THE STAPLE OF NEWS, KINGS AND KINGDOMS*

Yumiko Yamada†

1. New Wine into Old Bottles

Since L. C. Knights spoke of *The Staple of News* (1626)[1] as "that odd combination of morality play and topical revue,"[2] critical efforts seem to have served but little to mitigate the degree of the oddity of this combination. Further researches—in antiquated sources and the current events—have only widened a gap between morality and topicality, and hampered a total grasp of the play as an artistic whole—a natural consequence of somewhat biased valuation of the drama on the side of morality. We have very weak reasons, however, to believe that Jonson was earnestly preaching a time-worn sermon against the abuse of money or language from the vulgar "pulpit" after ten years' absence.[3]

It may be more appropriate to suppose that topicality consists or, rather, is hidden in the allegory itself. Let us remember that his two earlier morality plays had been highly allusive to topical matters. *Eastward Ho!* (1605), which is generally accepted as a satire on the genre of the prodigal play, caused his imprisonment with his collaborators Chapman and Marston for the slurs on the Scots who had found favour with the new king. Nearly a decade after, in *The Devil is an Ass* (1616),

* This paper is a revised version of my speech originally delivered at the 26th General Meeting of the Shakespeare Society of Japan held at Kobe College on 9 October, 1987.

† Lecturer at Soai Women's College

[1] All quotations from Jonson are from *Ben Jonson*, eds. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52). Further citations will appear as "H & S."

[2] L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 191.

[3] The abuse of money in this play has been almost a universal theme among scholars. I do not agree, for example, with D. M. Lanier on the argument that Jonson used morality form in pursuit of something eternal in his "The Prison-House of the Canon: Allegorical Form and Posterity in Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, ed. J. Leeds Barrol (New York: AMS Press, 1985), II. As to the abuse of language we have a close study by Alexander Sackton, in his *Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Jonson* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1948).

he made an attack on "the most important of the projects under James I's rule," a patent to drain Lincolnshire Fens.[1] We might even suppose that Fitzdottrel "of a good house, / As most are now in *England*" I. ii. 17–18), though not "in Scotland," could have been a caricatured figure of King James, a devoted scholar of demonology who was being preyed upon by the projectors, monopolists and patentees.

Moreover, Jonson's engagement during the previous ten years had been "nothing but *di stato*" as an unrivalled masque writer for the Stuart court. It was the early stage of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) on the Continent, and the Banqueting House had turned into a diplomatic battle field where the representatives of each league contended for priority. The English court racked its brains over the questions of guests and dates of performance, in order to avoid friction and maintain its neutrality. Since it was impossible to entertain both sides at once, they had to choose from the three alternatives of preparing for respective occasions (*News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* [1621]), dropping one side (*The Masque of Augurs* [1622]), or postponing the date till one side "would first be gone" (*Time Vindicated to Himself and to His Honours* [1623]). In the worst case the masque was left off, never to be performed (*Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* [written in 1624]).[2] Inevitably our poet was kept in touch with firsthand and authentic pieces of information concerning kaleidoscopic changes in both domestic and foreign affairs.

Thus it is unlikely that *The Spaple of News*, which abounds in verbal borrowings from those masques of 1620–25,[3] should be alien to state affairs. The play was first put on stage in the year succeeding the demise of King James, immediately after the coronation of his young son, Charles; besides a public performance at the Balckfriars in Lent, it was probably acted at court before Charles in February in 1626.[4] The occasion of performance, the allusions to the former

[1] Larry S. Champion, *Ben Jonson's "Dotages"* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Pr., 1967), p. 26.

[2] H & S (X, pp. 597–660) gives an account of the difficulties with each performance by citing several ambassadorial dispatches and official documents.

[3] H & S, II, p. 170. Sara Pearl has developed the idea in her "Sounding to Present Occasions: Jonson's Masques of 1620–5," *The Court Masque*, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1984).

[4] H & S, IX, p. 251.

king's clown in mourning (III. ii. 131–33) and "the Coronation" now taking place (301), the association of "the *Golden Heyre*" with Infanta (II. ii. 4), and above all his involvement in the war through newsmongering would have unmistakably converged into one particular heir of the day, with his vast estate of the whole kingdom. In the same way Penniboy Canter represents his dead father James,[1] and as to Penniboy Senior, we can at least say, though not specify the model,[2] that he is the embodiment of frugal values of the City, for which Jonson coined the word "Aldermanity" (3 Int. 1–9).

But this plain reasoning has long been rejected for the sake of academic self-defence.[3] Only recently Riggs managed to declare the identity of Penniboy Junior with Charles in his biography of Jonson.[4] It would be largely because the play has been rendered as fantastic as possible against "so sinister an interpretation": it is told that the play is the product of alcoholic hallucination of the drunken poet whose "*repeating* (i.e. producing) *head is all to pieces*," and "*they may gather it vp i' the tiring-house*" (Induction, 69–71).

The Staple of News is a fable of the author's vision towards the new reign, deduced from his service for the Stuart court during the previous years. It is a sort of "rich Mosaique workes"—inlaid not only with classical allusions as Richard James pointed out,[5] but with his own works written during his absence from the playhouse. What is left before us is the task of gathering up the scattered fragments of the poet's brain and reconstructing the play—which has as loose a con-

[1] David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1989) identifies Penniboy Canter with Jonson in association with "Chanter" (p. 297), but the character could largely embody the last Jacobean reign, to which Jonson had made contribution as the poet laureate.

[2] Devra R. Kifer, the editor of *The Staple of News* in Regents Renaissance Drama Series (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), concludes that Penniboy Senior was intended as a caricature of Sir Edward Coke (p. xx).

[3] D. F. McKenzie calls the idea the "fanciful web" and rejects it because "there is too little scholarly evidence ("*The Staple of News* and the Late Plays," *Celebration of Ben Jonson*, eds. William Blisset et al. [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Pr., 1973], pp. 124–25). And Anthony Parr, the editor of the newest version of *The Staple of News* (Revels Plays, Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1988), carefully avoids the subject.

[4] See Riggs, p. 296.

[5] J. F. Bradley and J. Q. Adams, *The Jonson Allusion Book* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1971), p. 137.

struction—into an organic whole.

2. The Golden Age Lost

The moment of Penniboy Junior's coming-of-age is highly suggestive of the recent coronation: it is ritualized with his pompous speech and then commemorated with the sudden running-down of his watch. After the immediate qualification for succession, he is surrounded by a set of "paper-squibs," or parasitic tradesmen, that may fire his "*Arsenall*" and "carry a *Mine*, / Would blow you vp, at last" (I. iii. 25–31). At length this prediction is verified and the bankrupt prodigal is to curse the day of succession, wishing it were erased from every almanac (V. i. 27–28). Beneath its outward festive levity and happy ending,[1] the play conceals an undercurrent of pessimism and anxiety about the age to come.

Penniboy Junior's "inaugural speech" begins with "Look to me, wit, and look to my wit, Land" (I. i. 3), a parody on Donne's "Elegy on the Untimely Death of the Incomparable Prince, Henry."[2] Donne's first line "Look to me, *Faith:* and Look to my *Faith*, GOD" is a prayer to God for support of his faith that is shaken violently at the death of England's most promising heir in 1612, for none but the dead prince could have attained "*Peace* through CHRISTIANITIE" (34) as "His great *Father's* [i.e. James's] greatest Instrument" (32). Now our Penniboy Junior makes an idiotic petition to his father's legacy for wit, the only thing he lacks. After all he is the counterpart of Henry's mediocre brother Charles, who is beside himself at a windfall crown. We may call this a Jonsonian version of an elegy on Prince Henry, whose bygone decease had to be mourned over again at an unprecedented crisis of the British monarchy. Or we may regard it as an advanced "Epitaph for the Untimely Reign of King Charles." In any case he had no hope for the slightest possibility of "*Peace* through CHRISTIANITIE."

Jonson's "Song of Welcome to King Charles" (*Ungathered Verse*, XLIV) betrays his reluctant welcome to the new reign. The poet offers the king the "first of fruits" of the people, "the prime of

[1] For example, Parr sees in the play the traditional battle between Carnival and Lent and calls it a "festive drama" (see p. 43).

[2] Donne's "Elegy" is quoted from *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Everyman's Library, London: Dent, 1985).

flowers" bred by the king's breath, which he describes as "Fresh as the Day, and new as are the Howers." The Billingsgate jargon "new" or "fresh" "as the Day"[1] reduces the majestic scene to a marketplace of costermongers or fishwives. It is ironical that Jonson makes Penniboy Junior use similar terms in his hankering after "*Newes* o' this morning": he "would faine heare some / Fresh, from the forge (as new as day . . .)" (I. v. 80–81). Worse still, he is utterly unaware that he himself has been sold to the newsmongers and, after all, up across the banner headline of the latest news (see I. v. 82–104).

The sparks which threaten to blow up the young heir can be related with the pyrotechnical engines of the Catholic League in the Thirty Years' War. The Staple scene affords a variety of them, such as "powder'd" eggs that would ruin a whole town (III. ii. 47–50), and Galileo's burning glass "To fire any Fleet" (52–55). Two years before, in "An Execration upon Vulcan" (*The Underwood*, XLIII), Jonson had shown how the fire leaped across the sea, from European battlefields to England, even to his small study in London. *The Staple of News* owes its central idea to this poem, which was written on the fire of the poet's library.

Literally and truly Jonson's vision of the new age was that of iron. Besides the image of the flying sparks of war, the firegod lurks in the play as a ubiquitous emblem of the iron age. We find several words which are used in association with Vulcan, e.g. "smith," "yron," "steel," "forge," "engine" etc.: Penniboy Junior asks for some news "Fresh, from the forge" (I. v. 81); Jesuits are called "The onely Enginers [punning upon plotters and inventors] of *Christendome*" (III. ii. 39) with their list of "engines" or machines used in the war; Pecunia must needs be shakled and manacled with "All malicious ingines / A wicked *Smith* could forge out of his yron" (IV. iii. 34–35); Picklock—maybe of the iron gate—who has "Fore-head of steele, and mouth of brasse" practises "Engine, compos'd of all mixt [i.e. impure] mettalls" to ruin the Penniboy family (V. ii. 34, 36).

Ironically enough, Jonson had celebrated the rearrival of the golden age just a decade before, by concluding his folio *Works* (1616) with his masque *The Golden Age Restored* (1615). Not that he was so optimistic

[1] "*Pin.* As new, as Day. *Lat.* She answers like a fish-wife." *The New Inn*, IV. iii. 31.

as to believe in the infallibility of James I, but he found a reasonable point of compromise in the monarch's constitutional and peacemaking, middle-of-the-road policy.[1] But the very efforts to steer a middle course backbited the king. The marriage of his daughter Elizabeth to Frederick V, Duke of the Rhenish Palatinate dragged England into the war, and his other plan of marrying his son to the Infanta evoked strong opposision among those who supported Frederick, the hope of the Protestant Union. In time the old king was exposed to plebeian censures in the streets and theatres.[2] His young successor, less experienced and more prodigal, somehow managed to evade the Spanish marriage. Yet he was to begin his reign with the dissolusion of his first Parliament. His policy of war supporting Buckingham's expedition against Cadiz faced with an open hostility of MPs. This inauspicious event is referred to in the play by Penniboy Senior's remark that the Infanta's outfit " Will cost as much as furnishing a Fleete " (II. v. 43).[3]

If the golden age of England was over, so it was with Jonson, unofficial poet laureate to the former king. The loss of his supreme patron and the indifference of the new king had driven the needy poet out of his study and back to the public stage, after ten years' happy absence. To Jonson this slight put upon himself as a public poet meant not only a personal loss; it was still another sign of the iron age. As is seen in *Poetaster* (1609) and *The Golden Age Restored*, the existence of true poets were indispensable to the realization of the golden age. Jonson believed that only the poet could claim equality to the king; as a counsellor he " can governe it [i.e. *Common-wealth*] with *Counsels*, strengthen it with *Lawes*, correct it with *Iudgements*," &c. (*Discoveries*, 1034–37). In *The Staple of News* we have no poets but Madrigal the poetaster; the Prologue for the Stage impresses the fact on the better sort of the audience by asking them to " make a difference 'twixt Poetique elues, / And Poets " (20–21).

---

[1] David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Rennaissance* (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 180, 187.

[2] Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623/24* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986) has proved that " during the period of several months . . . thousands of people had an opportunity to see or read dozens of plays, a number of which raised important political issues of the day . . . " (p. 1).

[3] See Kifer, p. 66. n.

Thus Vulcan had good reason to destroy the works of true poets in the author's study for the realization of his reign. Instead he saved "monstrous" fictions unburnt; as a patron god of forgery he is the defender of false dictions: romances of chivalry like "*Amadis de Gaule*," "*Arthurs*" legends and "*Don Quixote*" ("An Execration," 29–31); occult books, written especially by "the *Rosie-Crosse*" (72); the newspaper to catch the time with "the strong lines," e.g. "Captaine *Pamphlets*" and "The weekly Corrants" (78–82). Among these "fictions," the last was the very by-product of the war. As Penniboy Junior is exploited by the members of the Staple, so did the crown contribute to the growth of the press by falling victim to their fantasy writing.

3. A New Staple

The Staple of News rises and falls in accordance with "the *Golden Heyre*": it is erected "almost on the same floore" (I. ii. 32) on the day of his succession, and it is "melted into butter" (V. i. 49)[1] at the moment of his disinheritance. The Vulcanean network of "false news" in the play is precisely what Charles I had been caught in. To the disturbance of the new king, there were diplomatic storytellers on the Continent, such as Maximilian (the founder of the Catholique League) notorious for his snaky correspondence (see III. ii. 32–34), and "*Spaines* Ambassadour, / Old *Æsope Gundomar*"[2] who could freely hang the Netherlands on and off the hooks (212–13) with his "fables." On "this side" of water, the newborn industry of mass communication was broadcasting the recent news of the European "war-game" in minute detail, thus revealing the gist of the royal diplomatic policies to the common people.[3] By 1623 there were three weekly news sheets to answer the public curiosity, which settled themselves in "th' Exchange," "Popes-head-Alley" and "*Pauls*" ("An Execration," 80–81).[4]

The newsmongering scene (III. ii) reflects people's "hunger and

[1] The name of Nathaniel Butter, the stationer of the day, is sarcastically referred to in the play. Besides the naming of the clerk of the Office (Nathaniel), there are more than a dozen cases of "butter" punning upon his name, which is conspicuous in the Second Intermean.

[2] *The Underwood*, XLIV, 4–5.

[3] See Limon, p. 4.

[4] H & S, II, p. 172.

thirst after publish'd pamphlets of *Newes*" (To the Readers, 12–13) scarcely with exaggeration. In his "Speech According to Horace" (*Underwood*, XLIV),[1] Jonson proves how the common people learned to cite the names of generals on both leagues ("*Maurice*," "*Tilly*," or "*Spinola*" [38–42; the latter two appear in *The Staple*, III. ii]), or the main military achievements ("The *Berghen* siege [1622], and taking in *Breda* [1625]," 40) in their daily talk. We can imagine the cross fire of hottest political issues in "Tutle-*street*," "Gardiners-lane," or "*the* bowling-Alley," where old wives used to exchange trifling gossips like who kissed whom, or what matches were made, &c. (see *The Staple*, 3 Int. 17–29). Now they could not laugh at Sir Politic Would-Be—that man of self-sacrificing curiosity—as one of the paranoiac minority. It was they that talked freely "o' the King. / Or State. / Or all the World," "in *Pauls*" and "in all the tavernes"; they might have even "Censur'd the Counsell, ere they censure us [them]" (*Time Vindicated to Himself and to His Honours*, 207–12).

The Staple of News is called "the house of *fame*," where "the mother of sport" scatters "the *Cornu copiae* of her rumors" to the thronging vulgar who "will bite [the bate] like fishes" (III. ii. 115–22). We can identify the "fame" here with "public fame," which descries truth and praises false dictions (see "An Execration," 46–47) rather than *Fama Bona* who glorifies virtues (see *The Masque of Queens* [1609]). As a disseminator of gossips it is nearer to the monster Fame (*Fama Mala*) in Virgil's *Aeneid* (IV), which is cited in *Poetaster*: her body and wings are covered with "*so many waking eyes*," "*as many mouthes*" and "*as many listning eares*"; "*Little at first*," but while flying it gathers strength, and "*at length / Shee dares attempt the skies, and stalking proud*" (V. ii. 75–97).

As Vices "*are attir'd like men and women o' the time*" in Jonson's plays (2 Int. 16–17), so the monster "public fame" is incarnated in the four commentators on stage, Gossips Mirth, Tattle, Expectation and Censure. At the Third Intermean they demonstrate how to build up "public opinion" out of a piece of innocent news by adding artificial manipulation; they make it a rule to "*credit all* [the information they get], *and make more of it, in the reporting*," "*whether it were true, or no*"

[1] This was written approximately at the same time as our play; H & S (XI, p. 82) suggests 1625 or 1626 as the date of the poem.

(37–41). Thus a report of a nine-year-old boy, who only saw his teacher's "*coniuring booke*," is transformed into a "Fable" of "Doctor Lambe, *in the likenesse of a roaring* Lyon, *that runne away with him in his teeth*" (29–37).

Then comes their own leap-frog logic: nevertheless it is tue that schoolmasters are cunning men (i.e. conjurers), because they are cunning (learned) and know poetry; study in poetry has made our children "Play-boyes"; we cannot pay money for this—how we wish to have "*painfull good Ministers*" (i.e. Puritans) keep school, but "*they talke, we shall have no more Parliaments*" (43–54). Here they reach the core of the problem, the dissolution of Parliament. By this time Parliamentary speeches were accessible to the ordinary people,[1] who had now license to censure "the oppressive king."

There was still another fruit of journalistic exertion. The City's "hunger and thirst after *Newes*" was not merely for the curiosity of the thing; it also stemmed from the increased fears of a Spanish invasion, against which they had reorganized the Artillery Company by way of self-defence. "A Speech According to Horace" tells us that they could no longer count on the scions of blue blood, who had lost their fathers' valour through dissipation. Now the commons did "increase in virtue; and in fame: / And keep the Glorie of the English name / Up among Nations" (49–51). Now that their opinions were substantiated with their own military clique through their exercise against the supposed enemy, the initiative in "Politique and Militar affaires" (60) had completely shifted from the nobility to the citizen.

Again the portrait of our prodigal son was taken from living specimens of the time, not from the biblical parables. Jonson counts a number of Penniboy Juniors around him, who have "so much a land a yeare, or such a Banke, / That turnes us [them] so much moneys" (76–77). Their epithet "Taylors blocks" (99) fitly applies to Penniboy Junior, who is "moulded" and "made" "one, worth looking after" (*The Staple*, I. ii. 93, 94; I. i. 9) by his shoemaker, tailor, hatter and spurrier. He also refers to an "Academy," where these "Gallants" learned "to make legs" or "to smell most sweet" ("A Speech," 89–90). We find early examples of this kind in the "Academy" where

[1] Parr (p. 28) cites Stanley Morison, "The Origin of the Newspaper, in *Selected Essays of Letter-Forms in Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge, 1980).

Fitzdottrel learns his postures (*The Devil Is an Ass*, II. vii. 20–22), or in Lady Haughty's "College" for "the *Wits*, and *Braueries* o' the time" who "crie downe, or vp, what they like, or dislike in a braine, or a fashion" (*Epicoene* [1609], I. i. 77–79). On the summit of these salons was, in due course, Charles I the newly anointed King of England.

4. The College of Canters

While the fourth estate was enlightening and strengthening the commons, what was called "College" or "Academy" was corroding the aristocracy from within. This explains in part why Canters' College, rather than the Staple of News, should be the direct cause of Penniboy Junior's ruin. For one thing it is due to its debaucherous trait. The Gossips report it as "*the hopes of so many towardly young spirits. . . . As the* Doctors. . . . *And the* Courtiers" (4 Int. 30–32). Like the "Academy" in *The Devil is an Ass*, it consists of "the gallant spirits o' the age" (IV. ii. 140), and its members "can cry vp / And downe mens wits" (141–42) after the manner of the Collegeate in *Epicoene*. But this does not seem enough to incur the "dead" father's judgment of wrath upon the prodigal, nor does it seem to have any connection with Penniboy Junior's other venture on the Staple of News, which forms the title of the play.

Canters' College has a pack of "*Ieerers*" for its "professors." Before Cymbal becomes the "*prime Ieerer*" after his bankruptcy, the post was occupied by Fitton, the courtier. He works for the Staple as one of the four cardinal "*Emissaries*," "*Emissary Court*," until the insolvent of the "*Office*." Jonson's "Epistle Answering to One that Asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben" (*Underwood*, XLVII) testifies the existence of a certain group which sold "*Court-newes*" (*The Staple*, III. ii. 185) undoubtedly to the journalism. Like the Jeerers who enquire after "*Who dines and sups i' the towne? where*, and *with whom?*" (III. iii. 48), they get "their deale / Of newes" "to strew out the long meale" ("An Epistle," 27–28). They are given precisely the same name as the Jeerers, i.e. "the Covey of Witts" (22; see *The Staple*, II. iv. 41), and are similarly fed by "mans corrupt parts" "Like flies, or wormes" (18; see *The Staple*, IV. i. 36). Although our Staple scene affords nothing but a caricatured version of court news, such as "A *Precept* for the wearing of long haire, / To runne to seed, to sow bald pates withall"

(III. ii. 189–90), the news dealt in "An Epistle" works dangerous to the crown; the discussion on the possiblities of "French Designe" "to get the *Val-telline*," and on the skirmishing between the Spanish and the Dutch fleet brings about the hottest issue which had planted and left the popular distrust of the royal policies—"the Match from *Spaine*" (31–36).

In the Second Intermean, Gossip Mirth makes an evasive answer to Gossip Censure's rebuke that the name Aurelia Clara Pecunia with her title Infanta is a mock allusion to the Spanish Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, who was once Charles's supposed bride:

> *Why not the* Infanta *of the Beggers? or* Infanta *o' the Gipsies?*
> *as well as* King *of Beggers, and* King *of Gipsies?* (32–34)

Her answer is deliberately off the point and is still more radical than the satire on the Infanta, for it implies that all the king's subjects are begging Gypsies.

Here we have a hint to solve that enigmatic naming of the College; if Jonson had only intended to emphasise its mock-academic trait, it might have been, for example, "a College of Jargons." It had to be "Canters" at all costs, which also signified gypsies or beggars. The Jeerers mock at Penniboy Canter—Junior's father in disguise of a beggar—by calling him "the *Patrico*—Or *Arch-priest o' Canters*" (IV. i. 45). The name "Patrico" reminds us of Jonson's masque *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), in which the king's minion Buckingham played the part of the Patrico with other courtiers his Gypsy followers. A close study by Randall has proved that the masque was Jonson's secret satire upon courtiers who were no better than Gypsies or beggars in swindling the royal household out of its property.[1] In the same way the Jeerers are called "Beggers *of fashion*"—"*a* Court-Begger," a "*beggery* Poet[s]," "*a thred-bare* Doctor *of* Physicke" and "*a* Sea-captaine, *halfe steru'd*" (1 Int. 13–22), and finally Penniboy Junior enters "the society of *Canters*" (V. i. 35) as "*Dauphin* of *beggers*" (V. i. 10).

But it is also true that the College reflects, to some extent, the existing

[1] D.B.J. Randall, *Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked* (Durham, N.C.: Duke U.P., 1975).

academic institutes, including both Universities.[1] Whatever it may be, the highest seat of learning should be the highest seat of reason, through which the order of the state was to be established.[2] Jonson once set up a lofty ideal of the kind in his *Masque of Augurs*, where the god Apollo founds the College of Augurs to support James I's peacemaking policies with " *the tunefull Art of Augurie* " (281). We can easily imagine Jonson among the augurs as the chief priest of Apollo, whose oracle under the bust of the god at the Devil Tavern awed his " sons."[3] What he attempted with the masque was the extension of the peaceful influence of his circle on the whole court as well as on the Universities.

In every respect Canters' College is a negative correspondent to this College of Augurs. In the main masque Apollo descends from heaven, announcing that he has founded a college on earth in honour of King James and made his son Charles " President "; during his feast in the Apollo Room of the Devil Tavern, Penniboy Junior is suddenly inspired to the plan of building Canters' College and appoints Pecunia and himself to " *Founders.*" The room of the tavern coincides with the name of the god, and "A noble *Whimsie* " (IV. iv. 80) in his brain can be parallelled with the oracle of Apollo. Both Charles and Penniboy Junior acquire the uppermost title in their colleges. The only and crucial difference is that the professors at Canters' College make cacophony of their own " academic " cants, e.g. in arms, law, politics, astrology, poetry and culnary or military arts, which " no honest *Christian* / Can understand " (IV. i. 53–54).

" The study of words is the first distemper of Learning," Jonson quotes Bacon in *Discoveries* (2090–91; from *The Advancement of Learning*

[1] McKenzie (pp. 120–1) and Parr (p. 47) asserts that Canters' College is Jonson's response to new educational initiatives in England at that time, like Gresham College in London. But considering the subjects offered and that Jonson was an admirer of Bacon and had a copy of *Novum Organum* in his own library, it seems to be more probable that Jonson's main target was the established institutions.

[2] See the role of Reason in his masque *Hymenaei* (1606).

[3] Obviously Jonson had the Latin word *vates* (one of Sidney's definitions of a poet) in mind, which lays stress on the prophetic aspect, while he was composing *The Masque of Augurs*; but by " prophet " he did not mean something supernatural or occultly but one who has a deep insight into the future through an elaborate study of what is currently taking place.

[1605], I. iv). In *Novum Organum* (1620)[1] such abuse of technical terms is classified into one of the four deadly Idols, i.e. the "Idol of the Market-place," which should be dispelled from people's mind (XLIII). Bacon tells us that his target is the backwardness of the established organizations: "in the customs and institutions of schools, academies, colleges, and similar bodies destined for the abode of learned men and the cultivation of learning, everything is found adverse to the progress of science" (XC).

Thus the absurd College is the very symbol of the poet's pessimistic vision of the new age; by setting up a parody on his Whitehall masque within his "sanctuary" in Fleet Street, Jonson tried to recant all that he had predicted under the reign of the former king. The actual colleges of the day, which did nothing but weave "the Cobwebs of Learning" in their towers of Babel, were quite an incompetent support to the novice monarch, who was busy in building another sort of "College," the members of which did not hesitate to sell their master when they had no more to swindle out of him.

5. Would They Would Understand

Jonson's attitude in *The Staple of News* is historical as well as prophetic; for all its fantastic features, it is a work in which the poet attempted to leave an exact record of one critical moment of history. He had shown his own keen interest in historical works, by describing the frontispiece of Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* in "The Mind of the Frontispiece to a Book" (*Underwood*, XXIV).[2] The frontispiece shows "The Mistresse of Mans life, grave Historie" vindicating the globe of the world from oblivion, raising it to "good or evil fame" (*Fama Bona* and *Fama Mala*): she is "Times witnesse, herald of Antiquitie, / The light of Truth, and life of Memorie" (17–18). Probably Jonson composed the poem as a warning to his age when it was growing very difficult, though not impossible, to be a "Times witnesse." In *News from the New World* the factor plans to "erect a

[1] References to the translated passage of *Novum Organum* is to *The Works of Fancis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, R. L. Ellis and D. D. Heath (London: Longman, 1858).

[2] Allan H. Gilbert discusses the possibility of Jonson's suggestion in designing the frontispiece in his *Symbolic Persons in the Masques of Ben Jonson* (1948; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 122.

Staple for newes " (45), to which the chronicler complains that he has been cheated so often with false news that he has spent more time correcting his work than composing it. His duty is " to give light to posteritie in the truth of things " (31), but he cannot execute it, prevented by a flood of mass-produced rumors.

Penniboy Junior continues his indefatigable exertions for the chronicling of his actions on stage. He pinpoints the date and moment of his succession by stopping his own watch. When he obtains Pecunia he has a presentiment that he may " doe some worke, and worthy of a *Chronicle* " (I. vi. 93). Then he makes a large contribution to the establishment of " the house of *fame*." At length his cherished dream seems to come true with the foundation of Canters' College, which is " a worthie worke, / Fit for a *Chronicle* " (IV. iv. 99–100). But the plan is suppressed by his raged father, who sneers at it as really " *worthy of a Chronicle* " (179). Upon his disinheritance, the day he attempted the work is to be commemorated as an anniversary of " Deluding gaping heires " and driving them into " the society of *Canters* " (V. i. 30–35). Simultaneously both his ventures blow up *in fumo*, leaving him the butt of public opinion:

> Me thinkes, I should be, on euery side, saluted,
> *Dauphin* of *beggers!* *Prince* of *Prodigalls!*
> That haue so fall'n vnder the eares, and eyes,
> And tongues of all, the fable o' the time,
> Matter of scorne, and marke of reprehension! (V. i. 9–13)

There he helplessly stands, cheated out of all he had, by the slandering multitude and the begging nobility. His whole action of the day would be left long in a chronicle, as " the fable o' the time."

He feels as if he had " The *epidemicall* disease " (21). This metaphor appears again in "An Epigram to Our Great and Good King Charles, on His Anniversary Day. 1629 " (18; *Underwood*, LXIV). Etymologically, " *epidemicall* " means " prevalent among people," and the disease here is applied to the ingratitude of the subjects to their sovereign. The poem belongs to a series of some dozen written for the royal family in *The Underwood*. Most of them are specially affixed with dates 1629–32, and their tones are cautionary rather than encomiastic: the court has been turned into a marketplace where " the Prince, and State " are sold at a " wretched rate " (LXI); in 1629 there is another fatal dissolu-

tion of Parliament caused by "Peoples Evill" (translation of "the epidemicall disease" above, LXII); the City refuses to celebrate the Queen's birthday in 1630 (LXVII); "murmuring Subjects" no longer understand how they owe their peace to the king (LXIV, LXXVII, LXXXII et al.). The chronicling of these poems, no doubt "to give light to posteritie in the truth of things," would have had something to do with his appointment as the chronologer of the City of London in 1628.

Eventually the Curious in *Time Vindicated* reach an extremity of inflamed public opinion:

> Or let's have all the people in an uprore,
> None knowing, why, or to what end: and in
> The midd'st of all, start up an old mad woman
> Preaching of patience. (225–28)

A most gruesome example of such riot has been given in one of Jonson's tragedy, *Sejanus* (1603). No sooner has the news spread abroad that Sejanus lost favour with the Emperor and was condemned, than the mass throng to destroy their fallen idol; a moment ago they worshipped him as "the second face of the whole world" (I. 217). Now they scramble to bite the stone statues of Sejanus "like so many mastiues" (V. 767), tearing them down and dragging them along the streets. None of them take trouble to see how he became culpable; the displeasure of the tyrant is enough for them. Their fury does not cease until they tear his dead body apart. And when their anger is gone, they begin to weep; some are so flexible as to believe him innocent.

Most likely Jonson had anticipated the disaster like this already in the 1620's when public voices against the royal policies grew so clamorous. "An old mad woman / Preaching of patience" above is the likeness of the drunken playwright of *The Staple of News*, who has turned into "the most miserable *Embleme* of patience" after tearing the book in pieces (Induction, 67–74). The moral might have been that he was afraid to present his prophetic work. As an unequaled master of men and manners of the day and the exclusive writer of diplomatic court masques, he could divine, perhaps too clearly, the imminent catastrophe of the new king. Like the broken play book—i.e. the brain of the drunken poet—the fragments of his masques which

celebrated the somehow peaceful reign of the former king are scattered around in the play, as if to anticipate the forthcoming ruin of the Stuart magnificence.

Received June 5, 1989