

**THE EMPORIA STATE**



**RESEARCH**



**STUDIES**



THE GRADUATE PUBLICATION OF THE EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Prose Decorum and  
The Anatomy of Folly in  
*Bartholomew Fair***

by

**Larry D. Bradfield**

WHITE LIBRARY ESU EMPORIA

*The Emporia State Research Studies*

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
EMPORIA, KANSAS

Prose Decorum and  
The Anatomy of Folly in  
*Bartholomew Fair*

by  
Larry D. Bradfield

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE  
AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES  
HARDY STREET, Emporia

Vol. XXXII

Fall, 1983

Number 2

THE EMPORIA STATE RESEARCH STUDIES is published quarterly by The School of Graduate and Professional Studies of the Emporia State University, 1200 Commercial St., Emporia, Kansas, 66801. Entered as second-class matter September 16, 1952, at the post office at Emporia, Kansas, under the act of August 24, 1912. Postage paid at Emporia, Kansas.

The Emporia State Research Studies

Prose Decorum and  
The Anatomy of Folly in  
Bartholomew Fair

"Statement required by the Act of October, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code, showing Ownership, Management and Circulation." **The Emporia State Research Studies** is published quarterly. Editorial Office and Publication Office at 1200 Commercial Street, Emporia, Kansas (66801). The **Research Studies** is edited and published by the Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.

A complete list of all publications of *The Emporia State Research Studies* is published in the fourth number of each volume.

822.3  
J73bzb

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
EMPORIA, KANSAS

JOHN E. VISSER  
*President of the University*

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE  
AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES  
HAROLD DURST, *Dean*

EDITORIAL BOARD

JOSEPH V. HICKEY, *Professor of Anthropology*  
CARL W. PROPHET, *Professor of Biological Sciences*  
THOMAS D. ISERN, *Lecturer and Grants Fiscal Manager*  
MELVIN STORM, *Professor of English*  
CHARLES E. WALTON, *Professor of English*

*Editor of This Issue:* CHARLES E. WALTON

Papers published in this periodical are written by faculty members of the Emporia State University and by either undergraduate or graduate students whose studies are conducted in residence under the supervision of a faculty member of the University.

442440

DATA PROGRAMS  
SEP 19 1984

# Prose Decorum and The Anatomy of Folly in *Bartholomew Fair*

by

Larry D. Bradfield\*

I

## LANGUAGE APPROPRIATE TO SUBJECT

Satiric, topical, and didactic in comedy, Ben Jonson in mainly concerned with the unmasking of folly and vice. Edward Partridge has observed that "Jonson, like all comic poets, explored the gap which always opens between what men say and what they do, between their occasional profession of piety, morality, and reason and their usual practice of selfishness and folly."<sup>1</sup> If individuals are usually selfish, their behavior deviates from a moral standard. If they are usually foolish, their behavior deviates from a rational standard. The deviation in human conduct from rational and moral standards is the source of Jonson's comedy. Unwise actions reflect abuses of thought, reason, and logic. Immoral actions reflect abuses of conscience, morality, and ethics. Two categories of human behavior, folly and vice, overlap and interact, and instances of art and argument abound with treatments of the vices of folly and the follies of vice. Jonson, however, develops separate methods for treating folly and vice in his comedies, distinguishing between the forms of language with which he renders man's abuses of moral capabilities and rational capabilities, ultimately focusing entire dramas upon each category of abuse.

Were *folly* and *vice* always employed with the precision of their initial definitions in the *OED*, fewer misconceptions might arise in the critical discussion of their appearance in comedy, generally, and in Jonsonian comedy, particularly. *Folly* would signify "the quality or state of being foolish or deficient in understanding; want of good sense, weakness or derangement of mind; also, unwise conduct"; and *vice* would signify "depravity or corruption of morals;

\*The author is a graduate of the Division of English and Foreign Languages at Emporia State University. Portions of this study originated as a master's thesis.

<sup>1</sup>Edward B. Partridge, *The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 63.

evil, immoral, or wicked habits of conduct; indulgence in degrading pleasures or practices." But such precision is not, and has not been, the case with these terms. Instead, *vice* is used in references to matters amoral, as in the rhetoricians' references, in Jonson's time, to injudicious figures of speech as vices of language.<sup>2</sup> Jonson himself uses *vice* in this sense in *Discoveries*:

There is almost no man, but hee sees clearer, and sharper, the vices in a speaker, then the vertues. And there are many, that with more ease, will find fault with what is spoken foolishly, then that can give allowance to that wherein you are wise silently.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, *folly* appears in moral contexts, ranging from that of the King James version in Ecclesiastes, 7:25, "to know the wickedness of folly," through the references by preachers and moralists to the follies of greed, licentiousness, and unsanctioned behavior. Such cross-categorical applications intensify a writer's or speaker's disapproval: the unwise is the more reprehensible when colored by the immoral, and the immoral is the more despicable when colored by the unwise. In reviewing Jonson's mature comedy, however, it is important to maintain the precise distinction, because the human errors explored in each drama demonstrate, *primarily*, folly or vice.

Although some critics have noted Jonson's separate treatment of intellectual and moral issues, they have not pursued the subject to any great length. In 1898, Elisabeth Woodbridge cautioned against the assumption that all of Jonson's plays drive home a moral lesson, noticing his separation of folly and vice and pointing out that his emphasis is rather more on folly.<sup>4</sup> Finding Jonson's habit of judging to be more often intellectual than moral, Larry Champion concludes that "his satire is aimed primarily at those vices which lead man to misuse his intelligence rather than at those which are morally reprehensible."<sup>5</sup> Champion adds that Jonson's comedy "censures evil . . . through exposing the folly and gullibility of its victims or through showing how evil gains its advantage because of the victim's lack of intelligent discipline."<sup>6</sup> However,

<sup>2</sup>[Richard Putterham], *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589; rpt. New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 208. Putterham titles the twenty-first chapter of his third book "Of the vice or deformities in speach and vvriting principally noted by auncient Poets." He begins this chapter, "It hath bene said before how by ignorance of the maker a good figure may become a vice, and by his good discretion a vicious speach go for a vertue in the Poeticall science."

<sup>3</sup>Ben Jonson, *Timber: or Discoveries*, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 575.

<sup>4</sup>Elisabeth Woodbridge, *Studies in Jonson's Comedy*, Yale Studies in English, No. 5, Ed. Albert S. Cook (1898; rpt. New York: Gordian Press, 1966), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>Larry S. Champion, *Ben Jonson's "Dotages": A Reconsideration of the Late Plays* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Chapion, p. 15.

when Jonson exposes moral turpitude, as in *Volpone* or *The Alchemist*, "gullibility" and "lack of intelligent discipline" are simply static traits of his characters; their abuses of ethical conduct are developed and exposed for censure. When Jonson exposes abuses of reason, as in *Epicoene* or *Bartholomew Fair*, hypocrisy and moral laxity are the static traits of his characters; their irrationality or misused rationality is anatomized and its consequences illuminated. By suggesting that Jonson subordinates the censure of vice to the exposure of folly, Champion distorts Jonson's mature comic technique that holds characteristic vices constant when the play explores various abuses of reason, and characteristic follies constant when the play explores various abuses of morality.

One needs to place Jonson's comedies in perspective. His plays from the first version of *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) through *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) are generally regarded as differing from his very early and his very late work. Pre-1598 plays are looked upon as the works of an apprentice dramatist.<sup>7</sup> Only two of these survive, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Case Is Altered*.<sup>8</sup> Neither was included in the 1616 Folio, Jonson's audacious, carefully selected and edited version of plays that he claimed as serious literary "works." The late plays, *The Devil Is an Ass*, *The Staple of News*, *The New Inn*, and *The Magnetic Lady*, are generally taken to mark a diminution of Jonson's comic prowess. The first of these was produced in 1616, two years after *Bartholomew Fair*, and suffers in the shadow of its predecessor. The last three were produced after Jonson had been absent from the comic stage for ten years (their respective production dates being 1626, 1629, and 1632) and come from the period when Jonson's health had begun to fail. The term, *dotages*, first used by John Dryden, has been applied widely, and perhaps unjustly, to these plays.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, critical opinion finds something necessarily and typically "Jonson" in the comedies beginning with *Every Man in His Humor* and ending with *Bartholomew Fair*. In the course of these plays, Jonson devises specific applications for prose and verse in the depiction of folly and vice.

A specific use of poetry and prose is typical of the dramatists of Jonson's day. Dramatic verse of the late Elizabethan and early Jaco-

<sup>7</sup>C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 289. See also "apprentice," I, 313.

<sup>8</sup>"Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden," Herford and Simpson, I, 143 and 168 n. See also "The Case Is Altered," I, 305.

<sup>9</sup>John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., et al., XVII (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 59. See also Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, *Ben Jonson*, Twayne's English Authors Series, No. 258, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), pp. 101 ff.

bean periods generally denotes a speaker of noble rank, and dramatic prose generally signifies a speaker of lower rank. Furthermore, serious subject-matter and action are most often rendered in verse; humorous subject-matter and action, in prose. Amidst the inherent demands upon dramatic language and the contemporary conventions of the dramatic uses of prose and verse, Jonson formulated his own technique that connects dramatic prose to a comic exposure of folly, and verse to the comic exposure of vice.

Earlier scholars tend to overlook Jonson's conscious applications of prose and verse. For example, Mina Kerr, following Felix Schelling's lead in assessing the prose and verse in the comedies, insists that Jonson had no great influence upon dramatic blank verse or prose because his "rigidity" in blank verse ran counter to contemporary freedom and fluency in dramatic verse and because stage comedy was already making greater use of prose.<sup>10</sup> In the first volume of their authoritative edition (1925), C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson assert that "Jonson's choice of prose or verse for different plays fluctuates . . . while the choice between them for different scenes or situations in the same play is far less logical or consistent than in Shakespeare."<sup>11</sup> Whatever Shakespeare's logic in the application of prose and verse (and his logic also fluctuates), one gains little knowledge of Jonson's use of prose or verse by intimating that Shakespeare's application represents a standard from which Jonson's is a falling off. Jon Enck cautions: "Two axioms apply to all [of Jonson's] writing: nothing is accidental, and deliberateness does not guarantee results."<sup>12</sup> J.B. Bamborough is more explicit in his remark intended for those approaching Jonson for the first time: "Fundamental to his cast of mind seems to have been a passion for order, logic and consistency, for leaving no loose ends, and for bringing everything within a systematic and coherent framework."<sup>13</sup>

If a deliberate purpose is everywhere to be expected in Jonson's work and if Jonson is predisposed to the systematic, a careful analysis of prose and verse in his comedies is necessary. Some of the plays are predominately verse; some predominately prose. Two of the plays, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, are truly verse comedies; two, *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair*, truly prose comedies. Close observation, however, reveals that *Volpone* makes an excursion in-

<sup>10</sup>Mina Kerr, *Influences of Ben Jonson on English Comedy, 1598-1642* (1912; rpt. New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), pp. 16-17.

<sup>11</sup>Herford and Simpson, I, 288.

<sup>12</sup>John J. Enck, *Jonson and the Comic Truth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), p. 51.

<sup>13</sup>J. B. Bamborough, *Ben Jonson* (London: Hutchinson, University Library, 1970), p. 11.

to prose when the Fox disguises himself as a mountebank, a charlatan vendor of quack medicine, and stands in the street, violating all logic as he extols the virtues of his elixir. On the other hand, *Bartholomew Fair* makes an excursion into verse—rough and jangling doggerel—as the puppet play raises the most insipid questions of morality in the art of the drama and in the place of the theater before the assembled fools at the fair. The plot of *Epicoene* rides along on prose, a loose form much different in style from that of *Bartholomew Fair*. *The Alchemist* employs a verse less rigid than that of *Volpone*.

In Jonson's mature comedy, prose or verse is fitted to the type of behavior under investigation in the immediate situation, or in the play. For example, behavior exhibiting weak reason is rendered in prose; that exhibiting weak conscience, in verse. Jonson's choice is a unique application of the principle of language decorum. By applying a sense of decorum that links prose or verse to the rational or moral concern in the heart of a drama, Jonson directs the correct interpretation of the play. The prose medium of *Bartholomew Fair* is, thus, a sign that the play is a comic exposure of the abuses of reason, and the play needs to be regarded, above all else, for its resolute delineations of follies in action. Consequently, critical discussion could best be directed toward the subject-matter inherent in the drama—the sources and effects of folly, the complications folly gives rise to, and the manner of resolving or correcting the problems.

The concept of decorum is central to neoclassical ideals. Prior to Jonson, it was best espoused in English by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesy* (probably written 1582-83, published 1595). After Jonson, the concept was widely treated, notably in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668). The English neoclassical idea of decorum derives largely from admonitions in Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Some of these, in Jonson's translation, include "The Comick matter will not be exprest / In tragick Verse . . ." and "The very root of writing well, and spring / Is to be wise; thy matter first to know. . . ."<sup>14</sup> A native practice of decorum can be observed, however, in English authors not generally recognized for following classical dictates. For example, Chaucer's Knight and Miller do not speak the same level of language, nor do they tell the same type of tale. Moreover, the *Gawain* Poet uses words of different sounds and lines of different tempos in the seduction and hunting scenes.

<sup>14</sup>Ben Jonson, *Horace His Art of Poetrie*, Herford and Simpson, VII, 311, 11. 121-22 and 325, 11. 440-41.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Drunken Porter* speak hardly the same vocabulary. Horatian decorum, however, as Sidney works it into his *Defence*, is somewhat more exacting than that of native practice. He echoes Horace's advice to keep the subjects of tragedy and comedy separate, cautions that poetry is "not speaking table-talk fashion . . . but piecing each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject," and praises that style which is "fittest to nature."<sup>15</sup>

Of comedy and the responsibility of the comic poet, Sidney says "that the comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which [the comic poet] representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."<sup>16</sup> Jonson, like Sidney, puts upon the audience the responsibility for aversion, rather than mimicry, of the errors portrayed in comedy. If a writer presents the offensive side of humanity,

A man, that is on the mending hand, will either ingeniously confesse, or wisely dissemble his disease. And, the wise, and vertuous, will never thinke any thing belongs to themselves that is written, but rejoyce that the good are warn'd not to bee such; and the ill to leave to bee such.<sup>17</sup>

The responsibility for the comic exposure of man's tarnished side is the comic writer's; the responsibility for avoiding what the comic writer exposes is the beholder's. However, if he must represent "the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be," the comic poet will be hard pressed to do it in decent and uplifting language and still make each word fit "the dignity of the subject."

The requirements of comic drama necessitate that Jonson not be a whole-hearted adherent to the decorum of language in just the way that Sidney recommends. In Alexander Sackton's words, "The speech of fools must be foolish to be correct,"<sup>18</sup> because the life imitated in comedy may be that which fails to observe the polite decorum of society or the uplifting decorum of oratory. When Jonson transgresses these latter types of decorum, depicting a character who favors the indecent and the obscene, there is a serious purpose to his use of such base levels of humor. Nearly always, as Helena Baum notes, "the impropriety is in character for

<sup>15</sup>Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in *Prose of the English Renaissance*, ed. J. William Hebel, et al. (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1952), pp. 298, 274, and 301.

<sup>16</sup>Sidney, p. 284.

<sup>17</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 634.

<sup>18</sup>Alexander H. Sackton, *Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 42.

the speaker."<sup>19</sup> For Jonson, strict decorum of language appropriate to a given character is a means of exposing, and thus ridiculing, incorrect behavior. His comic characters frequently are comic because they practice affectations; that is, their comic characteristics do not stem simply from what they are, but from what they aspire to be and the manner in which they imitate their ideals. In other words, it is one thing to represent a fool in comedy and give him the language of a fool, but another to represent a person who is foolish because of his inept imitation of a worthy ideal or his adept imitation of a worthless ideal. Jonas Barish explains that the speech of Jonson's characters (who are ridiculous because of what they imitate or how they imitate it) reveals a norm.<sup>20</sup> Their speech reveals their own natural intellectual capacities or levels of conscience against which their follies and vices may be measured.

Thus, Jonson's acceptance of the prevailing notions of decorum is not indiscriminate. In his comedy, he cannot everywhere represent decent and uplifting speech because his comic characters cannot everywhere be decent and uplifting. He fits Sidney's definition of the comic poet; and to fulfill the obligations set forth in that definition, still working within the framework of classical literary precepts, he refines the principle of decorum to make it apply to the requirements of stage comedy.

## II

### PROSE AND THE COMIC POET

The divisions of poetry and prose are modern, and perhaps incorrect. In *The Defence of Poesy*, Sidney explain that, although many who write poetry clothe their art in verse, the verse is no determiner of poetry, "verse being but an ornament, and no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets."<sup>21</sup> He cites prose works of Xenophon and Heliodorus, which are called poetry. He concludes, "it is in that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by."<sup>22</sup> Similar to Sidney's explanation is Jonson's following note in *Discoveries*:

<sup>19</sup>Helena Watts Baum, *The Satiric and the Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), p. 39.

<sup>20</sup>Jona A. Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 92-93.

<sup>21</sup>Sidney, p. 273.

<sup>22</sup>Sidney, p. 274.

Hence, hee is call'd a *Poet*, not hee which writeth in measure only; but that fayneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the Truth. For, the Fable and Fiction is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any Poetical worke, or Poeme.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Jonson reinforces himself in his later assertion that "A *Rymer*, and a *Poet*, are two things."<sup>24</sup> In Sidney's and Jonson's contexts, there is no indication that a poet working in prose is any less noble, any less artistic, any less seriously concerned with the making of poetic literature than a poet working in verse. The feigning (the imitation) is the primary occupation, the primary determiner of a poet. Jonson's addition that the feigning is of a fable or story—a complete action, in Aristotelian terms—indicates his dramatic bent.

Prose works had been written in English prior to the Renaissance, but, for the most part, they lacked the control that meter, rhyme, and stanza give to verse, even to verse of poor technical quality. "Prose control in both narrative and discussion," points out Charles Baldwin, "seems assured first in Sir Thomas More; but as late as John Lyly the progress of prose was still uncertain."<sup>25</sup> The Renaissance in England, especially by way of the Erasmus-motivated educational system it fostered, provided the impetus for developing a literary prose controlled in a variety of ways, just as verse is controlled in several ways.<sup>26</sup> Slowly at first, because the prose studied in the schools was Latin, and then very rapidly, as the grammar-school methods of control became more adapted than imitated and other methods were discovered or devised, the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century saw the rise of English prose suited to the tasks of poetry that Sidney and Jonson described.

Tradition holds that Jonson received a grammar-school education, or the bulk of one, at Westminster School, although his name does not appear in the records of students there.<sup>27</sup> If Jonson remained to participate in the upper forms, he and his classmates, by statute, "wrote themes on Monday and Wednesday in prose, on Tuesday and Thursday in verse, Latin and Greek."<sup>28</sup> It is likely that

<sup>23</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 635.

<sup>24</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 638.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Sears Baldwin, *Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice: Classicism in the Rhetoric and Poetic of Italy, France, and England, 1400-1600*, ed. Donald Lemen Clark (1939; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), pp. 37-38.

<sup>26</sup>T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), I, 372. Baldwin comments, "the curriculum aimed to provide a literary training as Erasmus had demanded."

<sup>27</sup>Bamborough, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>John Sargeant, *Annals of Westminster School* (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), pp. 38-39.

he did achieve the upper forms because he explained to Drummond of Hawthornden that he wrote his verse first in prose, as Camden had taught him.<sup>29</sup> The lower forms were restricted to varieties of prose compositions.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the Westminster scholars regularly staged comedies. The regulations of 1561 required the boys to stage Latin plays each Christmas, and Roman comedy, especially Plautine and Terentian, was the standard fare.<sup>31</sup> Jonson must have been exposed to, if he did not participate in, these comedies during his stay at Westminster.

The seriousness with which the study of prose matched the study of verse in the Westminster curriculum is illuminated by T. W. Baldwin. Summing up the Eton-Westminster method of instruction, he describes the first three forms as having been devoted to the speaking and writing of grammatical Latin. In the third form, the boys were expected to "string enough sententiae together to call the result a theme," modeling their prose themes of the fourth form on Erasmus. Although the study of versification was introduced in the fourth form, the writing in both the fourth and fifth forms was restricted to prose; furthermore, fifth form prose was to exhibit rhetorical polish. In the sixth form, the boys began to compose, in equal amounts, verse and prose.<sup>32</sup> Daily, the boys in the upper forms at Westminster

... expounded a Latin or Greek author, alternating prose and verse. . . . Finally, a theme was assigned upon which they were the next morning to make Latin or Greek proses [sic] or verses, according to the alternation of languages and types of composition.<sup>33</sup>

Baldwin's summary of this rigorous routine is nearly complete—"The boys studied all the best Latin writers in prose and verse and learned to model their own styles upon them. Here is the fundamental formal literary training of the Renaissance"<sup>34</sup>—if one remembers to add that the boys engaged in this regimen would have been, according to the statutes, no older than eighteen.<sup>35</sup>

Even this brief account of the manner of education at Westminster clarifies such hints as Milton Crane's about Jonson's

<sup>29</sup>"Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden." Hereford and Simpson, I, 143 and 168. Camden was second-master at Westminster during the time of Jonson's attendance. Seutonius had recorded the same practice in Virgil.

<sup>30</sup>Sargeant, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup>Tucker Brooke, "The Renaissance 1500-1600," in *A Literary History of England*, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1948), pp. 447-48.

<sup>32</sup>T. W. Baldwin, I, 370-71.

<sup>33</sup>T. W. Baldwin, I, 365.

<sup>34</sup>T. W. Baldwin, I, 372.

<sup>35</sup>Bamborough, p. 13.



use of prose and verse: "What appears to underlie Jonson's willingness to restrict himself to prose or verse is a certain self-consciousness about his craft."<sup>36</sup> The grammar-school discipline which demanded that composition be restricted, now to prose, now to verse, but which alternated them continually throughout each day's sessions, would engender self-consciousness about the nature of the medium in which one was writing at the moment. Jonson's grammar-school education was probably a heavy influence on the adult poet/critic who, according to Partridge,

... never spoke of the freedom of the imagination or even the power of genius alone, but who felt that a poet ought to be brought down through "the disciplines of *Grammar*, *Logicke*, *Rhetoricke*, and the *Ethnicks*, adding somewhat, out of all, peculiar to himselfe."<sup>37</sup>

Such is Jonson's reflection, not of an anti-Romantic personality quirk, but of the grammar-school training which laid the foundation for his own poetic practice.

Henry Wells notices that the applications of prose and verse in the age differed according to subject matter:

Elizabethan prose has a myriad of varied uses, all, however, distinct from those of verse. Only two types of subject matter it refuses as foreign to its own nature, namely tragic passion and conventional and sentimental romance.<sup>38</sup>

Wells' assessment seems both to encourage a search for the different subject matters that Jonson rendered in prose or verse, and to support the comment, in passing, that Jonson's two tragedies are verse plays. Wells also notes that few of the comedies written at the outset of the seventeenth century were wholly in prose or verse, and that a comedy in which prose and verse were mixed (with prose dominant) was the norm; but he suggests that a rationale underlies the four Jonson comedies that depart from this norm: ". . . never romantic, they are more or less serious. The more serious, as *The Alchemist* and *Volpone*, are in verse; the more farcical, as *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair*, in prose."<sup>39</sup> Although Crane cannot find a principle directing Jonson's mixed or single use of prose and verse, he, too, hints that a rationale must exist. His tentative

<sup>36</sup>Milton Crane, *Shakespeare's Prose* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 34.

<sup>37</sup>Partridge, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup>Henry W. Wells, *Elizabeth and Jacobean Playwrights*, 2nd ed. (1939; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1964), p. 248.

<sup>39</sup>Wells, p. 242.

reference to the concept of unity of effect is in line with the claim that a personal application of language decorum guided Jonson's choice:

[Jonson] may have thought that the mixed form diminished the unity of effect; it is hard to believe that any less serious motive could have caused him to eschew prose almost altogether in *The Alchemist*.<sup>40</sup>

Although Wells is not so tentative, he is very close to the mark in his overview of the dramatic uses of prose and verse in the age:

The playwrights chose their medium with unflinching tact. Where romance, fantasy, and idealism dominate, verse is the leading medium; where intellectualism, realism, and satire dominate, the dramatists prefer prose. Verse depicts the passions, prose the manners of men.<sup>41</sup>

Since there is no romance and fantasy in Jonson's comedy, one is left with Wells' term, *idealism*, as the concern of Jonson's verse comedies which deal with departures from moral ideals. Wells' connection of *intellectualism* with prose admirably suits Jonson's prose comedies, wherein characters misuse their intellectual capabilities.

During the Elizabethan period, the methods of controlling prose, learned in grammar schools, had not yet been adapted fully to the play-length treatment of comic subjects. Barish recalls that, although Lyly had devised a "highly mannered prose" for audiences at court and subjects of fantasy, it remained for Shakespeare and Jonson to develop dramatic prose suited to matters both high and colloquial (with Shakespeare predominantly adapting older techniques of symmetric rhetorical ornamentation and Jonson predominantly devising asymmetric patterns to disrupt older standards and to create illusions of natural speech).<sup>42</sup> Grammar-school boys of Elizabethan England had been indoctrinated in the Ciceronian style of prose; and with its classical pedigree, its scholastic approbation, its polished form, and its oratorical nature, this prose style offered Renaissance Englishmen the epitome of language used by an intelligent and educated man in service to his country and conscience. Widely imitated in school exercises, the Ciceronian style had been adapted to the differences between Latin and English. The preëminent language taught in the grammar schools was Latin, in which a word's grammatical func-

<sup>40</sup>Crane, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup>Wells, p. 244.

<sup>42</sup>Barish, p. 2.

tion is determined by its inflectional form, and word order is somewhat discretionary. Renaissance English had lost its old inflectional system to become an analytic language in which a word's grammatical function is determined by its position in a phrase or clause. Thus, adaptation was necessary to maintain the sense of an English period cast in Ciceronian form "where the syntax remains incomplete up to some well-defined turning point, with phrases and clauses tending to mass themselves in parallel formation on both sides of the turning point."<sup>43</sup> But grammar-school training had also instilled the habit of working linguistic expression, first into one form, then into another; and Seneca, who was read in grammar school alongside Cicero, provided a different, and yet respectable, model for working and reworking prose expression. In Seneca's terse and aphoristic passages was a model to imitate and adapt, offering an alternative to the architecturally planned, mediate expression of the Ciceronian style; it afforded a way of expressing immediate "live thought." Instead of pouring a subject into the Ciceronian form, a writer might, with Senecan stylistics, let the form of expression be shaped by the verbalization of the subject as it came to mind. Those non-dramatic writers who rejected scholasticism, rhetorical polish, and the prescribed practices of oratory (Bacon, for example) chose to adapt the alternate model to their purposes. Morris Croll designates the paradigm they developed as "baroque prose."<sup>44</sup> As Croll explains, the purpose of the baroque prose stylists "was to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking it."<sup>45</sup> They believed that, if the form of a thought changed between conception and expression, the expressed thought was different from the conceived thought. They believed that the round, cumulative periods of the Ciceronian model so removed thought from the moment it presented itself to the mind as to alter the initial truth of the thought, destroying its freshly imagined vigor. To avoid this stylistic mediation which they perceived to be the central defect of Ciceronian prose, they utilized two manners of baroque prose expression, the curt style and the loose style.<sup>46</sup> The curt style employs short syntactical members, omits connectives, states the whole idea of the period in the first member by attaching succeeding members in imaginative succession rather

<sup>43</sup>Barish, p. 48.

<sup>44</sup>Morris Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in *Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Fredrick Klaeber*, ed. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Rudd (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929); rpt. in *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm: Essays by Morris W. Croll* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 207-33.

<sup>45</sup>Croll, p. 210.

<sup>46</sup>Croll, pp. 210-11

than logical progression, and is asymmetric.<sup>47</sup> The loose style employs connectives (coordinating conjunctions, correlatives, relative pronouns, and subordinating conjunctions) to build on an idea rather than to indicate tight, logical relationships. It frequently inserts absolute participial phrases, seeking to show the quick clarification or qualification of an assertion as it first comes to life in thought. The loose style, strongly associated with skeptical thought, proposes to show the order of thinking during which an idea presents itself to the mind.<sup>48</sup>

Applying Croll's studies to Jonson's comedies, Barish points out that "the curt period lends itself to the expression of quick shifts in feeling, afterthoughts, self-corrections, unexpected interpolations or dislocations of attention."<sup>49</sup> As Jonson's fools frolic with undisciplined minds, this kind of expression serves "to promote oddness of emphasis, to undermine expectations of 'normal' arrangement."<sup>50</sup> Within the curt style, Jonson found syntactic structures capable of readily characterizing the "angry or indignant, impatient or volatile, or merely distracted," as well as those rendering "the idiotic flapping about of a half-witted mind" or the "language of abuse."<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the loose style of baroque prose was suited to comic declamation, formal but foolish. To exploit the intricacies of folly, Jonson uses the baroque prose styles which allow for an exceptionally wide latitude of shifts and turns within quick, economical utterances that are essential to the language of the stage.<sup>52</sup>

### III

#### EVOLUTION OF JONSON'S PROSE-VERSE DECORUM

In *Every Man in His Humour* (the original Italian version, Quarto 1601), Jonson begins to develop his unique dramatic prose. His vigor and fine distinctions in expression lead Barish to observe that the depiction of character is through individual idioms, prose predominating over verse by more than a three-to-one ratio and becoming at once "the staple of language from which verse is a deviation."<sup>53</sup> Twice, within the first sixty lines of the play, Lorenzo Senior mentions items that seem, to him, unreasonable. The first is

<sup>47</sup>Croll, pp. 212-15.

<sup>48</sup>Croll, pp. 219-24.

<sup>49</sup>Barish, p. 51.

<sup>50</sup>Barish, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup>Barish, pp. 53-54.

<sup>52</sup>See Barish, pp. 8-9, for a discussion of the demands on dramatic rhetoric in the sixteenth century.

<sup>53</sup>Barish, p. 98.

his son's study of poetry. Lorenzo Senior admits that he, too, studiously applied himself to poetry in his younger days; age, however, made him wiser:

But since, Experience hath awakt my sprit's,  
And reason taught them, how to comprehend  
The soueraigne vse of study.<sup>54</sup>

Learning that Stephano, who speaks in prose, has bought a hawk (so as to practice a gentlemanly skill) but does not know how to care for the bird, Lorenzo Senior wishes that he would "Learne to be wise, and practise how to thriue" (I.i.59). Thus, at the outset of the play, Lorenzo Senior, who considers himself rational, is speaking in verse; Stephano, speaking in prose, is already exposed as a fool, abusing whatever rational powers he has; and the audience awaits the verdict on Lorenzo Junior, supposedly locked away somewhere in his study of poetry. It should be noted that verse is not consistently aligned, at this point in Jonson's career, with the exploiting of vice, but prose is already aligned with the exploiting of folly, the exhibiting of fools.

The next prose in the play is found in Lorenzo Senior's reading of the letter that Prospero has sent to Lorenzo Junior (I.i.142-75). This prose delivery of the contents of a letter breaks no new ground in dramatic technique. The letter functions as a plot device, arriving in the father's hands because he and his son have the same name, arousing the father's suspicions, and motivating him to check on his son as the scheme of the letter is carried out. Furthermore, the letter contains references germane to the association of prose with subjects of folly. Prospero promises, "*I thinke I haue a world of good Iests for thee: oh sirha, I can shew thee two of the most perfect, rare, & absolute true Gulls, that euer thou saw'st, if thou wilt come*" (I.i.153-56). His letter closes with the further persuasion,

*If this melancholy rogue [Lorenzo here] doe not come, graunt, that he doe turne Foole presently, and neuer hereafter, be able to make a good Iest, or a blanke verse, but liue in more penurie of wit and Inuention, then eyther the Hall-Beadle, or Poet Nuntius.* (I.i.171-75)

Prospero vows to entertain Lorenzo Junior with gulls, simple-minded creatures who can be made to believe anything. He cajoles young Lorenzo, admonishing him that, if he does not sport with the

<sup>54</sup>Ben Jonson, *Every Man in His Humour*, Quarto 1601, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), I, 197. Subsequent references to Jonson's plays are from this edition and are noted by act, scene, and line numbers following the material cited.

simpletons, it will be fitting for him to become a fool himself.

Later in the play, Pizo defines a *humour* in prose: ". . . it is a monster bred in a man by selfe loue, and affection, and fed by folly" (III.i.157-58). If Pizo's definition is Jonson's (and it seems to be at the time), then the humours themselves are fed by deficiency of understanding, want of good sense, and weakness or derangement of mind (in the terms of the *OED* definition of *folly*). Moreover, Pizo, like Lorenzo Junior, speaks in both prose and verse in the play. His oath to Thorello, just prior to his definition of "humour" for Cob, is in regular blank verse:

By my soules safetie sir I here protest,  
My tongue shall ne're take knowledge of a word  
Deliu'er'd me in compasse of your trust.  
(III.i.90-92)

Since Pizo is made to speak in verse as well as prose, it is worth noting that his prose definition of *humour* is delivered to Cob, a waterbearer who regularly speaks in prose, reflecting the traditional decorum of prose for characters of low social rank. Yet the prose dialogue between Pizo and Cob is also in line with Jonson's first practice of another type of language decorum: i.e., prose is the apt medium for matters of folly.

Significantly, Lorenzo Junior speaks consistently in prose while carrying out the mischief of the play with Prospero, his compatriot. Prospero and young Lorenzo, thus, use the manner of language spoken by all the fools as they reveal these characters' simple-mindedness. However, when Lorenzo Junior rises to his diatribe against false poets and false poetry (V.iii.312-43), he declaims in blank verse. Defiling poetry may be an act of fools, but its ramifications, "As she appeares in many, poore and lame, / Patcht vp in remnants and olde worne ragges" (V.iii.320-21), are moral; and defending poetry is very much a moral obligation, as young Lorenzo's blank verse declamation indicates.

Jonson extends his applications of prose in *Every Man out of His Humour*. Prefixed to the printed versions of the play are his brief character sketches of the *dramatis personae*, which Herford and Simpson refer to as "a daring and somewhat questionable innovation," noting that they "superficially recall the 'Characters' of Theophrastus, soon to be expressly imitated by Hall and his successors."<sup>55</sup> Jonson's petite Characters suggest that he was closely in

<sup>55</sup>Herford and Simpson, I, 374.

touch with the various contemporary applications of non-dramatic prose and willing, albeit in this instance without solid dramatic need, to reveal himself in the vanguard of prose-form exploration.

During his initial speech in the first *Grex*, Asper proclaims,

. . . my language  
Was neuer ground into such oylie colours,  
To flatter vice and daube iniquitie:  
But (with an armed, and resolved hand)  
Ile strip the ragged follies of the time.  
Naked, as at their birth. . . (13-18)

Just as Lorenzo Senior's first verse speeches in *Every Man in His Humour* present a judge exposing unreasonable behavior, so does Asper's first verse speech in *Every Man out of His Humour* present another judge proposing to expose folly. In both plays, the possessors of reason speak verse, and the pretenders to reason communicate in prose. In both plays, the exhibition of folly is accomplished in prose.

The principle of decorum that aligns prose with the exposure of folly appears early in Jonson's comedy. The fixing of verse to exposures of vice develops more slowly, perhaps because vice is not a central subject of comic investigation in Jonson's earlier comedies. Woodbridge notices that successful exposure of folly is accomplished by the "witty rogues" in *Every man in His Humour* and by the consistently "malignant" Macilente in *Every Man out of His Humour*; however, vice brings about its own ruin in *Volpone*, moral tone absents itself from *Epicoene*, the vicious are outwitted in *The Alchemist*, and a relatively painless calling to account of the fools occurs in *Bartholomew Fair*.<sup>56</sup> In the latter four comedies, Jonson gives separate, play-length treatment to the subjects of folly and vice.

The Characters prefixed to the printed texts of *Every Man out of His Humour* illustrate a weakness in the play's fitness for the stage. These sketches are set pieces, static analyses of traits, and the play itself suffers from being mainly a showpiece for language and character, more a *tableau vivant* than a drama. Barish finds Jonson in full command of dramatic prose in the play—with prose dominating verse by almost a six-to-one ratio and functioning well to reveal character—but in poor command of plotting, because Jonson invented rather than adapted a plot and failed to give it the

<sup>56</sup>Woodbridge, pp. 29-30.

suspense necessary to initiate movement from one point to the next.<sup>57</sup>

In *Cynthia's Revels*, some of this dramatic deficiency is corrected, but the play still depends more on moments that illustrate foolishness than on movement of plot that shows folly engendering complications and crises. Linguistically significant, as Barish points out, prose and verse are not now mixed in any scene. A character allowed to speak in verse speaks in prose during the time when prose-speaking characters are on the stage and resumes verse only when the prose speakers are absent.<sup>58</sup> Pizo shows this same discrimination in *Every Man in His Humour* as he addresses Thorello in verse with Cob absent, and Cob in prose with Thorello absent (III.i). But Jonson does not regularly hold to that pattern in *Every Man in His Humour*. In I.iv., Pizo, Thorello, and Giuliano begin a prose conversation, and Thorello and Giuliano continue in prose after Pizo exits, but switch to blank verse as Thorello explains to Giuliano the fears he has about the visits of Prospero and Prospero's friends to his house. With the advent of *Cynthia's Revels*, however, Barish notices that

A new criterion . . . for distinction between prose and verse has evolved. In the world of the court, presided over by a divine Cynthia, where truth and virtue reign unchallenged, only verse is spoken. In the world of folly that hovers illicitly about the edges of the true court, only prose is heard.<sup>59</sup>

The Prologue contends that the author's muse ". . . shunnes the print of any beaten path; / And proues new wayes to come to learned eares . . ." (10-11), and promises "Words, aboue action: matter, aboue words" (20). If *Every Man out of His Humour* suffers from being too much a *tableau vivant*, Jonson is not yet ready to discard the technique. First in importance is the matter of his play; then, come the words; and last, the action. Such a proclamation as the one which closes the Prologue of *Cynthia's Revels* is an understandable statement if Jonson is concerned that the basic subject of folly or vice at the heart of his plays is aptly revealed through the language rather than actions of his characters. Moreover, the action expected on the comic stage in Jonson's time included slapstick buffoonery. Concentrating, as he does, on the subject matter, Jonson belittles this expectation and works to replace it with the comedy of language, whereby the audience may not only laugh at how a

<sup>57</sup>Barish, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup>Barish, pp. 113-14.

<sup>59</sup>Barish, p. 114.

character articulates his vicious or foolish nature, but can also learn to be and to speak otherwise. Baum finds that, by the time of *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson had devised a way "to thwart the audience's desire to see pranks enacted," by replacing "aimless buffoonery" with "comedy implicit in the dialogue," and by including "satiric overtones."<sup>60</sup> While working out the technique that eventually controls *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson writes comedies that are like satiric set pieces rather than drama. It is noteworthy that while this technique is being developed—in *Every Man out of His Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and *Poetaster*—Jonson calls each play a "comical satire" as opposed to a "comedy," the designation that appears on the title-pages of *Every Man in His Humour*, *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. His attention to the specific problems of comic language may be hinted at in his choice of "comical satire" for plays in which he is exploring the manner of language best suited for the display of different subjects.

*Poetaster* is the last of the plays in which Jonson is developing his principle of language decorum that aligns prose with folly and verse with vice. Unfortunately, the play was, for Jonson's habits, hurriedly composed to give him a first-strike advantage when the war of the theaters was heating up. Reacting to the rumor that Dekker was composing a play for the Lord Chamberlain's Men that would disparage him, Jonson quickly determined to fire the first volley.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, he still observes the language decorum that gives verse to the court of Caesar and prose to the household of Albius, with a mixture of prose and verse in varying proportions when representatives of these extremes cross paths. He also shows his distaste for the inflated diction of Marston. Jonson's Horace administers a purgative to Crispinus (Marston) that causes him to vomit up *retrograde*, *reciprocall*, *incubus*, *glibbery*, *lubricall*, *defunct*, *magnificate*, and a host of other crudities (V.iii.391-565). At the end, Virgil admonishes Crispinus,

You must not hunt for wild, out-landish termes,  
To stuffe out a peculiar dialect;  
But let your matter runne before your words. . . .  
(V.iii.549-51)

Even here, in his vituperative attack upon Dekker and Marston, Jonson does not depart from the dictum with which he closes the Prologue of *Cynthia's Revels*.

<sup>60</sup>Baum, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup>Herford and Simpson, I, 415.

Barish observes that the prose in *Poetaster*, charged with the task of exposing those who abuse their own small portion of intellectual ability, is now colloquial and reliant upon the choppy syntax of the curt style.<sup>62</sup> For example, Crispinus responds to Horace in the curt style:

Troth, HORACE, thou art exceeding happy in thy friends and acquaintance;  
they are all most choice spirits, and of the first ranke of *Romanes*: I doe not  
know that *poet*, I protest, ha's vs'd his fortune more prosperously then thou  
hast. (III.i.234-38)

Illustrating Croll's anatomy of a curt period, Crispinus employs short syntactical members, omits connectives, has the whole idea of the statement in the first member, follows the first member with suggestions that come to mind from it, and is asymmetrical rather than balanced.

After *Poetaster*, Jonson composed his first tragedy, *Sejanus* (1603), a verse play. It was received coolly, as *Catiline*, Jonson's second tragedy would be received seven years later. However, following his first verse tragedy, Jonson composed his first mature verse comedy, *Volpone* (1605), unlike the mixed prose-verse comedies which he had been writing from *Every Man in His Humour* through *Poetaster*. Barish speculates that Jonson's abandonment of the mixture of prose and verse after *Poetaster* might signal his "growing preference for concentration and singleness of effect" or "his changing view of the theater and of his own role as playwright."<sup>63</sup> Later, Barish adds that

. . . where the chief stigma of folly is mimicry, as it is with most of the gulls in the early plays, prose is the normal vehicle. The return to verse in *Volpone*, hence, marks a momentary shift of Jonson's attention away from specifically linguistic caricature.<sup>64</sup>

In *Volpone*, then, Jonson is focusing his attention on something other than the way in which the sloppy thinking of fools is revealed in the manner of their speech. He had already developed some adeptness at using the variations of the rhetoric of baroque prose to portray a fool in the act of foolish thought. He had recently composed, in verse, a tragedy wherein he explored violations of conscience and ethical conduct. With *Volpone*, he continues to explore the moral matters of conscience, but now, in the genre of comedy.

<sup>62</sup>Barish, p. 123.

<sup>63</sup>Barish, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup>Barish, p. 187.

He avoids the prose he has developed for the display of folly, utilizing, instead, the verse medium already established (in tragedy) for matters of morality. His first comedy in the all-verse form reveals a "dark" comic world in which nearly everyone lacks a conscience, in which the ethical standard is degeneracy. Verse enables him to maintain the "singleness of effect" that Barish mentions. With *Volpone*, the comic playwright assumes the mantle of the moralist.

Edward Partridge sums up the problem which *Volpone* presents to its theater and reading audiences: "The special quality of *Volpone* is not easy to define. Is it a comedy?"<sup>65</sup> Though he hastens to add that no one would attempt to prove it a tragedy or near-tragedy, he notes that the usual terms applicable to comedy are insufficient to explain the techniques of *Volpone*. The play is obviously a comic work, but just as obviously a work focused on vice—specifically greed and licentiousness—which had not been generally the single focus of a comic play, not generally the sole subject-matter of a comedy. Barish contends that when, in the preceding plays Jonson wants to provide both deplorable situations and a commentary on them, his

... shifts between prose and verse become a rough counterpart to the shifts from a given situation to the comment upon it. Prose registers the folly embodied in palpable form, and verse affords glimpses of a positive moral norm from which the fools have strayed.<sup>66</sup>

Such moral norms were revealed in the first verse speeches of Lorenzo Senior and Asper. In *Volpone*, however, the moral norm is the immoral, and greed—a moral issue—motivates the fools' abuses of their powers of reason. Thus, the palpable form of vice, not the palpable form of folly is the central focus of this verse comedy. As Thomas Greene identifies the subject-matter basic to this play, "*Volpone* asks us to consider the infinite, exhilarating, and vicious freedom to alter the self at will once the ideal of moral constancy has been abandoned."<sup>67</sup>

Only when *Volpone* disguises himself as a mountebank and stands in the street, peddling his elixir in hopes of catching a glimpse of Celia, is prose fitting because *Volpone* is deliberately assuming the guise of one noted for skirting reason and logic. Jonson has already developed the close association of prose and abused reason which *Volpone* evidences as a mountebank. Having aligned

<sup>65</sup>Partridge, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup>Barish, p. 146.

<sup>67</sup>Thomas M. Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," *SEL*, 10 (1970), 337.

the verse of his earlier comedies with matters of the moral and rational norm in a given play, Jonson utilizes verse in *Volpone* to explore a range of departures from morality in human conduct. He has operable, now, his principle of language decorum for comedy: the dramatic prose which he has been developing alongside contemporary experiments with non-dramatic prose styles and prose genres is also fit to reflect abuses of thought, reason, and logic; dramatic verse, already entrenched in tragedies of the age as fitting the speech of noble personages on matters of state and conscience, he employs to reflect the abuses of conscience, morality, and ethics in comedy.

With *Volpone*, Jonson also changes a basic structure of his comedies. In the world of *Cynthia's Revels*, the court of Cynthia functions as the center of justice and truth, and the fools on the periphery, venturing in to be exposed by contrast to the court. Caesar, Virgil, and Horace provide such a center in *Poetaster*, and again the fools are peripheral. In the sharpened focus of *Volpone*, however, deceivers are moved, as Enck explains, "from the periphery to the center"; and with the source of justice kept peripheral to the play's action, the central, morally depraved characters betray themselves.<sup>68</sup> A new structure for the comic world evolves as Jonson limits the focus of the play to vice.

Against the verse background that establishes the depth of *Volpone's* depravity, Jonson contrasts the mountebank scene beneath Celia's window. The application of language decorum calls for a different manner of expression as the reprobate contrives to pass himself off as a charlatan. Barish terms the prose speech an exercise in "verbal fraud," finding that in this scene "*Volpone* contrives to use—and pervert—virtually every effect known to classic oratory."<sup>69</sup> Enck adds that the speech "moves with firm logic, wholly false, of course, and by the errors, underscores misapplied knowledge and criticizes pseudo learning which perverts rhetoric to subservient ends by a crude ingenuity."<sup>70</sup> For the type of character *Volpone* assumes and for the abused logic exposed in his speech, prose is the decorous medium of articulation, according to the principle of language decorum which Jonson has formulated.

Jonson's next play, *Epicoene*, disturbs some because it deals not with significant moral and intellectual problems which have come to be expected in his comedies, but with what William Slights

<sup>68</sup>Enck, p. 115.

<sup>69</sup>Barish, p. 143.

<sup>70</sup>Enck, p. 119.

terms "mildly contemptible trivia."<sup>71</sup> However, as Jonson has already shown himself adapting contemporary experiments with prose Character, so, in *Epicoene*, does he work with the levity and sophistry of another formal prose genre of the Renaissance, the paradox. In one form of the prose paradox, such subjects as dirt, lice, or folly are praised in the fashion of a classical encomium. In another form, propositions contrary to good sense are asserted and defended by various applications of tortured logic. Aside from the humor inherent in the paradox itself, the genre offers a means of strengthening the truth of a matter by illustrating the ridiculous means necessary to defend its opposite. For *Slights*, Jonson's first all-prose play is, in a sense, an extended prose paradox in which folly is not punished, but rather allowed to expose itself.<sup>72</sup> This observation about *Epicoene* parallels Enck's observation about *Volpone*. By moving the locus of justice in *Volpone* from the center to the periphery of the play's structure, Jonson allows depravity to betray itself; by moving wisdom out of the center, if not simply out of *Epicoene*, Jonson allows folly to expose itself. *Epicoene* has no structural center of wisdom like Cynthia's court or Caesar's court. In moving toward that "concentration and singleness of effect" which Barish sees happening with the abandonment of mixed prose-verse plays, Jonson has removed, or moved to the periphery, the sources of virtue and truth in his comic worlds. He can, thus, allow vice and folly to expose themselves across the full canvas of a given comedy and achieve that ridiculous and scornful imitation of human errors which, Sidney claimed, makes it "impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one." In so altering the structure of his comic worlds, Jonson applies his principle of language decorum to maintain focus on the type of human transgressions called up for exposure. Verse maintains focus on moral transgressions by holding constant a refined, polished manner of speech while the spoken matter reveals a faulty code of ethical conduct. Prose, especially the baroque forms that Jonson works with, maintains focus on intellectual shortcomings by holding constant the sense of spontaneity and rough asymmetry while the spoken matter ranges freely through the disorders common to misapplied or undisciplined reason.

Barish judges that the London setting of *Epicoene*, the broad social spectrum of characters, and the prose dialogue which treats

<sup>71</sup>William E. E. Slights, "Epicoene and the Prose Paradox," *PQ*, 49 (1970), 178.

<sup>72</sup>Slights, pp. 178-87.

contemporary subjects mark Jonson's move toward "realism."<sup>73</sup> Having said as much, he qualifies his terminology, for *Epicoene* impresses at least as many readers for its being fanciful as it does for its being realistic. Because it offers a "convincing imitation of human experience," not because it literally transcribes phenomena, *Epicoene* is realistic; and it reflects a departure from the earlier prose comedies of Lyly by establishing a manner of articulation that captures nuance and provides "a mode of discourse tailor-made for bored, fashionable wits who enjoy a precarious detachment on the edges of poverty and their own insecurities."<sup>74</sup> In the prose form of the language itself resides the topical "reality," the imitation of contemporary human experience in the abuse of intellect that gives weighty consideration to ineradicable nuisances (such as Morose's lengthy diatribe against all noise, except the sound of his own voice, of course) or that gives short-sighted responses to long-standing inequities (such as the "code" of the Ladies Collegiate by which they aspire to the same promiscuous and frivolous pastimes that male gallants, but not respectable women, of the day enjoy). With no metrical form to alter the immediate articulation of these abuses of reason, they stand out fully for what they are, and they are finally ill-considered responses to certain conditions of the age or of man as a social creature who needs to find sensible ways of living within the social structure. Mark Anderson maintains that, although Dryden (in *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*) praises the play's single action in which Dauphine gains Morose's estate, the settling of Morose's estate is secondary to the exposure of fools; when *Epicoene* is unmasked, "as elsewhere in the play, the action is designed to expose comically the folly in characters' misjudgments of themselves and others."<sup>75</sup>

*Epicoene* is followed by *The Alchemist*, the former being first staged in 1609 and the latter in 1610. But sometime during the period of his mature comedies, Jonson rewrote *Every Man in His Humour*. When the revision occurred that changed the Italian version into the English version no one knows. Sir E. K. Chambers argues for 1605, when the play was revived for a performance before King James.<sup>76</sup> F. G. Fleay proposes a pre-1603 date because the sovereign in the revised play is the Queen; but since the 1633 production of *A Tale of a Tub* likewise refers to the Queen as

<sup>73</sup>Barish, p. 144.

<sup>74</sup>Enck, p. 136.

<sup>75</sup>Mark A. Anderson, "The Successful Unity of *Epicoene*: A Defense of Ben Jonson," *SEL*, 10 (1970), 351.

<sup>76</sup>Herford and Simpson, I, 333 n.

sovereign, Fleay's rationale is not convincing.<sup>77</sup> Simpson contends that Jonson probably prepared the English Folio version in 1612, noting that the revision shows the influence of *Epicoene* (with the likelihood that *Epicoene* preceded it) and that it "contains no work, and no allusions to events, of later date" than 1612.<sup>78</sup> If the revision of *Every Man in His Humour* did follow the composition and performance of *Epicoene*, Jonson would have had behind him his first all-verse comedy and his first all-prose comedy. He would have become experienced in applying his decorum of language form and subject matter, which one would expect to be reflected in the revision.

Herford and Simpson find that, in the revision, Jonson not only

. . . removes obscure and harsh phrases, he shows a definite bent towards colloquial, even homely, idiom, and a decided dislike for the rhetorical, abstract, or bookish phrase into which he had often fallen in the earlier version.<sup>79</sup>"

Barish notes more details in the revised text, but finds that the proportion of prose to verse remains roughly the same, three to one.<sup>80</sup> He also explains that, aside from rhythmic and orthographic changes, three categories of revision predominate: first, dialogue revisions making speech more vivid or precise; second, revisions correcting flaws in character decorum or filling out sketchy characterization; and third, revisions transforming or adding new dimensions to characterization.<sup>81</sup> The following examples of differences in the Quarto and Folio texts of *Every Man in His Humour* illustrate the types of revision mentioned by Herford and Simpson and by Barish. Lorenzo Senior begins the Quarto version, thus:

Now trust me, here's a goodly day toward. *Musco*  
Call vp my sonne *Lorenzo*: bid him rise:  
Tell him, I haue some businesse to employ him in.  
(I.i.1-3)

His counterpart, Knowell, initiates the Folio script, thus:

A goodly day toward! and a fresh morning! *BRAYNE-WORME*,  
Call vp your yong master: bid him rise, sir.  
Tell him, I haue some businesse to employ him.  
(I.i.1-3)

<sup>77</sup>Herford and Simpson, I. 332.

<sup>78</sup>Herford and Simpson, I. 361.

<sup>80</sup>Barish, p. 130.

<sup>81</sup>Barish, p. 131. Barish provides detailed examples of these categories of revisions, pp. 131-41.

As is traditional in Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, each play sets the time of day in the speech of a character. The original "Now trust me" lends little to the purpose of Lorenzo's speech, and eliminating this phrase to add "and a fresh morning" makes Knowell's speech fulfill its purpose with the vividness and precision that Barish mentions. Moreover, the bookish gives way to the colloquial in the letter incorrectly delivered into the father's hands. Prospero's letter to young Lorenzo begins.

*Sirha Lorenzo, I muse we cannot see thee at Florence: S'Blood, I doubt, Apollo hath got thee to be his Ingle, that thou commest not aborad, to visit thine old friends. . . .* (I.i.142-44)

Wellbred's letter to young Knowell begins

*Why, NED, I beseech thee; hast thou for-sworne all thy friends i' the old Iewrie? or dost thou think vs all Iewes that inhabit there, yet?* (I.ii.70-72)

The revised letter is not only more direct and conversational, it is also shorter (some twenty-one lines instead of the original thirty-three), yet its detail is more vivid. After he reads the letter which his father has just read, Lorenzo Junior comments,

Here is a *style* indeed, for a mans sences to leape ouer, e're they come at it: why, it is able to breake the shinnes of any old mans patience in the world. My father read this with patience? Then will I be made an *Eunuch*, and learne to sing Ballads. (I.ii.55-59)

Young Knowell's reaction is less rigid, more vivid, and decidedly more colloquial:

Here was a letter, indeede, to be intercepted by a mans father, and doe him good with him! Hee cannot but think most vertuously, both of me, and the sender, sure: that make the careful Costar'-monger of him in our *familiar Epistles*. Well, if he read this with patience, Ile be gelt, and troll ballads for M<sup>r</sup>. IOHN TRVNDLE, yonder, the rest of my mortality. (I.iii.58-64)

Speaking of the elder Knowell in the revised text, Richard Dutton notices features that apply broadly to the entire revision. First, the Folio text shows Jonson's greater grasp of character decorum in language that exhibits an eccentric or deranged mind; second, greater terseness of speech more aptly reveals the impatient and suspicious mind; and third, seemingly less studied rhetoric and less use of balance combine with the first two points "to achieve a harsh, realistic style of verse, analogous to the baroque, anti-



Ciceronian prose. . . .<sup>82</sup> Thus, while he maintains the same proportion of verse and prose in the revision, Jonson reworks the verse so as to parallel the baroque style of prose, focusing the play more sharply upon the central matter of right and wrong reason. He avoids mixing rational and moral matters as he does in the original. Concluding that the revision "remains an indictment of follies, rather than an insight into human nature," Dutton seems to begrudge the play's single focus on the abuses of the powers of intellect when, perhaps, this single focus is the play's most praiseworthy accomplishment.<sup>83</sup> Barish's comments about the effects of the differentiation between young Knowell's and Young Lorenzo's characterizations are more fitting to the accomplishments of the Folio text:

Having cast off his poetical fervor, [young Knowell] ceases for the most part to be a spokesman for Jonson's ethical view of poetry. Having acquired, on the other hand, a mastery of ambiguous insult, together with his equally changed companion Brainworm, he becomes the satiric expositor engaged in the unmasking of fools. As Knowell and Brainworm now stand out more clearly than ever in the ranks of the witty, so the gulls recede further into the dim legions of the witless.<sup>84</sup>

That young Knowell's role is focused on matters of reason (not on matters of reason and morality as is Lorenzo Junior's) is strikingly revealed in the scene before Clement wherein false poetry is called to account. In the Quarto version, Clement complains that a conceit of Matheo's verse is so dark that he needs a torch to help him see it. Lorenzo Junior cries that, if Matheo's verse be called poetry, ". . . then call blasphemie, religion; / Call Diuels, Angels; and Sinne, pietie" (V.iii.305-06). Lorenzo Senior chides his son because low poetry ranks "In general opinion" (V.iii.311). Then, Lorenzo Junior delivers, in true, his lengthy moral defense of "Blessed, aeternall, and most true deuine" poetry (V.iii.312-43), after which Clement burns Matheo's verses. In the Folio version, Clement reads a verse of Matthew's, proclaims it stolen, after which young Knowell interjects (in prose), "A *Parodie!* a *parodie!* with a kind of miraculous gift, to make it absurder then it was" (V.v.26-27), and Clement torches the lot of Matthew's manuscripts. Then, elder Knowell chides, "There's an *embleme* for you, sonne, and your studies!" (V.v.35-36). Clement, not young Knowell, replies,

<sup>82</sup>A. Richard Dutton, "The Significance of Jonson's Revision of *Every Man in His Humour*," *MLR*, 69 (1974), 244-45.

<sup>83</sup>Dutton, p. 247.

<sup>84</sup>Barish, p. 141.

Nay, no speech, or act of mine be drawne against such as professe it worthily. They are not borne euerie yeere, as Alderman. . . . I will doe more reuerence, to him, when I meet him, then I will to the Major, out of his yeere. But these paper-pedlers! these inke-dablers! They cannot expect reprehension, or reproch. They haue it with the fact. (V.v.37-45)

To Clement's defense of honest poetry, young Knowell simply responds, "Sir, you haue sau'd me the labour of a defence" (V.v.46). As a part of the comic center of the play, and with the primary responsibility of helping to expose fools, young Knowell has no part in the defense of poetry, a responsibility given to young Lorenzo. Poetry's defense comes, in prose, from Justic Clement, identified in the Folio's list of characters as "An old merry Magistrat." All the ethical overtones are gone as Jonson concentrates the focus of his revised *Every Man in His Humour* upon folly rather than vice and reworks the prose, and what verse that remains, into the baroque style in order to apply his principle of language decorum. By adapting what he had developed in the baroque style of prose not only to the prose of the play but also to the verse, Jonson indicates that the comedy is an exhibition of follies, not vices. The removal of the moralistic verse defense of poetry—one very likely dear to Jonson himself—indicates how important the single focus on folly is to his conception of unity of effect for the play.

With *The Alchemist*, Jonson again shifts to verse and again produces back-to-back verse plays on matters of morality and ethical conduct. In his earlier pair of verse plays centering upon moral matters, Jonson had written, first a tragedy, *Sejanus*, and then a comedy, *Volpone*. His second excursion into verse drama brings forth, first a comedy, *The Alchemist*, and then a tragedy, *Catiline*. This pairing of verse comedies with verse tragedies during Jonson's mature period is reflected in Herford and Simpson's remark, "*The Alchemist*, and still more *Volpone*, are sinister to the verge of tragedy."<sup>85</sup> Indeed, they were both accompanied by a tragedy in Jonson's career as a playwright. Enck observes that, in the verse of *The Alchemist*,

The language moves with a firmness compounded largely from technical terms whose very association and arrangement suggest whole atmospheres and worlds, probable or impossible, which require no prodding by digressions. The characters, varied as they are, speak in one identical manner . . . .<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup>Herford and Simpson, I, 356.

<sup>86</sup>Enck, p. 170.

His observation recalls the way in which, through the steady meter of verse, Jonson holds constant the manner of speech in *Volpone* as he sounds the depths of depravity in the morals of his various characters. As the primary moral concern of *Volpone* is greed in its manifestations and ramifications, it is also central to the moral concern of *The Alchemist*. However, in *Volpone* greed is for something immediately tangible—the Fox's estate which each of the legacy hunters yearns to possess, and the gold, silver, and plate of the legacy hunters which the Fox desires. On the other hand, greed in *The Alchemist* is for something immediately intangible by way of which tangible ends may be realized. Observing that Sir Epicure Mammon's desire for the philosopher's stone illustrates the most obsessive greed in the play, Brian Gibbons explains that all dupes in *The Alchemist* are guilty of greed, and so are the tricksters who use their own familiarity with greed to control it in the dupes.<sup>87</sup> With the help of the mediating agent to be provided by alchemy, the dupes hope to satisfy their greed. Intellect is abused in the process, but the basic concern of this verse comedy is the unmasking of greed that lies beneath whatever misapplied rational faculties appear in the course of satisfying this desire.

The distinction is important, especially if one is uneasy with the following correct assessment but incorrect application in Woodbridge's critical investigation:

Jonson's comedy . . . is judicial but not always moral, that is, it always subjects its persons to judgment according to some standard, but this standard is quite as apt to be an intellectual one as a moral one. Among those which apply an intellectual standard, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* are preeminent; among those which apply the moral standard, *Volpone* stands alone among the comedies. . . .<sup>88</sup>

In light of Gibbons' conclusion that "The vital drive of *The Alchemist* is towards the exposure and ridicule of greedy fools and their fantasies,"<sup>89</sup> one suspects a critical viewpoint that excludes the "greedy" and restricts *The Alchemist* to applying an intellectual standard to the judgment of its "fools." One is even more suspicious after reviewing Jonson's development and application of a language decorum that applies verse to moral matters and prose to intellectual matters. *The Alchemist* and *Volpone* belong in the category of Jonson's comedies which apply the moral standard, and

<sup>87</sup>Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston, and Middleton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 169-70.

<sup>88</sup>Woodbridge, pp. 30-31.

<sup>89</sup>Gibbons, p. 170.

*Bartholomew Fair*—to which should be added, at the very least, *Epi-coene* and the Folio version of *Every Man in His Humour*—belongs in the category of Jonson's comedies which apply the intellectual standard. *Bartholomew Fair* provides the expected prose language for a play exposing abuses of intellect. Before applying any other critical apparatus to this comedy, before subjecting it to the readings it has received that range from topical satire (especially harsh on the Puritans<sup>90</sup>) to myth-ritual (with special interest in the contrast between sterility and fertility<sup>91</sup>), one should investigate the play as an assault on a selected group of intellectual abuses.

#### IV

##### THE ANATOMY OF FOLLY IN *BARTHOLOMEW FAIR*

Freda Townsend, credited with the resurrection of critical interest in *Bartholomew Fair*, calls it "the play furthest removed from classical canons."<sup>92</sup> Thayer sees the play as "the summing up of Jonson's career to 1614 as a comic writer" and speculates that it may have been omitted from the first Folio, not because time prohibited its inclusion, but because it inaugurated a new or greatly modified comic world whose "implications go far beyond those of the earlier plays."<sup>93</sup> Barish notes that in *Bartholomew Fair* "the reformers are reformed by the fools,"<sup>94</sup> capping the mountain of criticism that finds in the play a congenial, less authoritative posture than Jonson had assumed in his earlier comedies. However, as early as *Volpone*, Jonson had moved the source of judgment and justice to the periphery of his comedies in order to give fools and rogues a center stage on which to expose themselves for what they really are.<sup>95</sup> Finding much criticism placing "*Bartholomew Fair* between the poles of judicial satire and indulgent comedy," Nicholas Grene proposes that the play be considered in terms of the "comic contract" of the Induction, in which Jonson reaffirms his "principles of art, his disapproval of obscenity and slapstick, his dislike of fantasy and mixed dramatic form" while he "cajoles, bullies, and blackmails" his audience into being ideally

<sup>90</sup>See Gibbons, p. 186: "The main satiric force is directed towards Puritanical attitudes to art and life: the didactic purpose of Jonson is to demonstrate that here, in 1614, these attitudes are more of a threat to the Commonwealth than even the crassest stupidity, fashion-following or pretentiousness which he had ridiculed in the Comical Satyres of 1599-1601."

<sup>91</sup>See C. G. Thayer, *Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 136-49.

<sup>92</sup>Freda L. Townsend, *Apologie for Bartholomew Fayre: The Art of Jonson's Comedies* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1947), p. 72.

<sup>93</sup>Thayer, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup>Barish, p. 238.

<sup>95</sup>See above, p. 33; Enck, p. 115.

receptive to the comedy.<sup>96</sup> Grene, thus, implies that a sense of order is requisite to an understanding of the panoramic *Bartholomew Fair*. Moreover, Guy Hamel points out that the matter of the play is disorder brought into shape by a "sprawling action" to reveal "the scope and limits of order in human affairs, the role of right judgement in establishing such order, and the adjustments that the wise allow in recognition of the irrational and chancy."<sup>97</sup> In Jonson's sprawl of characters and action, Barish sees a microcosm of contemporary London and a corresponding microcosm of contemporary theater in the puppet play of Act V. He notes, also, that, in the tradition of Latin satirists, Jonson uses the puppet play to react to a generation of worn-out mythological, larger-than-life themes of the theater by devising a life-as-it-is burlesque of these concepts; however, the dramatist intensifies the irony of his burlesque by upbraiding, simultaneously, worn-out myth, coarse popular taste, a condescension to such taste, and a censure of the theater for the wrong reasons.<sup>98</sup>

There is general scholarly agreement that the play depicts follies, a concept strengthened by Jonson's use of prose for unmasking folly. Its characters more frequently talk at one another than with one another, leading Sackton to conclude that, for Jonson, "Persuasive speech is less important than characteristic speech."<sup>99</sup> As one might expect, persuasive speech is more important in the comedies focusing upon abuses of ethics (*Volpone* and *The Alchemist*) in which dupes must be convinced, whereas characteristic speech dominates the comedies concerned with the abuses of reason (*Every Man in His Humour*, *Epicoene*, and, of course, *Bartholomew Fair*) in which fools must disclose their foolishness. In *Discoveries*, one finds Jonson's rationale for employing characteristic rather than persuasive speech in comedy intended to expose the workings of foolish minds:

*Language* most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans forme or likeness, so true as his speech.<sup>100</sup>

Verse, on the other hand, would introduce an uncharacteristic ele-

<sup>96</sup>Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere: The Comic Contract* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980), pp. 1-15.

<sup>97</sup>Guy Hamel, "Order and Judgment in *Bartholomew Fair*," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 43 (1973), 48.

<sup>98</sup>Barish, pp. 232-36.

<sup>99</sup>Sackton, p. 154.

<sup>100</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 625.

ment into the speech of a fool; persuasive prose would distract one from a focus upon a fool's inept mental processes. The exposure of folly requires a characteristic manner of speech, a prose medium capable of mirroring the fool's mind.

Running throughout the play is *vapours*, a cant term for a fadish pastime, a simple predisposition to disagree (for the sake of articulating disagreement) with that which has just been uttered.<sup>101</sup> These *vapours* persuade no one; they merely reveal foolish uses of various characters' powers of reason.<sup>102</sup> For example, Knockhem, "*A Horse-courser, and ranger o'Turnbull*," employs the word shortly after his first appearance: "Let's drinke it out good Vrs, and no vapours! (II.ii.23-24). Eugene Waith notes that *vapour* is a staple of Knockhem's vocabulary, spoken so often as to become

. . . almost meaningless—a kind of verbal tic, but ordinarily it carries the suggestion of two related meanings . . . a senseless urge to contradict, to quarrel, to be touchy . . . or a bent of character, a predisposition, or merely a whim, but in any event an aberrant form of behavior due to some sort of imbalance.<sup>103</sup>

In short, Waith finds *vapours* applicable to Knockhem, Wasp, Quarulous, Overdo, Busy, and the puppets. Certainly, the word resonates throughout the play as various forms of misapplied or misdirected intellectual talent manifest themselves. It calls attention repeatedly to wanton thought and speech. Thus, *vapours* and the behavior to which it alludes recall Jonson's remark in *Discoveries*:

Wheresoever, manners, and fashions are corrupted, Language is. It imitates the publicke riot. The excesse of Feasts, and apparell, are the notes of a sick State; and the wantonnesse of language, of a sick mind.<sup>104</sup>

With comprehensive examples of undisciplined language in the play with which to illustrate the manifold occasions of ill-formed thought, Jonson anatomizes folly.

The first "sick mind" belongs to the Stage-keeper, who, in the Induction, reveals himself as one of old-fashioned, gross public

<sup>101</sup>Jackson, p. 123.

<sup>102</sup>Barish, pp. 217-19, sees a new theory of motivation tied to vapours. The old humours connoted affectations that made characters withdraw from each other; the vapours connote a perversity that makes characters "intrude on each other . . . meddle, and quarrel." He continues, "To carry the distinction between humors and vapors into the linguistic sphere, one may suggest, somewhat diagrammatically, that if the cardinal sin of the humors characters is mimicry, that of the vapors characters is solecism."

<sup>103</sup>Eugene M. Waith, ed., *Ben Jonson: Bartholomew Fair* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 192 n.

<sup>104</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 593.

tastes—one who speaks "in plaine English" (Ind. 9). In his judgment, the play is "a very conceited scuruy one" (Ind. 9), and he warns that the author depicts nothing of what the audience expects to see at the Fair—no sword-and-buckler ruffian, no itinerant dentist, no juggler or ape, no bawdy shenanigans between male and female mechants, no obscene clowning and slapstick. Perhaps, if the audience can be made to laugh at the Stage-keeper's rustic manner and his simple-minded criteria for comedy, it will not be inclined to call down the same ridicule upon itself by echoing his expectations. (As it unfolds, the play possesses much of what the Stage-keeper insists is missing.) Thus, when the Book-holder and Scrivener enter and dismiss this Stage-keeper as a simpleton fit only to sweep the stage and pick up broken apples, the audience is mindful not to show itself as lowly as he. However, the Book-holder prevents the audience from moving to the opposite extreme, saying that the play is written "iust to his *Meridian*, and the *Scale* of the grounded Iudgements here, his Play-fellowes in wit" (Ind.56-57). Quickly, Jonson introduces a fool, to whom the audience can feel smugly superior, and just as quickly he tweaks the audience's sense of superiority. The effect, here, is to evoke humor and throw the audience off guard, to elicit smug laughter over the antics of the Stage-keeper, and suddenly, to remind the audience that it resembles the object of its laughter. Subsequently, the Scrivener reads the famous Articles of Agreement between author and audience, in which the latter is requested to remain for the length of the performance, to hear it out. It is next informed that it shall be permitted to praise or censure in proportion to what it has paid for admission. In other words, those requesting and paying for multiple admissions may praise or censure in behalf of all for whom they have paid, provided that those so treated remain silent. No one is to "censure by *Contagion*, or vpon *trust*, for another voice, or face, that sits by him" (Ind. 98-99), and everyone is to be fixed in judgment, praising or censuring tomorrow and next week what he praises or censures today. Having requested fixed judgments, Jonson makes light of fixed tastes, as follows:

Hee that will sweare, *Ieronimo*, or *Andronicus* are the best playes, yet, shall pass vnexcepted at, heere, as a man whose Iudgement shewes it is constant, and hath stood still, these fiue and twentie, or thirtie yeeres. Though it be an *Ignorance*, it is a vertuous and stay'd ignorance; and next to truth, a confirm'd errorr does well; such a one, the *Author* knowes where to finde him. (Ind. 106-12)

Next, he cautions the audience to expect no more than it knows and no more than a fair can offer. He dismisses, item by item, those things which, according to the Stage-keeper, were lacking in the play. For example, he substitutes a horse-courser and his entourage for the ruffians, a pig-woman and her tapster for the tooth-drawer, a justice of the peace for the juggler and ape, and so on through the cutpurse, ballad singer, hypocrite (Puritan), and puppets. Finally, he cautions the audience not to attempt to decipher his characters to determine the actual person who is the model, nor to object to any language that "sauours of *Smithfield*, the *Booth*, and the *Pig-broath*, or of prophaneness" (Ind. 151-52). Moreover, although the *Hope* is not *Smithfield*, Jonson reminds his patrons that the sometime bear pit at the *Hope* is just "as durty as *Smithfield*, and as stinking euey whit" (Ind. 159-60); thus he claims to having "obseru'd a special *Decorum*" (Ind. 158-59) in setting and staging.

The Articles of Agreement continue in the attractive and admonishing tone inaugurated by the Stage-keeper, and *judgment* is reiterated so frequently as to become one of Jonson's primary concerns. He has demanded that this work be judged upon the basis of each spectator's attentiveness to the play and its material. Furthermore, the Articles are said to "appeare reasonable" (Ind. 61-62), even before they are read, yet they are clearly as much a spoof of reason as they are a reasonable meeting-ground for author and audience. As with letters and official proclamations in other contemporary dramas, prose, here, is the medium for this partly real, partly bogus contract.

Immediately following the Articles of Agreement, John Littlewit appears, proclaiming, "A pretty conceit, and worth the finding!" (I.i.1), congratulating himself upon noticing that the marriage license which he has prepared for Bartholomew Cokes and Grace Wellborn has been taken out on St. Bartholomew's Day. For him, "*John Little-wit*, Proctor *John Little-wit*: One o' the pretty wits o' *Pauls*, the *Little wit* of London" (I.i.11-12), the coincidence is a great discovery; nevertheless, the thrice iterated "Littlewit" in his monologue makes it clear that the coincidence would be of no great matter to any but "the *Little wit* of London." Just as the derogatory pun in his name escapes him, so does the pun in "I ha' such luck to spinne out these fine things still, and like a *Silke-worme*, out of my selfe" (I.i.1-3). *Still* serves as well for *dead* as it does for *yet*, and the luck of spinning out dead conceits is hardly good luck at all. Moreover, having just overlooked the puns, he now praises himself that no "quirk or quibbin" (I.i.13) escapes him. Littlewit sees

conceit-spinning as a silkworm operation; but spiders also spin (spin webs), and Littlewit has just been caught in his own web as he explores the possibilities in his own name and reveals that he really is "the *Little wit* of London." Missing the implication within the name, missing the pun upon *still*, and missing the further hint in *spin*, he nevertheless claims to miss no trick of language. In Littlewit, one discovers the degenerate remains of the linguistic sensitivity which produced the grand accomplishments of Elizabethan language. Because Littlewit is incapable of any linguistic grandeur, in prose Jonson may incorporate the offhand *still* or *spin* to anatomize Littlewit for the fool that he is with the other edge of the meaning in each word. Throughout the play, Littlewit constantly undercuts himself with his own words.

When Littlewit's wife enters, he exclaims, "*Win*, Good morrow, *Win*. I, marry, *Win*! Now you looke finely indeed, *Win*!" (I.i.18-19). He is now fascinated with the repetition of his wife's name, pronouncing it eight times in eight prose lines when she first enters. Barish observes that Littlewit's "obvious and certainly . . . most imbecile mannerism consists of the continual **hopping up** and down on his wife's name, almost as a mark of punctuation . . ." <sup>105</sup> Although her name could have been repeated as readily in verse, the meter would have dictated, to some extent, its location; thus, prose heightens the foolish interjection of "*Win*" at Littlewit's whim, to no real purpose in his speech. The idle repetition of words and names, as well as a simple-minded grasping for foolish, incidental conceits, marks Littlewit's language. They are the more remarkable and effective expressed in prose which, in Jonson's judgment as a baroque prose stylist, is properly concerned with communicating matter at hand rather than with calling attention to manner of statement. In *Discoveries*, he notes the proper preference that gives rise to a foolish language like Littlewit's: "Right and naturall language seem(s) to have least of the wit in it: that which is writh'd and tortur'd, is counted the more exquisite." <sup>106</sup>

After enduring her husband's gushing good-morning speech, *Win* tells him he is a fool, to which he replies, "No, but halfe a one, *Win*, you are tother halfe: man and wife make one foole, *Win*. (Good!)" (I.i.28-29). Here, "Good!" is a kind of self-congratulation which he employs elsewhere in the play whenever he finds himself (or another) playing upon words, in this case, on man and wife as one flesh, after Genesis, 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his

<sup>105</sup>Barish, p. 197.

<sup>106</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 581.

father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Although the perversion of *flesh* into *fool* is an instance of ill-applied intellect, Littlewit thinks it "Good!" In *Discoveries*, Jonson alludes to Bacon's impediments to the acquisition of learning, which, in turn, may apply to Littlewit's folly:

It was well noted by the late L. St. *Alban*, that the study of words is the first distemper of Learning: Vaine matter the second: And a third distemper is deceit, or the likeness of truth; Imposture held up by credulity. All these are the Cobwebs of Learning, and to let these grow in us, is either sluttish or foolish. <sup>107</sup>

Littlewit is guilty of focusing upon words, vain matter (his conceits), and the imposture of truth. In spite of self-praise, he is merely a fool.

Winwife, a suitor to *Win* Littlewit's mother, next appears, commenting that *Win*, in her new hat, has "a soft veluet head, like a *Melicotton*" (I.ii.16), which remark elicits praise from Littlewit and his own chastisement: "Good y'faith! now dulnesse vpon mee, that I had not that before him, that I should not light on't, as well as he! Veluet head!" (I.ii.17-19). Although Winwife's conceit is not an outstanding example of figurative language (it must have been banal in its own time), it matters not to Littlewit, because it is a figure which he did not happen upon. Joel Kaplan explains that

. . . myriad puns . . . display his wit at the expense of his judgment, his ability to see superficial resemblances at the expense of his capacity to discern material differences. Littlewit's promiscuous word play reduces meaning to mere sound jingles, much as the fair at its worst lowers all pursuits to the level of simple noise, and readies the way for his puppet show where these aesthetic practices will be carried to their logical conclusions. <sup>108</sup>

Quarlous next bursts upon the scene in a rush of questions, "noes," and "nots." His first words are addressed to Winwife: "O Sir, ha' you tane soyle, here? it's well, a man may reach you, after 3. houres running, yet! what an vnmercifull companion art thou . . ." (I.iii.1-4). He begins his next speech with "no," the next with "no," the next with "not"; he recounts his previous night's drinking bout with Littlewit and Winwife; and he appears to parody Littlewit's earlier repetition of *Win*'s name when he repeats Littlewit's first name: ". . . before *Truth*, if you haue that fearfull quality, *Iohn*, to remember, when you are sober, *Iohn*, what you

<sup>107</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 627.

<sup>108</sup>Joel H. Kaplan, "Dramatic and Moral Energy in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*," *Renaissance Drama*, NS 3 (1970), 152.

promise drunke, *John*; I shall take heed of you, *John*" (I.iii.32-35). Apparently, while drinking during the previous night, Littlewit and Quarlous had agreed that the latter would kiss Win at their next encounter, to which act Win objects, remarking, "Y'faith, you are a foole, *John*" (I.iii.52). Littlewit chuckles in reply, "A *Foole-John* she calls me, does you marke that, Gentlemen? pretty littlewit of veluet! a foole-*John*" (I.iii.51-54). Quarlous, now, fires a bawdy volley: "She may call you an *Apple-John*, if you vse this" (I.iii.55), which Waith glosses as "an apple which becomes very shriveled when kept";<sup>109</sup> and Quarlous may very likely have gestured to Littlewit's crotch, because Winwife responds, "Pray thee forbear, for my respect somewhat" (I.iii.56). His plea elicits from Quarlous a diatribe of forty-six lines concerning Winwife's "widow-hunting," a passage filled with baroque prose devices:

I'll be sworne, some of them, (that thou art, or hast beene a Suitor to) are so old, as no chaste or married pleasure can euer become 'hem: the honest Instrument of procreation, has (forty yeeres since) left to belong to 'hem, thou must visit 'hem, as thou wouldst doe a *Tombe*, with a *Torche*, or three handfulls of *Lincke*, flaming hot, and so thou maist hap to make 'hem feele thee, and after come to inherit according to thy inches. (I.iii.70-77)

Barish proposes that, in this passage, Jonson uses baroque prose "to suggest incipient rather than finished thought, the ideas seeming to leap and tumble at random from the tongue, scarcely half formed in the brain beforehand."<sup>110</sup> The whole idea in Quarlous' period on old women is contained in the first member (the two are long past being able to provide or achieve sexual gratification). Then, attached to this syntactic unit are a succession of imaginative units suggesting implications of the first. Connectives are lacking at the beginning as the mind conceives the imaginative implications of the first member; and when connections do appear, toward the end, they do not indicate tight, logical relationships, but rather the winding down of a mind from the vigor required in making associations with the first idea. Moreover, the period has no symmetry, and the parenthetical interpretations reflect a mind as it hurriedly clarifies a newly arisen thought. Again, the irregularity of the prose style, here, reveals a type of mental process which verse could not as accurately depict.

Humphrey Wasp, tutor to Bartholomew Cokes, arrives to obtain the marriage license which Littlewit has prepared. Declining to

<sup>109</sup>Waith, p. 42 n.

<sup>110</sup>Barish, p. 193.

read it, when a conscientious individual might be expected to do so, Wasp asks the amount of the fee, only to be brushed off by Littlewit, who sends Win to obtain the box for the license. Because Wasp will not be delayed, Littlewit reminds him that he already knows the price, after which Wasp is allowed his own manner of expression that shifts quickly from one thought or feeling to another, and is riddled with afterthoughts, self-corrections, and unexpected interpolations—all of which Barish finds suitable to the curt style of dramatic baroque prose:<sup>111</sup>

I know? I know nothing, I, what tell you mee of knowing? (now I am in hast) Sir, I do not know, and I will not know, and I scorne to know, and yet, (now I think on't) I will, and do know, as well as another; you must haue a *Marke* for your thing here, and *eight pence* for the boxe; I could ha' sau'd two *pence* i' that, an' I had bought it my selfe, but heere's *fourteene* shillings for you. Good Lord! how long your little wife staies! pray God, *Salomon*, your Clerke, be not looking i' the wrong boxe, M<sup>r</sup> *Proctor*. (I.iv.19-28)

Littlewit detects the sexual pun upon *box*. As he does whenever he hears a quip, he exclaims, "Good!": "Good i'faith! no, I warrant you, *Salomon* is wiser then so, Sir" (I.iv.29-30). So intent is he at catching Wasp's bawdy remark that he fails to be offended at what it suggests (in content or matter), yet he does not seem to be aware of his own ludicrous juxtaposition of *Solomon* and *wiser*. There is a statement in *Discoveries* applicable, here, to Wasp's manner of speech:

. . . disordered speech is not so much injury to the lips that give it forth, as to the disproportion, and incoherence of things in themselves, so negligently expressed. Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune, whose words doe jarre; nor his reason in frame, whose sentence is preposterous; nor his Elocution cleare and perfect, whose utterance breaks itselfe into fragments and uncertainties.<sup>112</sup>

All the more ironic is the presence of similarly disordered, negligent speech in Cokes' tutor. Barish finds nothing but perversity to account for Wasp's language with its "incessant tautologizing . . . thudding repetitions, [and] farcing of every statement with mouthfuls of senseless expletives"; Wasp, to his credit, does not affect "learned or modish language," but neither does he take any pains to speak with propriety.<sup>113</sup> Thus, prose is the fit medium for the exposure of his folly because it emphasizes his inconsistencies,

<sup>111</sup>See above p. 19; Barish, p. 51.

<sup>112</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 628.

<sup>113</sup>Barish, p. 216.

whereas verse in the same situation would merely call attention to itself for its irregular and jarring effects—in other words, for its being poor verse.

Cokes, now, arrives with his sister, Mistress Overdo, and his betrothed, Grace Wellborn. Wasp, alarmed because they are looking for him, fears that they may accuse him of stealing the fourteen shillings for the license and its box. Consequently, he defies Mistress Overdo's request that he speak more peaceably (her husband being a justice of the peace):

Mary gip, goody she-Justice, Mistris French-hood! turd i' your teeth; and turd i' your French-hoods teeth, too, to doe you seruice, doe you see? Must you quote your Adam to me! you thinke, you are Madam Regent still, Mistris Quer-doo; when I am in place? no such matter, I assure you, your raigne is out, when I am in, Dame. (I.v.15-20)

Obviously, Wasp continues to apply his thought to insults and threats rather than to reason. Because Mistress Overdo is a social climber, he insults her choice of a fashionable French hood. His favorite expletive, "turd i' your teeth," is meant to shock and insult, and his warning that he, not Mistress Overdo, is in charge of Cokes' affairs becomes the more ridiculous as he demonstrates himself mentally unfit for such an obligation.

In spite of Wasp's opposition, Cokes wants to see the license. When he is informed that it contains nothing but hard words, he replies, "I would see the length and breadth on't, that's all; and I will see't now, so I will" (I.v.37-38). For all of his determination, however, when informed that he cannot see the license, he merely dismisses his request: "Then I'll see't at home, and I'll look vpo' the case heere" (I.v.40-41). Thus, he is at once established as ir-resolute, easily distracted, and childish. He explains that his other reason for being there is to attend the fair—his fair: "I call't my *Fayre*, because of *Bartholmew*: you know my name is *Bartholmew*, and *Bartholmew Fayre*" (I.v.65-67). Littlewit protests this loose association of terms (not even yet a figure of speech): "That was mine afore, Gentlemen: this morning I had that i'faith, vpon his Licence, beleue me, there he comes, after me" (I.v.68-70). Here, the prose reveals, as no verse could, the sputtering claim of a small mind afraid lest its little witty accomplishment be credited to another. Cokes' attention, however, shifts to Win, and he muses (within earshot of Grace) about how pretty Win is and wishes that he could marry her. It is clear that he is incapable of prolonged attention, even to his betrothed.

The group leaves for the fair, followed immediately by Quarlous and Winwife. In the meantime, Littlewit and Win scheme to gain permission from Rabbi Zeal-of-the-land Busy to attend the fair. (Busy, the Puritan courting Win's mother, Dame Purecraft, is supposedly opposed to profane entertainment which the fair affords.) The Littlewits plot to use Win's pregnancy as the cause for a sudden craving for the famous roast pig at the fair, knowing that the mother will seek a means of satisfying the daughter's craving and that the suitor will find a way of satisfying the mother. The entire subterfuge will send the Littlewits to the fair with Purecraft's and Busy's blessing, so that they may view a performance of Littlewit's puppet play. They must conceal their real reason for wishing to attend the fair from Busy, to whom, as a Puritan, all forms of dramatic entertainment were anathema.

The ruse begins when Purecraft sends Littlewit to summon Busy. When Busy does not appear at once, however, Littlewit explains that the Puritan needed to clean his beard, because he had been found "fast by the teeth, i' the cold Turkey-pye, i' the cupboard, with a great white loafe on his left hand, and a glasse of *Malmesey* on his right" (I.vi.34-36), suggesting that Busy may be a glutton. When Busy enters, his speech consists of biblical phrasings and snatches from ponderous Puritan sermons. However, as one might have expected, all that Busy has mastered is the manner; he has no command of logic and no commitment to any subject-matter. To justify or condemn an action, he uses a pulpit prose delivery. For example, asked for his opinion concerning the legitimacy of Win's craving for roast pig at the fair, he launches upon a solemn consideration:

Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnall disease, or appetite, incident to women: and as it is carnall, and incident, it is naturall, very naturall: Now Pigge, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing, and may be long'd for, and so consequently eaten; but in the *Fayre*, and a *Bartholmew-pigge*, and to eat it so, is a spice of *Idolatry*, and you make the *Fayre*, no better then one of the high *Places*. This I take it, is the state of the question. A high place. (I.vi.48-57)

*High place*, of course, was not the state of the question which had been put to him. At any rate, he gives the impression of dividing and resolving the question, after the manner of the medieval scholastics who never went completely out of favor with Catholic, Anglican, or reform churchmen. Although *verily* sets an appropriately religious tone, what follow has little to do with truth. Busy resorts to tautology for definition ("the disease of longing, it is

a disease"), affixes unrelated terms appositionally ("a carnall disease, or appetite"), and assumes that which requires support or example ("incident to women")—all to the end of saying that longing is natural. His repetitions create the *illusion* that the subject is being analyzed carefully from many different angles. He also repeats *disease* three times; *carnall* twice; *naturall* twice (the second time with the empty modifier, *very*); *meat* twice; *eaten* four times (three times in empty phrases of affirmation, all of which are erased by the fourth use)—in the course of saying something that is relatively simple to express. For example, without belaboring the other members of this period, one may restate accurately Busy's analysis of this issue as follows: *longing is natural; pig may be eaten, but not in an idolatrous setting*. Barish notes that, in the continual repetition of words and in the regular employment of apposition, Busy makes no real point about anything, his oratorical manner simply putting the listener "into a narcotic doze" and his incessant repetitions creating "a trancelike rhythm that conceals the vacancy of meaning beneath."<sup>114</sup> Moreover, what little he says in such an expansive manner is really subject to reversal. For example, when Littlewit and Purecraft implore him to make "lawful" the satisfaction of Win's craving, Busy responds, "Surely, it may be otherwise . . ." (I.vi.67). After a display of more pseudo-religious, pseudo-logical gymnastics, he concludes that pig may be eaten at the fair and states, "In the way of comfort to the weeke, I will goe, and eat. I will eate, exceedingly, and prophesie . . . I will therefore eate, yea, I will eate exceedingly" (I.vi.92-97). Busy's greatest accomplishment is that of fooling himself. The Littlewits had known in advance that he would grant them permission to attend the fair. Before the day is ended, Purecraft will have dissolved her allegiance to him and have confessed that she had understood him from the start, and a puppet in the hands of a hobby-horse dealer will have defeated him in debate.

Only one of the "outsiders," or visitors to the fair, remains to be introduced. He is Adam, Mistress Overdo's husband and justice of the peace, magistrate of the Pie Powders (dusty foot) court. Already at the fair, disguised as a madman, black book in hand, he is hoping to discover enormities. He is pretentious, having assumed a degree of self-importance unwarranted by his minor court post. His soliloquy, comprising the first scene of Act II, begins and ends with "in Iustice name, and the Kings; and for the common-wealth!" Since his court is concerned mainly with pimps, prostitutes,

<sup>114</sup>Barish, pp. 198-99.

pickpockets, and ruffians, his stately battlecry is extraneous. He betrays himself in the double meaning of his utterance, "They may haue seene many a foole in the habite of a Iustice; but neuer till now, a Iustice in the habit of a foole" (II.i.7-9). Moreover, he complains that, on the testimony of a foolish constable or a sleepy watchman, he has been fooled: "As a while agone, they made mee, yea me, to mistake an honest zealous Pursiuant, for a *Seminary*: and a proper yong Batcheler of Musicke, for a Bawd" (II.i.33-35). As Busy, in the previous scene, had made much of an ecclesiastical question of high place, Overdo, now, puts himself in a secular high place:

This wee are subject to, that liue in high place, all our intelligence is idle, and most of our intelligencers, knaues: and by your laue, our selues, thought little better, if not errant fooles, for beleeuing 'hem. (II.i.36-39)

The comment resounds with double meaning. Overdo has no real claim to high place. Indeed, his intelligence will prove to be idle, and those individuals whom he chooses to believe will reveal him an errant fool. When his wife and party arrive at the fair, he is orating against bottle-ale and tobacco. In the pompous manner of formal speech, he delivers lines like "Thirst not after that frothy liquor, Ale" (II.vi.11), and "Neither doe thou lust after that tawney weede, tobacco" (II.vi.21-22). However, he almost undermines his inflated style when he notes that a snail, or a spider, or a newt may be lurking in the bottle, and that an alligator may have urinated upon the tobacco leaves. His spectacular oration, nevertheless, attracts a crowd, and Cokes has his first purse lifted at this time. Not realizing that the madman whose oration was responsible for the situation is his charge's brother-in-law, Wasp beats Overdo. Such is the pattern for confusion in everything that Overdo attempts at the fair.

The "insiders," the people of the fair, are now introduced. Leatherhead and John Trash exchange insults and threats over their wares and argue about an open view for customers at their booths. This language of low-class hawkers parodies that of Busy, piling modifiers upon a repeated word. For example, Busy's phrasings, "it is naturall, very naturall" (I.vi.50), "and so consequently eaten; it may be eaten; very exceeding well eaten" (I.vi.52-53), and "Very likely, exceeding likely, very exceeding likely" (I.vi.102), are echoed in the Costermonger's "Buy any peares, peares, fine, very fine peares!" (II.ii.32); in Joan Trash's "Buy any ginger-bread, guilt ginger-bread!" (II.ii.33); and Nightingale's "Buy any ballads; new



ballads?" (II.ii.41). The parallels emphasize Busy's affected language. Ursala, mistress of the booth dispensing roast pig and an accomplice to almost all of the criminal activities of the fair people, enters complaining that "Hell's a kind of cold cellar" (II.ii.44) referring to her roasting pit, bellowing to Mooncalf, her tapster, and whining to Nightingale, the ballad-seller:

My chayre, you false faucet you; and my mornings draught, quickly, a bottle of Ale, to quench mee, Rascall. I am all fire, and fat, *Nightingale*, I shall e'en melt away to the first woman, a ribbe againe, I am afraid. I doe water the ground in knots, as I goe, like a great Garden-pot, you may follow me by the S.S.<sup>s</sup>. I make. (II.ii.48-53)

Knockham, the horse dealer, engages her in lively repartee concerning his rumor that she had died from overindulging in ale and entrails. At one point in this exchange when she refers to Ketcham as a cutpurse, Overdo, listening in, thinks he has discovered an enormity. However, when Mooncalf corrects him, Overdo congratulates himself on being prudent enough not to be fooled. But when Edgeworth, the cutpurse, enters, Overdo readily mistakes him for a proper young man:

What pitty 'tis, so ciuall a young man should should haunt this debauch company? here's the bane of the youth of our time apparent. A proper pen-man, I see't in his countenance, he has a good Clerks looke with him, and I warrant him a quicke hand. (II.iv.30-34)

Mooncalf quickly agrees that Edgeworth has a quick hand, knowing his vocation. Thus, a constant feature of Overdo's ineptness is revealed. He is disguised so that, by appearing to be a harmless mad fool, he can infiltrate the ranks of criminals at the fair. But his mind is so limited as not to allow him to recognize that the criminals who wish to move freely among the ranks of visitors will also be disguised.

In advance of the others, Quarlous and Winwife finally arrive at the fair. Soon Quarlous and Ursala are engaged in what Knockhem calls "foule vapours!" (II.v.93). Quarlous dubs Ursala the body of the fair and the mother of bawds, a walking sow of tallow fit for axle grease, and asks Knockhem if she is his bog or quagmire, because "hee that would venture for't . . . might sinke into her, and be drown'd a weeke, ere any friend hee had, could find where he were" (II.v.95-97). On the other hand, Ursala hopes to see the likes of Quarlous and Winwife:

. . . plagu'd one day (pox'd they are already, I am sure) with leane playhouse poultry, that has the boany rumps, sticking out like the Ace of Spades, or the point of a Partizan, that every rib of 'hem is like the tooth of a saw: and will so grate 'hem with their hips, & shoulders, as (take 'hem altogether) they were as good lye with a hurdle. (II.v.105-10)

In the midst of this smutty insult, Knockhem and Quarlous come to blows, and Ursala, armed with a pan of hot grease, accidentally scalds herself.

The exchange between Quarlous and Ursala establishes the tone of the succeeding wit combats between insiders and outsiders at the fair. Noise and insult prevail over reason and logic at nearly every point; each character remains locked into his own unique, characteristic speech pattern; the thieves rob Cokes of everything but doublet and hose; and the three most vocal opponents (Wasp, Busy, and Overdo) will spend time in the stocks. Moreover, the respectable wives will be pressed into service as prostitutes, and Overdo will put his signature and seal upon a warrant allowing Quarlous the custody of Grace Wellborn, whom he will then betroth to Winwife. Such will be the ramifications of the follies of the outsiders.

Again and again, as the play unfolds, the characters (excepting, perhaps, Grace Wellborn) are guilty of what Jonson terms "negligent speech!" In *Discoveries*, he associates this kind of utterance entirely with abused, misapplied, inept reason:

Negligent speech doth not onely discredit the person of the Speaker, but it discrediteth the opinion of his reason and judgement; it discrediteth the force and uniformity of the matter, and substance.<sup>115</sup>

In his trivial punning and conceit-spinning, Littlewit neglects to include substantial matter in his speech. Quarlous and Winwife ignore the possible repercussions of the former's baiting of Ursala. Wasp is almost completely negligent of audience, propriety, and even the matter at hand. Busy and Overdo are so trapped by pulpit and court oratory that they neglect matter for mannerism. For the mirth and pique of the nursery, Cokes neglects mature vocabulary, syntax, and focus. The outsiders (some more often than others) show their inability to reason or judge. Only Grace Wellborn's infrequent speaking may be the one presence of good sense, here, reminding one of Demaratus' remark in *Discoveries*, "A foole could never hold his peace. For too much talking is ever the *Indice* of a

<sup>115</sup>Jonson *Discoveries*, p. 629.

foole."<sup>116</sup> Although Barish and others have found Grace to be a "false note,"<sup>117</sup> one suggests that there may be a rationale for her reticence.

Coke's speech reveals the folly that springs from childish innocence. Barish sees him as the consummate gull—an heir to country wealth; a credulous person, predominantly infantile, occasionally precocious; a master of childish language; and one incapable of lengthy attention spans. Moreover, Cokes' language contains no transitions between ideas because, in his mind, the appearance of one new thought drives out the preceding one.<sup>118</sup> Thus, robbed of all possessions down to his inner garments, Cokes meets Littlewit, who is attending to the final preparations for his puppet play. Littlewit lends him money to see the play and informs him that Wasp has been confined in the stocks. Cokes' reply is an illustration of his childish bent of mind: "For what i' faith? I am glad o' that; remember to tell me on't anone; I haue enough, now! What manner of matter is this, M<sup>r</sup>. Littlewit? What kind of *Actors* ha' you? Are they good *Actors*?" (V.iii.47-50). Obviously, it crosses Cokes' mind, here, to wonder at first why Wasp was stocked; and then it crosses his mind to be glad that his tutor should be so humiliated, simply dismissing the subject, thinking that he can find out about it later, because, for the moment, the promise of a puppet play and his curiosity about the "actors" engross him. By the end of the scene, he has named the puppet-actors after toys: "*Hero* . . . my fiddle! and *Leander* my *fiddle-sticke*: Then *Damon*, my drum; and *Pythias*, my *Pipe*, and the ghost of *Dinonysius* my *hobby-horse*" (V.iii.133-37).

On the other hand, Littlewit's speech reveals the folly that exists in a blend of the simple and affected. For example, Win is little more than a puppet herself. At Littlewit's insistence, she wears a fine velvet cap. At his urging, she plays the part of a pregnant mother with a craving for Bartholomew pig. When he leaves her with Knockhem and Whit, the flesh-peddlers, they transform her into a prostitute with a gown and the promise of a coach. When she vows that she "can be *Hypocrite* enough" (I.v.160-61) as she prepares to trick Busy and Purecraft, she alludes not only to her confidence in being able to deceive the Puritan (often called *hypocrite* at the time), but also to her innate ability to play roles, as suggested in the original Greek meaning of the term. Thus, the

<sup>116</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 574.

<sup>117</sup>Barish, pp. 222-23.

<sup>118</sup>Barish, pp. 220-22.

association of this malleable, role-playing personality with Littlewit, the puppet-playwright, sets up a play-length demonstration of the follies of the simple-minded aspiring to become something which they are not. As fools, the Littlewits are a degree or so above Cokes, who is a fool for being what he is.

Littlewit's linguistic mannerisms and trivial conceit-making, nevertheless, are kept within his own natural, middle-class idiom, and his wife is a natural role-player. On the other hand, Busy and Overdo carry to extremes the follies of mimicry and affectation. Barish argues that prose was "an absolute necessity" for Busy's expression:

The stupefying sing-song of the rhythm needed to be free of metrical interference in order to establish itself so totally. Busy ends by being perhaps the most complete linguistic imposter in Jonson . . . . The vocal disguise distorts but does not obliterate the "true" voice. With Busy one feels that every syllable is ersatz, maliciously manufactured out of alien matter to produce an impenetrable mask.<sup>119</sup>

Busy, one-time baker and continual glutton, thoroughly affects the mannerisms of the Puritan pulpit. His linguistic affectations are his paramount folly, assuming a manner of speech foreign to his intellectual capacity. Saxton's argument that Busy's language should not be regarded "merely as a satire on the speech of the Puritans" is well taken.<sup>120</sup> In Busy, Jonson has created a fool that forces himself into a role and mode of speech for which he is poorly equipped. His Puritan mannerisms are significant, but always secondary to his folly of affectation, which Jonson describes in *Discoveries*, as follows:

Many men beleeeve not themselves, what they would perswade others; and lesse doe the things, which they would impose on others: but least of all, know what they themselves most confidently boast. Only they set the signe of the Crosse over their outer doores, and sacrifice to their gut, and their groyne in their inner Closets.<sup>121</sup>

Jonson's progression to "least of all, know what they themselves most confidently boast" gives the secondary causes (not believing and not doing) and the radical cause (not knowing) of the folly evident in Busy's speech habits and behavior.

Overdo is another example of extreme affectation. Barish describes him as being "autointoxicate," adding that "Busy is un-

<sup>119</sup>Barish, pp. 203-04.

<sup>120</sup>Sackton, p. 156.

<sup>121</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 564.

thinkable without an audience, but Overdo is his own best audience . . . ."<sup>122</sup> Although Busy fools no one but himself (even the Littlewits manipulate him, and Purecraft sees through his disguise), he has need of an audience in order to accomplish this feat. He enters in soliloquy (II.i.1-49), orates against ale and tobacco for the benefit of the "civil" young Edgworth and makes possible the loss of Cokes' purse (II.vi.1-92), and resolves to "make no more orations" in a subsequent soliloquy (III.iii.1-41). Nevertheless, in the stocks, he speaks continually to himself: "In the mid'st of this tumult, I will yet be the *Author* of mine owne rest, and not minding their fury, sit in the stockes, in that calme, as shall be able to trouble a *Triumph*" (IV.i.43-46). He utilizes an extensive array of classical rhetorical devices, among which Saxton cites allusion, paradigms, correction (self-correction designed to turn the discussion another way), hypophors (the rhetorical question which one himself answers), epizeuxis (repetition for emphasis), auxesis (exaggeration), parathesis (apposition), and apostrophe.<sup>123</sup> Whereas Littlewit always strives (even strains) for a pun or conceit, Overdo uses classical devices to affiliate himself with Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal. Because of his affectation, however, all of his pompous rhetoric and his classical authorities are out of place, even as he is. Rather to keep him in the stocks, the appointed peace-keepers at the Fair at first attempt to take him to the court over which he should have been presiding; but finding the judge absent (Overdo himself), they return him to the stocks. Barish concludes:

By ridiculing Overdo's intimacy with Latin authors and his half-baked Stoicism, Jonson shows a new recognition that learning is not enough to preserve a man from folly, just as the fatuous endearments of the Littlewits teach us, more forcibly than elsewhere in Jonson, that stupidity can coexist with innocence.<sup>124</sup>

Assuming that truth resides in form, both Busy and Overdo are guilty of striving to master a form of expression, but neither the form of Puritan sermonizing nor that of stately oratory brings them any closer to a truth. In *Discoveries*, Jonson discloses that characters like Busy and Overdo may have a broader purpose than that of satirizing Puritans and burlesquing civil justice. For example, considering wisdom and an affected manner of speech, he concludes:

<sup>122</sup>Barish, pp. 204-05.

<sup>123</sup>Sackton, pp. 154-55.

<sup>124</sup>Barish, p. 209.

"Of the two (if either were to be wisht) I would rather have a downe-right wisdome, then a foolish and affected eloquence."<sup>125</sup> At length, then, he discourses upon the choice of "foolish and affected eloquence" over truth:

*Truth* is mans proper good; and the onely *immortall* thing, was given to our mortality to use. No good *Christian*, or *Ethnick*, if he be honest, can misse it: no *States-man*, or *Patriot* should. For without truth all the Actions of mankind, are craft, malice, or what you will, rather then wisdome.<sup>126</sup>

By affecting only the outward form of religious and judicial expression, Busy and Overdo waste their intellects. They can claim no wisdom; they can reach no truth.

Wasp reveals another kind of "autointoxicate" folly. His favorite utterance is "I," as, for example, shown in his response to the loss of Cokes' first purse. Having warned Cokes that he would lose something if he attended Overdo's spectacular oration against ale and tobacco, Wasp delivers to Cokes a typically overbearing and garbled I-told-you-so scolding:

Blesse 'hem with all my heart, with all my heart, do you see! Now, as I am no infidell, that I know of, I am glad on't. I, I am, (heere's my witness!) doe you see, Sir? I did not tell you of his fables, I? no, no, I am a dull malt-horse, I, I know nothing. Are you not iustly seru'd i' your conscience now? speake i' your conscience. Much good doe you with all my heart, and his heart that has it, with all my heart againe. (II.vi.106-13)

However, with his language, he whips himself into a frenzy rather than communicates with his listeners.<sup>127</sup> Once given the opportunity to speak, he is determined to make himself heard for as long as possible, ending his statements with questions in order to further the conversation. If Overdo, in his acquaintance with the Latin classics, proves that learning is no guarantee against folly, then Wasp, who scorns to read the marriage license and never attests to the value of books and knowledge (ironic for a tutor), must illustrate that a simple contempt for the follies of others is no safeguard against one's own foolhardiness.<sup>128</sup>

At first, Quarlous and Winwife appear to have the ability to listen and to speak to the occasion. As Gibbons observes, however, when Quarlous decides to participate in the game of vapours, he

<sup>125</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 564.

<sup>126</sup>Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 580.

<sup>127</sup>Barish, pp. 204-05, explains that, while Busy's language is designed to lull his listeners into a trance, Wasp's speech is designed to "jolt himself into a frenzy."

<sup>128</sup>Thayer, p. 139, discusses the scorn of antiquity and learning in Busy and Wasp as "original ignorance" (for original sin) in the myth-ritual approach to the play.

forfeits his ability to be the detached commentator upon the action.<sup>129</sup> Thus, he is not free from folly but has the ability (generally) to recognize it and be a fool by choice. Moreover, his choice allows him to realize personal gains from the foolish world about him. Significantly, Winwife, never so verbally aggressive as Quarlous, gains the hand of the reticent Grace Wellborn. On the other hand, Quarlous wins the love of Purecraft and her estate of six thousand pounds.

Barish proposes that, in the language of the people at the fair, one's

. . . ear is assaulted unceasingly by linguistic anomalies, by every form of corrupt vocabulary, syntax, and diction, by dialect deformations and drunken brayings. But . . . this linguistic muddle no longer carries very much moral stigma, because it is no longer correlated with the really capital vice of mimicry.<sup>130</sup>

Except for the introduction of *moral stigma* and *vice* into his analysis of a play dedicated to the unmasking of folly, Barish is sound in this assessment. Certainly, the game of vapours, so attractive to Quarlous and Wasp, has produced language like "Why, where are you, zurs? doe you vlinch, and leaue vs i' the zuds, now?" (IV.iv.10-11), and "I'le ne maire, my waimb warkes too mickle with this auready" (IV.iv.82-83). Moreover, Knockhem speaks of Ursula's leg as he would of horseflesh: ". . . body o' me, she has the *Mallanders*, the scratches, the crowne scabbe, and the quitter bone, i' the tother legge" (II.v.179-81). Nevertheless, it is significant that the speech of the fair people is always their very own—not mimicry or affectation. Frequently, they reveal touches of the same foolishness as Quarlous; indeed, they can waste their intellect upon senseless vapours; however, all display the basic ingenuity of people who must survive from moment to moment, day to day, by their wits. Like Quarlous, they seize upon an opportunity for gain. The fair itself is such an opportunity, and they are there—peddlers, pickpockets, pimps, and prostitutes. Unlike Quarlous, on the other hand, they encounter folly when they waste their native ingenuity upon the situation at hand.

In the anatomy of folly central to *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson exercises the principle of language decorum that reserves prose for the unmasking of fools, demonstrating thereby the absolute

necessity of prose in revealing the roots of folly. It is clear that none of the speech mannerisms depicting the inept and misdirected workings of his characters' mind could be accomplished in verse. Littlewit's repeated interjection of his wife's name at random places, Wasp's peculiar linguistic hammering with "I," Busy's piling of modifiers upon repeated words irregularly in his pronouncements, Overdo's slipping into and out of oratorical delivery, the fair people's characteristic dialects and explosive invectives, and Cokes' childish babble would either disrupt the verse flow or be sacrificed to the metrics of verse. A conscientious baroque prose stylist (as *Discoveries* everywhere reveals), Jonson accepts the premise that thoughts develop first in words and short syntactic units. As a conscientious comic dramatist, he brings together an assortment of fools articulating thoughts in the forms in which they first occur within their foolish minds. The result is a dissection of folly that transcends topical satire as it probes as deeply as myth into a basic, universal feature of humanity.

<sup>129</sup>Gibbons, p. 185.

<sup>130</sup>Barish, p. 225.