
UNIT 1 THE DRAMATIC CAREER OF BEN JONSON

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Our primary objective in this Unit is to **offer** a **bird's** eye view of i) the major phases in Jonson's dramatic career and ii) landmarks in Jonson's biography so that his achievements as an artist can be examined against the background of his time and his involvement with **the** theatre and fellow playwrights.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The growth and development of **Ben** Jonson, the dramatist, has been for a longtime **treated** as following an apriori critical commitment, and therefore, linear in character. A closer study indicates how restless Jonson was as an experimenter and how he **repeatedly** did not adhere to a formula: He was not trapped by success. His career **appears** to open a **new** chapter in **the** history of English drama because he **conferred** **on** comedy a dignity **unknown** earlier.

1.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF BEN JONSON

For students of British **drama**, Ben Jonson's career has a special interest partly because he **was** the first playwright to whom plays **mattered**, partly because his life is **documented** in **greater** detail than that of his fellow playwrights, and finally **because** his plays **seem** to bear a direct relationship to developments in the theatre and to the larger social milieu. While others acquiesced in the inferior rank accorded to plays as **ephemeral** and trivial, Jonson secured for the dramatic art its due place in serious **literature**. **Jonson's** inclusion of his plays in the 1616 folio edition of his works is a milestone in the history of **the** theatre. By thus elevating the status of plays, he probably **paved** the way for the publication of the first folio of Shakespeare seven **years later**. From this perspective, Jonson's two seminal observations on **Shakespeare**, "Would **he** had blotted a thousand," and "He was not of an age but **for** all time" may be said to inaugurate a new earnestness in the criticism of drama. **Jonson** was well known as an **epigramatist**, grammarian, and a writer of **odes**, lyrics, **and** masques. But this account focuses on his plays, and seeks to locate **The Alchemist** against the wider canvas of his life and other plays selectively highlighted in **the** accompanying 'Chronology'.

Tradition has it that **Ben** Jonson's ancestors hailed from Scotland. His **grand -** father is said to have made the move from **Carlisle** to London and prospered for a while. In

course of time, the family estate was lost and Jonson's father became a clergyman. Jonson himself was born probably in London in 1572 a month or so after his father's death. With the re-mamage of his mother to a bricklayer, Jonson spent most of his childhood in the vicinity of **Charing** Cross. In the face of his step-father's indifference to academic pursuits, Jonson was fortunate enough to attend a private school in St. Martin's church. Subsequently, in the Westminster School, he **came** to the notice of his teacher, William **Camden**, the eminent scholar and **antiquary**, the first and foremost influence on the boy's career.

Jonson's schooling came to an abrupt end when he was about sixteen. For a while he was apprenticed, against his wishes, in **brick** laying. Unable to proceed to Oxford or Cambridge, he enrolled himself in the English Expeditionary Force, and fought in Flanders in **1591-92**. During a lull in the fighting, he killed in single combat an enemy soldier "**in the face of both the camps**". Elizabeth **Cook** brings out the significance of this event: "The scene is an emblem of his life; the giant **figure**, a party to neither faction, wamng alone in the classic **manner** before his awed onlookers". Jonson's **carrying** back the weapons of the enemy as *opima spolia* **reverberates** throughout his many literary battles with rivals and foes. In 1594 he married **Anne Lewis** who bore him a son and a daughter who died in their infancy.

Like most playwrights of his time, Jonson too **seems** to have begun his career as an actor and a hack. An early version of *A Tale of a Tub* is often assigned to 1596. In 1597 **Jonson** figures as 'a player' in the theatre manager, Philip **Henslowe's Diary**. In the same year Jonson was sent to jail **for** his share in **Thomas Nashe's** "seditious" play, *The Isle of Dugs*. In 1598 the Children of the Chapel performed Jonson's *The Case is Altered*. He probably **considered** them minor and did not, therefore, include them in his *Works*, but he revised the **farmer** play in 1633, four years before his death. Jonson perhaps wrote a few tragedies which are lost, for Francis Meres mentions him as a leading playwright, among "our best for tragedy".

EVERY MAN IN HIS HUMOUR

The **yeas** 1598 appears quite **eventful**. His fist major play, *Every Man in his Humour*, was staged by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain theatre with Shakespeare in the cast. Within a few months he **was** imprisoned in **Newgate**, this time for killing the actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel. He turned a papist, and pleading benefit of clergy, escaped hanging **after** being branded on the **thumb**. **On** the curious situation of **Ben** Jonson in 1598 right **after** his release, **Herford** and **Simpson** comment: "**he** went out of prison, a **recusant**, a branded felon, and a pauper, but untouched in life and liberty, inspired by a **lofty** intellectual ambition, and the author of the best example of genuine comedy yet **produced** in England".

The original Florentine setting of *Every Man in his Humour* **was** changed to **London** and the revised version was published **probably** in 1605 and the first to be included in Jonson's **works**. The title provides a clue to Jonson's characterization **from** the perspective of Renaissance physiology. **The** excess of a '**humour**' or a fluid in the body, viz. phlegm, choler, blood and black bail would produce phlegmatic, choleric, sanguine, and melancholic **temperaments**. Thus **was born** the Comedy **of** Humours and **unfortunately** his reputation as the virtual inventor of this genre eclipsed his many-sided achievement. **The humour** of the merchant, Kitley is jealousy which is roused during a visit of his brother-in-law **Wellbred** and his **friends**. He suspects them of **dishonourable** intentions against his wife, and his **sister** Bridget. **Wellbred** is accompanied by his servant, **Knowell**, the mischief monger, Brainworm, his country cousin, Stephen, besides, **Bobadil** the **boastful** soldier, and Matthew **the** town gull. Complications **arise** through the inordinate concern of Knowell's father for his son's virtue, and the **trapping** of Kitley through luring him to discover his wife at the water-house. Through Justice Clement's intervention de-humouring **takes** place and wedding **bells** for **Knowell** and Bridget **mark** the close of the play.

The Prologue to the revised version of the play succinctly captures a programme for comedy as he envisages it:

He rather prays you will be pleas'd to see
One such to-day, as other plays should be;
Where neither chorus **wafts** you o'er the seas,
Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please...
But deeds, and language, **such** as **men** do use,
And persons such as comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times.

The focus is unmistakably not on persons but follies in order to portray contemporary life realistically.

In the very **next** year, 1599, **The** Lord Chamberlain's **Men** produced at **the** Globe, *Every Man out of his Humour*, "a comical satire" as **Jonson** describes it, a **truer** and more forthright expression of his views on the nature and **function** of comedy and humour. **Set** in the "Fortunate Island", the play castigates the **dramatis personae** explicitly through a prefatory note on "the characters of **the** persons", **Jonson**, suspecting that John **Marston** had ridiculed him in the sketch of **the** poet-philosopher, Chrisogonus in *Histrion-Mastix* parodied with characteristic deftness **Marston's** affectations in speech. This incidental portrait marked the **beginning** of **the** **War** of **the** **Theatres** which raged for the **next** **three** years, and **Jonson's** **further** skirmishes are celebrated in *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*. To *Every Man out of his Humour*, **Marston** responded with an **unflattering** portrait of **Jonson** as Brabant Senior in his *Jack Drum's* Entertainment.

In *Cynthia's Revels* staged by the Children of the Chapel in 1601, **Jonson** as **Crites**, attacked **Marston**, and for some obscure reason Thomas Dekker too as **Anaides** and **Hedon** respectively. The **Queen's** **participation** was hinted in the early production by the role of Cynthia. **Marston**, in turn, portrayed **Jonson** as the vainglorious **Lampatho Doria** in *What you will*.

Jonson countered this attack with *The Poetaster* produced in **the** same **year** again by the Children of the **Chapel**. In the self-portrait as Horace, he poured ridicule **on** **Marston** and **Dekker** through the figures of **Crispinus** and **Demetrius**. The former was given an emetic **so** that he could throw up all his recondite vocabulary. Dekker exposed **Jonson's** arrogance and peculiarities of appearance in *Satiromastix* or **the** Unmasking of the **Humorous** Poet (1602). For his part **Jonson** appended "The **Apologetical Dialogue**" to the *Poetaster*, not **an** expression of regret, much **less** a holding out of an olive **branch**.

The **war** of the **Theatres**, "*Poetomachia*" as Dekker called it, made **the** **children's** companies so popular in the city that adult groups had **to** **seek** a living in the countryside. Shakespeare takes **note** of this recent innovation:

... there is, sir, an eyrie of children, **little eyases**, that cry out on **the** top of question **and** are most **tyrannically** clapped **for't**. These are now **the** **fashion**, and so **berattle** the common stages (*Hamlet*, II.ii).

The fame of **Jonson** became a settled thing. As M.C. **Bradbrook** sums up, : "The War established **Jonson's** reputation **among** the judicious: hence forth he was 'dramaticorum sicut **sacculi facile princeps**'".

In spite of this success, **Jonson** found himself out of favour with the players, playwright friends and some influential people. In poverty, and possibly because of domestic discord, he **left home** to be with Sir **Robert Townshend** and **later on** with **Esme** Stewart, Lord of **Aubigny**. He occupied himself with epigrams **and** **hack** work on *The Spanish Tragedy*. In 1603 he **turned** his hand **to** tragedy for the **reasons** mentioned in "The **Apologetical Dialogue**".

... since the **Comick** muse
Hath **prou'd** so **ominous** to me, I will **trie**
If Tragedie will **have** a more **kind** aspect.

The result was **Sejanus produced** by the King's Men in 1603. This **scholarly** and faithful re-creation of **Roman** life and history proved unpopular and was hissed off the stage. In **the context of** the conspiracy of Essex, he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on suspicion of dangerous satire but was let off. But fortunately for Jonson, **he** was called upon to **compose** a masque in 1604 by royal favour. This launched him on a new phase of his career till the end of King James's reign.

Jonson returned to the **public** stage with *Eastward Ho!* collaborating with Chapman and **Marston**. For his **share** in poking **fun** at the Scots, they were hauled up by the authorities, and **were released** after a brief period of imprisonment. Jonson's voluntary **surrender before** the court has **been** noted by his biographers. His integrity was such that with the **wiping away of** suspicion, he was restored to favour. In 1605 he was commissioned to discover the **conspirators** behind the Gunpowder Plot, though he **mined** a **Catholic**.

VOLPONE

Volpone, produced by the King's Men at **the Globe** in 1606, marks a turning point in Jonson's personal and **professional** fortunes. During the next ten years, he wrote his "'mature comedies'", **according** to most critics. To this period belong *Epicoene*, or the Silent Woman, (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610) *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the monumental **Works** (1616), and the second tragedy *Catiline* (1611).

The action of *Volpone* or the Fox is **set** in the 'home' of corruption, Italy. **The** play is about cheating people, a game in which the magnifico, **Volpone**, pretends to be on his deathbed in order to **extract gifts** from the hopefuls for his legacy. His servant Mosca (the fly) lures the **lawyer** Volpone (the vulture) the merchant **Corvino** (the raven) and others.

Greed is the **master theme** of *Volpone*, a **power** degrading man and making him sink to the sub-human **level**. The animal symbolism lends the characters a fierce energy through a **reversal of the fabliaux mode**. For the dominant notes of **Jacobean** London affluence and **acquisitiveness**, **Jonson** finds a parallel in Renaissance Venice. Volpone's feigning **ironically** mirrors a deep sickness, matched by the depravity of the gulls, notably that of the merchant willing to prostitute his wife. Even more impressive than **Volpone's** apostrophe to gold, and **his** sensuality is his irresistible love of acting, of **dissimulation**. The English visitors, Sir Politick – would – be and his Fine Madame provide the necessary foil. **The** element of spectacle is exploited theatrically. In **investing eccentricity** with a rare intensity Jonson **succeeds** in depicting characters **driven** by an obsession.

After a lapse of three **years** Jonson returned to the stage with his *Epicoene*, acted by the Children of the **Queen's** Revels in 1609. The noise-hating miser, Morose is on the lookout for a silent woman as his wife. Assisted by his nephew, Sir Dauphine, he does succeed but very briefly. His wife, after marriage, turns out to be a loud mouthed chatterer, **and** worse, a boy who is passed off as the bride. With the restoration of the **inheritance** to his nephew, Morose obtains his release. **Dryden** chose this play as the **model** of excellence in his "Examen" and the play has been, since then, a **favourite with** theatre **goers**.

THE ALCHEMIST

From the monomaniac of these two plays, Jonson turns to sketching an acquisitive society in *The Alchemist* produced by the King's Men in the year of the plague, 1610.

Chicanery is the effect rather than the cause of the mischief in this comedy. Alchemy is employed as a metaphor for man's proneness to be gulled. Many critics consider this his best, if not the best in the English language. **Lovewit**, the master is away in the country, the servant, Captain Face colludes with Subtle, the quack, and **Dol** Common, the whore, to defraud a number of gulls through promising to fulfil their fond hopes for wealth, youth, business success, **love**, and so on. The sudden return of **Lovewit** forces the cheats to flee, abandoning their earnings. Jonson's comic realism, whether it be in the varied jargon of diverse professions, the evocation of the **Blackfriars neighbourhood**, the mastery of the alchemical know-how, or the numerous topical references, locates the play firmly in Jacobean London. Yet its universal appeal, despite occasional obscurity of phrase, has remained unrivalled. **The** morality of **Lovewit's** appropriating Dame Pliant to himself, the resolution of the play's action, has been much debated. The play's enormous and enduring success in the theatre is indisputable. **The** unforced economy of the action, the immense improvisation demanded of the actors and the sustained threat of exposure contribute to its power on the stage.

At the pinnacle of his fame, Jonson decided to return to tragedy, a genre in which he apparently failed earlier. *Catiline* was acted by the King's Men in 1611, **and** was a failure on the stage. Most of the next year, Jonson spent in Europe as tutor to Raleigh's son.

BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

In 1614, *Bartholomew Fair* was performed by the Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Hope. More loosely structured than his earlier comedies, the wide canvas of the play reflects a greater variety of characters and motives. While in *The Alchemist* Jonson seems to be more on the side of the cheats than that of the gulls, a greater balance is evident in *Bartholomew Fair*. The presiding deity, so to say, of the Fair, Ursula, the Pig Woman, errs on the side of **frailty** and has a touch of Falstaff about her. Another contrasting feature is that while in *The Alchemist* the impression of many characters is an illusion produced by the cheats, the cast of *Bartholomew Fair* is quite large befitting its social realism. The rogues here have been aptly compared to **Hogarth's** in vivacity, especially the horse-trader **Knockhunn**, the prostitute aptly named Punk Alice, and the pickpocket **Edgeworth**. The play set the tone for the Restoration Comedy of Manners.

The publication of Jonson's Works in the folio edition of 1616 is considered a milestone in English drama. Jonson **left** out his ventures prior to *Every Man out of his Humour* and chose for some mysterious reason not to include *Bartholomew Fair* also. Among the plays in this edition are: *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, *The Poetaster*, *Sejanus*, *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Catiline*. The revision, **often** an expansion of some of the plays, reflects Jonson's scrupulousness in matters of detail.

Soon after the publication of his Works, the King's Men produced *The Devil is an Ass*. This play along with *The Staple of News* (1626), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633) is ranked by **Dryden** and a number of critics among Jonson's "dotages". Recent critical evaluations of these plays have, however, **highlighted** Jonson's refusal to follow the beaten track and the surprising freshness of the pastoral and nostalgic elements in the late plays.

Jonson had already been awarded a pension of 100 marks annually by King James. As F.H. Mares notes, "In the first decade of James's reign begins the transformation of **Asper** ---- into 'Father Ben', the corpulent literary dictator, compelling the admiration of the best brains in London at a love-feast in the Devil tavern". Jonson undertook a walking tour of Scotland in 1618, and stayed briefly with William Drummond of Hawthornden who recorded his conversation, a not totally reliable record. On his return to England he was awarded an honorary M.A. degree by Oxford University, a gesture unparalleled till today. **Herford** and **Simpson** rightly

observe: It was a tribute, rare in the history of the University before or since, to a great scholar-poet who owed nothing to Universities".

The decline in Jonson's fortunes is evident in a series of calamities. In 1623, a fire reduced to ashes the **books** and manuscripts in his personal library. Five years later, he suffered a stroke and **was** paralysed. Still, he continued to write. When he died on August 6, 1637, the **inscription** on his tomb, "O rare Ben Jonson!" captures the popular image of the man and the playwright, more than **any** long-winded tribute.

Jonson's career spanning the closing years of Queen **Elizabeth's** reign and those of Charles I has been stereotyped as a linear development till 1616, followed by a decline. Anne Barton challenges this theory and rejects the alleged **Jonsonian** consistency as too simplistic an explanation. She underscores Jonson's flair for creative adventure, his rare sensitivity to the shifting pressures of his time and his deliberate refusal to be trapped by success into repeating a "**formula**". Ranking **Volpone**, **Epicoene**, **The Alchemist** and **Bartholomew Fair** among Jonson's great works, she undertakes a revaluation of his later plays and notes in them a **return** in depth to older forms and a new pervasive tone of nostalgia. The dotage theory, she **argues**, does not account for the freshness of the unfinished *The Sad Shepherd*. Jonson's enormous creativity in the **non-dramatic** verse of this period is cited as further justification.

David Riggs views **Jonson the man** as Rabelaisian in egotism, ever compulsively driven by persistently **neurotic** impulses. He cites as evidence Jonson's boasts, duels and imprisonment. In a striking **contrast** is the artist, ever in control of method and material, employing humour and the act of writing primarily for **their** therapeutic **function**. Recent assessments including those of **Marquette** Chute, Claude **J. Summers** and Ted-Larry **Pebworth** and others endorse Anne Barton's re-mapping of the **pattern** of Jonson's dramatic **career**.

13 CHRONOLOGY

1572 (June 11)	Birth of Ben Jonson
1572	Mother's marriage to a brick layer Favourite pupil of William Camden
1588	Apprentice bricklayer
1591	Enrolment in English Expeditionary Force
1594	Meets Anne Lewis
1596	Draft of A Tale of a Tub
1597	Mentioned by Henslowe Collaboration on The Isle of Dogs Imprisonment
1598	The Case is Altered performed by the Children of the Chapel. Every Man in his Humour performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain Hailed as "The best for Tragedy" by Francis Meres. Killing Gabriel Spencer Imprisonment Claiming benefit of clergy Becomes a Catholic
1599	Every Man out of his Humour performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe
1600	Cynthia's Revels performed by the Children of the Chapel
1601	Poetaster performed by the Children of the Chapel
1602	Living in the home of Lord Townshend
1603-1607	Patronage of Esme Stewart, Lord D'Aubigny

1603	<i>Sejanus</i> performed by the King's Men Charge of Treason – imprisonment.
1604	Invitation to write a Masque Eastward Ho! in collaboration with Chapman and Marston, performed by the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars
1605	Revised version of Every Man in his Humour acted by the King's Men
1606	<i>Volpone</i> acted by the King's Men at the Globe.
1609	<i>Epicoene</i> acted by the Children of the Queen's Revels
1610	<i>The Alchemist</i> acted by the King's Men Return to the Anglican Church
1611	Catiline acted by the King's Men
1612	Continental tour as tutor to Raleigh's son
1614	<i>Bartholomew Fair</i> performed by the Lady Elizabeth's Men
1616	Works – the folio edition The <i>Devil</i> is an Ass performed by the King's Men at the Blackfriars.
1618-19	Walking tour to Scotland.
1619	Honorary Master of Arts – Oxford University
1623	Library destroyed in a fire Virtual Poet Laureate "Sons of Ben" like Robert Herrick meet in the Apollo Room of the inn, The Devil and St. Dunstan Death of King James Return to public stage under Charles I
1626	The Staple of <i>News</i> performed by the King's Men at the Blackfriars.
1628	Paralysis
1629	The <i>New Inn</i> acted by the King's Men at the Blackfriars
1632	The <i>Magnetic Lady</i> acted by the King's Men at the Blackfriars
1633	A Tale of a Tub, revised and acted by the Queen's Men
1637	Death – burial in Westminster Abbey.

1.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

M.C. BRADBROOK

The introduction to *Every Man* out of his Humour, his **first** manifesto, contains a definition of his new **type** of comedy, and a justification of his departure from classical models. At the **same** time he sought constantly to defend his **Art**, so that the introductions, epilogues and incidental comments in his plays furnish the most complete theory of the **drama** which the age produced, based not upon scholastic arguments but upon practical experience.

CLAUDE J. SUMMERS AND TED-LARRY PEBWORTH

Although his final plays were neither popular nor critical successes, they represent continued experimentation with theatrical form. **When** he died, he left **an** unfinished **manuscript** of a pastoral drama, The Sad Shepherd, perhaps his most lyrical dramatic composition. He continued writing non dramatic poetry in his last years, **too**, and his final poems show no great diminution of poetic power. Perhaps most remarkably, they avoid despair and sentimentality, embracing instead quiet dignity and **gentle** humor.

RENU JUNEJA

Jonson began with the traditional New Comedy, largely affirmative in **its conclusion**, moved to satire, thence to irony, and finally concluded with comedies which have

rich symbolic and **ritualistic** overtones...Insofar as Jonson's world view is consistent, his norms of judgement constant, his universe may be said to be unchanging.

HERFORD AND SIMPSON

But no earlier British **poet** had **so** truly reigned, or **been** commemorated at his passing, with honours **so** signal, on purely literary grounds, as Jonson... **A** square flag of blue marble **was** alone to be **seen**, rudely inscribed with the legend: 'O rare Ben Jonson'. .. **That** brief vernacular ejaculation, so naively human in its contrast with the sententious Latin epitaphs around conveys the impression made by Jonson upon his age more vividly than any **formal** obituary... The Jacobean world saw in this doughty champion **of** unpopular traditions the most incisive individual personality, the **most commanding personal** force which had, within its memory, mingled in the world **of letters**. For it, he was not the **assertor** of commonplace, but the 'rare', the **incomparable**, the unique, Ben Jonson.

F. H. MARES (1967)

He was a public figure, a man of strong (sometimes overbearing) character, arrogant, opinionated, **disputatious**, convivial, but of great **courage**, honesty, and integrity, and surprising tenderness **and** delicacy of feeling... This independence is like Jonson's own, who served the **court** for years without ever seriously compromising his own integrity, who could **beg from** great men or dedicate to **great** ladies in a tone that never allows **compliment** to decline into flattery. **When** Jonson **prepared** his text for the printer of the folio **he** did not write in all the details of **stage-business**, especially if they were clear **from** the dialogue... It is the assumption of this edition that the 1616 folio represents **Jonson's** considered intention...

D.H. CRAIG

In the early part of his **career**, when he **was** establishing himself as a writer of humorous comedies and as the English Horace, his emphasis is positive, stressing the **reforming** and **innovative** aspects of his drama. In 1605, in his *Volpone* prologue Jonson defines his **allegiance** to **classicism** negatively, as an act of opposition to contemporary popular culture... The failure of *Sejanus* on stage in 1605 was the key event in this development it.

D.V.K. RAGHAVACHARYULU

Ben Jonson's famed **erudition** was thus organic and functional to his world – view of which all his work as a **dramatist** was **paradigmatic**. In his understanding of tradition and individuality, **Ben Jonson** is astoundingly **modern**, which explains the recent **sea-change** in his critical **reception**, long overshadowed by the Shakespeare Goliath.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What was **Jonson's contribution to** the **status** of plays in England?
2. Write notes on : a) **Comedy of Humours**, b) The War of the Theatres.
3. Sketch the **personality** of Jonson.
4. Why did so many of **Jonson's** plays, in spite of their success, involve him in controversies?
5. Comment on **Jonson's** stated goals in **the realm** of comedy.
6. What are the aspects of Jacobean society depicted in Jonson's plays 3
7. Identify the concerns **of** Jonson's mature comedies.
8. How was Jonson **treated** by men of letters in his last days?

9. Point out the nature of recent assessments of Jonson's career.
10. What was Jonson's contribution to the status of **plays** in England?

1.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following passages with reference to context.

- i) But I shall put you in mind, sir, at Pie Comer,
Taking your meal of stem in from cooks' stalls,
Where; like the father of hunger, you did walk
Piteously costive, with your pinched-horn nose,
And your complexion of the Roman wash,
Stuck full of black and melancholic **worms**,
Like powder-cornshot at the artillery yard.
- ii) When all your alchemy and your algebra,
Your minerals, vegetals, and animals,
Your conjuring, cozening, and your dozen of trades,
Could not relieve your corpse with so much linen
Would make you tinder, but to see a fire,
I ga' you count'nance, credit for your coals,
Your stills, **your** glasses, ~~your~~ materials,
Built you a **furnace**, drew you customers,
Advanced all your black **arts**; lent you, beside,
A house to practise in —
- iii) No, your clothes.
Thou vermin, have I **ta'en** thee out of dung,
So poor, so wretched, when no living thing
Would keep thee company but a spider or worse?
Raised thee from **brooms** and dust and watering pots?
Sublimed thee and exalted thee and fixed thee
I' the third region, called our state of grace?
Wrought thee to spirit, to quintessence, with pains
Would twice have wan me the philosophers' work?
Put thee in words and fashion? Made thee fit
For more than ordinary fellowships?
- iv) Nor any melancholic **underscribe**,
Shall tell the Vicar; but a special gentle,
That is the heir to forty marks a year,
Consorts with the small poets of the time,
Is the sole hope of his old grandmother,
That knows the law, and writes you six fair hands,
Is a fine clerk, and has his ciphering perfect,
Will take his oath, o' the **Greek Testament**,
If need be, in his pocket, and can court
His mistress out of Ovid.
- vi) The spirits of dead Holland, living **Issac**,^o
You'd swear were in him; such a vigorous luck
As cannot be resisted. 'Slight, he'll put
Six o' your gallants to a cloak, indeed.'
- vii) O, good sir!
There must a world of ceremonies pass,
You **must** be bathed **and** fumigated first;

Besides, the **Queen of** Fairy does not rise
Till it be noon.

- viii) This is my friend, **Abel**, an **honest** fellow
He **lets** me have **good** tobacco, and he does not
Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
Nor washes it in **muscadel** and grains,
Nor buries it in gravel underground,
Wrapped up in greasy leather or **pissed** clouts,"
But keeps it in fine lily-pots, that opened,
Smell like **conserve** of roses, or French **beans**.^o
He has his maple **block**, his silver tongs,
Winchester pipes, and fire of **juniper**.^o
A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.'
- ix) By a rule, **Captain**,
In **metoposcopy**, which I do work by,
A certain star i'the **forehead**, which you see not.
Your chestnut or your olive-coloured **face**
Does never fail, and **your** long ear doth promise
I **knew't** by certain **spots** too, in his teeth,
And on the **nail** of **his** mercurial **finger**.
- x) The thumb, in **chiromany**, we give **Venus**;
The forefinger **to Jove**; the midst, to **Saturn**;
The ring to Sol; the least, to **Mercury**:
Who was the lord, sir, of his horoscope,
His **house** of **life** being Libra, which foreshowed,"
He should be a **merchant**, and **should** trade with balance.
- xi) ...There is a ship **now**, coming **from Ormus**,^o
That **shall** yield him such a commodity
Of drugs —**This** is the west, and this **the** south?
- xii) Why, now, **you** smoky **persecuter** of nature!
Now do you **see that** something's to be done,
Besides your **beech-coal** and your **corsive** waters,
Your **crosslets**, **crucibles**, and **cucurbites**?
You must have stuff brought **home** to you to work on?
- xiii) This is the day I am to perfect for him
The *magisterium*, **our** great **work**, the **stone**,^o
And yield it, made, into his **hands**: of which
He has this **month** talked as he were possessed.
And now he's **dealing** pieces **on't** away.
- xiv) **Methinks** I see him entering ordinaries,
Dispensing for the pox; and **plaguy houses**,
Reaching his dose; walking **Moorfields** for lepers;[']
And offering citizens' wives pomander-bracelets^o
As his preservative, made of the elixir;
Searching the **spittle**, to make old bawds young;
And the highways for beggars to make rich.
- xv) He will make
Nature ashamed of her long sleep, when art,
Who's but a **stepdame**, shall do more than she,
In her best love to mankind, ever could.
Sf his dream last, **he'll** turn the age to gold.

UNIT 2 JONSONIAN COMEDY AND THE ALCHEMIST

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 **Jonsonian** Comedy and The *Alchemist*
- 2.3 Critical Extracts
- 2.4 Questions
- 2.5 **Annotation** Passages

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit an attempt is made to (1) trace the origins of **English** comedy, a divided stream, (2) contrast Shakespearian and Jonsonian comedy, (3) identify the rival traditions of acting and (4) sketch the interaction between the native morality tradition and the classical comic structure.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The appreciation of **Jonsonian comedy** has been complicated by (1) confining his contribution to the virtual invention of the genre, Comedy of Humours, (2) **undue** emphasis **on** his classical **erudition** and (3) alleging the want of a Shakespearian spontaneity of spirit. Moreover, Jonson's occasional observations on the nature and function of comedy, dispersed, as they are, throughout his plays do not offer a consistent conception of comedy except through an over simplification. Jonson's defining of the impact of his Satiric comedy is **further** highlighted through attention to the Prologue to *The Alchemist*. Jonsonian Comedy is examined in its literary social and economic dimensions.

2.2 JONSONIAN COMEDY AND THE ALCHEMIST

The appreciation of **Jonsonian** comedy is hindered by the misconceptions about his contribution. On account of the enormous popularity and the notoriety following the production of *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*, he has been dubbed as the virtual **inventor** of the new genre, the Comedy of Humours. In **formulating** this form of comedy, **Jonson** was not attempting to validate his characterization by reference to Renaissance notions of physiology. He was re-phrasing the function of comedy in terms acceptable, to the hostile Puritans. By underscoring the therapeutic character of de-humouring, and by re-directing attacks **from** persons towards follies and foibles, Jonson sought for his comic experiments a **raison d'être**. The point is well raised by **Harry Levin** when he observes: "The induction to *Every Man Out of His Humour* sets forth the full argument for comedy as a social purgative. It is perhaps as relevant to Jonson's work as psychoanalysis is to the dramas of Eugene O'Neill."

A literal interpretation of the theory behind the Comedy of Humours would also result in the distortion of Jonson's characters. In spite of the mode of **caricature** **Jonson** adopts, his characters possess an astonishing range of distinguishing traits and

an undeniable vitality. **Narrowly** conceived, the Comedy of Humours affords scope only for four characters in four moulds. Bobadil and Kiteley, Brainworm and **Wellbred** defy stereotyping. Jonson employs "humour" to mean a fad, a fashion, an affectation as well.

Often Jonson's erudition is **considered** a liability. The star pupil of the eminent scholar, William **Camden**, had no rivals for learning among the writers of his time. For some mysterious reason, **superior** knowledge has been held to be the enemy of creative spontaneity. The **failure** of *Sejanus* is instructive, for this is wrongly attributed to Jonson's fidelity to Roman sources. All claims to originality are summarily **dismissed** primarily because of Jonson's scholarship. Even **Dryden** is guilty on this **count**. L.C. **Knights** observes: "**Dryden** said of him (Jonson) that he was a learned plagiarist of all the ancients: 'you track him everywhere in their snow'. But this, the common view, **violently** distorts the sense in which Jonson is 'traditional'. It completely **hides** the native springs of his vitality".

By sheer bulk, Jonson's **observations** on comedy dispersed through his numerous prologues, epilogues, and debates in the course of the War of the Theatres, present a formidable critical corpus. **By** nature occasional, their significance has a specificity, and taken out of context **they** tend to appear inconsistent and self-contradictory. This is not to deny him a critical **stance** of his own which has undergone creative mutations over a span of **more** than three decades. For instance, the mimetic and pragmatic aspects of **Jonson's** comic theory can be fallaciously made out to be polar opposites.

One way of defining **Jonsonian** comedy is to contrast it with Shakespearian Comedy. The dramatic world of **Jonson** is peopled by citizens, and in the absence of loving relationships it seems to **deserve** and demand "a harsh ethic". On the other hand, in Shakespeare there is **greater interaction** among men and women of all walks and stations of life, and the spirit of understanding appears to be pervasive. Hardly any of Shakespeare's creations is "**incapable** of a generous impulse". Hence, Shakespearian comedy has been labelled as sweet and romantic, and Jonsonian comedy as bitter and satiric. Much mischief was **caused** by linking the hues of the world of the plays to the temperament of **the playwright**.

Rightly understood, neither Shakespeare nor Jonson was offering through his dramatic world clues to his **temperament**. Both were adopting earlier traditions, the Medieval and the **Renaissance** versions of comedy were derived ultimately **from** the Latin grammarians of the **fourth** century. Making up for the paucity of theories of comedy, they viewed **tragedy** as an illuminating foil. Since tragedy dealt with kings and generals and portrayed a movement from happiness to calamity, comedy had to be peopled by private **people** and trace the movement from wretchedness to happiness. Unlike in tragedy, life in comedy is not to be dreaded but embraced., Vices and follies are to be **punished**. Thus, elements of the Romantic comedy and of the Satiric co-existed **originally** The Romantic elements surfaced early, **i.e.** in the Middle Ages; The Satiric **lay** underground for a long time to become prominent only in the Renaissance, and **Jonsonian** comedy is a characteristically Renaissance manifestation. It is **Shakespeare's** Romantic Comedy which harks back to the medieval times, to genial **Chaucer**. The difference between the two traditions is quite radical.

When **Asper**, a spokesman for Jonson, states his aim in the introduction to Every Man in His Humour,

Well I will scourge those apes:
And to those courteous **eyes**, **oppose** a mirror,
As large as is **the stage**, whereon we act:
Where they shall **see** the time's deformity
Anatomiz'd in **every** nerve, and sinew,
With constant **courage**, and contempt of fear

he echoes the views of Renaissance theorists like George Whetstone: "For by the reward **of** the good, the good are encouraged in well doing; and with the scourge of the lewd, the lewd are feared from evil attempts;" and Sir Philip Sidney, "Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he represents in the most ridiculous and scornful sort may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."

In tune with its quinessential corrective function, Jonsonian comedy deals with contemporary movements, real life figures and pastimes. When L.C. Knights remarks, "Of the dramatists handling social themes Jonson is undoubtedly the greatest", he has in mind the gulls and the cheats of a society **governed by the acquisitive impulse**. Though it is true that the gulls call into being the cheats, and that Jonson's satire is directed against the cozeners, the individuals drawn **from** varied occupations really present a cross-section of society. A pageant of vices is transformed into an all devouring organism, and both gulls and cozeners are unified by their ruthless individualism and obsessive acquisitiveness. The clerk and the churchman, the shopkeeper and the countryman are welded by their greed and lust.

As a keen observer of nascent capitalism, Jonson documented social change, notably the rise of the new merchant class, dispossessing traditional landed aristocracy. Jonson's concern for realism for "deeds and language such as men do **use**" is well known. In portraying contemporary manners, he was not content to provide a mere reflection. For **Jonson**, imitation and mirroring involved praise and blame, **i.e.** taking a moral stand. The playwright did not adopt the moral standard of the emerging world of entrepreneurs, nor did he express a merely personal code. His standards of moral judgement were indeed from an earlier era, summed up in M.C. Brabrook's phrase "the traditional economic morality inherited from the Middle Ages".

The opening note of the play, the involuntary and habitual projection of three tiers of self-images by the cozening triumvirate, Subtle, Face and **Dol** constitutes a parody of leading social institutions: in their "**republic**", Subtle is the "sovereign," Face, the "general" and **Dol** their "cinque port" and before they call a truce, they are but a cur, a mastiff, and a bitch, and alternately, "Bawd!", "Cowherd!", "Conjuror!" "**Cutpurse!**" and "Witch!" The abuses hurled at each other and the ranks they assign themselves illustrate the range of roles they can play.

Since the playwright's relationship with the players is a vital dimension of the former's career, Jonsonian comedy had to interact significantly with acting styles of the time. There was the tradition of the Revels, which included mimes and spectacle, and brought actors and audience close to one another. There was also the courtly, academic, learned tradition heavily leaning towards rhetoric, and declamation on moral themes. The former lacked shape and structure for it presented isolated scenes loosely connected. The latter lacked flexibility and spontaneity. Satiric drama, Jonsonian drama called for the greatest interaction between **actors and** audience, and flourished however briefly because of a fortuitous circumstance – "The momentary fusion of the popular and learned traditions, the temporary interaction of two modes : 'which were not compatible.'"

The nature and function of Jonsonian comedy was enunciated in **Cicero's** dictum cited in the introduction to **Every Man Out of His Humour**: "Comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of manners and an image of truth". Imitation involved interpretation, mirroring some degree of evaluation, and imaging a certain measure of permanence. Jonsonian comedy because of its focus on the momentous changes **of his** time makes us aware of "a great reorientation of attitude", which according to L.C. Knights, anticipates our own anxieties and concerns. It is the double focus **of** Jonsonian comedy on things as they are and as they ought to be, rather than his scholarship, which is of the essence of his 'classicism'.

In the prologue to *The Alchemist*, Johnson envisages "fair correctives" beyond "The rage / Or spleen of comic **writers**." The foibles of the contemporary scene are to be presented in their essence, their universal dimension with such realism that individuals may not be able to recognise themselves.

If there be any, that will sit so nigh
Unto the stream, to look what it doth **run**,
They shall find things, they'd think, or wish, **were** done,
They are so **natural** follies, but so **shown**,
As even the doers may see, and yet not own.

Correction is to be brought about not by exposure to consequences of specific manners, vices, or **humours**, but by the ineffable impact of the deeper, universal dimension of folly. That is why the doer **may** not own his deed.

23 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

J.B. Steane

This **does** not mean that Jonson is an **irresponsible** moralist here, or that *The Alchemist* is 'mere' **entertainment**. It is a very highly organised, sharply pointed moral comedy, but its sting is directed not so much at the exploiters as at **the** society: which by its greed and **folly** is so open to exploitation...The gulls are so varied-as to show in cross-section a **society** led by greed and lust to folly and loss. The nobleman, the countryman, the little **clerk**, the churchman, the small shopkeeper: **Jonson's** net is cast widely enough over **society** to take in all these... What might have been a parade of assorted vices **gains** unity and purpose from the motive that is common to all of them: an obsessive desire for easy money. In this way the play does more than offer a rich **collection** of **satirical** portraits; it depicts a whole society, ruthlessly individualistic **and** acquisitive, and ultimately deluded and **impoverished by** its own false values... Greed for wealth is so much the unifying factor in *The Alchemist* that it almost seems an end in **itself**, but **Sir Epicure** reminds us that the play's attack extends to the delusive ways of life that folk propose to themselves **as** ends. Here Mammon is the means; the complete Epicure the end. The bed and the table become the twin centres of **life**.

Michael Jamieson

Professor **Nevill Coghill** has usefully demonstrated that two traditions of comedy existed in Elizabethan **times**, with different antecedents, both stemming from theoretical reversals of **Aristotle's** notions of tragedy. Romantic Comedy begins with wretchedness and the threat of danger but ends happily. Satiric Comedy teaches by exposing the errors of **city** folk. Shakespeare, and Jonson, Professor **Coghill** argues exemplify the two comic forms... The quality of a Jonsonian Comedy, however, lies not only in its **construction** and in its presentation of character **as** obsession, but also in its language. The master-theme in Jonson's satirical comedies is **human** folly,

L.C. Knights (1937)

... the material on which **the** dramatists work – in comedy and history play – is drawn from-has an immediate reference to the movements, the significant figures of contemporary life: the satire on usurers, the profiteers and the newly rich, **on** social ambition and the greed for money, can be abundantly illustrated. And the social interest that are drawn **on are** not those of one class alone... Of the dramatists handling social themes **Jonson** is undoubtedly the **greatest**... In his handling of ambition, greed, lust, acquisitiveness and so on he implicitly, but clearly, refers to a more than personal **scheme** of values. **Jonson** in short was working in a tradition.

What we have to determine is where that tradition '**came** from'... These significant developments- most of them were aspects of the growth of capitalism; and **company-**promoting, 'projecting' and industrial enterprise certainly formed an important part of the world which Jonson and his fellows observed, the world which gave them their knowledge of human nature. The Elizabethan drama owed, if not its existent patronage of the governing class, a class drawing its wealth mainly from the land and conscious of the encroachment of the 'new man' of commerce and industry.

M.C. Bradbrook.

Sweet and bitter comedy, **romantic** and satiric comedy, or Shakespearean and Jonsonian comedy have all **been** used as terms of description for the two main divisions, of which the first may be said to be characteristically Elizabethan, and the second Jacobean Behind Elizabethan drama there lay at least two modes of acting first, the tradition of the revels, whether country or popular, and all that these implied of intimate collaboration between actors and audience... Second, the learned tradition of rhetorical and satiric drama upon moral themes, built up in the schools and universities, found expression in an even more intimate private presentation... When these two traditions **coalesced**, the great age of Elizabethan drama began. Jonson was bold in his readiness **to modify** classical precept, he admired the native tradition, and the **form** which he evolved was as far removed from the pedantic as it was **from the spontaneous**....

W. David Kay

~~Like~~ Dickens, **to** whom he is often compared, Jonson also offers evocative **glimpses** of the city's **seemier** side **Jonson's** local allusions, however, are **not merely** 'atmospheric', but are **instrumental** to his satire, and although his humour characters are increasingly particularized, they are conceived as contemporary manifestations of enduring follies and vices, given **new** artistic life by the realistic detail with which **they** are invested.

Nevill Coghill

Shakespeare was not simply **following** the chances of temperament in designing his **comedies**, any more than Jonson **was**; each was following earlier traditions, that evolved during the Middle **Ages** and at the Renaissance, from the **same** parent stock of thought which is to be **found** in the writings of the Latin grammarians of the fourth **century** The Renaissance **view** of Comedy was entirely different: suddenly the Satiric, after more than a thousand **years** of hibernation, sprang fully **armed** out of **the** ground and **possessed** the new theorists. For them the proper, the only, concern of Comedy was ridicule; it offered no necessary antithesis to Tragedy, it gave no suggestion, however rudimentary, of containing a narrative line ... Such, then, were **the** two theories of Comedy, the Romantic and the Satirical, of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance **respectively**, that twinned out of the late Latin grammarians to flower in Tudor times. Faced by a choice in such matters, a writer is wise if he follows his temperament. Ben Jonson **knotted** his cat-o-nine-tails. Shakespeare reached for his **Chaucer**.

Jonathan Haynes

Forcing someone who was borrowing money to take up worthless commodities was a **well-known form** of sharp **dealing**, so Face's business sense has a touch of the **underworld** about it, but it nevertheless extends to a centralized market in credit and commodities.

Marquette Chute

The *Alchemist* is exactly what the great critic inside Jonson intended it to be-a vast, brilliant portrait of his own times **set** within **the** strictest limits of classical

requirements The *Alchemist* is a **realistic** play, rooted in the Jacobean London of Jonson's own day... some of the touches in the play that sound like a poet's fantastic imagination are actually an echo of sober civic records.

L.C. Knights (1955)

The best of **Jonson's play** are living **drama** because the **learning** and 'classical' elements are assimilated **by** a sensibility in direct contact with its own age ... 'I believe', said **Coleridge**, 'there is not one whim or affectation in common life noted in any memoir of that **age** which may not be found drawn and **framed** in some corner or other of Ben Jonson's **dramas** Jonson, in short, is neither the classicist whose learning puts a **barrier** between himself and the experience of his age, nor the purely native product in whom a certain provinciality is the price of forthright **vigour**, he is a man who, having **seen and learnt from** other civilizations, is thoroughly at home in his own time and place. **The** result of this blend is an uncommon poise and strength The issues **with** which he chose to deal **were** among the most deeply ingrained preoccupations **of his age**... when we think of the sixteenth century we think not only of 'the **Development of the Individual**', 'the Revival of Antiquity', 'the Discovery of the World and of **Man**', but of the **thrust** of capitalist enterprise, the rise of economic individualism, the **development** of an a-moral 'realism' in political thought and action.

J.B. Bamborough (1967)

The Alchemist has a **fair claim** to be called Jonson's most brilliant play... The fact that it seems on the **stage** like improvisation by the characters is a tribute to Jonson's skill Obviously one of the **difficulties** of the Unity of Place was finding plausible reasons for **all** the **characters** to arrive at the same spot... Making **Lovewit's** house a centre for a sequence of frauds and confidence tricks gets over the difficulty completely; ... Jonson **really** solved the problem of the Unity of **Action** by not having a plot at all, but rather a series of episodes **unified** by involving **the** same characters and happening in the **same** place The real Unity of *The Alchemist* is more a unity of **theme**: it is a **study in Greed** and Self-deception.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu

Ben Jonson's comedy **is** in the final analysis apocalyptic and **terrifying**, elemental and intellectual in its **perception** of mortal time as **Kali-Yuga**. With a satirical passion as intense as Marlowe's **Icarian** euphoria and Webster's charnel-house melancholia, Ben Jonson presents his figures as emblems of damnation not to look **upon** which is to turn to stone. A mimetic world meticulously created and offered not for adoption but avoidance: such is the **stern** didactic premise of the Jonsonian comedy Ben Jonson lets common **sense** triumph over **abstraction** and civilization prevail over **attitudinization**. The **ethical** arbitration is motivated by a comic **anagnorisis**, the essence of which is **an awareness** of human limitation **from** which nobody is **free**.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss **the differences** between **Shakespearian** Comedy and Jonsonian Comedy.,
2. Describe the **misconceptions** about Jonson's **theory** of comedy.
3. Bring out the **note** of social realism in Jonsonian comedy.
4. Consider **Jonson** as a Renaissance theorist of comedy.
5. Comment on the satiric function of comedy according to Jonson.
6. Summarise **some** of Jonson's **dispersed** observations on his art.

Annotate the following passages with reference to context.

- i) Now you set your foot on shore
In novo **orbe**; here's the rich Peru;"
 And there within, sir, are the golden mines,
 Great Solomon's **Ophir**! He was sailing to't^o
 Three years, but we have reached it in ten months.
 This is the day wherein to all my **friends**,
 I will pronounce the happy word, 'be rich'.
 This day you shall be **spectatissimi**.^p
- ii) No more^o
 Shall thirst of satin or the covetous hunger
 Of velvet entrails for a rude-spun cloak,
 To be **displayed** at Madam Augusta's, make^o
 The sons of sword **and** hazard fall before^o
 The golden calf, and **on** their knees, whole nights,"
 Commit idolatry with wine and **trumpets**,
 Or go a- buy feasting, **after** drum and ensign."
- iii) But when you **see th'** effects of the great medicine,
 Of which one part projected on a hundred
 Of **Mercury** or Venus or the Moon
 Shall turn it to **as** many of the **Sun**;^o
 Nay, to a **thousand**, **so ad in-nitum**:'
 You will believe me.
- iv) He that has once the flower of the sun,
 The perfect ruby, which we call elixir,"
 Not only can do that, but by its virtue
Can confer honour, love, respect, long life,
 Give safety, **valour—yea**, and victory,
 To whom he will.
- v) **'Tis the secret**
 Of nature **naturized 'gainst** all infections,"
 Cures all diseases coming of all causes,
 A month's grief in a day; a year's in twelve;
 And of what age soever, in a month,
 Past all the doses of your drugging doctors.
- vi) Will you believe antiquity? Records?
I'll show you a book where Moses and his sister
 And Solomon have ~~w~~ritten of the art;
 Aye, and a treatise penned by Adam."
- vii) Such was **Pythagoras'** thigh, Pandora's tub,"
 And all the fable of Medea's charms,
 The manner of our **work**; the bulls, our **furnance**,
 Still breathing fire; our argent-vive, the dragon;
 The dragon's teeth, mercury sublimate,"
 That keeps the whiteness, hardness, and the **biting**;
 And they are gathered into Jason's helm^o
 (Th' alembic) and then **sowed** in **Mars** his **field**,^o
 And thence sublimed so often, till they are **fixed**."

- viii) Both this, th' **Hesperian** garden, Cadmus' story,"
Jove's shower, the **boon** of Midas, Argus' **eyes**,^o
Boccace his **Demogorgon**, thousands more,"
All abstract riddles of our stone.
- ix) For I do mean
To have a list of wives and **concubines**
Equal with Solomon, who had the stone
Alike with me; and I will make me a **back**
With the elixir that shall be as tough
As Hercules, to encounter fifty a **night**.^o
- x) I will have all my **beds** blown up, not stuffed;
Down is **too** hard. **And** then **mine** oval room
Filled with such pictures as **Tiberius** took
From **Elephantis**, and dull **Aretine**
But coldly imitated. Then, **my** glasses^o
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the **figures** as I walk
Naked between my *succubae*.
- xi) My mists^o
I'll have of perfume; **vapoured 'bout the room**,
To loose ourselves **in**; and my baths like pits
To **fall** into, **from** whence we will **come forth**
And roll us dry in **gossamer** and roses. —
- xii) The few that **would** give out themselves to be
Court and town stallions, and **eachwhere** belie
Ladies, who **are** known most **innocent**, for them,"
Those will I beg to **make** me eunuchs of,
And they shall fan **me** with ten ostrich **tails**
Apiece, made in a **plume** to **gather** wind.
- xiii) We will be brave, Puff, now we **ha'** the medicine.
My meat shall all **come** in in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate, **set** in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths and rubies.
Dressed with an exquisite and **poignant** sauce;
For which, I'll say unto my cook, **'there's** gold,
Go **forth**, and be a knight.'
- xiv) My shirts
I'll have of taffeta-sarsnet, **soft** and light
As cobwebs; and **for** all my other raiment
It shall be such as **might** provoke the Persian,"
Were he to teach the world **roit** anew.
My gloves of fishes' and birds' skins, **perfumed**
With gums of paradise, and eastern **air**—^o
- xv) My venture brings it me. he, honest wretch,
A **notable**, **superstitious**, **good** soul,
Has worn his **knees** bare and his slippers bald,
With prayer and fasting **for** it; and, sir, let him
Do it alone, for **me**, still. Here he comes,
Not a profane word afore him! **'Tis** poison.
- xvi) You're covetous, that thus **you** meet your time
I' the just point, **prevent** your day, at **morning**.
This argues **something** worthy of a fear

Of **importune** and carnal appetite.
 Take heed you do **not** cause the blessing leave you,
 With your **ungoverned** haste. I should be sorry
 To **see** my **labours**, now e'en at perfection,
 Got by long watching and **large** patience,
 Not prosper **where** my love and zeal **hath** placed-'em.

xvii) Infuse vinegar,
 To draw his volatile substance and his tincture,
 And let the water in glass E be filtered,
 And put into the gripe's egg. Lute him well;"
 And leave him closed in **balneo**.

xviii) As, if at first, one ounce convert a hundred,
 After his second loose, he'll turn a thousand;
 His third solution, ten; his fourth, a hundred.
 After his fifth, a thousand thousand ounces
 Of any imperfect metal, into pure
 Silver or gold, in **all** examinations
 As gold as any of the natural mine.
 Get you your stuff here, against afternoon,
 Your brass, your pewter, and your andirons.

xix) It is, of the one part,
 A humid exhalation, which we call
Materia liquida, or the unctuous water;"
 On the other part, a certain crass and viscous
 Portion of earth; both which, con corporate, .
 Do make the elementary matter of gold,
 Which is not yet **Propria materia**,^o
 But common to all metals and all stones.
 For where it is forsaken of that moisture,
 And **hath** more dryness, it becomes a stone;
 Where it retains more of the humid fatness,
 It turns to **surphur**, or to quicksilver,

xx) Of your elixir, your lac virginis,
 Your stone, your medicine, and your **chrysosperm**,
 Your **sal**, your sulphur, and your mercury:
 Your oil of height, your tree of life, your blood:
Your marcasite, your **tutty**, your magnesia,
 Your toad, your crow, your dragon, and your panther:
 Your sun, your moon, your firmament, your **adrop**,^o
 Your **lato**, azoth, **zarnich**, **kibrit**, **heautarit**,
 And then, your red man, and your white woman,"
 With all your broths, your **menstrues**, and materials
 Of piss, and **egg-shells**, women's terms, man's blood,
 Hair o' the head, burnt clouts, chalk, merds, and clay,
 Powder of bones, scalings of iron, glass,
 And worlds of other strange ingredients,
 Would burst a man to name?

xxi) **Was** not all the knowledge
 Of the Egyptians writ in mystic symbols?"
 Speak not the Scriptures oft in parables?
Are not the choicest fables of the poets,
 That were **the** fountains and first springs of wisdom,
 Wrapped in perplexed allegories?

- xxii) I urged that,
And **cleared** to him **that** Sisyphus was damned^o
To roll the ceaseless **stone** only because
He would have made **ours** common.
- xxiii) O, by this light, no, **Do** not wrong him. He's
Too scrupulous **that way**. It is his vice.
No, he's a rare physician, do him right.
An excellent **Paracelsian**! And has done
Strange cures with **mineral** physic. He deals all
With spirits, he. He will not hear a word
Of **Galen**, or his **tedious** recipes.'
- xxiv) You're very right, sir; **she** is a most rare scholar,
And is gone mad with **studying Broughton's works**."
If you but name a **word** touching the Hebrew,
She falls into her fit, and will **discourse**
So learnedly of **genealogies**,
As you would run **mad**, too, to hear her, sir.
- xxv) An this be your elixir,
Your lapis mineralis, and your **lunary**,^o
Give me your honest **trick**, yet at **primero**,
Or **gleek**; and take **your** lutum **sapientis**,^o
Your menstruum **simplex**.
- xxvi) O, what else, sir?
And that you'll make **her** royal with the stone,
And empress; and **yourself king** of Bantam."
- xxvii) A townsman born in **Taurus** gives the bull,
Or the **bull's** head; in **Aries**, the ram.
A poor device: No, I **will** have his name
Formed in some **mystic** character, whose radii,
Striking the senses of **the** passers-by,
Shall, by a virtual **influence**, breed affections,
That may result upon the party owns it;

UNIT 3 THE STRUCTURE OF *THE ALCHEMIST*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Structure
- 3.3 Glossary Of Alchemical Terms
- 3.4 Critical Extracts
- 3.5 Questions
- 3.6 Annotation Passages

3.0

In this Unit, the focus is on the structure of the play. An analysis of the play's structure is a preliminary step. This is followed by issues like performance of the play, stagecraft characterisation, and language, in the subsequent units. A variety of perspectives are then presented as aids to evaluating the play's meaning for the modern reader.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern science teaches us that substances differ in atomic structure. The so-called base metals can be transformed into gold through a highly expensive process of fission. Jonson's contemporaries, including the learned and the mighty did believe in alchemy. Queen Elizabeth was no exception. The religious aura around the person of *The Alchemist*, his speech interlarded with astrological jargon, and his airs of piety, humility, and simplicity combine to lend him a status above ordinary mortals. In order to enjoy the play, the reader and the spectator need to shed all doubts for the duration of the reading or of the performance.

3.2 STRUCTURE

The action of the play involves the three cheats – Subtle, Jeremy the Butler, and Dol Common who enter into a 'venture tripartite' to cozen eight gulls the clerk Dapper, Druggier the tobacconist, the knight Sir Epicure Mammon, the gamester Surly, the two Puritans, Tribulation and Ananias, the boy Kastril and his sister, the widow Dame Pliant. In the absence of the master of the house, Lovewit on account of the plague, the cheats carry on their trade briskly, luring potential gulls by appealing to their delusions.

The joy of the tricksters in cozening the credulous gulls seems to have an autobiographical basis. William Drummond of Hawthornden, Jonson's host in his Scottish tour recorded that Jonson had tricked a lady by disguising himself as an astrologer. Jonson's common sense attitude towards alchemy is evident in Epigram VI, "To Alchemists",

if all you boast of your great art be true
Sure, willing poverty lives most in you.

Thematically, *The Alchemist* has been linked to Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and Erasmus' *Colloquies*, the major early satires on alchemy. It has also been suggested that Jonson may have drawn upon *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street*, a play anonymously published just three years before the first performance of *The Alchemist*. In "the immediate model," W. David Kay argues, the elements that might have gone into the making of *The Alchemist* include: "two swindlers posing as a captain and a conjurer, an intrigue plot involving the marriage of a rich widow, and incidental satire on Puritan hypocrisy and casuistry."

The teeming life of London is evoked through numerous local allusions which, besides contributing to the play's realism, are vital instruments of satire. Jonson had used London as the locale for action in *Eastward Ho!* on which he collaborated with Chapman and Marston, and after turning to Venice for *Volpone*, confirmed his preference for London in *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), *The Devil is an Ass* (1666) and the revised folio version of *Every Man in His Humour* (1616). Jonson's many references to the vicinity of the Blackfriars theatre where the play was performed, and to the plague as the time of action made for direct appeal to the audience, to a pressure of the times. The prologue to *The Alchemist* clarifies this intent:

No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known
No country's mirth is better than our own,
Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
Whose manners, now called humours, feed the stage.

The pace of action does not slacken and is virtually continuous spanning the six hours from 9 O'clock in the morning. The setting is a room in Lovewit's house with a lane facing the front door. The play opens on an almost explosive quarrel by the prostitute pickpocket Dol Common. The gulling of the eight assorted victims concurrently contributes to suspense, for some of them are known to one another. Suspense is further heightened by the prospect of Lovewit's return too. When the imaginary laboratory goes up in smoke, the make-believe world is shattered. The rehabilitation of Face, after his master's marriage with the Dame Pliant is arranged, rounds off the action. As in other plays of the time, one character steps out of his role partially to comment on the ending: Lovewit's address to the audience,

Therefore, gentlemen
And kind spectators, if I have out-stripped
An old man's gravity, or strict canon ...
Introduces a note of objectivity, demanding the audience's attention.
Face's are the certain lines:
Gentlemen,
My part a little fell in this last scenes;
Yet it was decorum

An absorption in oneself, the strategy required of the cozeners momentarily slips off to reveal his humanity.

An analysis of the plot suggests a patterning of effects in the action. The prologue focuses on corruption in London, the playwright's attempt to correct vices, and above all his care to present correction without embarrassing the tricksters and the gulls. Act-I opens with an interruption of chicanery in progress, occasioned by Face's condescension towards Subtle, and the intervention of the bullying Dol Common. In quick succession, Dapper the lawyer's clerk, Druggier the tobacconist and Sir Epicure Mammon the voluptuary arrive to renew their petitions for a familiar, advice for setting up a shop and the Philosopher's stone respectively. On one protest or other, each is sent away to return after fulfilling certain conditions. Thus, early in the play, the absolute power delusion has over the gulls is sketched. Subtle demonstrates his capacity to become whatever the gull's imagination requires.

Mammon's re-entry in Act-If, accompanied by the sceptical Surly, establishes the **former's** sensuality and amorality. A number of ironic turns are noticeable in Subtle's insistence on purity in the pursuit of the Stone, Mammon's **causistry** in asserting Subtle's purity and his own capacity to buy. Subtle's insistence on patience and purity on Mammon's part is a clear anticipation of the ending of the play. When Face presents **Dol** as the sister of a **lord** given to fits of madness, Mammon's carnality comes into the open. The Puritan Ananias' demand for the stone is **brushed off by** Subtle and Face. Their esoteric mumbo-jumbo leaves him crest-fallen. **Grateful** for the magical **anagrom**, **Drugger** mentions Kastril would have his sister widow Dame Pliant **marry** only an aristocrat, and this brings in a new pair of gulls.

In **Act-III** Tribulation seeks to make amends for Ananias' rudeness, and gladly accepts Subtle's **approval** of the plan to make counterfeit coins. Puritan hypocrisy stands thoroughly exposed here for after all only Dutch dollars are **involved**. Surly in order to woo **Dol** enters disguised as a Spanish don. While Dapper is ready for a meeting with the Queen of Fairies (another role for Dol), he is blindfolded and his pocket picked. Further, he is gagged and locked in the privy to prevent discovery by Mammon almost at the doorstep.

The action flows on into **Act-IV** when Face as Lungs helps Mammon to meet **Dol** as the sister of a lord. As **Kastril** and Dame Pliant arrive, being a quick **change** artist resumes his role as Face. Unable to bring in Dol, they **think on their feet**, and **allow** Dame Pliant to be alone with Surly in **the garden**. **Kastril** is instructed in **polite** quarrel-too. In the **meanwhile**, Mammon with his mind set on the philosopher's stone utters the fatal words, and brings on Dol's "fit of madness." Because of Mammon's violation of **Subtle's** command, the fulfilment of his dream is postponed, and the **laboratory literally** goes up in smoke. Still Mammon is undeceived. Surly's **attempts** to win Dame by **exposing** Face and Subtle are shattered when he **had** to remove his own disguise in the process. **Ananias** arrives, but enraged by Surly's **gandy** dress, drags him out. To crown it all, **Lovewit** is just then sighted.

In the concluding act, the goings on in **Lovewit's** house are made known to him by the neighbours. Jeremy is no longer able to manipulate the situation. While all the **gulls rush** back and threaten to complain to the police, Dapper calls out for release and meets the fairy of his **heart briefly**. As the officers knock at the door, Subtle and **Dol** run away. **Lovewit** marries Dame Pliant leaving the gulls helpless lookers on. Face alone **appeals to the** audience to understand his lot.

In spite of the multiplicity of intrigues, the plot has a unity as noted by **several critics**. In **Coleridge's** view, The Alchemist, Oedipus **Tyranners** and Tom Jones have the three '**most effect plots ever planned**.' Coleridge perhaps had in mind the union of comic decorum with freedom of and richness of inventions. Evaluating **the structure** of the play, in **terms** of seven numbered intrigues which forms the core of the action, **Uma Ellis-Fermor** draws **attention** to the inner form of the play-characterized by a **rhythmic design, and considers** The Alchemist "to be without a companion in the drama with which I am acquainted." Paul Goodman offers an Aristotelian approach to the action. **The impression** of unity is attributed by T.S. Eliot to an "inspiration that radiates into plot and personages alike." Indeed, "as a masterpiece of design, within the compass of the classical unities," says Frederick S. Bocs, "The Alchemist takes its place at the head of Jonson's comedies." Here, we have, declares Felix E. **Schelling**, "the utmost cleverness in the construction, the whole fabric building **climax on climax**, witty and ingenious, and so plausibly presented that we forget its **departures** from the possibilities of life." And L.C. Knight avers: "**The Alchemist** is **built** as the double theme of **lust** and greed and the whole play is constructed so as to isolate and magnify the central theme. The extraordinary complications of the plot all centre on Subtle and Face, and all work in one end. The play is completely **self-consistent**; all the characters are actuated by **variations** of one motion, and no extraneous passions are allowed to **enter** All the interests aroused in the readers

point in one direction." Thus *The Alchemist* has acquired the status of a classical play, and confirmed for better or worse the clacissist image the playwright cultivated.

Moreover, the plot of *The Alchemist* is both original and realistic. It is based on the facts of contemporary London life; and Jonson's originality can be seen in using these facts. The spread of the epidemic plague in London and the evacuation of their houses by some of the landlords gave Jonson the idea of using these very circumstances as the background of a play exposing the frauds of the alchemists and the follies and the foibles of their victims.

In *The Alchemist*, the three classical unities have been observed to perfection:

Unity of Actions The opening quarrel of the cozeners has been acclaimed as masterly exposition, intimating the antagonism between Subtle and Face patched up momentarily by Dol and 'the venture tripartite'. The old rivalry surfaces again in moves and countermoves in regard to marrying the rich widow, Dame Plaine, and ends eventually in Face's assertion of his place in Lovewit's household and the hasty escape of Subtle and Dol. The core of the action, the intrigues the cozeners plan, is highly theatrical. The readiness with which Subtle, Face and Dol assume a role on the spur of the moment, their spontaneous realignment because of last minute change of plans (notably during Surly's attempts to expose them) and their skill in improvisation and histrionics are much in evidence throughout the play. Besides the aforementioned episodes, another would be the end of Act III, the bundling of Dapper off to the privy, the transformation of Captain Face into Lungs, and the surreptitious entry (at the start of Act IV) of the amorous Mammon on to an empty stage that a moment before was full of activity; another would be Mammon's guilty attempt to hide and Subtle's simulation of distressed piety after the explosion of the furnace later in the same act; yet another would be the discovery by Lovewit of Face, as he attempts to communicate to Subtle inside the house in Act V scene III. The examples could be multiplied. Discerning students would notice i) that not only are the various minor plots gathered into a single action, but the gathering itself is used to provide a great deal of theatrical comedy; and ii) that the stories of the various gulls interrupt each other and provide repeated opportunities for the oldest and most permanently effective kinds of comic action. This justifies J.B. Bamborough's comment: "Jonson really solved the problem of the Unity of Action by not having a plot at all, but rather a series of episodes unified by involving the same characters and happenings in the same place ... the real Unity of *The Alchemist* is more a unity of theme: it is a study in greed and self-deception. Structurally, Jonson's "brilliant use of alteration," in the opening scene Ailthum Sale observes, makes it "a demonstration of method ... like the prelude to an opera."

Unities of Time and Space

Not only has *The Alchemist* the most complete unity of action of any of Jonson's plays, it also observes the unities of time and place with more exactness than any other play of Jonson. The time of the action is pretty well coterminous with the duration of the play in performance. There is only one place where time can be considered to pass during a break in the action, and that is between Act II and III. According to Subtle's statement nearly an hour passes between the end of Act II Scene V, and the opening of Act III Scene ii, the two intervening lines contain just 150 lines. There is no anticipation at the end of Act II of the characters who will open the next act; whereas at the end of Act I we are told of the approach of Mammon and Surly; the last words of Act III are addressed to Mammon, who is off-stage, waiting to enter; and Act IV ends with Lovewit seen out of the window, talking to the neighbours with whom we find him when Act V opens. This audience would lose its point if followed at once by an interval in which it could be forgotten. There are no lapses of time indicated between the scenes within the acts, and in most cases there is clear evidence of continuity. On the basis of the discussion we have had till now, it seems reasonably safe to suggest that *The Alchemist* was written to be performed without interruption except for one interval between the second and third

acts. With regard to Unity of Place, too, this play is the most circumscribed that Jonson wrote. The whole action is confirmed within or immediately outside Lovewit's house in **Blackfriars**.

3 3 GLOSSARY OF ALCHEMICAL TERMS

No edition for the **general** reader or **playgoer** can **hope** to cover the **alchemical** background thoroughly, and **we** have not tried to explain **all** the **terms** **either** in the **glosses** or in the longer **explanatory** notes. Jonson's alchemical terms fall into **three** main classes: (a) **materials** and substances, (b) alchemical equipment and **apparatus**, (c) alchemical **processes**. The following selective glossary may **assist the reader and playgoer**.

Materials, substances etc.

<i>Adrop</i>	:	the matters out of which mercury is extracted for the Philosopher's Stone ; the Stone itself.
<i>aqua fortis</i>	:	impure vitriol
<i>aqua regis</i>	:	a mixture of acids which can dissolve gold.
<i>aqua vitae</i>	:	alcohol
<i>argaile</i>	:	unrefined tartar
<i>aurum potable</i>	:	liquid, drinkable gold
<i>azoth</i>	:	mercury
<i>azot</i>	:	nitrogen
<i>calce</i>	:	powdered substance produced by combustion or 'calcination'
<i>chibrit</i>	:	mercury
<i>chrysosperm</i>	:	elixir
<i>cinoper</i>	:	sulphide of mercury
<i>kibrit</i>	:	sulphur
<i>lac virginis</i>	:	mercurial water
<i>lato</i>	:	a mixed metal which looks like brass
<i>maistrie</i>	:	the magisterium or Philosophr's Stone
<i>sericon</i>	:	a mixture of arsenic and sulphur
<i>zernich</i>	:	black tincture
	:	auripigment or gold paint

Alchemical equipment and apparatus

<i>Alembic</i>	:	the vessel at the top of the distilling apparatus which holds the distilled material
<i>aludel</i>	:	subliming pot
<i>athanor</i>	:	a furnace
<i>balneum</i>	:	bath ; or process of heating a vessel
<i>bolt's head</i>	:	a long-necked vessel
<i>cross-let</i>	:	crucible
<i>cucurbite</i>	:	a distilling vessel
<i>griper egg</i>	:	a vessel shaped like a vulture's egg
<i>lembek</i>	:	a still
<i>pelican</i>	:	an alembic

Process

<i>ceration</i>	:	softening hard substances
<i>chrysopoeia</i>	:	the making of gold
<i>chymia</i>	:	alchemy
<i>cibation</i>	:	seventh stage in alchemy

<i>citronize</i>	to become yellow
<i>cohabitation</i>	redistillation
<i>digestion</i>	preparation of substances by gentle heat
<i>dulcify</i>	to purify
<i>inbibition</i>	a ~~bathing~~ process associated with the tenth stage
<i>inceration</i>	softening to the consistency of wax
<i>macerate</i>	to steep
<i>potate</i>	liquified
<i>projection</i>	the ~~twelfth~~ and last stage in alchemy
<i>putrefaction</i>	the ~~fifth~~ stage in alchemy whereby impurities were removed by the use of moist heat
<i>solution</i>	the ~~second~~ stage in alchemy
<i>spagyrica</i>	the ~~spagirc~~ art; Paracelsian chemistry
<i>sublimation</i>	conversion into vapour through the agency of heat, and reconversion into solid through the agency of cold

3.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

F.H. Mares (1983)

In both *Much Ado* and *The Alchemist* the action depends very largely on a series of deliberate deceptions. This is more the case in *Much Ado* than in perhaps any other comedy of Shakespeare's... The comparison between Beatrice and Dol is a little more elaborate. Dol, clearly, is a fully liberated woman... Jonson, more frequently than Shakespeare, withholds information from his audience... Jonson's comedy is mordant, reductive and conservative, while Shakespeare's is kindly, exploratory and radical.

In marked contrast to Beatrice, the docile Hero is willing to marry who ever she is told to marry. Dame Pliant will marry anyone wearing a Spanish suit. Both ladies are commodities to be acquired, as is clear from the way Face and Subtle discuss the Widow ... the comparison between Beatrice and Dol is a little more elaborate. Dol, clearly, is a fully liberated woman.

It is arranged for Subtle to overhear the raving of Dol as the mad lady; and it provokes his own brilliant charade of outraged virtue. When it is arranged for Beatrice and Benedick in their turns to overhear the account of how each loves the other, we have a little malicious pleasure in the gulling, but we are not moved to admiration by the skill of the performance Beatrice and Bendedick... Like the gulls in *The Alchemist*, their own desires help them to be deceived. The difference is in the nature of their desires and our moral valuation of them. One final point: the agents of resolution in both *Much Ado* and *The Alchemist* are the most simple and stupid people: Dogberry in *Much Ado* and Druggier in *The Alchemist*.

J.B. Steane

Alchemy, however, is essentially a vehicle in the play: the center of interest lies elsewhere, and Jonson is using the particular subject of alchemy as the means to another end. Other kinds of trickery might have sufficed, certainly other ways in which men could be exhibited as capable of infinite selfdegradation when confronted with the prospect of easy mopey... *The Alchemist* too dramatizes this kind of 'possession'. Because they see Lovewit's house as a gold mine, the gulls who come visiting are obsessed with the single idea of gain, and this is now their 'humour'. .. So by his status in the plot, Lovdwit's judgement should be the one which we as audience are called on to respect The rogues themselves ought, in an orthodox morality, to be merely ruthless and despicable. Instead, we find ourselves laughing

with them too often... There is every inducement for the audience to identify themselves with the rogues.

Michael Jamieson

The density of the dialogue, the contemporaneity of the comedy to Jacobean audience, makes *The Alchemist* (like *Bartholmew Fair*) more difficult than *Volpone* for readers and playgoers today That he (Lovewit) dodges retribution is psychologically right, and reminds the audience that con-men, like the **poor**, are always **with** us.

Arthur Sale

The Alchemist is not only about alchemy: it is itself an alchemical work. Its blood is visual and verbal – especially verbal – transmutation. Reality where all is illusion is the reality of the illusion... The first scene is not merely an exposition transformed from static narration to violent drama by a brilliant use of alteration. It is also a completed alchemical process, a demonstration of method, a telescoping of the whole like the prelude to an opera... Also, more strikingly, indeed marvolously, the coals and stills and **alchemical ferments** which give such excitement, rich colours, exotic associations, and piled – up solidarities in the play are not facts but words... The glittering captain and the canonical **doctor** use the language of the gutter to metamorphose each **other into** animals, beetles, vomit Among other great things . **Dol** is here saying not only **that** the Heads of State share her equally but also that they are contained in her Subtle, of course, intends that for Mammon it shall remain a **vision** and a dream, and all the alchemy in the play has this ironic dimension. Subtle and **Jonson both use** alchemy for their own ends, but the interested motive of the **former do not** call into question, but enrich; those of the latter. Sexually, **Mammon** and Subtle embody two ancient and opposed alchemical concepts.

W. David Kay

In the tradition of the 'estate morality', Jonson uses this representative sample to demonstrate how greed and credulity pervade society at all levels... **Jonson's** attitude toward alchemy is indicated in Epigram VI, 'To Alchemists': 'If all you boast of your great art be true; / Sure, willing poverty lives most in **you**'... The **satire** in *The Alchemist* thus cuts in many **directions** at once, mocking fantasies of self-gratification and power, **as** well as particular forms of credulity and ignorance.

Una Ellis-Fermor

The play, *The Alchemist* is outwardly a comedy of character and event, **so** that the intrigue and interactions of the plot have one set of relations, analogous to the rhythmic design expressed in the painting by the lines. But the inner **form** of the play is one which is hardly representational at all of this interaction of event in everyday life, for the characters and consequently the moods they impress upon our minds, exist independently also **as** something more than the means. For the sake of this brevity I have given each intrigue a number in order of its appearance and used this number to refer to it in the text. Thus the plot set up against Dapper is the first, that against **Drugger** the second, Sir Epicure Mammon's the third, Surly's **the** fourth, **Ananias'** the fifth, Mistress Pliant's the sixth, **Kastril's** the seventh... As a piece of almost geometrical **form**, this play appears to be without a companion **m** the **drama** with which I **am** acquainted.

Jonathan Haynes

Subtle and **Dol** and Face are clearly **underworld** figures, professional criminals, setting them off from **Jonson's** sharp gallants and from the **inspired** amateur **Volpone**, who glorifies more in the cunning purchase of his wealth than in the glad possession.

They have evolved **directly out of the cony-catching pamphlet literature** The "Argument" makes the **"tripartite indenture"** sound like shares in an acting company they here contract. It **looks like** a joint **stock** company, the newest form of capitalist organization **Alchemy** is the grand **symbol** for this **volatile state of affairs**. Alchemy makes a **neat metaphor** for nascent capitalism, and *The Alchemist* fits neatly in the **development** of Jonson's economic thought between *Volpone*, in which a real pile of ... gold draws "interest" in the old center of mercantilism, and the direct satiric exploration of capitalist "projection" in *The Devil is an Ass* The play toys with the **idea** that something can come of nothing, but **substance is finally the issue**; we move from the tripartite indenture to a **marriage** between the substantial property holders **Lovewit** and **Dame Pliant** The play opened with a crisis in the triple indenture, with **Subtle** claiming he **had countenanced Face** (pun intended) by **sharing his knowledge**, and **Face** claiming to have **countenanced Subtle** by providing the house, the material means of production.

Renu Juneja

The "honest" **Surly** in *The Alchemist* fares badly. One sound way of **assessing Jonson's attitude to a character** is to see how the plot deals with him. The dispute over the **worthiness of Surly** as against the **skulduggery and moral Wine of Lovewit** can be ended once for all by **reminding ourselves that it is Lovewit who succeeds and not Surly**. Jonson does not always punish the wrongdoers but nor does he **allow them to triumph as unequivocally as Lovewit triumphs**

S. Musgrove

Jonson's prime service to Elizabethan comedy was to give it structure and coherence, firm plotting and clear characterization. The **overshadowing genius** of Shakespeare tends to hide its need of such reform... Jonson's characters, like **Marlowe's**, are **heroically obsessional: needing to become themselves** to an absolute degree, they expose the raging vacuum of the self... Each of the gulls seeks to be changed from himself, but only becomes **more completely what he really is**.

J.B. Bamborough (1967)

The argument is also a first-rate piece of explication for the benefit of the audience, *The Alchemist* progresses largely by a series of quarrels... The out-facing of **Surly** in these scenes, in Act IV might be regarded as **Face and Subtle's finest hour** because it is all **improvised**, whereas the **discomfiture** of Mammon is something they have planned long before. Effectively, as the audience actually **experiences** the play, both scenes contribute to the feeling that *The Alchemist* is being made up by Face and Subtle as it goes along *The Alchemist*, and like all Jonson's comedy it demands to be played quickly and without pause *The Alchemist*, indeed, lends a good deal of colour to the charge that Jonson seems at times to approve more of his rogues than his fools... what motivates him in his attempts to expose the cheats is not love of truth, but, as he says, his objection to being gulled It almost begins to look as if in his portrayal of 'natural follies', as he calls them in the preface to *The Alchemist*, Jonson has begun to lose sight of his sterner moral purpose.

Alan C. Dessen

Does analysis of the dramatic possibilities provided by such late moralities offer any insight into the techniques and structure employed by the master of Jacobean satirical comedy, Ben Jonson?... there have been few critical studies which have argued for a definite relationship between any of Jonson's major comedies and the morality tradition ... no allegorical personae intrude into the literal Jacobean scene ... Jonson has here supplied six characters who represent different social stations, different professions, and different age groups but who possess one common denominator, a susceptibility to the wiles of Subtle, Face, and Dol But so does the ending of *The*

Alchemist. Here, as in the morality play or the masque, Jonson has projected his final effect beyond the fictive world on stage into the lives that must be led by the audience after the performance. In general structure, *The Alchemist* has many interesting connections with the late morality... owing to our own culpability, there is only limited hope for improvement in the world outside the theater. *The Alchemist*, particularly in its last two acts, is the culmination of Jonson's moral comedy.

Edward B. Partridge

This inflation and explosion of the plot is apparent in the way epithets are used throughout *The Alchemist*. In the first scene two motifs are developed side by side; ... one is the motif of abusive epithets which Subtle, Face, and Dol fling at each other. They call each other rogue, slave, cheater, cut-purse, bawd, and witch... The impostors are compared to mongrels, scarabs, vermin, curs.... The dog i— recurs most often. Dol is a bitch, and Face and Subtle are mastiffs. In short, we are among the snarling animals that live on other beings or each other ... that ambiguous world between the animal and the human ... The imagery of *The Alchemist* is perfectly functional in several ways. First, it develops, as alchemy develops, beginning with base metals, such as a whore, a pander, and a quack, which it tries grandiloquently to transmute into finer beings - finally ending, as the dream of the philosopher's stone ends, in a return to the state of base metals.. The imagery is functional in another way. The images work on the same principle that the pby as a whole and usually each scene work. They are extravagant, inflated, and ludicrous The monstrous gap that opens between the tenor that we know to be mean and the vehicle that we assume to be great, and the demand that we find some similarities between them to bridge that gap, outrages our sense of decency and decorum... A third function of the imagery is to extend and develop the multiple references that alchemy had in actual life-especially the religious, medical, and commercial references In other words, the imagery suggests that, in *The Alchemist's* world, the acquisition of gold is a religion, a cure-all a sexual experience, and a commercial enterprise.

F. H. Mares (1967)

It is an over-simplification to say that Jonson's plot 'provided him with exceptional opportunities for satirising two social pests of the age: Puritanism and the profession of alchemy'. Alchemy is not so much the object of his satire as the means he uses to ridicule human greed and credulity The laboratory - It is the dream factory, the most potent instrument of delusion,... This one fixed point in space obliged Jonson to have others: the two doors, right and left, one to the outside world, one to the 'back way'.. .. The exit to the laboratory is the focus of the play's physical action, its implied presence behind the scenes is as important... For this reason the localization of the scene is fixed and firmly maintained until after the symbolic explosion... The grandiose imagery proposed by Mammon's fantasy becomes meaningless by its excess, or lurches into grossness.... All through the play there is a disparity between what people are and what they say they are. The servant, the quack, and the prostitute are the Captain, the Doctor, and the Lord's sister, or a priest and the Queen of Fairy. These high titles are counterpointed with abusive ones In *The Alchemist* we are not obliged to hold the play at a greater distance from us by having some characters come between us and it: we are invited to come closer, to identify ourselves with it. Lovewit and Face address the audience directly-Face even offers a comment on the dramaturgy: but they do so without coming out of the characters they have supported in the play This is not to make Jonson a seventeenth-century Pirandello, trapped in the insoluble problem of distinguishing illusion from reality, or a Genet, asserting at once man's inevitable need for illusion and the illusory nature of all conventional moral authorities... Jonson does not doubt for a moment that truth can be distinguished from illusion, that right and wrong are absolute and not relative terms.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu

Jonson's denouements have an air of the unexpected, in the sense that the dispensation of rewards and punishments is subtly calibrated through a principle of comic justice operating in favour of intelligence and common sense instead of innocence and piety. This administers a kind of comic trauma directed towards the quotidian poise of social order rather than heroic individuality Subtle is no alchemist and the theme of the play is not alchemy. Alchemy is a burnished mirror in which Faustian power is madly cast weird, heraldic images of Mephistophelean appetite Somewhere colloquially stands Sir Apicure Mammon whose auriferous extravagances of fantasy and arabesque serenades of sensuality are products of an excessive romanticism that goes entirely against the Jonsonian norm of classical balance and decorum He is Faustus and Falstaff doubled into one He is the grand anarchy waiting to undo all civilized order; he is a gargantuan Anti-Christ who, in trying to set things right in his own fashion, would destroy the cosmic order itself.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Analyse the structure of *The Alchemist*.
2. Bring out the effect of developing the intrigues concurrently.
3. How does Jonson produce the illusion of reality with regard to alchemy?
4. Comment on the impact of the opening scene.
5. Does *The Alchemist* point to a lowering of the standard of judgement? Illustrate from the ending.

3.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following passages with reference to context:

- i) He bears
The visible mark of the Beast in his forehead."
And for his stone, it is a work of darkness,
And with philosophy blinds the eyes of man.
- ii) The children of perdition are oft-times
Made instruments even of the greatest works.
Besides, we should give somewhat to man's nature,
The place he lives in, still about the fire,
And fume of metals, that intoxicate
The brain of man, and make him prone to passion.
- iii) Where have you greater atheists than your cooks?
Or more profane or choleric than your glass-men?
More antichristian than your bell-founders?
What makes the devil so devilish, I would ask you,
Satan, our common enemy, but his being
Perpetually about the fire, and boiling
Brimstone and arsenic?
- iv) We must give, I say,
Unto the motives, and the stirrers up
Of humours in the blood. It may be so,
When as the work is done, the stone is made,
The heat of his may turn into a zeal,

And stand up for the beauteous discipline
Against the menstruous cloth and rag of Rome."

- v) Have I discoursed so unto **you; of** our stone?
And of the good that it shall bring your cause?
Showed you (beside the main of hiring forces
Abroad, drawing the Hollanders, your friends,
From the **Indies**, to serve you, with all their fleet)"
That even the med'cinal use shall make you a faction,
And party in the realm?
- vi) As, put the case,
That some great man in state, he have the gout,
Why, you but send three drops of your elixir,
You help him straight: there you have made a friend.
Another has the palsy or the drosphy,
He takes of your incombustible stuff:
He's young again: there you have made a friend.
- vii) A lady that is past the feat of body,"
Though not of mind, and hath her face decayed
Beyond all cure of paintings; you restore
With the oil of talc: there you have made a friend,
And all her friends. A lord that is a leper,
A **knight** that has the bone-ache, or a squire
That hath both these, you make 'em smooth and sound,
With a bare **fricace** of your medicine: still
You increase your friends.
- viii) No, nor your holy vizard to win widows.
To give you legacies; or make zealous wives
To rob their husband for the common cause;
Nor take the start of bonds, broke but one day,
And say they were forfeited by providence.
Nor shall you need o'er night to eat huge meals,
To celebrate your next day's fast the better,
The whilst the brethren and the sisters, humbled,
Abate the **stiffness** of the flesh. Nor cast
Before your hungry hearers scrupulous bones,"
As whether a Christian may hawk or hunt,
Or whether matrons of the holy assembly
May lay their hair out, or wear doublets,"
Or have the idol, Starch, about their linen.
- ix) Nor shall you need to libel '**gainst** the prelates,
And shorten so your ears against the hearing^o
Of the next wire-drawn grace. Nor of necessity
Rail against plays to please the alderman
Whose daily custard your devour. Nor lie
With zealous rage, till you are hoarse. Not one
Of these so singular arts. Nor call yourselves,
By names of Tribulation, Persecution,
Restraint, Long-Patience, and such **like**, affected
By the whole family, or wood of you,
Only for glory, and to catch the ear
Of **the** disciple.
- x) When you have viewed and bought'em,
And ta'en the inventory of what they are,
They're ready for projection; there's no more

To do: cast on the medicine, so much silver
As there is tin there, **so much** gold as brass,
I'll gi' it you in, by weight.

- xi) **She** must prepare **perfumes**, delicate linen,
The both in chief, a banquet, and her wit
For she must **milk** his **epididymis**

- xii) He will win you
By **unresistable** luck, **within** this fortnight,
Enough to **buy** a **barony**. **They will set him**
Upmost, at the groom-porter's, all the Christmas!
And for the whole year through, at every place
Where **there** is play, **present** him with the **chair**,
The best attendance, **the best** drink, sometimes
Two **glasses** of **canary**, and pay nothing;
The purest linen, and **the sharpest knife**,
The partridge next his **trencher**, and **somewhere**,
The dainty **bed**, in private, with the dainty.

- xiii) In the third square, the **very** street and sign
Where the commodity **dwells**, and does but **wait**
To **be** delivered, be it **pepper**, soap,
Hops, or tobacco, **oatmeal**, woad, or cheeses.
All which **you** may **so handle** to enjoy
To your own use, and **never** stand obliged.

- xiv) And then for **making** matches for rich widows,
Young **gentlewomen**, heirs, **the fortunat's** man!
He's sent to, far and near, all **over England**,
To have his **counsel**, and to know their **fortunes**.

- xv) Hoping that he **hath vinegared** his **senses**,
As he **was** bid, the Fairy **Queen** dispenses,
By me, this robe, the **petticoat** of Fortune;
Which that he straight put on, **she** doth **importune**.

- xvi) And though to Fortune **near be her petticoat**,
Yet nearer is her **smock**, **the Queen doth note**;
And **therefore**, even of **that** a piece **she** hath sent,
Which, **being** a child, to wrap him in was rent;
And prays **him** for a **scarf** he now will **wear** it
(With as much love, as **then** her **Grace** did tear it)
About his eyes, to show **he** is fortunate.

- xvii) **She now** is **set**
At dinner in her bed, and **she** has **sent you**
From her own private **trencher**, a **dead mouse**
And a piece of gingerbread, to be merry withal,
And stay your stomach, **lest** you faint **with** fasting;
Yet, if you could hold out till she saw you (she says)
It would **be** better for you.

- xviii) Of gingerbread
Make you it fit He that **hath** pleased her Grace
Thus far, shall not now **crinkle** for a little.

UNIT 4 THE ALCHEMIST IN THE THEATRE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *The Alchemist in the Theatre*
- 4.3 Performance and Stagecraft
- 4.4 Critical Extracts
- 4.5 Selected Bibliography
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Annotation Passages

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss (i) *The Alchemist* in the theatre, and (ii) its performance and stagecraft and to place before you the critical opinions of some of the great critics on *The Alchemist* in the theatre and its performances.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of the unit of *The Alchemist* in the 1616 folio of Jonson's *Works* is the statement: "This comedy was first acted in the year 1610 by the King's Majesty's Servants": Since then *The Alchemist* became popular and stayed in the repertory until the theatres were closed on the eve of the Civil War. With the Restoration in 1660, it was one of the first plays to be reviewed, and with some minor rises and falls in popularity, it continued to be played for more than three centuries.

4.2 THE ALCHEMIST IN THE THEATRE

The enduring popularity of *The Alchemist* is acknowledged by its inclusion in the repertoires of several theatre groups. The first phase of its stage history obviously corresponds to performances during Johnson's life time. The very first performance has been a matter of considerable debate. It was performed in 1610 by the King's Men probably at the Globe, according to Herford and Simpson. The King's Men might have staged the play before July at the Globe; or during the closure of the theatres they might have taken it to the provinces. The possibility of trying at a new play outside London is often discounted. On account of the plague, the theatres in London were closed from July to November. Geoffrey Tillotson discovered evidence of an earlier performance at Oxford in September 1610.

"Since the setting in Blackfriars", Mares avers, "the King's men possibly staged the play at the Blackfriars theatre". A significant detail that emerges, however, is that Burbage played Face right until his death in 1618. Performance at the court in 1623 has also been recorded. In a telling comment on the *dramatis personae*, William Gifford hits upon the dominant note of theatricality: "The Puritan neighbours tell Lovewit later that they have been visitors of all classes: 'some as brave as lords,' Ladies and gentlewomen, 'Citizens' wives,' knights", 'oyster women'. 'Sailors' wives, and 'Tobacco men', a good cross - section of the Blackfriars community. The only absentees are actors, but they are already inside the house, putting on the show."

The second phase is marked by the revival of *The Alchemist* at the Restoration. The influence of *The Alchemist* on the emergence of the **new** genre, the Comedy of Manners has already been **noted**. This period is characterised by the appearance of great actors and the play's **introduction** into the repertoire of major theatres. Mrs. Corey who played **Dol** Combn right after the Restoration, was better known by the nickname, Dol. For nearly **40 years** during the first half of the eighteenth century, *The Alchemist* was regularly staged at the Drury Lane theatre. The financial crash, known as the South Sea **Bubble**, gave a new lease of life to the play in 1720. Jonson's critique of nascent capitalism and of man's acquisitiveness found an echo at that time.

For more than a quarter century **Garrick** by his sheer histrionic talent, **won** for the play unrivalled acclaim. Beginning with an appearance as Drugger in 1743, he took up that role from 1746 until his retirement in 1776. Garrick's Drugger was at that time compared only with his own **Lear**. Observations on how he played Drugger are instructive: "Mr. **Garrick** has taken that walk to himself, and is ridiculous above all conception. When he first opens his mouth, the features of his face seem, as it were, to drop upon his tongue, it is all caution; it is timorous, stammering, and inexpressible. Another notable actor who made the play enormously popular was Macklin, who played Face in the decade, **1737-1748**".

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, a new phenomenon makes its appearance, **viz**, revival by **academic** and professional groups. The Elizabethan Stage Society, for instance, staged the play under the **direction** of William **Poel** in 1899 and again three years later. After the outbreak of the first World War, the play was performed by the **Marlowe Society**, the Birmingham Repertory Company, and the Phoenix Society. Further **drama** festivals were occasions for staging *The Alchemist*. Mention may **be** made of the **Malvern** Festivals of 1932 and 1934, and in the U.S. the Oregon Festival of 1961.

Among modern **experimental productions**, mention needs to be made of Tyrone **Guthrie's** at the **Liverpool** House in **1944-45** and at the Old **Vic** in 1947. Reviewing the latter production, Arthur **Colby** Sprague contrasts the acting style of **Alac Guinness** with reports on Garrick's **performance**: "Both actors, it is curious to **note**, were at their best in moments of invented by-play. **Garrick** was particularly admired for 'the bottle and boxing scenes'.....As for Guinness, his Abel Drugger, **having** been sent to fetch the Spanish hat and **cloak**, returned wearing the showy things, and as he waited outside the house, did a little dance of self - **admiration**." Jonson's sense of the theatre is a marvel.

The actors appeared in modern dress **because** costumes of Jonson's day and disguises did not convey social rank or **degree of** formality to the audience three centuries after the first production. At the **Old Vic** production attempt was made to further modernise certain details: the plague is replaced by a flu epidemic, and in the opening scene Subtle threatens **Face not** with a magical vial but with a chamberpot. *The Alchemist* was **staged** for the BBC, over the TV, and by several dramatic societies of universities.

The appeal of *The Alchemist* is **partly** because of the impression of crowded actim. As **Dol** plays the **distracted gentlewoman and** the Queen of Fairies, Face too assumes the role of Jeremy, Captain **Face**, Lungs, and Ulen Spiegel. The gulls, all eight of them, Dapper, Drugger, **Mammon**, Surly, **Ananias**, Tribulation, **Kastril**, and Dame Pliant, have to **cope** with an **equal** number of cozeners. Improvisation and the capacity for quick change of **disguises** makes the **performance** spirited and lively.

The offshoots of *The Alchemist* bring out elements in the play which have great histrionic potential and **relevance**. In the seventeenth century form of entertainment known as droll originated. **These** are farces based upon well-known comic scenes, and depended for **their** success on the improvisation the actor could display. These performances had a special **vogue** during the interregnum, and *Bartholomew Fair* and

similar festive occasions were preferred. In 1672 a droll was performed **adapting** two scenes with **Drugger** and another with Ananias. Drugger was the favourite of several leading actors beginning with **Armin**, followed by **Garrick**, Cedric **Harwicke** and **Alec Guinness**. Assessing the importance of Garrick's acting, Robert Gale **Noyes** rightly concludes: "The history of *The Alchemist* was virtually the history of the role of Abel Drugger."

Another offshoot was "The Tobacconist," Francis Gentleman's prose farce produced in 1770 with revivals in 1782, 1787, and 1800. Edmund Kean's performance as Drugger was much applauded. A recent adaptation of *The Alchemist* is Eric Linklater's *The Mortimer Touch* produced in 1950 during the Edinburgh Festival. The power and appeal of the play is noted by Steane:

"Certainly the relevance of *The Alchemist* to the modern world should be clear enough. Our own acquisitive society is quite as susceptible to exploitation as were the Londoners of 1610. The prospect of big and easy money makes knaves and fools now as it did then," and one of the chief pleasures of the audience is laughing with the rogues. Jonson is modern too in demanding judgement rather than empathy, in being critical and unsentimental.

It is true that on the stage, Jonson's use of a variety of jargons acquires a **rare** force. The encounter between Subtle and the Puritans is an example. Surly's feigning ignorance of English when he disguises himself as a Spanish grandee and the cozeners' acceptance of the disguise bring out the talent of the actors. Echoing **Una Ellis-Fernor's** estimate of the play, John J. Enck **comments**. "It is true that *The Alchemist* is a stunning comedy and nothing else quite equals it in English".

The relation of the script to the **action** is an aspect of the play that surfaces in the course of performance. *The Alchemist* was entered in the Stationer's Register in October 1610. Franz **Fricker** rightly infers that the Quarto edition was "printed from a prompt-book." The stage directions, then, "can be interpreted as makeshift notes added to the text." Jonson's use of knocks, and implied exits and entrances confirm the need for reflexive mirror passages. The actors' clues to one another in such passages as Dol's question "Will you **have**/**The** neighbours hear you?" and Face's admonition, "Speak lower, rough," re-create mutual responses theatrically. In supplementing voice, gesture, and mood, the mirror passages have a theatrical function. As sophisticated aids to the actor, the passages reveal Jonson's vision of the comic action.

4.3 PERFORMANCE AND STAGECRAFT

In Unit **III** we have discussed that *The Alchemist* is the most circumscribed play that Ben **Jonson** wrote. The whole action is confined within or immediately outside Lovewit's house in **Blackfriars**. The nineteenth century editor, Gifford designated 'a room in Lovewit's house,' 'an outerroom...!', 'the lane before Lovewit's house,' 'another room in the same' (three times), 'before Lovewit's door, and finally returned to 'the room' and 'the outer room', again for the last two scenes of his last act. Discerning students will understand that this method of location is novelistic rather than theatrical; that the two outside scenes are the same, and that it is hardly necessary to suppose two locations inside the house, certainly not five. Further, if there were a door to be **approached** from the 'street' side before entry into a realistic Lovewit's house, there would be no need for Jonson to inform his audience, with the last words of Act I, **III**, and IV, and at the end of several other scenes, who is going to come on the stage next, and where they are. In the first two acts, not only is the action of the play continuous, but it can easily be scene as taking place in a single location - a quite generalised 'room in Lovewit's house.' Also, it is easy to show that **this** 'room' requires three entrances - a requirement that could be met by most of the conjectured reconstructions that have been made of the **Globe or Blackfriars theatre**.

- The play opens with an explosion; through the central entrance, Subtle and Face rush on to the stage quarreling, which Dol tries to part them. By means of this quarrel, both the pretensions and the true nature of these three are made clear, and a good deal of expositions managed quickly, excitingly and with dramatic probability. The hardly whole-hearted reconciliations provide the motive for the action, and its limitations in time.

The rest of the act serves to demonstrate the methods of the partnership in dealings with Dapper and Druggier, and to establish firmly the significance of the right and left doors. One is to the outside, through which the customers are admitted - or not: 'good wives, I pray you forbear me, now' (I, iii) - and through which Captain Face enters following Abel Druggier, after he has conveyed Dapper 'by the back way' - through the exit on the other side of the stage.

Act II introduces Mammon and Surly, and the first scene is set by Gifford in an outer room of Lovewit's house! There is no need for this as it is clear from the text that there is no break in the action during the whole of the act, and certain scenes are plainly inside the house and clearly related to the laboratory. Further, Jonson's intention is to attach certain plain significances to certain areas of a non-representational stage:

"Come on, Sir. Now, you set your foot on shore
In novo orbe; here's the rich pern;
And there within, Sir, are the golden mines,
Great Solomon's Ophir! (IV, I, 1-4)",

says Mammon to Surly. If we analyse his metaphor, we perceive that when Surly sets his foot on shore in novo orbe, he learns the ocean of the street and enters the house - i.e. through the stage - right door that leads to the street in an arbitrary disposition of the stage. When Mammon points to the golden mines 'there within, Sir' he means the laboratory, the alchemical apparatus, and he points to the central entrance to the stage's through all the act, and particularly in the third scene, the attention of the audience is concentrated on this central entrance. You must note that when Jonson prepared his text for the printer a f t . folio, he did not write in all the details of stage-business, especially if they were clear from the dialogue.

Moreover, when - at the end of Mammon's hyperbolic outburst on the life of sensual pleasure he will lead when has the stone, Face says:

"Sir, I'll go look" .

A little, how it heightens (II,ii,87-88) and leaves the stage by the central entrance that leads to the laboratory. Strictly afterwards, Subtle enters through the same door at the beginning of scene iii. In the long discussion of alchemy that follows, Face - now Ulen Spiegel - is reportedly called on to give a report on the progress of the works - must repeatedly pass into and out of the laboratory. He may sometimes call out from within, or perhaps the curtains of the "discoverable space" were drawn back, revealing an elaborate piece of apparatus set up and the stage locations of the dream factory is firmly established for future reference.

Also,

"What a brave language here is, next to country!"

says Surly of the discussions of alchemy, but the point of the scene is not only to ridicule the grotesque impropriety of the alchemical language which at the same time establishing the pervasiveness of Subtle and the obsession of Mammon; it is also to establish in terms of stage geography the location of the 'golden mines' in Mammon's rich pern!

In a production in a **proscenium** - arch theatre, the scene that opens Act III, the conversation between Ananias and Tribulation in the lane outside Love wit's house, would probably be presented in **front** of the stage curtains.

At the end of the **scene** they would go off, the curtains would open, **and** they would promptly enter once more. Once the action is back in Subtle's consulting **room**, the locations so firmly established at the beginning of the play become operational once more. Subtle at once refers to the apparatus within, and could move angrily towards the laboratory entrance, restrained by Tribulation, to set about the threatened work of destruction when **Ananias** chips in with his protests. When these locations are established they are put to excellent comic use. The pace of the play **gets** faster as the **customers** arrive one after another and have to be prevented from meeting.

Act IV begins at the point of Mammon's **entrance** because this is the beginning of the crisis. It leads to the explosion of the laboratory in scene V. **Dol** 'in **her** file of talking' and Mammon could use the 'upper stage' (if there was one) in this scene, but there is no need for them **to.do so!** The scene could with more convenience be managed on the main stage.

Act V begins in the street outside the house and remains there for the first three scenes., while Face is finally forced to telling his master the truth - or some of it. As scene iii ends, and Love wit and Face go into the house through one door, **Dol** and Subtle bring Dapper out through the other - soon followed by Face - and we **are** back inside the house again. The loose ends of the plot are tied up one by one. Face blows up one by one - reversing the expectations of **Dol** and Subtle. The dupes return with officers to search, and are out faced by **Lovewit**, and the play ends.

You must note that **the laboratory** - though it is never seen, or need not be - is the **symbol at the centre of the play**. It is the dream factory - the most potent instrument of delusions, **and** its presence and locations are **firmly** established early in the play. This one fixed point in space obliged Jonson to have others; the two doors, right and left - one to the outside world and one to the 'back way'. **Jonson the scholar was no doubt pleased to construct a play that fitted so neatly the neo-classical prescriptions of the unities of time, place, and action; Jonson the man of the theatre turned these strict limitations to brilliant account - in contriving comic stage-business-comingsand goings quick changes unexpected entries, double takes, and so on. But scholar and theatre craftsman are but subservient to the imaginative artist, who saw the apparatus for making gold - the get-rich quick machine - as the central symbol of a play about human greed and credulity, and their inevitable consequence in disappointment and loss.**

4.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

J.B. Steane

The Alchemist is one of the best comedies in English, but many conscripted **readers** may be forgiven if they do not think so. They will have met the play in a schoolroom and read it 'in class'. They will have looked ahead to **try** to make some sense of their own next speech, lending one ear meanwhile to Subtle who is only just able to keep pace with his script, casting one eye at the notes to see if they have anything to say about a line that might possibly be amusing if it could be understood, and wishing perhaps that they had listened to their teacher's symposia of what was happening 'last period'.

Michael Jamieson

When Sir Tyrone **Guthrie** directed The Alchemist at London's Old Vic in 1962, the play was performed in modern dress. In part this was because the desire for wealth

still makes people **gullible** today, Guthrie gave a further reason in his programme – note: modern dress gives **more** point to the frequent disguises and impersonations used by the **trio** of **rogue**. In **Jacobean** dress, who would **know** when Face was a Captain or House **Servant**? But because Jonson used contemporary idiom and **place-reference** so vividly, **some** **obscurity** is **nowadays** unavoidable, and a director may well want to make **cuts**.

L.C. Knights (1937)

Recent revivals of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* occasioned some surprise – surprise that they **were** such **good** 'theatre'. Certainly the reception given to those plays implied a **still** **widespread** **misconception** both of Jonson's intrinsic merits and of the extent and kind of his **indebtedness** to the Classics.

M.C. Bradbrook.

Jonson's Dickensian **comedies** of the London underworld, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*, have **proved** much **the** most popular with modern audiences; the literary as distinct **from** **the** **theatrical** popularity of Jonson has grown. In the universities, where in **many** **cases** social and interdisciplinary features of literary history are stressed, **Jonson's** **plays** take a **central** place.

S. Musgrove

The staging, **like** **the** **play**, is **highly** **concentrated**... A problem arises in **those** **scenes** where some characters **are** **inside** and **others** outside the house. H.S. and E.K. Chambers **visualise** a wall **build** out on to the stage containing a door practicable from both sides, used by Face talking to Mammon in **III. V**... If this is so, then every character entering from the **street** must be **seen** by the audience well before they **enter** was implied in the text. Lovewit and the **Neighbours**, for instance, must appear, with nothing to say, before the **end** of **IV. vii**; and there are other difficulties. I have therefore **followed** the **traditional** editorial **view** by which the stage turned itself into the exterior of **the** **house** for **IV. i-iii**, and probably **III. i**, but otherwise remains an interior, with **the** characters **in** the street heard, but not seen, "within".

J. B. Bamborough

His technique of **accumulation**, of heaping one **absurdity** or humorous clause **on** another until the audience is **almost** battered into **laughter**, works well in the theatre, but is **difficult** to **demonstrate** in a lecture-room, and because even his shorter comic passages depend so much for their effect on the context in which they occur they cannot easily be detached **by** the critic. We do not swap quotations from Jonson as we do from Shakespeare or **Wilde**, and this perhaps may have contributed to the belief that he is a slow and **ponderous** writer... A visit to a production of *The Alchemist* should prove an adequate **corrective** to this belief. It is the most energetic and **fast-moving** of all Jonson's robust and **vigorous** comedies, a non-stop display of ingenuity **and** invention, **centering** flawlessly in the quick-change artistry of Face, Subtle, and **Dol** Common ... *The Alchemist*, and like all Jonson's comedy it demands to be played quickly and **without** pause.

F. H. Mares (1967)

This play is the most **circumscribed** that Jonson wrote. The whole action is confined within or immediately outside Lovewit's house in **Blackfriars**... E.K. Chambers **seems** to have thought of some kind of permanent set for this play, for **he** mentions the need for a 'practicable' door and **seems** to suggest that, for example, at the beginning of Act **III** the Anabaptists would approach this door from one side and **talk** outside it in the **first** **scene**, **then** **knock** and go through the door (all the while fully **visible** to the audience) to meet Subtle for **III, ii** inside the house... In the theatre this

illusionism is given its visual counterpart in the rapid assumption of **different roles**—The Alchemist presents a **different** personality to each of his customers—or infrequent changes of costume: Abel **Drugger** was one of **Garrick's** most famous and **successful** parts, and his performance in it was regularly contrasted with his **Lear** as a measure of his range and versatility... In 1770 an Irish actor, Francis Gentleman, provided a **farce** called *The Tobacconist*, crudely from Jonson's play, with **Thomas Weston** in the part of **Drugger**...

Arthur Colby Sprague

The happiest period enjoyed by this most popular of Jonson's plays **began** in 1721 and ended, with the retirement of David **Garrick**, in 1776... Something like an **Elizabethan** upper stage is useful in certain scenes, most clearly, I should **say**, at **Lovewit's** homecoming, **when** the action takes place outside his house and Face at last appears in answer to **the** repeated knocking.

Franz Fricker

The large mass of stage directions are, as in **Volpone** and **Epicoene**, **additions** for the sake of the **reader**. **They** are **concerned** mainly with sound and stage business. Half dozen reflect exits **and** entrances, the rest deal with disguise and ways of speaking... first, **there** is the simple kind defining walk-ons **and** **walk-offs** in an incidental way **such** as by means of short reflexive mirror passages... **The** second kind is much more elaborate, **often** developing into a **dramatic** scene invariably **created** as the careful **preparation** of a dupe's walk-on... The **possibility** of **observing** visitors from the **window** conveniently lends itself to the discussion **of** **characters** before their walk-ons. The device used is **frequently** that of the transitive **mirror** passage **Summarizing** the results of our examination of the **mirror** passages in *The Alchemist*, we can say that

They are concerned **mainly** with sound, disguise, and deception;

An allusive quality of his **speeches** often replaces possible **straightforward** **dramatic** control, related to a tendency to prefer colloquial language to rhetoric;

Clear-cut mirror passages tend to **occur** in satirized rhetoric;

Their function is frequently to express irony;

The playful, **often** sophisticated, technique offers less guidance to **the** actor **than** the straightforward method **known** from *Volpone*;

The author found it necessary to add stage directions to restore the balance between implicit and explicit theatrical guidance.

Herford And Simpson

Jonson's **setting** of the **scene** and careful dovetailing of the events of **the** plot are exceptionally well **thought** out, even for him. There is no change of **scene**. **Everything** takes place in a **single** room of **Lovewit's** house **of** in front of **the** door that opens on the lane outside. The house **has** a window which commands a view of the **he**; The doors **were** in an interior wall built **on** the stage, 'for action **Jonson** here is a clear innovator, so far **as** the English public theatre is concerned; no **other** play of our period **reproduces** this **type** of permanent interior setting... The time-sequence is worked out **with exceptional fullness**.

Robert Gale Noyes

Of all the comedies of **Jonson**, *The Alchemist* had the most brilliant **stage-history**... It was acted **oftener than any** other **Jonsonian** play, it held the stage the **most** steadily, almost exclusively as a Drury Lane piece; always there was a curiously false emphasis in considering the most important acting role neither *Subtle*, *The Alchemist*,

nor the wonderfully imaginative Sir Epicure Mammon, but the pusillanimous tobacco-boy, Abel Drugger... The history of *The Alchemist* was virtually the history of the role of Abel Drugger, Garrick's problem in altering *The Alchemist*, a play very long and highly wrought technically, was to reduce the bulk without changing the progress of events, because once the sequence was tampered with, the carefully graded continuity was almost irreparably destroyed and suspense was ruined. The acting version, therefore, consists of a great number of minor cuts, but no characters are wholly eliminated as in *Volpone*, and no scenes are expanded as in *Every Man in His Humour*.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu

One wonders whether *The Alchemist* as a language experiment, does not attain the quality of such plays as Beckett's *Endgame*, Ionesco's *The Chairs* and O'Neill's *Hughie*. In many ways indeed the author of the play is our cousin, Mr. Ben Jonson.

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4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Keeping the stage craft used in *The Alchemist*, discuss the problems, with possible solution, that might arise in trying to make *The Alchemist* acceptable to a modern audience.
2. Write a short note on *The Alchemist* in the theatre.
3. What were the contributions of Jonson the scholar, Jonson the theatre craftsman, and Jonson the imaginative artist to the making of the play, *The Alchemist*.

Annotate the following passages with reference to context:

- i) How **scrupulous** he is, and violent,
'**Gainst** the **least** act of sin. Physic, or mathematics,
Poetry, state, or **bawdry** (as I told you)
She will endure, and never startle; but
No word of controversy.
- ii) Rain her as many showers as Jove did drops
Unto his Danaë; show the god a miser
Compared with Mammon. What? The stone will do't.
She shall feel gold, **taste** gold, hear gold, sleep **gold**:
Nay, we **will** *concumbers* gold.
- iii) Nature
Never bestowed upon mortality,
A more unblamed, a more harmonious feature;
She played the **stepdame** in all faces, else.
- iv) Above the art of **Aesculapius**,
That drew the envy of the **Thunderer!**^o
I know all this, **and** more.
- v) It is noble humour. But this form
Was not intended to so dark a use!
Had you **been crooked**, foul, of some coarse **mould**,
A cloister had one well; but such a feature
That might stand up the glory of a kingdom,
To live recluse! Is a mere solecism,"
Though in a nunnery.
- vi) I'm pleased the glory of her sex should **know**
This nook, **here**, of the Friars, is no climate
For her to live obscurely in, to learn
Physic and surgery for the **constable's** wife
Of some odd hundred in **Essex**; but come forth,
And taste the air of palaces; eat, drink
The toils of **emp'rics**, and their boasted practice;
Tincture of pearl, and coral, gold, and **amber**;
- vii) Be **seem** at feasts, and triumphs; have it asked,
What miracle she is? Set all the eyes
Of court afire, like a burning glass,
And work'em into cinders, when the jewels
Of twenty states adorn thee, and the light
Strikes out the stars; that, when thy name is mentioned,
Queens may look pale; and we but showing our love,
Nero's **Poppaea** may be lost in story!"
Thus will we have it.
- viii) We'll therefore go with all, my girl, and live
In a **free** state, where we will eat our mullets^o
Soused in high-country wines, sup pheasants' eggs,
And have our cockles boiled in silver shells,
Our shrimps to swim again, as when they **lived**,
In a rare butter made of dolphins' milk,

Whose cream ~~does look~~ like opals; and with these
Delicate meats, set ~~ourselves~~ high for pleasure,
And ~~take~~ us down ~~again~~, and then renew

Our youth and ~~strength~~ with drinking the ~~elixir~~,
And so enjoy a ~~perpetuity~~
Of life and lust.

ix) And thou ~~shalt ha'~~ thy wardrobe,
Richer than Nature's, still, **to change** thyself,
And very **oft'ner**, for ~~the~~ pride, than she,
Or Art, her wise and **almost-equal** servant

x) **O, this's** no true **grammar**^o
And as ill logic! You ~~must~~ render causes, **child**,^o
Your first and **second intentions**, know your canons
And your divisions, **modes**, degrees and differences,
Your predicaments, **substance** and accident,
Series **extern** and **intern**, with their causes
Efficient, material, **formal**, final,
And ha' your elements perfect —

xiv) **O**, your linea **fortunae** ~~makes~~ it plain^o
And **stella**, here, in **monte Veneris**:^o
But, most of all, **junctura** anularis."
He is a soldier, or a ~~man~~ of art, lady,
But shall **have some great** honour shortly.

xiv) **I'll** ha' you to my chamber of demonstrations,
Where **I'll** show you **both** the grammar and logic
And rhetoric of quarrelling; my whole method
Drawn out in tables; arid my **instrument**,
That hath the several **scale** upon't, shall make you
Able to **quarrel** at a **straw's** breadth by moonlight.

xiii) Now lies upon't. It is but one marl more,
Which on's chance to **have** her; and, beside,"
There is no **maidenhead** to be feared or lost.

xiv) Your Spanish jennet **is the** best horse; **your** Spanish
Stoup is the best grab; ~~your~~ Spanish beard"
Is the best cut, your **Spanish** ruffs **are** the best
Wear; your **Spanish pavan** the best dance.
Your Spanish **titillation** in a glove
The best **perfume**; and for your Spanish pike,
And Spanish blade, **let your** poor Captain speak.

xv) And so we may arrive ~~by~~ Talmud skill,"
And profane Greek, to **raise** the building up
Of **Heber's house**, **against** the Ismaelite,"
King of **Togarma**, and **his** habergions^o
Brimstony, blue, and **fiery**; and the force
Of King Abaddon, and ~~the~~ Beast of **Cittim**,^o
Which Rabbi David **Kimchi**, Onkelos,"
And Aben-Ezra do **interpret** Rome."

xvi) **O** sir, we are defeated! All the works
Are **flown** in **fumo**; ~~ever~~ glass is burst."
Furnace, and all rent ~~do~~ down, as if a bolt
Of thunder had been ~~driven~~ through the house.
Retorts, **receivers**, **pelicans**, bolt-heads,
All struck in shivers!

- xvii) Lady, you see into what hands you **are** fallen;
'Mongst what a nest of **villains!** And how near
Your honour was to have caught a certain clap
(Through your credulity) had I but been
So punctually **forward, as** place, time,
And other circumstance would ha'made a man;
- xviii) For you're a handsome **woman:** would yo' were wise, too.
I am gentleman, come here disguised,
Only to find the knaveries of this citadel,
And where I might have wronged your honour, and have not,
I claim some interest in your love. You **are,**
They say, a widow, **rich;** and I am a bachelor,
Worth nought. Your fortunes may make me a man,
As mine ha' preserved you a woman. Think upon it,
And whether I have deserved you, or no.
- xix) **Ther'es** no such thing intended. A good cart
And a clean whip shall **case** you of that fear."
I am the Spanish **Don** that should be cozened.
- xx) O, make your approach, good Captain.
I've found **from** whence your copper rings and spoons
Come, now, wherewith you cheat abroad in taverns.'
'**Twas** here, you learned t' anoint your boot with brimstone,
Then rub men's gold **on't,** for a kind of touch,
And say '**twas** nought, **when** you had changed **the** colour,
That you might **ha't** for nothing? And this Doctor,
Your sooty, **smoky-beared** compeer, he
Will **close you so** much gold in a bolt's-head,
And, on a turn, convey **I'the** stead another
With sublimed mercury, that shall burst **I'** the heat,
- xxi) Then **weeps** Mammon;
Then swoons his worship. **Or** he is the Faustus"
That casteth figures and can conjure, cures
Plague, piles, and **pox,** by the ephemerides,
And holds intelligence with all the bawds,
And midwives of three shires? While you send **in—**
Captain—what, is he **gone?—dansels** with child,
Wives that **are** barren, or the waiting-maid
With the green-sickness? [Seizing Subtle] Nay, sir, you must **tarry**
Though he be '**scaped,** and answer by the ears, sir."
- i) This cheater would ha' **cozened** thee o'the widow. —
He owes this honest **Drugger,** here, here, seven pound,
He has had **on** him, in two-penny'orths of tobacco.
- ii) Thou **art** not of the light. That ruff of pride
About thy neck betrays thee, and is the same
With that, which the unclean birds, in seventy-seven,
Were **seen** to **prank** it with on divers coasts."
Thou look'st like Antichrist in the lewd hat."
- iii) The Spaniard hates the brethren, and hath spies
Upon their actions; and that this was one
I make no scruple. But the holy synod
Have been in prayer and meditation of it,
And '**tis revealed** no less to them than me,
That casting of money is most lawful.

UNIT 5 CHARACTERIZATION AND LANGUAGE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Characterization
- 5.3 Language
- 5.4 Critical **Reception** of Ben **Jonson**
- 5.5 Questions
- 5.6 Annotation **Passages**

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective **of the** unit is to discuss the **characterization** and language used in the play.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Characterization, as you **know**, is an **important** aspect of plays. As characters contribute to the development **of plot** and attract the attention of the audience. Dexterous playwrights like **Jonson** and Shakespeare put in efforts to infuse blood into their characters and **made them** immortals in the minds of their **audiences/readers**. To make the characters realistic **and lively**, suitable language **should** be used by the playwright.

5.2 CHARACTERIZATION

Ben Jonson based his characterization on **the** doctrine of humours derived **from** the Middle Ages. The humours **were** four bodily fluids - choler, blood, phlegm and melancholy - corresponding in their attributes to the four elements; choler, like fire, was hot and **dry**; blood, like air, hot and moist; phlegm, like water cold and wet; melancholy, like **earth**, cold and dry. **Just** as the **balance** of the elements in a **material** body determined its **kind**, so the balance of the humours in a man determined his psychological type. A **disturbance** of the balance-appropriate for an individual's temperament**to** both physical and psychological disorders, Jonson wrote two comedies, **Every** man **In His** Humour and **Every** Man out **of His** Humour, where he relied on the doctrine of humanness as a basis for his characters' personalities. Such **an** approach constituted a scientific justification for **the** extreme character types that have always been a staple of comedy.

Jonson stated his position in the opening scene of **Every** Man **Out of His** Humour and the key lines are worth quoting:

".....**so** in every human body
The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood
By reason that they flow **continually**
In some one part, and are not continent,
Receive the name of **humours**. Now this **far**
It may, by metaphor, apply itself
Unto the general disposition;

As when someone peculiar quality
Doth so **possess** a man, **that** it **doth** draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In **than** confections, all to **run** one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour."

However, humours were **not as** important in Jonson's later plays as they **were** in his early plays. In the twelve years between Every *Man In His Human* (1598) and *The Alchemist* (1610) his emphasis shifted. *The Alchemist*, like *Volpone's* a few years earlier, was a satirical attack on lust, greed and hypocrisy. In *The Alchemist* "humour" means simply a quirk of character. Surly says "I have a **humour**/I would **not** willingly be gulled," which **means** "I have an odd quirk of **character**; I do not like to be cheated."

As a **dramatic** technique, **the** doctrine of humours has advantages as well as disadvantages. It is a **simplifying** method. If we compare Jonson and Shakespeare as dramatists, it is at once **apparent** that Shakespeare's characters are more complex; that-their motives are more various than Jonson's; that they are capable of surprising us. In other **words**, **they are** more like real people. Jonson's, on the other hand, are like caricatures but not portraits. They are simplified and exaggerated, and just for this reason, they **are** alienated from our sympathy. We shall explain **them** by citing an example. It is a serious problem in *The Muchant of Vemice* that Shylock is a traditional comic villain who suddenly twins into a deeply informed human being whose desire for revenge, if not pardonable, is at best understandable. This **could** not happen in *The Alchemist*: we feel little or no sympathy for the **characters because** we know from the **start** they **are** not **human**; They are both super-human and **sub-human**: **superhuman** in the extent and intensity of their passion and sub-human in its **singleness** and limitation **and** in the absence of redeeming counter qualities.

Attached to these broad **principles** of character creation are two devices that can be considered points of **craftsmanship**. Jonson always supplied a thorough **introduction** for each character on his **first** appearance, we come to **know** Subtle, Face and **Dol** in the first scene. We also come to **know** each of the victims as he arrives. After their introduction, characters do not develop during the play. The other device is the **language**. It is discussed in the following section.

We shall now discuss the important characters:-

A. **The Cheats**: The three cheats: Subtle, Face and **Dol** Common operate in different ways and, perhaps out of different motives. **When** they don the **costumes** of their roles, they **assume** the **characteristics** of the disguises they put on, not just playing the part, but by **identifying** themselves with the roles.

i) **Subtle**: He is the central figure in *The Alchemist*. As **Herford** and **Simapson** put it, he stands with **one** foot in the region of the prodigious, with the other **planted firmly** on the ground of **contemporary** human nature. It is through him **that** Ben Jonson has exposed and **satirised** the cheats and swindlers who flourished **abundantly** in his age.

Alchemy a **pseudo-science** - was a widespread social malady in the Elizabethan Age. The jargon of alchemy is the basis of Subtle's metaphors and our echo of how he thinks. Throughout the play he is the complete swindler who derives full satisfaction from his job of swindling. To illustrate: in Act III scene ii, when Face is not particularly concerned about not finding Surly in town - as, **after** all, there is no money to be made **from** Surly - Subtle has his mind on higher things than money: "O but to have gulled **him/had** seen a mastery."

Subtle is most interesting when he plays various roles, changes his **role** at a **moment's** notice, and behaves differently with different dupes. At the opening of the play, we

will find Subtle in ordinary clothes - the only symbol his craft being the vial of acid that he carries. But as soon as Dapper arrives he dons his robes, and he is now engaged in magic. He **assumes the** dignity that is required; he feigns reluctance to take money. He is equally **dignified** with **Drugger** when he reads his forehead or his palm. In his dealings with **Mammon**, Subtle apparently becomes the completely dedicated alchemist, **working** with his ambition to achieve the philosopher's stone. He proclaims that **impure thoughts will** result in the failure of the process. He is worthy of the awe with **which** Mammon treats him, who, except Surly, can doubt that Subtle is not the holy **doctor**. When he describes the process, he speaks with dignity and authority as though he **has** forgotten that no experiments are in progress and no work has **been** done. And **when** he explains the rationale of alchemy to Surly, he is the very spirit of sweet reasonableness - a man who is secure in his knowledge and has only pity for the skeptic **who** does not understand. Finally, when the fake explosion takes place, he **succeeds** in convincing Mammon that it has **occurred** due to Mammon's sin. With the **puritans**, Subtle adopts an entirely different image and is consistent in it: he is **irascible**, stubborn, opinionated, and impatient.

But he lacks the refinement, **culture**, and poetry of Jonson's Volpone. In this regard, **Herford** and **Simpson** wrote: Volpone yields nothing in knavery-to Subtle, but Subtle is despoiled of the explicit **poetry** which breaks in lurid flashes from Volpone, the Fox; he comes before us, **not** chanting an exultant morning hymn to his **shrined** treasure, 'the world's soul and mine', but exchanging volley's of gutter language with his partner **i.e.** Face. And **this** sordid imposter of north is at bottom far more intelligible than the **Venetian** patrician. Volpone, so securely incorporated, by his rank and status, with **the very body** of the Venetian polity, is yet felt to be the alien he is. Subtle is **bound** by **no such** ties of ostensible community to the society. He prays upon, and his operations are far more deeply ingrained- with sham; but, we are made, nonetheless, to see that this **creature** had a natural history, that his is a growth of the soil, a fungus - growth routed in the greed and hunger of London. In words of Carylean flavour **and pungency**, **Jonson** tells us what he preciousy was:

"Taking your **meale of steam** in **from** cookes,
Where, like the **father** of hunger, you did **walke**
Piteously costive, **with** your pinche'd hme-mess
And you **complexion**, of **romane** wash,
Stuck full of black, **and melan** choliue wormes.

And Subtle remains to the **end** sordid in his making and spending of money."

Subtle, thus, is a **powerful representative** of the medieval pseudo-alchemists who, - unlike the other **alchemists that** figured in literature - has some individual attributes. He is shrewd and versatile, perspicacious and **persuasive**. He is both a type and an individual.

ii) **Face**: In the play **Face has** not one face but **many**: he plays varied roles and wears many masks. In the beginning of the play, he is Jeremy, the butler in the house of **Lovewit** and **so** he is at the **end**. He is **also** a persuasive rogue who lures clients for Subtle by using his skills **and** shrewdness. It is he who builds up the image of Dr. Subtle as the man who can **make** the **philosopher's** stone; as a magician who has dealing with the world of **spirits**; as an astrologer who can read signs and lines on the palm and foresee the future. He is here, there and everywhere.

He is sharp-witted, **glib-tongued** and is always ready with some excuse or plan to save a situation. He is **right** in saying that he should be given a larger share of the projects as he **lures** in the **clients** and dupes and takes more pains than Subtle.

Jonson, in the opening **scene**, throws some light on the part of Face. The play opens with a quarrel between Face and Subtle, and the latter gives a graphic account of the earliest face of Face **before he** became Jeremy, the butler. In those days Face was

poor, thin, and had the company of ruffians whom he had met in disreputable taverns. As Subtle puts it:

"Thou **Vermine**, have I not taken thee, out of dung,
So **poore**, so wretched, when no living thing
Would **keepe** thee **companie**, but a spider or horse?
Rais'd thee from **broomes**, and dust, and watering pots?
Sublim'd thee; and exalted thee, and fix'd thee
I, the third region, call'd our start of grace?
Wrought thee to **spirits**, to quintessence, with panes
Would twice have won me the philosopher's works
Put thee in words and fashion?
Made the fit
For more than **ordinarie** fellowships?"

Moreover, Face is a typical rogue who reminds us of Mosca of Volpone. **Here** is the analysis of **Herford** and **Simpson**: "Face is much more nearly related to **Mosca** than Subtle to Volpone. But he is far from being a replica. The fabric of make believe which he sustains is several degrees more complicated and various; Mosca is a real parasite dependent **upon** a **real** patron; Face plays alchemist's drudge, as he plays the Captain in the joint business in which, at least, he is the more masterful partner and has the larger stake. The energetic opening scene, where the two **rogues** vie in tearing away the last ragged vesture of each other's self-esteem, **makes** us vividly aware of the natural history of Face no less **than** that of Subtle; but **Jeremy**, the enterprising butler, accomplished in all the varieties of back stair pilfering, who compounds with a conjurer **for** the use of his master's empty house **on** the terms of equal profits and a bonus horse-race, cock-pit, cards, must have **been** instantly accepted as a London **rascal true** to type."

Like Subtle, he responds to the roles he must play. He is Captain Face; he is 'Lungs', the sorcerer's apprentice, and at the end he is Jeremy the butler. **As Captain** Face he is the rude and over bearing bully. He can fight Subtle in the opening scene of the play, and this role gives him the required fillip to his confidence first and later, success. **When** he is the sorcerer's apprentice, 'Lungs', he is affable and obsequious. As Jeremy he retires from the limelight as soon as his real master, **Lovewit** amves. You, as a discerning student, can understand the actor's (**i.e.** the one who plays this role of a rogue) difficulty in changing personalities while changing roles.

iii) **Dol Common**: Though **Dol** is not as active as Subtle or Face, she plays well the part assigned to her. The following are **the** comments of **Herford** and **Simpson** on her roll: "If Face is a **Mosca** of **more** shifts and better luck; the third member of 'the indenture tripartite' has no equivalent in the earlier play. The female rogue, **paramour**, and **partner** of the chief contriver of the harms, was, however, a figure not **unknown** to Jonson. She is an indispensable member of the 'house' - indispensable to the precious pair whose game she plays and whose dangerous fends she quells, indispensable to the intrigue which she complicates and enriches, indispensable above all to **the** satire, to the flavour of which her presence adds an ironical pungency not to be otherwise obtained. Even the business of catering for the lust of clients illustrates less drastically the pretension of the alchemist to 'holy living' **than** do the sordid lotteries and altercations of Subtle and Face for the possession of their common mistress." Even though as the Queen of Fairies, she has no opportunity to improvise, she still stands in the front rank of Jonson's women.

B) **The Dupes**: The three dupes Mammon, **Drugger**, and Dapper, have different levels of imagination and are at different levels of evolution.

i) **Sir Epicure Mammon**: Surly describes Sir Epicure Mammon aptly:

"Heart! Can it be
That a **gram** sir, a rich, that has no need,

A **wise** sir, too, at **other** times, should thus,
With his own oaths, and arguments, make hard means
To gull **himself**?

Mammon is an imposing figure who **stands head** and shoulders above the **other** dupes viz., Dapper, Druggier, and **Kastrill**. **His** highly poetic imagination exalts and transmutes even **the coarse and the vulgar** into **something** noble and high. His passions are two: craving for money **and** lust for **women**. Due to **these** passions, he **becomes a prey** to the three cheats in the play, viz. **Subtle**, Face, and **Dol**.

Here are the **comments** of **Herford** and **Simpson** on Mammon's opulent imagination! "Sir Epicure Mammon **stands** apart and **aloof**. **He** **belongs** not merely to a different **social** rank as it's a **different order** of imagination. The realism of Jonson's method, elsewhere in **this** play so **pervading** and to all appearance so sedulously **preserved**, here gives way to personage who belongs to the London of Jonson and James I by **about** as **good** right - **as Marlowe's Faustus to Wittenberg**. The sinister romance of Volpone, the hint of **poetry** in the worship of gold, his god, is resumed and heightened in Sir **Epicure's magnificent** dreams. Jonson is here for once Marlowesque, but in a kind **unborrowed** and his own. Mammon is a Faustus of the senses, captivated by **the dreams** of exploring the utmost possibilities of **recondite** and requisite sensation, as **Faustus** by the **dream** of boundless **knowledge** and power. **The** sordid **Mephistophiles** of the laboratory never **fulfils** his **bond**, but Mammon has already taken possession of his kingdom and **feasts** full at the **origins** his imagination provides. **Volpone's** imagination is an **instrument** of his cunning and cruel brain, employed to discover new **ways** of explicating and deluding others. Both are magnificent in sin; **even their lust** is aristocratic and demands a noble prey; but while Volpone almost secures the **noblest** and chastest lady in Venice, Mammon hails a **harlot** as a princess, and discovers in **the** common mistress of Subtle and Face, not **only** the Austrian lip and the **Medicean** forehead, but **an** air,

"That sparkles a **diceinitic**, beyond an earthy beantie!"

Keeping in **view** the **comments** of **Herford** and **Simpson** given above, we **can analyse** his role: we first meet **him** **after** he has been a client of the three cheats for sometime and so we can conclude that **they** have had ample time to convince him. But, what we see is Mammon weaving fantasies - which are above the reach of Face's descriptive abilities - in a **language** full of poetic **colour** and imagery. He describes the virtues and the procedures **of** alchemy with learning and delight. He talks of **books written** by Adam (in '**High Dutch**'); he **reinterprets** mythology (Jason's fleece) to fit his purposes. The **weaving** of fantasies **never ends** while he is on stage. The luxuries he **describes** are the **measure** of his **character**:

"I'll have no bawds
But fathers and mothers they will do it best,
Best of all others. And my flatters
Shall be the **pure** and gravest of divines
That I can get for money. My **mere fools**..
Eloquent **burgenes**
The few that would give our **themselves** to be
Cant and town-stallions..
These will I beg, to make me **eumuchs** of "

Moreover, the famous passage **about** food is fascinating and enticing **for** Gourmets. Gluttony, a vice usually **comic** or distasteful is heightened by rich verse:

"My meat shall all come **on**, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and **studded**
With emeralds, sapphires, **hyacinths**, and rubies,
The tongues of carps, dormice, **and** Camel's heels,
Boiled in the spirit of sol, and dissolved pearl

Apicius' diet, **'gainst** the **epilemy**:
And I will eat these **broth's** with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and **carbunch**.
-----I myself will have
The beards **of barbell served**, instead of **salads**;
Oiled **mushrooms**, and the swelling unctuous paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Desert **withan** exquisite and poignant sauce"

This **poetry**, full of **imagery**, which is **evocative** of lust and gluttony, **peppered** with dreams of luxury beyond belief and showing occasional display of omnipotence based **on** unlimited wealth describes • though partly • the character of Sir Epicure **Mammon**.

ii) **Drugger**: He is a simple **tradesman** with modest ambitions. As he intends to open a new **tobaccoconist's** shop, he is in search of a lucky sign; he wants his **horoscope** read **so that** he will **know** whether he will be successful; and he is keen on knowing how to arrange his merchandise and **shelves** on the best scientific principles, **so that the** supernatural forces will be **favourable** to him, so his quest is not for **Philosopher's** stone, but for lucky signs and days. We will, now, take a look at the **analysis** of **Herford and Simpson**:

"In **the** admirable character of Drugger, on the other hand, **Jonson** has exemplified the side of alchemy which commended it to the plain, **prosaic** philistine who **wanted** to insure his business, **or** to steal a march upon trade rivals by more 'scientific' methods than theirs. And the **scholar's ridicule** for pseudo-science is **here compounded** with the ridicule of a man of **shrewd** sense for **the dabblers** in science who try to make learning do the **work** of mother-wit, and **book** knowledge to take the place of practice, Drugger, proposing to plan his shop 'by necromancy,' and **Kastrill**, eager to **qualify** for **the** company of the other **Angry** Boys by learning the rule of **duelling** suffer **equally**. They are less innocently amusing creatures than Stephen; but the infusion of gull in their composition, if slighter, is intrinsically of a deeper dye. **They** are **pedants** of a bogus craft."

Moreover, had Drugger paid his money for knowing **lucky** signs and days, he **would** have succeeded in his business. But, unfortunately for him the team of swindlers lure him with the possibility of **marrying** a young, beautiful, wealthy widow **i.e.** Dame Pliant. Thus, the swindlers exploit the superstitious and credulous nature of Drugger to the fullest extent.

iii) **Dapper**: By profession, **Dapper** is a lawyer's clerk, but he doesn't have **commonsense**. He is easily gulled to believe that the Queen of Fairies is his aunt and that she is fond of him. He is inflicted with the most humiliating of **personal** indignities; he swallows anything including gingerbread gags. Of all the gulls, he is the worst.

C. **The Puritans**: In Act III we have discussed how Jonson made use of the happenings in contemporary England for the purpose of writing his plays. We find two such historical happenings, which were responsible for Jonson's depiction of the characters of the Puritans. Those are: i) The puritans of Amsterdam, in order to promote their 'holy cause' of converting more and more people of England to their faith, were in **need** of huge amounts of money; and they thought that they would get it through the Philosopher's stone. When they approached 'the **alchemists** in England for 'the stone' they were gulled by the latter. ii) The puritans wanted the **theatres** to be closed down **as** they **considered** them dens of inequity and disrepute. The playwrights like Jonson and **Shakespeare** accused them of **hypocrisy** and **satirised** their cant **hypocrisy** and greed in their plays: Jonson's most **famous** Puritanical hypocrite is Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in **Bartholomew Fair** and Shakespeare's is Malvolio in **Twelfth Night**.

We will take a **look at** the analysis done by **Herford** and **Simpson** of the two puritans: "**The** puritan **dupes**, Ananias and **Wholesome**, **mark** a **new departure**. Jonson, as a **professed** catholic, **during the** precious **ten** or eleven years, can never have **felt any attraction** for the '**saints** of the **Reformation**', but this was his **first** undisguised **exposure** of puritan **foibles** on the pillory of **the stage**. His attitude to puritanism was indeed not unlike his **attitude** to alchemy. Both were, for him, social **pests**, offensive by their hypocritical **pretension** and their **masquerade** of hollow and **questionable** learning. He treats the two **puritans**, indeed, with a palpably **deeper** contempt than any of **other** dupes, **or even** than the chemist himself. **The** debates with Subtle are insidiously **contrived** to **exhibit** the similarity of their aims and his. The **Philosopher's** '**Stone** is a **more effective** and certain way of getting that advantage which the puritans sought through the cumbrous **machinery** of '**longwinded** exercises' and **inconvenient** dress; and **Subtle's** praise of it thus naturally takes the **form** of an ironical **recital** of the Puritans' **practices** with which the stone will enable them to dispense. When Ananias **introduces** himself as '**a faithful** Brother', and **Subtle** affects to understand by this as **devotees** of alchemy, the two professions at once assume the air of parallel **fraternities**. And **Jonson's** **erudite** humour is thoroughly in its element when he is pitting the **two professional jargons** against each other as in the second **scene** of Act III."

i) **Ananias**: He is narrow and stupid, violent and inflexible. He **regards** Subtle and his language of alchemy as heathen and his stone 'a work of darkness', and **does** not want to have **any** truck with the alchemist. He **firmly** believes that the **seared** cause of **Puritanism** should flourish by **good** means. But, due to his great faith in the integrity and **wisdom** of his **friend**. Tribulation Wholesome, he **approaches** Subtle. But he **disagrees** with Subtle and says: 'please the profane, to grieve the godly; I may not'. But **being** a hypocrite, he concludes that 'casting of dollars is concluded lawful! When **Lovewit** threatens to beat him with a cudgel, he grows violent and heaps **curses** on Lovewit's **house**:

"May dogs defie thy walls
And wasps and **hornets** breath **beneath** thy roof'

ii) **Tribulation Wholesome**: He also - like his **naïve friend**, Ananias - uses expressions peculiar to **the** puritans. But, unlike Ananias, he does not believe in means and he **thinks** that **means** are **justified** by the ends:

"We **must** bend **into** all means,
That may give **furtherance** to the holy **cause**".

When Ananias is **horrified** at the **idea** of appeasing a swindler like Subtle, for Tribulation,

"The children of perdition are oft-times
Made **instruments**, even of **the** **greatest** works."

Subtle-being a shrewd **swindler** - understands his client, Tribulation extremely well, Having been able to **convince** Tribulation about getting money by means of Philosopher's stone, Subtle moves **from** noble causes to those that appeal to the former's bases **uses** such **as** it is a **cure** for gout or palsy or drops; (for health purpose) it can **restore** 'A lady **that** is past the feat of body, though not of mind' (for lewd use) and **as** an offshoot 'you **have** made a **friend** / **And** all her friends' (again for lewd use) and then, To buy the king of France out of his **realms**, or **Spain** / **out** of his **Indies**.' Having been enticed and entrapped, Tribulation says, "We may be temporal lords ourselves, I take it," Thus, **the** puritans, Tribulation is an epitome of hypocrisy.

D) **Minor Characters**: **Surly**, **Kastril**, Dame Pliant, and **Lovewit** are minor **characters**, but **as they contribute** to the development of the plot - especially **denouement** - their roles become significant.

i) **Surly**: We first meet Surly with Mammon. He suspects the alchemical cant and the elaborate masquerade, regards Subtle as a swindler, calls their house a bawdy house, and says **Dol** is a prostitute in league with Subtle and Face to cheat people like Mammon. The discerning comments of **Herford** and **Simpson** are as follows: "...he is the all-knowing and well-meaning in the play, a **type** of character who **makes frequent** appearance in Jonson's plays. If his **function** in the plot connects him with **asper**, his name **associates** him with Morose, and the one who sees through and exposes imposture is as **effectually** denuded of heroic quality as Dame Pliant is, of pathos. He is beaten in argument by Subtle. When on the verge of triumphantly establishing his case, carrying out his just vengeance, and reaping **his** modest **reward**, he is checkmated by Lovewit's volts-face, and is involved in the discomfiture of the rogues and dupes. Surly corresponds to Bonario in Volpone, as Dame Pliant to Celia **Bonario's** rescue of Celia is a wooden imitation of the chivalry and pathos of romance; the rescue of Dame Pliant by Surly is denuded of romance **to the last** shred:

" You are
They say, widow, rich; and I am a bachelor,
Worth nought: Your fortunes may make me a man,
As mine have preserved you a woman. **Think** upon it, ·
And whether, I have **deserv'd** you, or no".

Surly at this point appears, like Bonario, to have the game in his hands. Subtle, like Volpone, is for the moment dumb-founded, but Face, like Mosca, promptly **recovers** the lost ground, and enlists the whole band of dupes against the one shrewd **man**. **Druggier** and Dapper testify against him, and he is forced to go away, **humbled** and disgraced by the support · **Lovewit** extends to Face. He is a shrewd man and disguised as a Spanish Don he gets inside knowledge of goings on in the house, but all his efforts are **frustrated** because **Lovewit** reverses the situation.

ii) **Kastril**: He is the brother of Dame Pliant and a heir to three thousand pounds a year who has come to town recently. He still retains the **mannerisms** and coarseness of a villager:

"Ass, my suster,
Go **kuss** him, as the cunning man would have you;
I'll · thrust a pin in your **buttocks** else"

Even a cursory reader can notice the way he mispronounces 'sister' and 'kiss' and his coarse language. Jonson based his characters on 'humours' in Every Man in His Humour, Kastril's character in The Alchemist was also based on a humour called 'Choler'. In the play, he is referred to as 'the angry boy'. He has come to town to live by his wits and to learn the art of duelling. To a modern reader like you the idea of learning the art of duelling may look ludicrous, but · Kastril has some like-minded **friends** in Shakespeare's plays: In Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio talks about Tybalt, who adheres to the rigid etiquette of the duel; one in As You Like it-Touchstone describes the art of insult - the steps by which a duel is developed. **Kastril**, thus, is young, brash, purse-proud, and ill-mannered.

iii) **Dame Pliant**: She is a young, beautiful, and wealthy widow who does not have any individuality. She is offered as a bait to Surly; she is annoyed with Surly as he did not act in time for marrying her. She is meant to be a prize and is bestowed on **Lovewit** at the end of the play. We will take a look at **the** analysis done **by Herford** and **Simpson**: "Little need be said of the three characters who in various degrees and ways contribute to **bring** about the denouement, and who, though all at one point or other victims of the imposture, yet stand apart from the main body of the alchemist's dupes. Dame Pliant is in every sense the least important. In his desire to **make-her** character expressive of her name, Jonson, has really made her **of 'no** character at all'. Even Pope, however, would not have regarded her as like 'most women'; she is **little** more than a passion, and serviceable abstraction · a ball whose

various movements serve exhibit the quality of the players and mark the progress of the game - projected by the **Angry Boy**, saved by Surly, struggled for by Surly and Face, and finally **secured by Lovewit**. It is in this last stage of her fortunes that she at length counts decisively in the plot, when her person and her money serve to buy off the **Nemesis** which **threatens** the chief rogue and brings about one of these amazing reversal with which Jonson was somewhat too fond of baffling the expectations of his audiences. Her part in the plot somewhat resembles that of Celia; but Jonson has this time taken care that as a **character** in a comedy, she should not excite any tragic pity. Unfortunately, in denuding her of this improper **kind** of interest he has made her **too** unsubstantial to be even **matter** for mirth."

iv) **Lovewit** He arrives late - **i.e.** in the last act of the play and describes himself in a single sentence. "I love a teeming wit as I love my nourishment." Like other landlords in London, **Lovewit** leaves **his** home in the care of his servant **Jeremy**, when the plague **breaks out**. On his unexpected return, he comes to know that his **house** has **been** misused by Jeremy in the guise of Face. He loves his servant for his 'teeming wit' and **readily** forgives him in **return** for a matrimonial **alliance** with Dame Pliant. The analysis of **Herford** and **Simpson** is pertinent: "Righteous Nemesis **at** the hands of an **indignant** mob **allied** with **offended** justice appears to **impend, too secure** for comedy. It is **Lovewit**, who at a stroke, reverses the situation. Jonson was bent upon avoiding the **lofty** retribution air by which in **Volpone** he had established his abhorrence of violence; and he has contrived the denouement with great skill for this end. **Lovewit** is as far as possible **from** resembling the ideal vindicator of virtue. He comes with an **authoritative** air; but strikes a bargain with the principal culprit - Face - for the lion's share of the spoils. He **effects** a revolution in the plot in virtue **merely** of a temper too easy and **humorous, seriously** to resent **wrongs** even when they **concern** himself, and **ready** for a jest to overlook a **multitude** of sins. "I love a teeming wit, as I love my nourishment," he **declares** and indeed his only **concern**, when he hears of the **mysterious** goings on in his house, is as to **the 'nature** of the device which his witty **knave** may **have contrived**." Jonson has placed **the** jest in the hands of a joy boy'. **Not** hide-bound, whose **easy** geniality proves a ready **solvent** for menacing tragic **harms**. The witty trickster comes off unscathed, while the fools and dupes suffer." **Lovewit** - whose **name** is suggestive of love for wit and witty situations-brings out a **merry** denouement befitting for a comedy.

The aforementioned **discussions** of characters is sufficient to make you **understand** that with **The Alchemist** we are not concerned with 'characters' at the level of psychological realism that often we are in Shakespeare's plays. **Jonson's characters are types, exemplifications of particular attitudes and capacities that are found in society, but rarely found in the isolated and purified form in which he presents them.** His **process** is what **the** Elizabethans might have called an anatomy - meaning a dissection, a careful **laying-out** of the parts of a body, to show their essential nature and **function**, and their interrelations **The Alchemist** is an **anatomy** of the **'humour'** of greed, and it **demonstrates** with beautiful simplicity an obvious truth that is often forgotten; if everybody cheats, **everybody** will be cheated. **This is not to say that Jonson is not interested in human nature, and that he does not know a great deal about it.** Moreover we don't complain of a newspaper's **cartoon** that it is a worse **picture** of a politician than the news photo on the **front** page. **The** exaggerations may **amuse and** delight us in **the** caricature at the same time as they reveal things not **apparent** in the photo. **Jonson's characterisation has the ruthless energy and economy of the best kind of caricature.**

5.3 LANGUAGE

Over a period of time the **Elizabethan** playwrights developed a kind of dramatic verse which reached its pinnacle by the time **The Alchemist** was written. The entire area of development can be traced in Shakespeare's plays **from** his earliest to the latest.

Elizabethan and Jacobean verse is usually called 'blank verse' (please note that it is not 'free verse') A ten-syllable line 'iambic pentameter' is the basic. The line has five feet; each consisting of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. By the time *The Alchemist* was written, the lines were irregular in stress, frequently contained more or fewer than ten syllables. They were frequently run on; that is, no natural pause in meaning occurred at the end of the line. These irregularities made for a more flexible verse. The lines did not cease to be poetry; the audience had a built in expectation, due to long habit, of the rhythmic line, and irregularity added a feeling of variety. At one extreme, a passage could be more mundane, less lofty, prosaic without being prose, while at the other end, passages become more poetic, flowery, musical without perhaps ever quite being poetry.

Further **Jonson's** dramatic verse is functional; it is the rhetorical means to the end of his art. *The Alchemist* is in blank verse except for Surly's phrases of Spanish, the concluding lines of the play - where rhyme is used unobtrusively and parts of the two scenes where Dapper is prepared for an then meets the Fairy Queen. Here the **mock-ritual** is emphasized by the addition of rhyme. The use of the one form of verse for all the varieties of idiom, mood, and social status in the play insists on its essential unity, but within this common form Jonson is capable of very varied effects. He can range from the coarse **insults** of the opening quarrel to the grandiose fantasies of Mammon. The language and the forms of syntax it takes are always appropriate to character and situation and the blank verse has great variety and rhythmic vitality.

I am a **young** beginner, and am building
Of a new shop, and't like your worship; just,
At corner of a street. (Here's the plot on't).
And I would know, by art, sir, of your worship,
Which way I should make my door, by necromancy,
And, where my shelves. And, which should be for boxes.
And, which for pots. I would be glad to thrive, sir.
And, I was **wish'd** to your worship by a gentleman,
One Captain Face, that says you know men's planets,
And thie good angels, and their bad. (I.III.7-16)

In this passage **Drugger's** stammering nervousness, his clumsy repetitions, and his low and monosyllabic vocabulary dislocate the verse until it scarcely exists. Only two of the lines above **have** ten syllables: they are consecutive, and linked by a violent enjambement which virtually imposes a different division on the speaker: 'just, /At corner of a street!

Tribulation, the practised preacher, has by contrast an unctuous fluency:

The children of perdition are, oft-times,
Made instruments even of the greatest works.
Besides, we **should** give somewhat to man's nature,
The place he lives in, still about the fire,
And **fume** of metals, that intoxicate
The brain of **man**, and make him prone to passion.
Where have you greater atheists than your cooks?
Or more profane or choleric than your glass-men?
More antichristian, than your bell-founders?
(III.i.15-23)

This is much more regular and the units of syntax tend to coincide with the divisions of **the** verse. While he **can** carry a sentence over two or three lines of **verse** Tribulation never goes far before coming firmly to rest on a metrical and syntactic pause. The repeated rhetorical questions (a line apiece) indicate the **pulpit** orator as clearly as phrases like 'children of perdition', 'instruments ...of the **greatest** works', or '**more profane**'. Mammon's syntax, like his range of allusion, is much **more**

adventurous. His clauses **spring** from **one another** and **proliferate** in **apposition** as his fantasy moves (by **association**) to wilder visions:

I am **pleas'd** the **glory** of her sex should know,
This nook, here, **of the** Friars, is no climate
For her, to live **obscurely** in, to learn
Physic, and **surgery**, for the Constable's wife
Of some odd **hundred** in Esses; but **come** forth,
And taste the air **of palaces**; eat, drink
The toils of **emp'r^{ies}**, and their boasted practice;
Tincture of pearl, **and** coral, gold, and **amber**;
Be seen at **feasts; and** triumphs; have it **ask'd**,
What miracle she **is**? Set all the eyes
Of court a-fire, **like a burning-glass**,
And work 'em intocinders; when the jewels
Of twenty states **adorn** thee, and **the** light
Strikes out the stars; that, when they **name** is **mention'd**,
Queens may **look** dale: and, we but showing our love,
Nero's Poppaea may be lost in story!
(iv.i.130-45)

The natural rhythm of the **voice** speaking these lines does **not destroy** the pattern of recurrence in the metre, **as so** nearly happens in **Drugger's** lines. Nor, as with Tribulation, does it **reinforce** it, offering only crude **and** simple **variations**. Rather it counterpoints and **harmonizes** to produce a rich and exciting rhythmic texture. sixteen lines are all one **sentence** and can scarcely be **divided**: the energy of Mammon's vision **carries through** and unifies the almost **Miltonically** relaxed **syntax**. The syntax itself **is like a dream** or vision, **where** things **shift** into each other **and** **change** their **form**.

The syntax of Subtle's **exposition** of alchemy (ii.iii.142 ff.) is, like the verse, regular, logical, and orderly. As **with** Tribulation's speech, the verse • and sense-units tend to coincide, but here the **linguistic structures** are those of **reasoned** argument, not emotional exhortation. **Wh**at Subtle is saying is non-sense, for the language of alchemy defines itself, **and** has no **reference**, for **all** its sonority and glamour, to the **real** world. But the **forms** the language takes are those of ordered rational discourse, of logical, learned, **unimpassioned** disputation. This tone is **emphasized** by the regular but not **over-emphatic** forward march of the verse. Here in the **verse-form** and the syntax is a **parallel** to the **concern** with disguise and the playing of parts noticed before (see p.xxiii). Subtle disguises his language in **the forms** of learning **and** reason, and **therein demonstrates** his subtlety. Surly **cannot** dispute with him on **these terms**, for to **do so would** be to move into Subtle's **self-defining** world and argue upon his **premises**. Accordingly he launches into a **catalogue**, a violent piling-up of **terms** (182-98) that

Would burst a man to name

And almost bursts **the actor** in speaking. The continued **appearance** of sweet reason in Subtle's **response** to this irascible and (in form) irrational outburst leaves Surly no reply. In **the scene which** follows, **where** Subtle has to **deal** with the much less sophisticated **Ananias**, his tone is **more** authoritative, his rhythm much more staccato. It is, **as** he says,

In a **new** (tune, new **gesture**, but old language.
(II.iv.27)

The pattern of the **verse** is maintained not **only** in **the** longer set speeches. It persists in the most rapid **exchanges** of **dialogue**:

Sub.		Cheater.	Characterization
Face.		Bawd.	and Language
Sub.	Cow-herd.		
Face.	Conjuror.		
Sub.	Outpurse.	-	
Face.		Witch.	
Doll.		O me!	
	We are ruin'd! Lost!	(i.i.106-8)	*

Jonson admirably **manages effects** of interruption and rapid changes of gear:

Sub. ~~The~~ divine ~~secret~~, ~~that~~ doth fly in clouds,
From ~~east~~ to west; and whose tradition
Is ~~not~~ from men, but spirits.

Ana. I hate traditions:

I do not trust them -

Tri. **Peace.**

Ana. They are Popish, all.

I will not peace. I will **not-**

Tri. Ananias.

Ana. **Please** the profane, to grieve the godly: I may not.

Sub. Well, Ananias, thou shalt overcome.

(III.ii.104-10)

'Tribulation's 'Peace' fits into the caesura of Ananias's line. His 'Ananias' cuts a line **short** and completes it, **but Ananias's** next line is long and he need hardly **pause** in his delivery (which must be rapid) for Tribulation's interruption. Subtle's much slower line would come after a marked pause, leaving 'I may not' hanging in an **embarrassing silence**. Mammon and on occasion other characters) **interrupts** himself:

My baths, like pits
To fall into: from whence, we will come forth,
And roll us dry in **gossamer** and roses.
(Is it **arriv'd** at ruby?) - Where I spy
A wealthy citizen,...

(II.ii.50-4)

A. most ingenious verse effect is the passage at N.V.25-32, where against the background of Doll's incantory ravings 'out of Broughton', Face and **Mammon have** an agitated colloquy about what is to be done.

Jonson's dramatic verse is **less easily quotable than Shakespeare's**. Set pieces do not detach themselves so readily from context. It is exactly **Jonson's 'art'**, in his sense of the term, the **art** that he said Shakespeare wanted, that makes this so. **His ramatic verse has great range and energy but it is always ordered and controlled by a considered dramatic context, and this is both its strength and its limitation.**

5.4 THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BEN JONSON

Jonson was a celebrity in his own day. Taking the English stage by storm with *Every Man in His Humour* he followed it up with the comical satire, *Every Man out of His Humour*, a **theatrical** success accompanied by considerable controversy. His **characters** were so life-like that to clear himself of the charge of attacking particular persons, he had to declare his purpose, viz., portraying follies, not individuals. The War of the Theatres, and the mature comedies brought his avowed critical principles so much to the **fore** that it was easier to label his artistry as classical, realistic, etc.,

rather ~~than take into~~ account its growth and development. **Thus**, the dynamism of his dramaturgy **came** to be **ignored**. Among the playwrights of his age, Jonson was alone in viewing plays **as literature**. The significance of the publication of Jonson's **Works** in 1616 ~~has been pointed out in~~ Unit-1. **Jonson** was in the habit of revising a play for publication and in **the process** expanded the text considerably. **The** acting versions of the play, on **the other** hand, reveal several cuts in the long **speeches** and expository passages. Jonson **seems to have** followed the Renaissance principle of '**copia**' and elaborated so ~~that a point is~~ **heavily underlined**. Combined with this is his love of **technical terminology** of **diverse** kinds, which he was fond of displaying both for purposes of **accuracy or realism** and to **impress** others with his learning.

Milton **was perhaps** the first to pair **Jonson** and Shakespeare, and the familiar lines from "L' Allegro," as **Michael** Jaimieson explains, contain "a graceful compliment to **Ben Jonson**," which is missed by many modern readers. This pairing **was continued** by **Dryden** as well. **The** course of **Jonson** Criticism came to present an irony of **sorts** a little later. In the eighteenth century **Jonson** who praised Shakespeare as "**not of an age**," **was** declared not "a **universal** genius, but of his time only." In 1753 an enthusiastic champion of Shakespeare, Robert Shiells, quietly added his own comments **into** an edition of **Conversations**. As Shiells's **interpolations** were not detected till the end of the century, his **unfavourable** comparisons of Jonson to Shakespeare **was regarded** as the testimony of one who knew the **poet** in the flesh. A few years earlier, **Macklin**, a Shakespearean actor brought out a letter supposedly **referring** to a pamphlet published in the last days of Jonson's career. Barish cites a passage to establish the **malicious** forgery:

"It would greatly exceed the limits of **your** paper to set down all the **contempts** and **invectives** which **were** uttered and **written** by **Ben** ... as **unanswerable and shaming** evidences to prove his ill-nature and **ingratitude** to **Shakespeare**, who first introduced him to the theatre and fame [**modernised** spelling]."

The critical **reception** of **Jonson** is **coloured** by misconceptions about **Jonson's** views on **Shakespeare's** art. The 1616 Folio edition of Jonson's **Works** probably paved the way for the publication of the **First** Folio of Shakespeare for which Jonson wrote the commemorative poem, "To the **memory** of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William **Shakespeare**". **Jonson's** tribute reaches out to the **quintessential** Shakespeare, and his very phrases have **been assimilated** into all estimates of the bard: Soul of the age! **The** applause ! Delight! The **wonder** of our stage! ...

He was not of an age, **but** for all time! My gentle Shakespeare...

But what ~~has stuck~~ in the public mind is the oblique criticism of Shakespeare incidental to the defence of **Jonson's** own conception of comedy. References to **Pericles**. 'Tales, Tempests and such drolleries' and his general condemnation of the violation of the Unities, **considered** along with **Jonson's** remark cited by William Drummond in the course of conversation. "**That Shakespeare wanted Art**" had initiated **unfavourable comments** on **Jonson**, the man, and **the** dramatist.

As a **kind** of **literary** eminence, **Jonson** presided over the '**tribe** of **Ben**' which used to assemble at the Devil's tavern. **This circle** included **Robert Herrick** and other "**poetic sons**". The tribute to Jonson's **memory**, *Jonsonus Virbius* (1638), in spite of the **hyperboles**, does ~~reveal, remarks~~ **D.H. Craig**, "something like an alternative literary history, an English Renaissance **without** Shakespeare. According to the elegists, it is Jonson **who** has **brought** English culture, and the **English** language **from** obscurity and crudity to one that can match the culture of the ancients". The motivation behind this tirade **remains** to a large extent a mystery. It was a half-apologetic **Edmund Malone** who **cleared Jonson's** name but diffidently. The final cleansing of the blot on Jonson was chiefly the work of William **Gifford** much later. **An** unfavourable comparison of Jonson, **the** artist, with Shakespeare became in the words of Barish, "

a **conditioned reflex**," and **Gifford** "silenced the chorus of detraction against **Jonson** as man."

The **eighteenth** century presents a paradox, while Jonson the man was **reviled**, his plays **enjoyed** immense popularity. A feverish contest seems to have **run** its **course** "the 18th century critics – those who were involved – competed with each other in **ascribing** ignoble motives to Jonson." scenes were invented purporting to **sketch** Jonson's being "forced to acknowledge Shakespeare's superiority." Forgeries were **resorted** to so that Jonson could be presented as a plagiarist and even a blackmailer. The malicious forgeries of Robert Shiells and the fabrications of **Macklin** are well **known** instances. It was the actor David **Garrrick**, who in the role of **Drugger**, secured for *The Alchemist* a special place in English stage history.

Jonson's self-image did not fit in with the Romantic conception of the artist, a dreamer; in temperament and artistic aim he was the apposite of Shelly and Keats. **Hazlitt**, for one, deplored **what** he perceived to be a **defect in Jonson, the inability** to roam imaginatively, being **just** a grub. Much stress was laid on artifice. **As Barish** notes, "To praise Jonson, **one** had to **turn** him into a schoolmaster, or an exhibitionist of learning, or a purveyor of exoticism".

The tone of criticism changed somewhat in the Victorian era. Jonson's lyrics were singled out for renewed appreciation, thus accounting for the inclusion of a few pieces in that celebrated **anthology, Palgrave's Golden Treasury**. **T.E.Hulme** paved the way for an appreciation of classicism and romanticism in his **famous** essay, and indirectly **for** a critical re-orientation more responsive to Jonson's kind of **art**. It was, however, **T.S.Eliot** with whom there was a turning of the tide. His identification of Jonson's artistry as a matter of overall design rather than of single passages, and his emphasis on Jonson's relevance to the modern times brought about a revival of interest in Jonson. **Edmund** Wilson, in spite of his general censure of Jonson, isolates *The Alchemist* for special praise. A number of twentieth century critics carried forward the new enthusiasm for Jonson's art and some of them were cited in Unit-111.

The researches of **Herford** and **Simpson** over a quarter of a century bore **fruit** in the massive edition of Jonson's **works** in ten volumes (1925-52). Most critical studies and editions have been **referred** to in the **preceeding** Units and in the Bibliography. A review of Jonson scholarship of the 1980's is provided by **Daryl W.Palmer**. Besides examining the biographies by Rosalind Miles and David **Riggs**, he **summarises** the **findings** of seven studies of Jonson's oeuvre and of nine critical approaches to isolated aspects. The final word **on** this survey is furnished by D. **H.Craig**: "In a special sense, then, Jonson is irreparable from his critical heritage; the student of his works in the late twentieth century must still begin with questions which he himself raised and which his contemporaries and his immediate posterity were compelled to answer."

5.5. QUESTIONS

1. Write a long note **on** the swindlers: Subtle, Face, and **Dol** Common
2. Write a **long** note **on** the dupes: Mammon, **Drugger**, and Dapper
3. Write a short note **on** the female figures in the play.
4. Discuss the appropriateness of the names given to the **characters** in the play.
5. Show how language reflects the social standing, the temperament, or the **intellectual background of various characters**.
6. "*The Alchemist* is a satire on human follies and foibles." Discuss.

5.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following **passages** with reference to context.

- i) Sure he has got
Some bawdy **pictures**, to call all this **ging**;
The friar and the **nun**; or the new motion
Of the knight's **curser** covering the parson's mare;
The boy of **six year** old, with the great thing;
Or 't may be he **has** the fleas the **run** at tilt
Upon a table, or **some** dog to dance?
- ii) But that 'tis yet **not deep** I' the **afternoon**,
I should **believe** my **neighbours** had **seen double**
Through the **blackpot**, and made **these** apparitions!
For on my **faith** to **your worship**, **for** these three weeks
And upwards, the **door** has not been opened.
- iii) Sir, you were **wont to** affect mirth and **wit**—
But here's no place to talk on't I' the street.
Give me but leave **to** make the best of my fortune,
And only pardon **me** th' abuse of your house:
- iv) But the sweet face **of** your hath turned the tide,
And made it flow with joy, that ebbed of love.
Arise, and touch **our** velvet gown.
- v) To leave him **three or** four hundred chests of **treasure**,
And some twelve thousand acres of **Fairyland**,
If he game well and comely, with good gamesters.
- vi) She must by any **means** address some present
To the cunning **man**; make him **amends** for wronging
His art with her **suspicion**; send a ring,
Or chain of **pearl**; **she** will be tortured else
Extremely in her **sleep**, say, **and** ha' Strange things
Come to her. Wilt **thou**?
- vii) Good faith, now **she** does blame y' extremely, and says
You swore, and **told** her you had **ta'en** the pains,
To dye your beard, **and umber** o'er your face,
Borrowed a suit and ruff, **all** for her love;
And then did **nothing**. What an oversight,
And want of **putting** forward, sir, was this!
Well fare an old ha'quebusier, yet,
Could prime his **powder**, and give fire, hit,
All in a twinkling.
- viii) That master
That had received **such happiness** by a servant,
In such a widow, **and** with so much wealth,
Were very **ungrate** **ful** if he would not be
A little indulgent **to** that servant's wit,
And help his fortune, though with some small strain.