action. His repentance is brought about by a few curses from those he has just called "licentious rogues," "poor wormes," and "Thred-bare horse-bread-eating rascals":

What curses breathe these men! how have my deeds
Made my lookes differ from another mans,
That they should thus detest, and lothe my life!
Out on my wretched humour... . . . . . 

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

I'le make faire amends
For my foule errors past... . . .
(III, viii, 36-40, 42-43)
A "state of grace" is something which descends from above upon one, who, within the play, has not been adequately prepared to receive it. Its advent may be preceded by an uncomplimentary reflection in the eyes of others, but it is only a reflection and the reflection is temporary. It does not lead to a permanent comprehension of the human part in the miracle of grace, and no self-knowledge is achieved. The "miracle" appears as something outside and alien to the nature of the characters of this dramatic world.

By implication the real salvation remains outside the play itself. At the end of the play, when Macilente has been purged of his humour and his soul is at peace, Jonson reaffirms through Macilente that he has indeed shown an image of the times:

I am so farre from malicing their states
That I begin to pitty them. It grieues me
To thinke they haue a being. I could wish
They might turne wise vpon it, and be sau'd now,
So heauen were pleas'd: but let them vanish, vapors.
Gentlemen, how like you it? has't not beene tedious?
(V,xi, 61-66)

Macilente reasserts that these vapors "have a being". He reaffirms the nature of the world he has had a part in depicting. For the present this world is terminated, but he wishes that his fellows could now turn wise upon their lessons and be saved. The whole tenor of the play, including the ambiguity of Macilente's concluding "So heau'n were pleased", seems to imply that this possibility has retreated beyond man's grasp and depends too entirely on heaven's being pleased to grant arbitrarily a state of humanly incomprehensible and humanly undeserved grace.
In *Every Man In His Humour* the follies were of a superficial quality, and many characters in the present play possess only superficial humours, but the tone of this play, transmitted by the Grex and Macilente, indicates now a more serious and more permanent source. The reformation still touches only the transitory manifestation of that permanent source of derangement. According to the humour theory in vogue, morality depended on a balancing of the humours. If no balance is either potential or possible, and if the humour becomes in itself a vice or sin, and if there is no good affixed to this negative state, then change is both more important and more impossible. Jonson must realize his predicament. In *Volpone* the characters themselves embody that which is simply theoretical discussion in *Every Man Out Of His Humour*. Volpone and Mosca remain absolutely true to their negatives, and a strong, coherent dramatic world emerges.

This play flows with a new intensity of feeling, unwitnessed heretofore in Jonson's drama: Asper's fierce indignation and Macilente's seething envy are almost pure and undefiled. But in allowing these passions to flow so freely and strongly, Jonson has not made a commensurate adjustment in form that will give them adequate dramatic control and expression. The first two-thirds of the play is occupied almost completely with character sketches, with providing a series of reflected images in a sterile glass of form. It is not until the fourth act of the play that Macilente begins to

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2Eliot, in his analysis of the spirit of envy in the Induction to the *Poetaster*, says, "It is not human life that informs envy and Sylla's ghost, but it is energy of which human life is only another variety." Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p. 100.
pull the strings of action. In the "calme of his humour" he plots, and

hee is so full with 'hem [malicious thoughts]
that you shall see the very torrent of his enuie breake forth
like a land-floud: and, against the course of all their affections
oppose it selfe so violently, that you will almost
have wonder to thinke, how 'tis possible the current of their
dispositions shall receiue so quick, and strong an alteration.
(IV, viii, 154-159)

It is Macilente, the strongest humour in the play, who is chiefly responsible,
with the aid of his admiring implement, Buffone, for the name of action
(with the exception of Sordido's purgation). He does not bring forth his
own action in the way that Kitely does; instead he pushes others into
actions which bring about his own purging. He combines in his function
something of both Kitely and Brainworm, but is not, like Volpone, intimately
involved in the action which he implements. In the first part of the play
when his envy burns with a self-consuming force, his energies are devoted
to standing on the side-lines and counterpointing the deformities of the
other characters. He does this with a wrath which would indeed seem to
make his eye-balls crack and burst forth into two globes of wild-fire.
This violent emotion, however, helps to maintain the life of this portion
of the play.

The business of the chorus is also to aid in character building and
to substitute for adequate dramatic structure and action an explanation by
means of an appeal to classical model and definition. In the opening scenes,
when Carlo Buffone and Macilente are introduced, the Grex provides further
sketches to round out what the characters have already revealed of themselves.
Carlo in his introductory speech has devoted his ability as jester primarily
to jibing at the author rather than programming his own humour. Cordatus,
then supplies for Mitis and for the audience a string of epigrammatic traits in which to clothe Carlo:

He is one, the Author calls him CARLO BUFFONE, an impudent common iester, a violent rayler, and an incomprehensible Epicure; one, whose company is desir'd of all men, but belov'd of none; hee will sooner lose his soule then a iest, and prophane eu'en the most holy things, to excite laughter: no honorable or reuerend personage whatsoeuer, can come within the reach of his eye, but is turn'd into all manner of varietie, by his adult'rate simile's.

(Prologue, 3rd Sounding, 356-364)

Macilente, on the other hand, concentrates upon his self-delineation, and the Grex merely announces "this is your envious man". After the two principal characters have made their debut, the Grex continues to control the play's movement and introduces them again, in scene two, now in company with Sogliardo who reveals the great aspiration of his life - to be a gentleman at any cost. Both the Grex and Macilente then comment on the scene, Macilente with a fury which does not seem directly proportional to the folly revealed:

O, I could eate my entrailes,  
And sinke my soule into the earth with sorrow.  
(I, ii, 35-36)

Macilente now assumes control from the Chorus and makes the next introduction - Sordido, who in turn introduces his own humour of avarice. A scream of pain is wrung from Macilente, who, for the benefit of the audience, outlines in indignation the fuller implications of Sordido's affliction:

Is't possible that such a spacious villaine  
Should liue, and not be plagu'd? or lies he hid  
Within the wrinckled bosome of the world,  
Where heauen cannot see him? Sbloud (me thinkes)
'Tis rare, and strange, that he should breathe, and
walke,
Feede with digestion, sleepe, enjoy his health,
And (like a boist'rous whale, swallowing the poore)
Still swimme in wealth, and pleasure!
(I, iii, 67-74)

The Chorus takes the opportunity of this fulsome expression by Macilente
to explain the nature of envy as opposed to hate. Then they return to
introducing - bringing forth again Buffone and a new "bright-shining
gallant" Fastidious Briske. By the time Briske has indulged his humour
in talking of excellent hobby horses, the Chorus echoes the opinion of the
auditors concerning the whole substance of the play thus far:

Why, this fellowes discourse were nothing, but for
the word Humour.
(II, i, 56-57)

Jonson's critical faculty tells him how his play is being received
by his audience, and by the middle of the Third Act he feels the necessity
of offering, by his own admission for lack of a better, a "classical"
definition of comedy:

You say well, but I would faine heare one of these
autumne-judgements define once, Quid sit Comoedia? if he
cannot, let him content himself with CICEROS definition
(till hee haue strength to propose to himself a better) who
would haue a Comoedie to be Imitatio vitae, Speculum
consuetudinis, Imago veritatis; a thing throughout pleasant,
and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of
manners; if the maker haue fail'd in any particle of this,
they may worthily taxe him, but if not, why - be you (that
are for them) silent, as I will bee for him; and give way to
the actors.
(III, vi, 202-216)

The author is attempting an image of the times, but it is a rather roughly
distorted image: his mirror flickers with tongues of flame, trembling
and threatening to burst into a conflagration; it does not pulsate with
the lifelike image of nature, nor show "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

Jonson's "image of the times" rarely lacks form, but frequently it does want "body" and "pressure". Indeed, much of it is form, form rather than imitation or creation. It is not form simply for the purposes of construction and technique; it is form as the substance of his art as well - a perversion of the creative process. Two critical terms often used in connection with the discussion of literary modes are essence, the "form-giving cause," and idea, the "form of a form-giving cause". Less abstract terms better applied to art itself might be generating idea and shape. The first has only a spiritual birth in the artist. In the creation of art it is the intangible, spiritual imperative and becomes an inextricable part of the shape, the result or fulfillment of which it controls. The shape is the final outcome of imitation.

Chartres, Venus de Milo, Madonna of the Rocks, each of these possesses a shape as the result of a generating idea conceived by someone capable of conceiving. The most obvious part of that shape is its physical manifestation, that phenomenal quality which is first to strike the eye. This physical manifestation can be copied-for instance, something may be reproduced exactly according to certain physical proportions - but only the shape can be imitated. If art is to be an imitation of life, the generating idea must be caught from the shape of life - a shape whose infinity pervades life's every physical manifestation. The kind of outlet it chooses for expression does not matter, for the channels to life's Truth are numberless. Though one may say no Truth is there, one may yet
perceive the Truth, and still it will be there. And one may say Truth is there, but not perceive the Truth, and yet it will be there.

For Jonson the generating idea is much constrained in the early phases of his work. With Volpone it finally bursts forth, only to be brought under the rigid control of his form again later. The "form of the form-giving cause" continually intrudes upon the "form-giving cause." As a result, many of his characters emerge as amorphous in the full artistic sense. They possess the form but not the shape of life. Jonson sees his fellow men assuming and personating empty forms, but he also chooses to see them thus. Empty forms do not easily generate action which can reveal character. Two examples from Every Man Out Of His Humour will illustrate how his excursions into characters, subtle as they may be, too often remain static images for the mind's contemplation.

In Act IV, scene v, Sogliardo appears with his newly bought tutor, Cavalier Shift, the man of many faces and many names, who swears that he is, but is not what he swears. Sogliardo begs his good Pylades to "discourse a robberie, or two,/ to satisfie these gentlemen of thy worth," and Shift completes the conceit by addressing his employer as "my deare Orestes." The other characters pick up the pattern and fill it out with further examples:

Carlo. O, it's an old stale enterlude deuice: No, I'le giue you names my selxe, looke you, he shall be your IVDAS, and you shall bee his Elder tree, to hang on.

Macilente. Nay, rather, let him be captaine POD, and this his Motion; for he does nothing but shew him.

Carlo. Excellent: or thus, you shall bee HOLDEN, and hee your Camel.
Shift. You do not mean to ride, gentlemen?

Puntarvolo. Faith, let me end it for you, gallants: you shall be his Countenance, and he your Resolution.

Sogliardo. Troth, that's pretty: how say you, Caulier, shalt be so?

Carlo. I, I, most voices.

Shift. Faith, I am easily yeelding to any good impressions.

Sogliardo. Then giue hands, good Resolution.

(IV, v, 59-74)

Herein is revealed something not only of Jonson's dramatic technique but also of the world's reflection in his eyes. The relationship, in classical myth, legend, and literature, of Orestes to Pylades, like that of Horatio to Hamlet, was a vital and organic, albeit a quiet, one. In the Choephoroe of Aeschylus, based both on classical legend and early ritual, Pylades, though he is present throughout the play, speaks only three lines. When Orestes is carrying out the terms of his oath, sworn at Delphi, to avenge King Agamemnon's murder, and having slain Aegisthus is about to send his mother to the embrace of her dead lover, he pauses, he vacillates with misgivings:

Orestes. Dare I to shrink and spare? speak, Pylades.

Pylades. Where then would fall the hest at Delphi given,
   Yet unfulfilled? where then thine oath, sworn true?
   Choose thou the hate of all men, not of Gods.

Pylades serves as Orestes's divine conscience and maintains for him in the face of the human pity of this human agent his commitment to a higher design. Pylades is not a man of action, he is not even a man of words, but he is Orestes's resolution, the keeper of the spiritual gates of
horn and ivory. He allows passage only to the true dreams, and in allowing them issuance through the Gate of Horn, he helps Orestes retain his connection with the Gods. Orestes then fulfills his oath, and in doing so, in imitating the gods rather than men, he reasserts the divinity within him (that divine half of his daimon or semi-divine nature), and carries out his Destiny.

Shift, is Sogliardo's resolution, but he, as his name implies, does not provide Sogliardo with a focus on which to fix his countenance; he, Resolution, forms not for Sogliardo a countenance, an impression, a character, but rather easily yields himself to any good "impressions". Sogliardo seeks for his image or character, the passing face and show of a gentleman, from a shifting phantom composed only of "shreds and patches".

In personating such a phantom Sogliardo pursues a course as empty and senseless as that of Buffone, when he pledges himself into drunkenness at the Miter. The revelation of character made here, however, is done

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3 The name Pylades is derived from pule; (singular) meaning one wing of a pair of double gates. The suffix means "man of".

I do not say that Jonson necessarily intended this parallel, at least not to the extent that I have drawn it, but it is certainly well placed.

4 In the Greek the word daimon means "spiritual or semi-divine, being inferior to the Gods," but it also means Destiny, and would illustrate the Heracleitian concept of "A man's character is his destiny."
in an action rather than in a conceit or image. The action is an isolated one, a scene constructed within a scene. Buffone, it seems, imitates only the shadow of himself; he sets two cups apart, and first drinks with the one and pledges with the other:

1. The count FRVGALES health sir? I'le pledge it on my knees, by this light.

2. Will you, sir? I'le drinke it on my knee, then, by the light.

... .................................................................

2. Nay, doe me right, sir.
1. So I doe, in good faith.

2. Good faith you doe not; mine was fuller.

1. Why, beleeeue me, it was not.

2. Beleeue me, it was: and you doe lie.

1. Lie, sir?

2. I, sir.

1. S'wounds!

2. O, come, stab if you haue a mind to it.

1. Stab? dost thou thinke I dare not?

Carlo. Nay, I beseech you, gentlemen, what meanes this? nay, looke, for shame respect your reputations. (V, iv, 73-76, 79-90)

And Buffone is the man who calls no man his friend and can strike a false face which makes friendship no matter. He too has no countenance and no resolution.

These Jonsonian characters imitate for life a shadow of things which are not (an eidolon) rather than the shadow of things which are (skia).
Their characters are built for them of richly embroidered cloaks, but within the cloak is often no more than swirling vapours. Jonson's imitations are the shades of life, because those he imitated were shades, and while such exist, they were also thus because he saw them thus. He saw them in uncomprehending subjection to only a small portion of their being, a being unallied to any higher conception of itself. Missing is the spark of divinity. By the time of this play's composition, the gay temper surrounding Bridget, Bobadill, and Clement has hardened to the lean bitterness of Macilente and the foolish pretentiousness of Saviolina. And Carlo Buffone can find nothing resembling man so much as a hog or swine:

Carlo. 'Tis an Axiome in naturall philosophie, what comes nearest the nature of that it feeds, converts quicker to nourishment, and doth sooner essentiate. Now nothing in flesh, and entrails, assimulates or resembles man more, than a hog, or swine -

Macilente. True; and hee (to requite their courtesie) often times d'offeth his owne nature, and puts on theirs; as when hee becomes as churlish as a hog, or as drunke as a sow: but to your conclusion.

(V, v, 60-68)

Devoting so much of the play to this vertical movement of character delineation makes it difficult for Jonson to push such a stolid structure into motion with any semblance of fluidity. There must be a momentary pause during which the movement shifts its direction onto a horizontal plane. This change is not accomplished by an overflow of Macilente's teeming humour. Instead, quietly and coolly, in the "calm of his humour," he draws the lines of action: he sends Puntarvolo and Briske to prepare at
Saviolina's court the scene of her purgation; he arrives himself with the country clown Sogliardo to preside over its enactment; he poisons Puntarvolo's dog and directs the discovery of the culprit to Shift who, in his own revelation, disillusions Sogliardo of his gentlemanly pretensions; he directs the cast, despite their lagging melancholy, to Buffone, waiting at the Miter, whom he then assists in administering his own coup de grace; with a quickening step he dispenses Fungoso and leads Deliro, Fallace, and Fastidious Briske through the paces of their motion, until he too, like Sordido, can exclaim in wonder:

Why, here's a change! Now is my soule at peace.
I am as emptie of all enuie now,
As they of merit to be enuied at.

(V, xi, 54-56)
CHAPTER VII

Volpone

In the plays discussed earlier the flaw or humour made its appearance as an aberration which was, in fact, the equivalent of character. It appeared thus because of its deviation from a positive scale of values against which it was continually measured. These positive values did not grow out of the life of the plays but were instead morally imposed upon the characters. This imposition inhibited free, natural movement on the basis of those negative values from which the characters were impelled to draw life. A seemingly mechanical or stilted action was often the result. In Volpone the characters are allowed the absolute truth of their deformities. Evil is the dominating force. It exists now in the nature of things rather than in the somewhat artificial delineation of a humour. Powerful, natural action is the result.

The good characters are insipid and their existence would seem to imply that good is an accident of nature, a miracle of nature rather like Sordido's state of grace, a state which, in order for it to exist, must remain completely secluded from the world around it. There is little interaction between it and the surrounding world; it combats evil simply by shutting itself up in a cocoon and appealing to "god and his good angels" for a miracle. Good, it would seem, is some men's "several"; it would seem not to be a potential in the nature of all things, towards which men can aspire by striving to know the fullness of its nature. It is an unalterable state which, in order to preserve itself, constructs a wall of innocence. Celia and Volpone are good examples of two characters created from a dichotomous
world view. Celia descends from an abstract sphere of virtue; Volpone springs from the vitality of evil. They exist in two completely different worlds: within two separate circles each one closed to the other. It is Volpone's speeches (in Act III, scene vii) which contain the beauty of life and Celia's which contain the beauty of heaven. The world of man and the other heavenly one are completely distinct and unrelated.

In the exchange between Celia and Volpone it is evident that there exist no terms in which Celia is either capable of answering or which he is capable of comprehending. Their fundamental assumptions are different, and neither character reflects a genuine understanding of the other. That which is a "cause of Life" for Celia, her honour, and for whose protection she pleads to "god and his good angels" is to Volpone "the beggers vertue" lacking in "wisdome". Since their respective worlds, points of view, and languages neither overlap nor touch on the level of the mind or spirit, Celia turns to a defense based on the purely physical, with regard to herself as well as to Volpone:

If you haue eares that will be pierc'd; or eyes,  
That can be open'd; a heart, may be touch'd;  
Or any part, that yet sounds man, about you:  
If you haue touch of holy saints, or heaven,  
Do me the grace, to let me scape. If not,  
Be bountifull, and kill me.

Yet feed your wrath, sir, rather than your lust;  
(It is a vice, comes neerer manlinesse)  
And punish that unhappy crime of nature,  
Which you miscal my beauty: flay my face,  
Or poison it, with oyntments, for seducing  
Your bloud to this rebellion. Rub these hands,  
With what may cause an eating leprosie,  
E'ene to my bones, and marrow: any thing,  
That may disfavour me, saue in my honour.  

(III, vii, 240-245, 249-257)
If he will do so small a thing, she will kneel and pray for him and "pay downe/ A thousand hourly vowes" for his health. She has no perception of his world, nor he of hers. Volpone, however, assumes the worst - an assumption which both protects and betrays him:

Think me cold,
Fro.zen, and impotent, and so report me?
That I had NESTOR'S hernia, thou wouldst thinke.
I doe degenerate, and abuse my nation,
To play with oportunity, thus long;
I should have done the act, and then have parlee'd.
Yeele, or Ile force thee.

(III, vii, 260-266)

Here he reveals that all arguments and persuasions were superfluous to his original intent and he judges one who lives outside his world by the assumptions on which his own rests. His judgment betrays him, but his momentary retribution is brought about with the rather artificial appearance of a deus ex machina - Bonario, who leaps at this moment from behind the curtain. His repentance does not, however, equal that of Sordido after the descent of grace: he fears only that he will be betrayed to beggary and infamy. In Volpone's own world the assumption of the worst intent protects him from others of his kind. Later, his downfall is brought about partially by the betrayal of this assumption: in not assuming the worst of Mosca, he fails to live by one of the fundamental assumptions of his world.

In this scene then is a specific moment in which the two worlds are juxtaposed: good, in the person of Celia, is protected in Volpone's world, but it is done in a mechanical way. Celia herself feels that she has no personal control, nor does she actively attempt to exercise control. She calls to the heavens for her protection and feels that all she has to
lose is her innocence, beyond that nothing else. Her rescue passes to the hands of someone else, but again in a mechanical fashion. Knowledge of a wrong act, as well as participation in that act, would shatter the cocoon of innocence, and it is on the basis of the formal, rather than the organic, existence of innocence and honor that she makes her appeal. The appeal is for a personal and physical annihilation or for a divine transformation. Never do her beliefs partake of a vitality which would enable her to act with the same effectiveness as do Volpone and Mosca.

Later Volpone and Mosca meet their final retribution in Celia and Bonario's world. That retribution does not result from a positive force working within their world or outside it, but from their betrayal of this sphere in which both have their being. They are summoned before a wraith-like tribunal that does, in its official decrees, little to dissipate the pervasive odor of evil.

Since Jonson generally presents characters who are either entirely "good" or completely "evil", and since he can present the "evil" ones with great effectiveness, one may raise the question of why it should be so difficult for him to present good people acting from good motives. His spiritually opposed characters seem caught on the horns of an old theological dilemma. In attempting to explain the nature of man, the theologians had abstracted from the subtle complexity of life the related ideas of good and evil as the basic components. In so doing they did not differ greatly from earlier Greek thinkers who had endeavored to explain the essential nature of the universe in terms of love and hate, creativity and destructiveness. These terms had meaning in themselves, but because they were abstract-
tions from life observed they had fuller meaning in relation to their opposites. And in life itself it was recognized that the interplay of these opposites held the world in balance. In Jonson there is no interplay of opposites. When evil occurs, it does not appear as the privation of good, as a negative, joined to a certain good or positive. His resolution of one-half of the puzzle remains forever in a theoretical sphere, when it should for the sake of his drama be of a more vital constitution.

Jonson is the heir of the scholastic philosophical tradition which defined evil as the absence of good, as a lack, as a negative, as the existence of a vacuum. The idea of being was prior to the idea of goodness. No being was evil except in so far as it lacked being. If it lacked being or form, it could not therefore act, except by virtue of some good attached to it. Good possessed a due end by which it was moved. The absence of a due end did not in itself constitute evil unless that absence was attached to an undue end. If then evil is negative, a thing without being, it should be difficult to present in a dramatically effective way an evil character acting positively. Those evil characters who are presented as acting, and with least difficulty, are those like Iago who can say "Evil be thou my good". A negative becomes a positive, and aspires within the relatively free state of non-being beyond to an ultimate cause or end where it would change the nature of its source.

Volpone aspires and he has made of evil a positive good. He has decided that all is baseness and has made of that a positive so that he has no difficulty in acting. He has created his own good to which he can aspire - the "son of Sol", his gold. He is completely devoted to his idol,
to his uncaused cause, which makes all men false but remains always true to itself. It is this god that animates Volpone's world and controls the nature of the actions performed therein. But it is a man-made god, formed from the dross of his heart and created by an unnatural inversion of the nature of things, and in the end it plays a fool of Volpone himself.

Volpone not only worships it but he also aspires to an artistry in worship: he creates, but he creates mountebanks, eunuchs, hermaphrodities, fools, he constructs a liturgy of worship, he and his fellow celebrant, but it is a liturgy participated in by vultures, crows, and ravens. He aspires to create his own heaven and creates instead, like Lucifer in his fall from the presence of God, his own hell—his creation is not a mixture of good and evil, but pure evil only. But Volpone is not overtaken by a Nemesis growing out of a world where there is an interplay of opposites; he is stricken by the excesses of his own manipulations and by the desertion of his chosen god for his own unrestrained pleasure.

The feeling concerning the previous plays that there is no organic interaction between character and event is in Volpone far less evident. The line of action seems less mechanical and less pre-determined and exists more in the nature of things. For once a character is carried away by a zest for life, albeit a perverted one, by a determination to action which

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"For a similar consideration of this element of perverted religious worship on a symbolic level, see C. G. Thayer, *Ben Jonson. Studies in the Plays* (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 50-111. At the writing of this chapter, I had not read Mr. Thayer's book."
springs from the fullness, corrupt as it is, of his own being. Like Bobadill, Volpone aspires to a better life, to a fuller life, but for him that better life is intimately connected with and dependent on material gain and success. For the early Elizabethans of a prosperous and expanding society, this connection was perhaps inevitable, but with Volpone the strain of disillusionment and cynicism introduced into the drama with Marlowe's Machiavellian hero has come to full fruition, and now only the obverse side of the coin is in view.

Volpone seems for a time to be master of his will, to in fact possess free will, but the moment he turns to take it into his own hands, the moment at which his personal enjoyment of the thing becomes more important than the thing itself, that is, his god, then at that moment does he run his head into a noose of his own making and all is lost. The Spectre of Justice materializes and the impotence to which he pretended "by faining lame, gout, palsey, and such diseases" becomes the impending reality. The Venetian representatives of justice are not, however, untouched by the moral disease and the total impression of vice is not perceptibly alleviated by the assertion that "there is force in the decrees of Venēce" to punish even these evil-doers. Volpone's image still rules the stage; Celia, Bonario, the Avocatori, remain insubstantial shadows that quickly fall in darkness. With the advent of The Alchemist Jonson frees his characters entirely from the abstract menace of retribution. In a sense Jonson here wilfully allows the strings of the puppets to slip from his hands and gives them for the first time free will. They possess it and they are masters of it and they have no desire to go against their mēros or portion; indeed they manage
it and maintain it; they themselves work out all the subtleties of shade and form to fill the canvas on which they have their being.

Herford and Simpson refer to the history of Seianus as the source for "the fundamental situation of Jonson's two greatest comedies, the league of two able villains, master and servant, ending in a deadly struggle between them," and it is in the partnership of Volpone and Mosca that the nexus of motivation and action exists. The difficulty of presenting in a dramatically effective way characters acting solely and purely from either good motives or bad motives was discussed earlier. In this play Jonson is faced with an even greater difficulty: when one omits from an intimate connection the interactive elements of good and bad, when one removes from the center of the stage the passive, but essentially good man, and retains only the active but bad man, there can be a still greater difficulty in producing an organic interaction. It was also stated earlier that in this play motivation and action seem to exist more in the nature of things and as a result spring more naturally into being, but with regard to the characters alone, it is necessary to attempt the assigning of specific motivation and specific action, albeit this may involve an over-simplification.

In addition to Volpone's god, the "world's soule" and his own, Volpone himself may be said to provide the essential motivation; his part is the "Resolution" and Mosca's is his "Countenance". His greed and his love of

\[2\] Herford & Simpson, I, 60.
seeing others sweat under the same feverish torment from which he suffers provide the immediate moving force for Mosca's actions. Rather, they are the seeming primary motivation for Mosca's actions in the first part of the play. Mosca, however, desires his own resolution, and it is Volpone's god, "the world's soule" and his, which is also to Mosca "virtue, fame, Honour, and all things else". It is this which provides Mosca with his primary motivation and nurtures in the first part of the play both the most apparent actions of a servant attempting to please his master and the embryonic action which in the latter part of the play comes to the forefront as Mosca parades in a magnifico's attire.

In Act I, scene ii, there is a subtle hint of Mosca's real interests and a preparation for his later treachery. After Voltore's departure, the following dialogue takes place:

Volpone. I long to haue possession
Of my new present.
Mosca. That, and thousands more,
I hope, to see you lord of.
Volpone. Thankes, kind MOSCA.
Mosca. And that, when I am lost in blended dust,
And hundred such, as I am, in succession -
Volponé. Nay, that were too much, MOSCA.
(I, ii, 116-121)

Mosca is straining so far to flatter Volpone that even Volpone recognizes "that were too much." By saying to Volpone that he, Mosca, will be blended dust, along with Corbaccio, Corvino, and Voltore, while Volpone yet lives to enjoy thousands of new possessions, he is filling out the pattern in Volpone's mind with respect to himself. He is including himself in the
succession of legacy-hunters on two different levels: (1) he implies that Volpone does not have to worry about him as a legacy-hunter and so can trust him, and (2) he is including himself in actuality as a legacy-hunter. This one scene contains in a microcosmic way the essence of the relationship between Volpone and Mosca and at the same time illuminates the nature of all the other relationships within the play. One of the central themes of the play is Volpone's desire to outlive all the rest and he attempts to prolong life by feeding on his gold and on the base desires and frustrations of others. In Jonson's hands this theme becomes more than a mere literary borrowing from classical authors; it achieves an imaginative life which imposes a truth of its own. Volpone's desire to prolong life becomes one of the manifestations of the intensity of his evil, and of his god's evil, for he is perverting nature. He perverts nature on a purely physical level by attempting to enjoy the fullness of life from within a "tombed sepulchre" and he perverts it on another level by worshipping a false god. Mosca too wants from Volpone what Volpone wants from his worshippers. He is using Volpone as his instrument just as Volpone uses him. He is "in the succession" of legacy-hunters and he hopes to be "in the succession" of Volpone's wealth. Mosca is feigning impending death to Volpone as Volpone feigns impending death to his legacy-hunters. It should be obvious to Volpone that Mosca will outlive him, but he, like the rest, lets his desires perplex his judgment, and so, like Corbaccio, his ears have grown stale with age. But his point of deafness is far removed beyond that of Corbaccio or Voltore or Corvino.
His point of deafness comes with the personal limitation of an ego that believes itself invulnerable, that cannot conceive of that happening to itself which he sees happening to the others. Of these Mosca says:

True, they will not see't the duplicity.
Too much light blinds 'hem, I think. Each of 'hem
Is so possesst, and stufst with his owne hopes,
That any thing, vnto the contrary,
Neuer so true, or neuer so apparent,
Neuer so palpable, they will resist it —

Volpone. Like a temptation of the diuell.
(V, ii, 22-28)

It is Mosca who not only provides for Volpone his final temptation bringing about his downfall but who also articulates what Volpone's response to that temptation should be. Earlier, in Act I, Mosca has likewise provided, in his description of Corvino's wife, the essence of the temptation, in a vocabularly suited to Volpone's understanding. The wily contriver describes Celia in terms measured against Volpone's gold and against a fleshly sensuality which promises the eternity Volpone desires;

a soft lip,
Would tempt you to eternities of kissing!
And flesh, that melteth, in the touch to bloud!
Bright as your gold! and lovely, as your gold!
(I, v, 111-114)

But it is Volpone here who articulates his own reaction when he says he must see her and that "I will goe see her, though but at her windore."

In Act V, sc. ii, however, immediately following the court scene when Voltore has performed so beautifully for Volpone's sake, the roles begin to shift subtly. Mosca gives to the advocate high praise:

He' [Voltore ]has taken paines, in faith, sir, & deseru'd,
(In my poore judgement, I speake it, vnder vauour,
Not to contrary you, sir) very richly —
Well - to be cosen'd.
(V, ii, 44-47)
This he speaks even after his advice to the contrary:

Why, now you speake, sir. We must, here, be fixt;
Here, we must rest; this is our master-piece:

(V, ii, 12-13)

And Volpone follows the lure to cozen:

'Tis right.
I cannot answer him, MOSCA, as I would,
Not yet; but for thy sake, at thy intreaty,
I will beginne, eu'n now, to vexe 'hem all:

(V, ii, 53-56)

As pointed out above, it is Mosca who not only suggests the fact of action but who also provides Volpone with the intent. Volpone falls to the temptation and abrogates his will. For Mosca's sake, and not for his "world's soule" and his own, he will "vexe 'hem all."

This may seem a fine point of subtlety, but it is at this point that their roles shift in action as well as in dialogue, and it prepares the way for Volpone's eventual downfall. Volpone still remains the dominating genius of the play, the fullest realization of the spirit of evil, and its source. As pointed out earlier, he provides the basic motivation, a monumental desire, godlike in its proportions, for godlike mastery. The motivations of the other characters are but shadows or extensions of his own. He approaches this mastery with an histrionic genius for deception and a mirth both cosmic and satanic. He is far too cunning for the victims of his trickery to bring about his fall. In addition to his own excesses and his hubris, he is undone by one who has observed from behind the scenes and has had for teacher the master of them all.

Volpone now begins, as Mosca has formerly done, to implement the action; he outlines the specifics of the proceedings by telling Nano and
Castrone to advertize that he is dead and by telling Mosca to present himself as the newly-made heir. The spider's lair is deserted and Volpone doffs his magnifico's attire to descend into the streets, where Mosca once had worked his master's will. Volpone plays his god false by giving lip service to a natural rhythm which he had sought to pervert, that is, his death. He deserts his social position and his shrine to gain his pleasure in a "common way" upon the streets. No longer does he aspire to and for his god in its addition and possession; instead he taunts others in their lack for his own personal satisfaction.

He has in effect committed the crime of hubris: he has deserted his portion, he has trespassed his bounds, and exceeded his fate. When the legacy-hunters hear of his death and the death of their hopes, the spell of evil and the hope of gain, which Volpone has helped to cast, is broken. Volpone does in effect become dead; his misfortune is in living beyond his time, into a realm which is reality for his victims but illusion for him. The illusion is his death, for he is no longer in a position to impose his will; what is reality for the others becomes, because he has abrogated his will and his power, likewise a reality for him.

The shift in Volpone's role and his subsequent downfall are foreshadowed in several scenes: in the mountebank scene when, after assuming a disguise and mounting his bank, he is drubbed by Corvino; and just after the court scene when Mosca points out, "'T seem'd to mee, you sweat, sir . . . . Were you not daunted?" Volpone admits "In good faith, I was/ A little in the mist" but swears "not deiected:/ Neuer, but still my selfe." Immediately preceding this avowal, however, it has taken considerable drink to restore his vitality, and his discourse has revealed more profound misgivings:
Well, I am here; and all this brunt is past:
I ne're was in dislike with my disguise,
Till this fled moment; here, 'twas good, in priuate,
But, in your publike, Cauet, whil'st I breathe.
'Fore god,- my left legge 'gan to haue the crampe;
And I apprehended, straight, some power had strooke me
With a dead palsey: well, I must be merry,
And shake it off. A many of these feares
Would put me into some villanous disease,
Should they come thick vpon me: I'le prevent 'hem.
Glive me a boule of lustie wine, to fright
This humor from my heart;

(V, i, 1-12)

In the public market place Volpone is out of his element and there he
does not breathe so easily. The camouflage which aids preservation in his
natural habitat provokes in public those ailments held in abeyance at his
private haunts. This habitat in which Volpone flourishes is for him a
natural one, but measured against a wider frame of reference - that frame
constituted by the values of the Elizabethan world picture - it is an
unnatural, perverted, and artificially created one. In Volpone the humour
has completely embraced Volpone's character and it has grown beyond that to
an organic vision of evil, flourishing in a world of its own. It is when
Volpone begins to lose his adhesion to this world that he feels himself
shake with a "dead palsey" and a deadly humour strike his heart with fright.
The "thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to" creeps back into reality
only when he deserts the "wholeness" of his chosen world. His fall comes
about then not only by his commitment to that world in the first place, as
in medieval tragedy, but by his unfaithfulness to that world. The world
of justice and right cannot infect his world by its presence there, just
as all of Celia's pleas fall on deaf ears. His world can infect a healthier
one with disease and sickness, just as the fourth Avocatori can think of
his personal gain in having Mosca as a son-in-law.
The foreshadowing of Mosca's defection has already been discussed above. As for the flaw which brings about his fall, it consists, like that of Volpone, in a personal point of deafness, which for Mosca results in over-confidence, and in the perversion of a higher devotion for personal ends. By the commencement of Act III Mosca has begun to grow in love with himself:

I Feare, I shall begin to grow in loue
With my deare selfe, and my most prosp'rous parts,
They doe so spring, and burgeon; I can feele
A whimsey i' my bloud: (I know not how)
Successe hath made me wanton. I could skip
Out of my skin, now, like a subtill snake,
I am so limber. O! Your Parasite
Is a most precious thing, dropt from aboue,
Not bred 'mong' st clods, and clot-poules, here on earth.
I muse, the mysterie was not made a science,
It is so liberally profest! almost
All the wise world is little else, in nature,
But Parasites, or Sub-parasites.

(III, i, 1-13)

Like Kitley and other humour characters he begins to feed upon himself, to batten upon the tumour of self-love instead of, in allegiance to his character of Parasite, fattening solely upon the hopes and fears of others and upon his patron and his patron's god. He too falls short of the worship and turns toward becoming his own god, a "precious thing, dropt from above." The mystery of the universe has come to this poor pass, to a world where the most precious creation is a parasite, and all the world is little else save parasite and sub-parasite. Earlier in Act I, scene ii, man's previous conceptions of the mystery of things have been parodied by Volpone's zanies, the eunuch, the fool, and the hermaphrodite: the soul of Pythagoras "that juggler divine" has come from Apollo, has transmigrated through Pyrrhus and the sophists of Greece, and is now in this age incarnate
in the body of an hermaphrodite. Mysteries of the universe have shrunk to the perversion of an hermaphrodite or the brilliant cunning of a parasite or they have become the common trade of science. The spark of creation and its artistic growth in the nature of things is reserved for the "fine, elegant rascal":

This is the creature, had the art borne with him;
Toiles not to learne it, but doth practise it
Out of most excellent nature: and such sparkes,
Are the true Parasites, others but their Zani's.

(III, i, 30-33)

Yet in the next moment, confronted with the accusations of Bonario, he pleads the excuse of his environment and of "strong necessity." On his environment rests his seeming sins but on his natural self rests his self-love. He intends to change that environment and does in fact skip out of his skin like a "subtil snake" to don the robes of a magnifico. When, however, he and Volpone exchange their roles, know division one from the other in personal diversion from their common purpose, and fall away from their higher goal, both fall together. Their respective roles slip back into the original positions of the relationship; Volpone is punished in accordance with his position and not in strict accordance with his crime; Mosca is punished not only for being "chiefest minister" of the treachery but also for, although being a fellow of no birth and no blood, having abused the "habit of a gentleman."

In Volpone the tension existing between a humour and a scale of positive values, which gives to that humour its definition as a flaw or an aberration, is no longer evident. Morality is no longer imposed from without; instead it is incorporated in the structure of the play. Deviates
from the full implications of its tenets are embodied in the persons of the
play, and the epitome of its perversion is found in Volpone himself. In
this play one finds the logical culmination of a dogmatic belief in a
morality which has lost its spiritual force. Its emotional reality is
the obverse of its rational dictates, and it is perhaps ironic that Jonson
depicts so powerfully and so poetically a reality which he appears to
condemn. The age was becoming increasingly cynical of the aspiring
individualism of the early Elizabethans, but the dynamism of Volpone's
aspiration makes one suspect in Jonson both bitterness and sadness at
the dream's disappearance. That which might shape man so like a god might
likewise twist him to deformity.

Actually, Jonson's characters do not become less human by attempting
to soar beyond their humanity. This humanity they never possess. Volpone
begins in error and ends in error; error is repeated again and again, and
each repetition adds to the enormity of the whole. In speaking of the
satiric elements in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*,
Alvin Kernan points out that,

> There is, as Shakespeare saw, a form of death
> wish lurking in satire, a compulsive urge to
> destruction and nothingness. He also saw that
> the titanic fury of a great satirist is not
> innate but rather the perversion, the twisting,
> of a desire for goodness and for love.3

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Yale Studies In English, Vol. 142 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959),
p. 204.
In *Volpone*, however, there is no explanation on the human level for Volpone's evil. Unlike Timon, he is not a disillusioned man whose cynicism is based on a knowledge of man's potentiality for both good and evil. He seems to have sprung full-grown from the womb of nature, her fullest expression of baseness. Aspiration is inherent in man; it is natural for him to reach towards an affirmation of life. Because Volpone seems an unaccountable growth of nature, because he seems totally evil, and because he is imbued with such vitality, it would appear that the creative force is itself being characterized as evil or perverted.

If there is in Volpone a defect in vice called virtue, at least an affirmation of something positive, it is his trust of Mosca. Volpone, walking the streets disguised as a "Commandador", learns from Nano that Mosca has taken the keys:

> Did master MOSCA take the keyes? wy, so!
> I am farder, in. These are my fine conceipts!
> I must be merry, with a mischiefe to me!
> What a vile wretch was I, that could not beare
> My fortune soberly? I must ha' my crotchets!
> And my conundrums! well, goe you, and seeke him:
> His meaning may be truer, then my feare.
> Bid him, he streight come to me, to the court;
> Thither will I, and, if 't be possible,
> Vn-screw my aduocate, vpon new hopes:
> When I prouok'd him, then I lost my selfe.
> (V, xi, 12-22)

Volpone so often depends upon Mosca to save him. When Lady Politique Would-Be is wordily prescribing her own physic for the restoration of Volpone's health, which she further impairs, Volpone utters a cry of relief as Mosca enters:

> Mosca? welcom,
> Welcome to my redemption.
> (III, v, 2-3)

Eventually, it is his own downfall, partially precipitated and confirmed by Mosca, which Volpone must welcome. If the irony is a double one and if
there is here a moral echo, it is abortive and grimly humorous, for Volpone at the end of the play is sent to the *Incurabili* with his disease unremedied.

Northrop Frye refers to this play as a "comic imitation of tragedy," but it does not have the reconciliation of either comedy or tragedy. Often its structure parallels that of tragedy, but *Volpone* does not culminate in a deeper perception of the world. There is no growth in a fuller conception of human nature which incorporates in itself something of positive values. There is growth, but it is the humour which grows and expands into an organic world of evil. It is against the backdrop of this world that Volpone and Mosca move, and their primary humour consists in their affinity with and allegiance to this world. In this context, their flaw, or secondary humour, becomes a decline from the fullness of this world to a humour of a purely personal nature, a substitution of the microcosmic for the macrocosmic without any inclusion of the greater within the lesser. Neither Mosca nor Volpone, in the latter part of the play, is adding to the dimensions of the "son of Sol." Volpone is no longer glorying in the glad possession of his gold nor in its cunning purchase; he is rather tormenting others for their having failed in their intrigues to obtain what is his. Mosca now seeks only to add to himself a greater dimension by acquiring Volpone's wealth. This degeneration on both their parts carries them, as pointed out in some detail above, out into an alien world, where certain natural rhythms reassert themselves and where other values prevail. The natural rhythms that exist in this world are not, however, depicted as flowing freely nor do the values appear to

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possess much force. It is the other world, that of Volpone and Mosca, which is the more powerful one, powerful enough to hold all natural rhythms in abeyance and to dispossess any values of a positive nature. Volpone's world, the world of evil, emerges as the organic, positive one. Evil is the positive and good is the negative; good consists simply of the absence of evil.

The Elizabethan world view had provided a moral framework within which man might aspire beyond himself and need not fall into destructive self-loathing or escape into quiescent acceptance. Perhaps the age's growing materialism, its spiritual weariness, and his own rationalism blind Jonson to that mysterious force that moved the earlier Elizabethans to look unflinchingly through the fire of life into the face of death. Jonson cannot probe that mystery; generally for him the mystery is not allowed. He is concerned with the so-called "purely human condition" and he stops short of any extended questioning or broad investigation:

> For to utter truth of God, but as he [the servant of humility] thinks only, may be dangerous, who is best known by our not knowing. Some things of Him, so much as He hath revealed or commanded, it is not only lawful but necessary for us to know, for therein our ignorance was the first cause of our wickedness.⁵

Man must neither soar too high, nor sink too low. In this poetically restrictive attitude he symbolizes the new temper of the times and he foreshadows Pope's advice to a later age:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

For all Jonson's self-imposed restrictions, his humour characters do spring into life, life of a peculiar brand. They survive his theorizing critics and they survive more easily in his plays when he himself begins to feel some sympathy for his creations. His lack, as well as his inclination, leads him to rely heavily on form. Through form he maintains the vigor of his characters by an action continual, intricate, complicated, and confined. Once he has found the limits of his world picture and has decided the nature of its canvas, his weakness becomes his strength, and he paints with an indelible stroke.
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