CHAPTER IV

"AN IMAGE OF THE TIMES"

With his firm opinion that a conscientious artist has no right whatsoever to play about with improbable fairy tales set in imaginary background and in remote countries, Jonson felt that the function of the playwright is to mirror the life he sees around him and thereby "show an image of the times". That is precisely why he chose as a vehicle for his expression that kind of comedy which Cicero had defined as "imitatis vitae, speculum consuetudinis, image veritatis",¹ that is, imitation of life, a mirror of manners, an image of truth.

Since Aristotle's time, 'imitation' has been frequently echoed both by critics and playwrights. Aristotle asserts that Comedy is an imitation of those who are worse than ourselves, yet not in every sort of evil but only in that baseness of which the ridiculous is a species.²

The Italian critic, Trissino, states:

Comedy is an imitation of the wicked and the vicious, yet not in every extremity of the vices, but merely of that which is ugly, whence springs the ridiculous³ ....

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1. Every Man Out of His Humour, III, vi, 206-207. H.L. Snuggs, however, thinks that Jonson, for his definition of comedy, is indebted to the Fourth Book of Minturno's De Poeta rather than to Cicero. See "The Source of Jonson's Definition of Comedy", M L N, LXV (Nov. 1950), pp.542-44.


The usual interpretation is seen in Sir Thomas Elyot’s description of comedy as

a picture or as it were a mirror of man’s life, ⁴

or in Ascham’s idea that drama was a

perfect imitation, or fair lively painted picture of the life of every degree of man. ⁵

Sir Philip Sidney declares that

Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life. ⁶

The phrase is constantly repeated. Lodge and Heywood all claimed on Cicero’s authority. ⁷

Coming to the playwrights, Shakespeare upholds the same view when he expresses through Hamlet that the end of playing is to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(III, ii, 25-29)

Webster seems to be of the same opinion when he praises the Queen’s Men at the Red Bull for their acting in The White Devil (1612 or 1613):

For the function of the play ’twas generally well, and I dare affirm, with the joint testimony of some of their own quality, (for the true imitation of life, without striving to make nature a monster) the best that ever became them.

So also an imitation of life is praised in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611):

Thou shalt see my lady
Play her part naturally, more to the life
Then she's aware on.8

Thus the Elizabethan dramatists attempted to imitate life in their plays.

All the same, we would be thoroughly mistaken if we think that these dramatists tried to make their plays exactly the same as real life. The point, however, is that they did not endeavour, to put it in Marston's words, to "relate anything as an historian but to enlarge everything as a poet".9 Naturally "their plays were more exciting and colourful, more full of meaning, than real life".10 To cite but a few examples, the mirror held up in the courtly plays of Lyly and in his *Euphuus* was unequivocally a flattering one. The same is the case with Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio, when he finds Portia's picture in the leaden casket, exclaims:

> What demi-god
> Hath come so near a creation?

(III, ii, 115-116)

To Ophelia, Hamlet had been

> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form.

(III, i, 153)


Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* claims that her 'statue' can show life "Lively mock'd" (V, iii, 10). This the Elizabethan dramatists could easily afford because of the fact that "for an Elizabethan to imitate was to interpret and not to reproduce: a mirror would either flatter or warn, but would not simply reflect: and truth involved the revelation of eternal forms behind the distorting veil of events".11 Yet, the Elizabethan audience was prepared to take all this as real while the plays were in performance. Thus, "within the charmed circle of the theatre, a new world could be accepted as real, and what they saw personated could be accepted as truly done before them".12

With this licence that has belonged to the drama of the times, Jonson does not simply 'imitate' the life around him, but slightly exaggerates the follies of life which he means to correct. Because, his purpose was not simply to present the world of common experience, uncriticized and unstructured. Jonson's mirror, then, is a kind of "magic mirror which slightly distorts the objects it shows, heightening their deformity and making more obvious to the spectators their normal proportions".13


The resulting picture of contemporary life in his plays, therefore, cannot be taken at its face value. His picture of life, then, is like the 'perspectives' of pictorial art which were at first designed to deceive the external eye. If one looked at them as one did at a usual picture, they appeared to be too distorted to be recognised. But the artist provided a small hole and by looking through it from a precise particular angle one could see the picture restored to its normal proportions. Similarly Jonson provided the small holes in his careful instructions to the readers through Prologues, Inductions and interpretative choruses which explain to us 'the springs and mechanism' of his art. Jonson repeatedly demanded that the audience should

thinke nothing true:
Lest so you make the maker to judge you.
For he knowes, Poet neuer credit gain'd
By writing truths, but things (like truths) well fain'd.

(Epicoene, II 'Prologue', 11. 7-10)

Thus Jonson repudiates mere literal reproduction of contemporary life in plays. The principle is repeated in the court prologue to The Staple of News. Jonson appealing to the audience makes it clear:

Wherein, although our Title, Sir, be Newes,
Wae yet adventure, here, to tell you none;
But shew you common follies, and so knowne,
That though they are not truths, th' innocent Mugs
Hath made so like, as Phant'sie could them state,
Or Poetry, without scandal, imitate.
(11. 9-14)

14. "In Elizabethan painting there was a curiosity known as the 'perspective picture' which seen from a particular angle would display objects which, if the picture were directly faced, would be too distorted to be recognized". (M.C. Bradbrook, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy, p.109).
Hence, we have to approach the 'perspectives' of Jonson's plays through the 'small holes' of irony, distortion, exaggeration, pretence, disguise and indecorum, which are Jonson's comic ways of presenting the contradictions to the ideal, in order to have the apparently distorted picture of contemporary life restored to its "full reality and flesh-and-blood existence".

Jonson, however, was not the only renaissance writer to create the contradiction to the ideal. Jonson's sense of a perverted age appears in the pamphlet literature of both the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. Greene, Nashe and Dekker, whose prose-pamphlets\(^\text{15}\) testify to the Elizabethans' intense interest in the sheer mechanics of roguery, present the life of the London underworld from the perspective of a sweeter, simpler past or of a religious ideal.

Particularly Greenes 'conny-catching' pamphlets, purporting to be an exposé of ingenious tricks of the card-sharpers confidence men, cutpurses, and other disreputable characters of the underworld of Elizabethan England, are of great relevance to our study of Jonson's comic world. In strong contrast to his love-pamphlets, which give us none of the characteristics of contemporary society, the 'conny-catching' pamphlets are full of realistic traits and hints and sketches of the times. As A.B. Grosart has rightly pointed out, "having himself

\(^{15}\) See A.V. Judges, ed. The Elizabethan Underworld.
frequently fallen into the clutches of London courtesans, Greene was an authority on the subject.16

The first of these is *The Notable Discovery of Coosnaje* (1591). In the preface 'To The Reader', Greene says that 'Conny-catching' and 'Cros-biting' are

such pestilent and preudiciall practices, as of late have been the ruine of infinite persons, and the subversion and overthrow of many Marchaunts, Farmers, and honest minded yeomen,

and that he has

written faithfullie to discover these coosening practices.17

The purpose of this pamphlet, then, is to warn inexperienced country people coming up to London, of the cunning, snares laid for them by the London sharpera. To achieve his purpose Greene minutely describes the favourite arts of these 'conny-catchers', and acquaints the reader of their thieves' language.

In the preface to his pamphlet, *A Disputation between a Ma Conny-Catcher and a She Conny-Catcher*, Greene informs his readers that he is going to acquaint them with the manners and customs of the London 'domi-monde'.18 This pamphlet is a tale of how a courtesan, Nan, succeeded in duping and overreaching one of the sharpest 'conny-catchers', Laurence, who was ultimately obliged to confess himself vanquished. The tale is concluded


17. Ibid., p.7.

with an account of the repentance and reformation of a prostitute. A postscript is added wherein Greene assures his readers that this account had been taken down from the words of the woman herself, and was not fictitious. He says that what he described is

A merry Tale taken not far from Fetter Lane end, of a new foamed Conny-catcher, that was Conny-catcht himself. 19

Thus, the realistic, satirical 'conny-catching' pamphlets of Greene reveal his extensive knowledge of London's underworld.

Nashe's rambling narrative, The Unfortunate Traveller or The Life of Jack Wilton, perhaps suggested by the Spanish Lazarillo de Tormes, 20 offers a fictional biography of a rogue. The writing has a vivid pictorial quality as though everything is seen in brilliant sunlight. Let us take, for example, the description of the tapster:

he was an old servitor, a cavalier of an ancient house, as might appeare by the armes of his ancestors, drawen verie amiably in chalke on the in side of his tent dore. 21

Then, Nashe's description of a heatwave, as Brian Gibbons points out, "brings us closer to the physical stuff of Elizabethan London than all Greene's pamphlets put together". 22 With a pose

of confident assertion, Nashe depicts the effects of "a vehement hot summer":

Felt makers and Furriers, what the one with the hot steme of their wool new taken out of the pan, and the other with the contagious heat of their slaughter budge and connieskinnes, died more thick then of pestelence: I have seene an old woman at that season, having three chins, wipe them all away one after another, as they melted to water, and left hir selfe nothing of a mouth but an upper chap .... Masons paid nothing for haire to mixe their lyme ... it drooped off mens heads and beards faster than any Barber could shave it.23

Nashe's pose of confident assertion combined with such flat statements as "I have seene" drive home to us the point in hand.

Dekker followed Greene and Nashe in producing realistic, satirical accounts of the London underworld, as in The Wonderful Year, The Seven Deadly Sins of London, The Belman of London and The Gull's Horn Book. These prose pamphlets contain accounts of an Army of insufferable abuses, detestable vices, most damnable villainies, abominable pollutions, inexplicable mischiefs, sordid iniquinations, horrible and hell-hound-like perpetrated flagitious enormities.24

The Wonderful Year "consists of desultory gossip together with rhetorical accounts of events that were known to everybody, larded with 'tales cut out in sundry fashions, of purpose to shorten the lives of long winter nights'."25 The Seven Deadly

founders who rack rents, cheating tradesmen, brewers and bakers who give false measure, fraudulent executors, and usurers

who for a little money and a great deal of trash (as fire-shovels, brown paper, motley cloak-bags, etc.) bring young novices into a fool's paradise till they have sealed the mortgage of their lands, and then like pedlars go they (or some familiar spirit for them, raised by the usurer) up and down to cry commodities, which scarce yield the third part of the sum for which they take them up.26

The Gull's Horn Book, offering a lively picture of varieties of fools and rogues in London, "shows the beneficial influence of Jonson and the early Jacobean vogue for dramatic satire".27 Thus, the prose pamphlets of both the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods show a remarkable knowledge of London low-life.

Jonson's contemporary life forms the life of London at one of its most fascinating moments. The London in which Jonson had to battle for a livelihood was enormously rich in stimulus and provocation for an eye and mind like his.28 Socially, intellectually and politically it exercised a great influence. Since the fall of Antwerp in 1576 London had become a chief Centre of European commerce.29 Professional adepts -

27. Brian Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy, p.217.
28. "The London of Queen Elizabeth, by its size, wealth and power, was the most formidable unit in the Kingdom". (G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History, p.142).
29. "London, absorbing more and more of the home and foreign commerce of the country at the expense of many smaller towns, was already a portent for size in England and even in Europe". (G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History, p.142).
medical, metallurgical, commercial and financial - found it worth their while to flock from Italy and France to the English metropolis. The ground was being prepared for the Jacobean projectors.30

The rapidly expanding Inns of Court31 were the nucleus of a society. Numerous and accomplished of wits and men about town - lawyers, courtiers, young graduates from the universities - thronged the aisles of Paul's and discovered the middle classes by their free living and free talk. In addition, a crowd of provincials, country squires and their sons gathered in the capital bent on seeing plays, learning to take tobacco and conversing with the wits. Thus, "half of the matter of Jonson's future play-making was being enacted daily before his eyes".32

The literary world was in its full swing. University wits and courtiers shared its honours and failures with men of small education and learning. The world of scholarship was spacious and exhilarating. Scholarship was pursued in a spirit of adventure and conquest. It was a time when a scholar like Bacon could profess that he took all knowledge to be his province33

30. See L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, pp.78-81.
31. "This was indeed the golden age of the Inns, when all was pulsating with vitality and joie de vivre". A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth, p.522).
It is at this time that Haleigh thought it possible for a single man to write a history of the whole world. Haleigh studied most of his sea voyages where he "carried always a trunk of books along with him and had nothing to divert him".34

The everyday life of London was full of theatrical contrasts. It surged through the Strand and Cheapside and overflowed into the narrow lanes and by ways. It was a time when luxury and poverty ran parallel courses. The contrasts, however, became so marked that the society was growing more and more class-conscious.35 This resulted in social unrest. The relationships of classes and groups to one another were critically examined and carefully studied. And whenever they were faulty and untoward they were immediately challenged. Thus, the modern world, as we know it, was already begun.

Jonson, the dramatist, came into the midst of these times with the purpose of holding a mirror up to it in his comedy. With his full and first-hand knowledge of men and manners combined with a certain power of detachment he had in his nature, Jonson could successfully accomplish the task he set before himself. Even at the moments of most whole-hearted absorption in life, he was able to hold himself a bit outside of his experience, so as to reduce it to order. The result was that the various phases of contemporary existence assumed a pattern when reflected in his orderly mind. It was Jonson's object,

35. "Never can there have been more class-consciousness, one feels in any age". (A.L. Rowse, The England of Elizabeth, p. 245).
then, to give this ordered reflection back to the world through the vehicle of his comedy, in the earnest hope of clarifying its vision and correcting its follies.

This was also the object of most of Jonson's contemporaries like Chapman, Marston, Middleton, Dekker, Heywood and Massinger. In Chapman and Marston, of course, we have only a limited presentation of London life and its manners. Chapman's plays like *An Humorous Day's Mirth, All Fools* and *Sir Giles Goosecap* show his detached and analytic view of life and a satiric outlook.

Marston seems to have reached excellence in the portrayal of the abnormal excesses of contemporary manners. His plays abound in violent railings at the corruption and hypocrisy of courts and courtiers. The *Malcontent*, for instance, is full of the poisonous air of a jaded court. Paseroello, the court fool, touches on all things with a 'meditative cynicism'. The *Dutch Courtesan*, in its opening part, offers a vivid picture of tavern life.

It is, however, to the delightful comedy, *Eastward Ho*, on which Chapman and Marston collaborated with Jonson,\(^6\) that we have to turn in order to get a successful picture of contemporary life. The play is set in London, and the city setting is accurately achieved with many placing references to street

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\(^6\) "The exact division among the collaborators is not easy to determine, but the coherence and firmness of the structure, particularly in the denouement, seem due to Jonson". (A.H. Thorndike, *English Comedy*, p.149).
and district names. The play deals with the conflict of the industrious and idle apprentices of a London Goldsmith, Touchstone. The typical interests of the gallant in Jacobean society are summarised when Sir Petronell, after having lost his country estates to usurers, laments:

Taverns growe dead; Ordinaries are blowne up; playes are at a stand; Howses of Hospitalitie at a fall; not a Feather waving, nor a Spurre gingling any where .... my creditors have laice to arrest me,

(II, ii, 220-222)

We get "a malign view of the motives and 'adventurous' spirit of Elizabethan merchant investors and colonisers",37 when Sir Petronell and the idle apprentice, Quicksilver, set out on a voyage to Virginia to make their fortunes there:

I tell thee, Golde is more plentiful than Copper is with us; and for as much redder Copper as I can brag, Ile have thince the weight in Gold. Why man all their dripping Pans, and their Chamber pottes are pure Gold;

(III, iii, 25-28)

Thus, Eastward Ho is unmistakably realistic, but the trouble with Chapman and Marston is that, both being more interested in tragic themes, they do not follow up their entry into realistic comedy by any consistent development. For this one has to look to Middleton.

Although we cannot completely agree with T.S. Eliot 'that Middleton's comedy was 'photographic', that it introduces us to the low-life of the time far better than anything in the comedy

37. Brian Gibbens, Jacobean City Comedy, p.23.
of Shakespeare or the comedy of Jonson, better than anything except the pamphlets of Dekker and Greene and Nashe", 38 we may say with K.M. Lynch that "Middleton's keen concentration on the spectacle of the interplay of different social classes marks an important development in realistic comedy". 39 Middleton accurately reflects the low-life of libertines and loose women, tricky lawyers and swindlers, drunkards and usurers, wanton wives and complacent husbands needy knights and harsh creditors of Jacobean London.

Middleton's early comedies like Your Five Gallants and Michaelmas Term are remarkably interesting as realistic studies of 'social confusion'. "They portray an age in which medieval standards have broken down, in which "degree" has been disregarded, in which all sense of social responsibility has been completely lost. They show class struggling against class, individual against individual; they show the sons of toothdrawers rising to affluence and the sons of gentlemen losing their estates. They show that money, land, and women - the only prizes in the social struggle - are quickly gained and quickly lost". 40 We are thus introduced to an unsavoury London.

In his comic masterpieces - A Trick to Catch the Old One, A Mad World, My Masters and A Chaste Maid in the Cheapside - Middleton presents, with a profound sense of irony, "a moral

40. R.H. Barker, Thomas Middleton, p.52.
and critical analysis of City society".  

A Trick, like Volpone brilliantly illustrates the power of wealth as well as the gullibility of the unscrupulous men who pursue it. Witgood successfully dupes both his creditors and his uncle, the citizen-usurer Lucre, by passing off his Courtesan as a rich widow and circulating the rumour that he is about to marry her. Similarly Pollywit in A Mad World gulls others "without conscience". He says:

I go without order, swear without number, gull without mercy, and drink without measure.

(I, 1, 23-24)

Disguising himself as Lord Owemuch he robs his grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress, of his wealth.

A Chaste Maid in the Cheapside, undoubtedly the best of Middleton's comedies, gives a broader picture of Jacobean life. "As a study in manners, in fact, the play is unsurpassed in Jacobean drama, except perhaps by The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair". To give an illustration, the scene of the promoters highlights Middleton's powers of observation and his marvellous ability to mould contemporary rackets into his dramatic material.

As the promoters during Lent are greedily looking for meat and confiscating whatever they find, a man enters with a basket of meat concealed under his cloak. Immediately they seize the

41. Brian Gibbons, Jacobean City Comedy, p.168.
42. Ibid., p.78.
meat. But when the servant of Master Beggarland, who is free with his bribes, enters with a basket, the same promoters just let him go scot-free saying:

Go, go, we see thee not; away keep close!

(II, ii, 122)

Now enters a Country Girl concealing her illegitimate child in her basket. The promoters avariciously seize the basket, but only to be fooled. Probing the basket they first discover a fat loin of mutton and then the child to their painful surprise.

Second Promoter. A Child!
First Promoter. A pox of all dissembling cunning whores!
Second Promoter. Here's an unlucky breakfast!

"...Villainous strange!..."
Life, had she none to gull but poor promoters,
That watch hard for a living?

(II, ii, 158-64)

The scene brings out contemporary ways of making 'a living' by corrupt means. Thus, most of Middleton's comédies are thoroughly representative and prove that he is "a hearty observer of life at first hand".43

If Marston and Middleton present the ugly and least edifying elements in the society of their time, Dekker and Heywood portray citizen-life in its rosiest colours. They glorify the rising middle class and the lower classes. Naturally their plays deal with the ordinary lives of men and women with their favourite pastimes like hawking, hunting, dancing, singing and

playing the game of cards after dinner. They also deal with their social barriers, emotional entanglements, marital harmony and superstitious beliefs.

'The Child of London', Dekker writes especially of London and for the cockney people. With his hearty joy and easy-going cheerfulness, he finds mostly gentility among citizens. His masterpiece, The Shoemaker's Holiday, realistically presents the class distinctions of the age. In this play we have a thorough-going picture of the three classes -- the landed aristocracy, the rich merchant class and the working labour class. It seeks to present the various conflicts of these three classes especially those arising from marriage alliances. Lacy, the nephew of the Earl of Lincoln, is in love with Rose, a citizen's daughter. But with their class-consciousness, neither Lacy's uncle nor Rose's father approves of the match. The Mayor, who "scorns to call Lacy son-in-law", tells the Earl:

Poore Citizens must not with Courtiers wed,
Who will in silkes, and gay apparell spend
More in one yeare, than I am worth, by farre.

(I, 1, 12-14)

The Earl in turn tells his nephew not to cast an amorous eye

Upon so means a project, as the love
Of a gay wanton painted citizen

(I, 1, 76-78)

Symon Eyre also dissuades Rose from marrying Lacy:

A courtier, wash, go by, stand not vpon pisherie
pasheries; those silken fellowes are but painted Images,
coutsides, outsides, Rose; their inner linings are
torne; no, my fine mouse, marry me with a Gentleman
Grocer like my Lord Maior, your Father, a Grocer
is a sweete trade, Plums, Plums: had I a sonne or
Daughter should marrie out of the generation and
bloud of the shoe-makers, he should packe: what,
the Gentle trade is a living for a man through
Europe, through the world.

(III, iii, 40-47)
The passage reveals how the shoemaker takes a legitimate pride
in his profession and how strongly he feels the necessity
and desirability of getting married in one's own class.

Although The Shoemaker's Holiday primarily "appealed to
the pride of the citizen-craftsman in his craft and status",
it is not altogether devoid of "shrewd, caustic comments on
social ambition, wealth and luxury". 44 For instance, when Margery,
Eyre's wife, vociferates:

I must enlarge my bumme, ha, ha, how shall I looke
in a hoode I wonder? .... It is verie hot, I must
get me a fan or else a maske ... But, Bake, get thee
in, call for some meate and drinke, thou shalt find
me worshipful towards thee.

(III, ii, 33-34; 44; 99-101)
Dekker seems to laugh at her naive assumption of dignity.

Like Dekker, Heywood is concerned with presenting middle
class life, its conventions, its beliefs, its pastimes and its
various problems with sureness of touch. "With his tender
charity and generous impulses he is able to understand the
problems of life and present them realistically". 45 Heywood's

44. L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson,
plays of domestic life exquisitely portray the bourgeois elements in the Jacobean society with 'simplicity', 'sympathetic humanity' and 'vivid realism'.46

Heywood's plays of London life reflect the prevailing attitudes, customs, conflicts and sentiments. They essentially appeal to national as well as local pride of the citizens. The first part of Edward IV gives us a clear picture of the siege of London by the rebel Falconbridge and his repulse by the citizens. The events of the play are located in quite familiar places - Mint, Cheapside, Lombard Street. Further, 'velvet coats', 'gorgets', and 'leading staves' the whole companies of mercers, grocers, drapers and the rest are vividly represented on the stage. Similarly in the second part of If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, we witness the planning, building and naming of the Royal Exchange.

In his Fair Maid of the West, the streets and inns are shown crowded with laughing gallants moving about in a rollicking mood. These tavern-scenes have been justly praised by critics for their superb realism.47 These 'shining gallants' come only to court the tavern maid, Bess. She, no doubt, allows

46. See M. Velte, The Bourgeois Elements in the Dramas of Thomas Heywood, p. 140.
them to dote upon her but she knows where to draw the line, even if she is a maid in the tavern. Her lover Spencer says how

She 'll laugh, confer, keep company, discourse, And something more, kiss; but beyond that compass She no way can be drawn.

(I, iii)

Even Goodlack who has a poor opinion of the tavern maids admits that

'Tis a virtue
But seldom found in the taverns.

(I, iii)

Thus the tavern scenes bring the first part of the play nearer to life, "a life that has been shared and experienced even by the commoners of that age with pride and satisfaction". Then there are certain passages in the sub-plots of A woman Killed with Kindness and The English Traveller which almost recreate the scenes of real life by their close, intimate touches and homely images. This kind of accuracy in detail seems to make the remote past tangible and familiar. The 'social significance' of Heywood's plays, thus, lies "in the kind of conduct they extol. Most of them contain examples of neighbourly dealing; debts are forgiven, the poor and unfortunate are relieved. 'Impersonal' economic processes, that is, are not accepted with complacency; they are seen in terms of human suffering and happiness".49

49. L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.255.
Massinger, like Ben Jonson, critically observes the significant social and economic activities of the age. Though his themes are often drawn from the Jonsonian field "there is fresh perception of a contemporary world, and the treatment shows that the tradition on which Jonson drew is active in Massinger". In *The City Madam* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, we have two realistic comedies dealing with contemporary London.

In the figures of the City Madam and her daughters on the one hand and in the figure of Luke Frugal on the other, the Jacobean social morality is 'vivified'. The City Madam, Lady Frugal, and her daughters, longing to "be ladified" exhibit throughout the play a purely material ambition. They simply scare away the suitors by making extravagant demands for luxury after marriage. Anne, for instance, from Sir Maurice demands:

French and Italian cooks, musicians, songsters,
And a chaplain that must preach to please my fancy:
A friend at court to place me at a mask;
The private box ta'en up at a new play,
For me and my retinue; a fresh habit,
Of a fashion never seen before, to draw
The gallants' eyes, that sit on the stage, upon me;
Some decayed lady for my parasite,
To flatter me, and rail at other madams;
And there ends my ambition.

(II, ii)

Luke Frugal essentially represents the acquisitive attitude that was becoming common in Jacobean times. He has already bidden

Religion, conscience, charity, farewell!
To me you are words only, and no more;
All human happiness consists in store.

(IV, ii)

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50. Ibid., p.273.
He exults over the treasures filling his room:

    In by-corners of
    This sacred room, silver in bags, heap'd up
    Like billets saw'd and ready for the fire
    Unworthy to hold fellowship with bright gold
    That flow'd about the room, conceal'd itself.
    There needs no artificial light; the splendour
    Makes a perpetual day there, night and darkness
    By that still-burning lamp for ever banish'd!

(III, iii)

The passage invariably reminds us of Volpone's address to gold. Also, he resembles Sir Epicure Mammon in his infinite avarice driven home to us when he says:

    Increase of wealth
    Is the rich man's ambition, and mine
    Shall know no bounds.

(IV, ii)

A New Way to Pay Old Debts, like The City Madam, is a comedy of London manners representing as it does the new wealthy class that threatened the privileges of the gentry. If Sir John Luke of The City Madam represents the thriving merchant class, Sir Giles Overreach stands for the new aristocracy of wealth. Being conscious of his enormous wealth, he appeals to his depressed daughter:

    In birth! why art thou not my daughter,
    The blest child of my industry and wealth?
    ...  ...  ...
    Be thou no enemy to thyself; my wealth
    Shall weigh his titles down, and make you equals.

(III, ii)

So he plans to marry her to a nobleman and thus triumph over the aristocracy:
And therefore, I'll not have a chambermaid
That tie her shoes, or meaner office
But such whose fathers were right worshipfull.
'Tis a rich man's pride; there having ever been
More than a feud, a strange antipathy
Between us and true gentry.

(II, 1)

Thus Massinger's two plays witness to the vital social and
economic conflicts of the day.

Thus, the contemporary writers of comedy have, in their
own way, reflected various aspects of the times in their plays.
However successful these playwrights have been in their attempt
to hold a mirror to the times, their picture of the contemporar:
life seems to fall short of a comprehensive whole, as it is
likely to be self-conscious, or restricted by other factors,
or coloured by romance.

It is to Jonson, then, that we have to turn in order to
have the image of "the very age and body of the time his form
and pressure". For, more than any of his contemporaries he
seemed to have had that ability of vigorous intellectual grasp
to hold the pageant of life steadily and the capacity for
detachment to reproduce the same in his plays with fidelity.
In his comedies we gain a vivid impression and a comprehensive
image of Elizabethan and Jacobean life.

In his earnest object to show an "image of the times",
Jonson pictures such outstanding phases of contemporary life
as the problem of dramatic art - its playwrights, players and
theatre-goers - the court life, the interrelationship of classe
the tendencies of the non-dramatic poetry then appearing and, above all, the character and significance of everyday life.

Jonson gives us a peep, as it were, into the theatrical world of his time in his Prefaces, Prologues, Inductions and throughout the plays themselves. He shows us what the contemporary stage was like. It was the time of rival companies and rival playhouses when writing for the stage was a means of livelihood. And competition was so keen that the pleasure of the audience was the first care of the playwrights. While propounding his theories of dramatic technique Jonson traces these aspects of the contemporary drama, pointing out its flagrant violation of realism and dramatic unities and romantic excesses. Besides, stage tricks such as acrobatics, juggling and conjuring were prevalent on the Elizabethan stage. Jonson gives a sample of these in the mountebank scene in Volpone (II, v).

51. The two leading companies were the Lord Chamberlain's company (1596-7) and the Lord Admiral's Company (1600). Other companies were the Earl of Worcester's Company (1604) the Duke of York's Company (1610) the first Lady Elizabeth's Company (1611) the children of the Revels' Company (1629). "In the Tudor period, in addition to the professional companies, the schools, the Inns of Court and the Universities had been important theatrical centres". (F.S. Boas, In Introduction to Stuart Drama, pp.11-12).

52. The leading playhouses were the Globe on the Bankside, the Blackfriars theatre on the north side of the Thames, the Fortune on the north-west of the City, the Curtain in Shoreditch, the Red Bull playhouse in Clerkenwell, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, the Hope on Bankside, and the Salisbury Court playhouse in Whitefriars.

Jonson lets us know the condition of the playwrights of the Elizabethan period. The average playwright was relatively an unimportant person. As the playwrights pandered to the demands of actors and audience without regard for the dignity of their calling, they could not command respect in society and the very profession of playmaking was considered to be disreputable. This is clearly brought out in the words of Ovid Senior who says:

What? shall I have my sonne a stager now? an enghle for players? a gull? a rooke? a shotclogge? to make suppers, and bee laught at? PUBLIVS, I will set thee on the funerall pile, first.

(\textit{Poetaster}, I, ii, 15-18)

Jonson tells us something about the players of the time in general. The players had a good capacity for wine and capons and they were full of jests and inclined to have flamboyant manners (\textit{Bartholomew Fair}, V, iii, 5-85). There were what were called the 'common players' who were looked down upon. Jonson shows this through the contemptuous words of Tucca who refers to them as

honest gent'manlike scoundrels, and suspected to ha' some wit, as well as your poets; both at drinking, and breaking of iests: and are companions for gallants.

(\textit{Poetaster}, III, iv, 152-55)

Jonson shows us what the theatre-going public of the time was like. The Elizabethan audience attended the theatre mostly as a fashion and to pass the time.\footnote{See Dover Wilson, \textit{Life in Shakespeare's England}, p.215.} Among the audience, apart
from the groundlings, were found such representative types as the curled, tobacco-smoking gallant who attended the play merely as a matter of fashion, (The Case is Altered, II, vii, 46-47) the man from the country who came to London "once in fine yeeres at a parliament time or so", (Poetaster, III, iii, 188-190) the swaggering captain who would see a play if it were "a good bawdie one" (The Staple of News, Induction, 11. 8-13). Jonson also reveals the audiences of the Elizabethan private theatres who "consisted mainly of courtiers, gentlemen of the Inns of Court, wits, and women of fashion, together with such hangers-on as gamblers, soldiers, prostitutes, and would-be gallants". He shows how particularly the "women of fashion" claimed to be the "persons of quality" and came to the theatre "to see, and to be seene", expecting every play to "be a merry one" (The Staple of News, 'The Induction', 11. 9-13). The Elizabethan audience also included such peculiar persons as came to see, who weares the new sute to day? whose clothes are best penn'd, what ever the part be? which _actor_ has the best legge and foote? what _king_ plays without cuffes? and his _queen_ without gloues? who rides post in stockings? and daunces in bootes?

(The Staple of News, 'The Induction', 11. 39-43)

The passage illustrates how fantastic the tastes of some of the audience had been. However, the chief offenders among the audience were the empty-witted fashionable gallant

Who (to be thought one of the judicious)
Sits with his armes thus wreath'd, his hat pull'd here,
Cryes meaw, and nods, then shakes his empty head,
Will shew more seueral motions in his face,
Then the new London, Rome, or Niniuheb

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And, (now and then) breaks a dry bisquet iest,

He steeps in his owne laughter.

(Every Man Out of His Humour, Grex, ll. 160-62)

Lastly Jonson presents in his plays the puritan opposition to the theatre of the times particularly through the typical puritan Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy who denounces the puppet play crying:

Downe with Dagon, Downe with Dagon; ... I wil remove Dagon there, I say, that Idol, that heathenish Idol, that remains (as I may say) a beame ... in the eye of the brethren; a very great beame, an exceeding great beame; such as are your Stage-players, himers, and Morrisse-dancers, who have walked hand in hand, in contempt of the Brethren, and the Cause; and beene borne out by instruments, of no meane countenance.

(Bartholomew Fair, V, v, 1-13)

Jonson reproduces the fashions and practices of the non-dramatic poetry of the time. Though Jonson was primarily interested in the drama, he was quite alive to the state and future of English non-dramatic poetry in those years that lay between Spenser and Milton. For, poetry in Jonson’s time had become a fashionable trick of the successful courtier. Jonson presents the amateur versifiers at court in the two coxcombs - Matthew and

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56. "From the erection of the theatres in 1576 to their suppression at the outbreak of the Civil War, the Puritan party waged an unceasing warfare against the stage". (Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare’s England, p.227).

57. Poets were engaged in "seeking less to please the public than to attract the notice of the Court ... or of some lord of fashion when poetry was fashionable". (G.M. Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts, p.51).
Fastidius Briske. Matthew boasts before Stephen:

I am melancholy my selfe divers times, Sir, and then
doe I no more but take pen, and paper presently, and
overflow you halfe a score, or a dozen of sonnets,
at a sitting.

(Every Man in His Humour, III, i, 90-93)

If the fit of melancholy fails to inspire to produce poetry,
the courtier must necessarily

hearken out a veine, and buy: provided you pay for
the silence, as for the worke. Then you may securely
call it your owne.

(Cynthia's Revels, III, i, 63-64)

This shows the extent to which courtiers of the day freely
indulged in plagiarism.

The contemporary court life is also well reflected. Jonson
says how the court was "a bountifull and brave spring; and
waterest all the noble plants of this island" in which

the whole Kingdome dresseth it selfe, and is
ambitious to use thee as her glasse.

(Cynthia's Revels, The Court, 11. 7-8)

None the less, he is not blind to the superficialities of the
court life. It was fashionable in the court to affect scholar-
ship, poetry and histrionic talent. There are many instances
in Jonson's plays where a courtier steals verses from some
obscure poet or scholar in order to win his lady's favour.

Conversation had become a matter of fashion at court. The con-
versation was well-larded with foreign phrases and affected an
interest in the public issues of the day. Jonson through Crites
regrets the waste of energy and brains of the courtiers in the
pursuit of "these outward and effeminate shades".
Touching the world of scholarship of the times, Jonson, while showing the great scholars, exposes the pseudo-scholars. Matthew in *Every Man in His Humour* is a typical pseudo-scholar of the day. In order to show off his scholarship, he always carries Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* in his hands. To him source-hunting is an end by itself. To Bobadill's question as to whose verse he read to him, Matthew readily bluffs:

This, Sir? a toy o' mine own, in my nonage: the infancy of my *Muses*!

(I, v, 72-73)

Clove and Orange in *Every Man Out of His Humour* are great pretenders to scholarship. At the arrival of Sogliardo and others Clove tells Orange:

*pr'y thee let's talke fustian a little and gull 'hem: make 'hem beleene we are great schollers.*

(III, iv, 7-8)

We can easily trace in Jonson's plays the seamy side of the glory and splendour of the Golden Age of the Renaissance. Jonson might be thought of as the Marlowe of low-life of Renaissance England. He paints the ludicrous underside of the great heroes of the past in the characters of his middle comedies. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, the world-conqueror, is never larger to Jonson than a Sejanus or a Volpone. Faustus simply shrinks in Jonson's hands to Subtle, Mephistophilis to Face, and Helen of Troy to Dol Common. The vast world of Tamburlaine or of Faustus is in Jonson's drama narrowed down to a bedchamber or to a London house during the plague or to Smithfield during Bartholomew Fair.
Besides holding the mirror up to the stage, the non-dramatic poetry, the court, the scholarship of the times and the spirit of the renaissance, Jonson gives a comprehensive picture of the daily life as he found it within as well as without the doors of London. As F.R. Leavis points out "Jonson was as robustly interested in men and manners and his own talk as in literature and the poetic art". Jonson closely observed the minutest things with zest and zeal and transcribed his objective observations into his plays with great fidelity. This does not necessarily mean that Jonson brings in details for their own sake or just to enable himself to practise his theory of offering "an image of the times". His artistic economy and brilliant dramatic talent would never allow him to do so. All the details he brings in invariably serve some artistic purpose or other. Sometimes they serve as a setting to interpret a particular character or to extenuate a foible and at other times to show the distinction between various characters.

Jonson represents the contemporary habits of daily life - eating, smoking, singing, reading, dressing, duelling and gambling. Kinds of food in Jonson's time were prescribed rather by fashion than by personal taste. The social aspirant of the day must necessarily learn to make strange sauces, to eat souchoues, macaroni, bo oli, fagioli, and ca iare.

(Cynthia's Revels, II, iii, 105-106)

Then, the fashionable dinner must needs be served in silver

dishes and eaten with elaborate nicety. For instance, the
doting Tallace admires the courtier's table manners:

0 fine courtier! ... how upright hee sits at the
table! how daintily he carves! how sweetly he
talkes, and tells newes of this lord, and of that
lady! how cleanely he wipes his spoone, at every
spoonfull of any whit-meat he eates, and what a
nest case of pick-tooths he carries about him, still!

(Every Man Out of His Humour, IV, 34-40)
The passage exquisitely sums up the dining manners of the
courtiers of the time.

The varieties of tobacco and the elaborate devices for
lighting which are found in Druger's shop show what a fashion
smoking had become. We are shown how Bobadill uses seven
pounds of tobacco in a week and discourses volubly on different
brands (II, v, 71-72). When Fastidius Briske wants to call on
Saviolina at the court he finds a pipe of tobacco a social asset.
He eagerly asks Cinedo:

Is my tobacco readie, boy?
This tobacco is not dryed, boy, or else the pipe's
defective.

(Every Man Out of His Humour, III, ix, 36-39)

The people of the time, evinced a great deal of interest
in reading. But the books, barring the serious scholars, one

59. "The habit of taking tobacco in long clay pipes was very
general by the time the Queen died". (G.M. Trevelyian,
English Social History, p.200).

60. "As the public today consumes newspapers ... so the
Elizabethan man in the street bought and read broadsides
and pamphlets that related sensational events, strange
wonders, the untimely ends of criminals, and the frailties
of human kind". (Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture
read were often a matter of fashion. Matthew visits Bobadill with an approved volume of *The Spanish Tragedy* and at the slightest provocation begins to read a few passages. Fungoso would like to "lie abed and reade the *Arcadia*", till his tailor finishes his suit. We find a great book-lover in Dauphine who enjoys his bachelor retirement and reading to such an extent that Truewit warns him saying:

You must leave to liue i'your chamber then a month together vp upon AMADIS de Gaule or Don QUIXOTE.

*(Epicoene, IV, i, 55-57)*

The Elizabethans took a keen interest in music — sacred and secular, vocal and instrumental. Jonson's plays abound in allusions to music, and songs.*62* In *Every Man Out of His Humour* a 'viol de gamba' hangs on the walls of Madame Saviochina's court apartments. When Fastidius Briske comes there to woo her, he takes the instrument down and plays upon it a soothing accompaniment to a tough conversation. When Deliro's wife is at odds with him, he steps into the street and returns with a band of musicians to play and restore her good humour. In *Cynthia's Revels* Amorphus, the would-be courtier, composes an ode upon his lady's glove and sets it to his "most affected instrument, the lyra" and says:

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Why, doe you not observe how excellently the dittie
is affected in euery place? that I doe not marrie a
word of short quantitie to a long note? nor an ascen-
ding sillable to a descending tone?

(Cynthia's Revels, IV, iii, 327-330)

This shows how at times even poetry followed the pattern of
music.

The Elizabethans were very fond of fashionable costumes.63
Portia's remarks upon one of her suitors hits off happily the
fashion of the day:

how oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet
in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in
Germany, and his behaviour every where.

(The Merchant of Venice, I, ii, 78-81)

The two gulls in Every Man in His Humour, Matthew and Stephen,
excellently illustrate this aspect. From them we learn that
the stiffened ruff was the most important fashion and that the
dress of a gentleman was considered incomplete if he did not
wear a rapier or a sword.

This leads us to the fact that the people were also fond
of fencing and duelling.64 There was a whole literature of
fencing and duelling. Every gentleman was expected to be well-
versed in the science of fencing. Bobadill claims to "have

63. "'Fashions from proud Italy' and France were always being
imitated ... costly trinkets of all sorts were worn by men
as much as by women". (G.M. Trevelyan, English Social
History, p.159).

64. "Clashing of swords was then daily music in every street".
(Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, p.128).
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absolute knowledge" and "very rare, and un-in-one-breath-utterable skill" in the art of fencing. Subtle makes a table with mathematical demonstrations relating to the art of quarrels. We find Matthew and Kastril learning lessons in fencing from Bobadill and Subtle respectively.

The Elizabethans were also given to gambling that was prevalent in England right from the Middle Ages. Jonson shows this wide-spread evil practice. In The Alchemist there are references to gambling houses such as 'the Dagger' and 'Madam Augusta's' and also to the well-known gamblers of the day like 'dead Holland' and 'living Isaac'. The play presents three gamblers Dapper, Surly and Kastril. Kastril is fascinated by the idea of having a 'familiar spirit' to have success assured at gambling.

Jonson gives as intimate a picture of the outdoor life as of the indoor. As we know from the contemporary writers like Dekker, the London streets were full of jostle and noise. Jonson represents this hubbub in lively detail. In The Silent Woman, Morose, the gentleman that loves no noise, lives in a street, "so narrow at both ends, that it will receive no coaches, nor carts, nor any of other common noises" (I, i, 167-169).

Managing to keep himself away from the usual disturbing cries


66. "In every street, carts and coaches make such a thundering as if the world ran upon wheels: .... Besides, hammers are beating in one place, tubs hooping in another, pots clinking in a third, water-tankards running at tيل in a fourth". (Dover Wilson, Life in Shakespeare's England, p.125).
of vendors he has been "upon various treaties with the fish wives and orange women" to make them not to cry near his house. Still he is harassed by the "chimney sweepers, bromaen, costermongers and brasiers" who will not so easily agree to silence. Besides, there were the boisterous street entertainers like

a Beare-ward ... with the dogs of some four parishes ... and a Fencer marching to his prize.

(I, i, 173-78)

Jonson lets us know some of the outdoor diversions of the time. Hunting, fowling, tennis, riding, betting on races and bowling were the prominent fashionable outdoor pastimes.67 Stephen studies the sciences of hawking and hunting which he says "are studied more than the Greek, or the Latin". To a question - "What should a man doe?", Clarimont answers giving the things wherein fashionable young men exercise themselves:

Harken after the next horse-race, or hunting-match; lay wagers, praise Pannya, or Pepper-corne, white-foote, Franklin; swear upon white-maynes partie.

(The Silent Woman, I, i, 35-37).

In Cynthia's Revels we learn of horse-riding and playing tennis. Mercury tells Cupid how Hedaon

courts ladies with how many great horse he hath rid that morning, ... he dares tell 'hem, how many shirts he has sweat at tennis that weeks, but wisely conceales so many dozen of bals hee is on the score.

(Cynthia's Revels, II, i, 63-69)

Then, the narrow, crowded streets were full of catchpenny

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entertainments taking place at the same time when people were rushing to the theatres to see plays. Trained animals such as monkeys, elephants, camels and especially bears were made use of on the Elizabethan stage and the names of the trainers of these animals were as widely known as the names of great actors and playwrights. The people took great interest in these shows. 

Waspe tells how

Yesterday i' the afternoone, we walk'd London, to shew the City ... and where hee (Cokes) spil'd a Parrat, or a Monkey, there hee was pitch'd, with all the littl(e) long-coats about him, male and female, no getting him away!

(Bartholomew Fair, I, iv, 107-116)

Excluding the theatre, the most elaborate entertainment for the Elizabethan people was the puppet-show or 'motion'. The motions could be seen at Fleet-bridge. The whole manner of presentation is set forth in Bartholomew Fair. The performance is announced by a banner. The rate of admission is on a sliding scale. Lanthorne tells Filcher:

And there come any Gentlesfolks, take two pence a piece.

(Bartholomew Fair, V, i, 21-22)

The puppets are kept in a basket and the showman manipulates them quite dexterously and also talks for them.

Jonson projects effectively the dominant issues - economic, social and moral - of the Jacobean world. The economic instability of the times resulted in the mushroom growth of monopolies,

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patents and projects. The nefarious activities of the projectors and monopolists had increased most alarmingly by the middle of the reign of James I. Jonson displays these activities in The Devil is An Ass (1616). He presents the contemporary projectors in Meercraft who projects various ways - "by suits, by marriages and by undertakings" - to enrich men and make them great. Jonson shows how the avaricious projector lures a series of greedy fools into his net through his promises of patents.

Far-reaching social changes came about in the wake of the economic upheaval. With the rise of the gentry, people grew enamoured of being considered gentlemen in society. Stubbes tells us how every man was

crying with open mouth, I am a gentleman, I am worshipful, I am Honorable, I am Noble.  
Jonson's plays abound in instances of this craze for gentry. The word 'gentleman' recurs throughout Every Man in His Humour. Bobadill constantly swears: "as I am a gentleman". However, it is in Sogliardo that Jonson presents the most typical aspirant to gentlemanship. Sogliardo is so enamoured of the name of 'gentleman' that "he will have it, though he buys it". He takes "a most gentleman-like resolution"

I have land and money, my friends left me well, and I will be a Gentleman, whatsoever it cost me.  
(Every Man Out of His Humour, I, ii, 2-3).

69. See L.C. Knights, Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson, p.211.
The age Jonson lived in was essentially superstitious. The people believed in such pseudo-sciences as alchemy, astrology, palmistry, witchcraft and necromancy. Jonson reproduces this crudely superstitious character of his age. Subtle and Face represent the typical alchemists of the times. Sir Epicure Mammon has such an unshaken faith in alchemy that he fondly proclaims:

This night, I'll change
All, that is mettall, in my house, to gold.

(The Alchemist, II, 1, 29-30).

Dapper would have 'a familiar' to help him win cups at horse-races and make him a successful gambler. Drugger would have ill-days crossed out of his almanack and also have magic signs to attract customers to his shop. Dame Pliant would be told of her fortune. The puritans, Ananias and Tribulation, pay a handsome amount of money to procure 'the philosopher's stone' which is to perform wonders.

People in Jonson's time were greatly fascinated by the published pamphlets of all sorts of news least bothering themselves whether or not the news was authentic. This contemporary craze for current news is clearly brought out by Jonson in The Staple of News. Thomas, the barber, who has a pretty talent in spreading gossip, tells Pennyboy Junior of a newly granted Staple of News:

Where all the news of all sorts shall be brought,
And there be examin'd, and then registered,
And so be issu'd under the Seal of the Office,
As Staple News; no other news be current.

(I, 11, 33-36)
And we find at the Staple Registrar and clerks examining and filling all sorts of news -

Authentical, and Apocryphall, ... Barbers newes ... Taylors Newes, Porters, and watermens newes ... vacation newes, Termes-newes, and Christmas-newes ... Reformed newes, Protestant newes, and Pontificall newes.

(I, v, 8-15)

Thus, Jonson comprehends in his characteristic 'image of the times' most of the findings of all contemporary exploration, most of the forms of life to be found in Elizabethan and Jacobean London, and reflects their background, the people's habits and processes, their daily life, particularly the eccentricities and the peculiarities of their gesture and speech. Apart from the idealists and saintly figures, Jonson has ranged over the whole of the society from courtier to water-carrier and has set vividly before us a motley company of its types and has faithfully mirrored the variety of its fashions.

However full is this picture of life that Jonson presents, it has been often felt that Jonson's world, being exaggerated, is far removed from the world of our daily existence. J.C. Grierson, for instance, complains that Jonson "flew at comparatively small game" and in all his plays wasted his powers "on pigmies whom at the distance of three centuries we can hardly descry". But the point is that, though the new comic world Jonson creates, particularly in his masterpieces, is not precisely our world, it is, none the less, closely related to

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our reality without being the same. In a similar manner "Jonson's world, while being exaggerated, is exaggerated in proper proportions, so that we see a magnified version of part of our daily experience, and we are startled by this new vision of the commonplace".  

This great phenomenon is accomplished by Jonson technically by 'stilisation' of and 'concentration' on the chosen medium. In full realisation of what he was doing, Jonson accepted a strict dramatic discipline and thereby achieved a trenchancy of comic language and a control of dramatic form. This artistic discipline results in the 'simplification' which "consists largely in reduction of detail ... This stripping is essential to the art, to which is also essential a flat distortion in the drawing.... The 'world' of Jonson is sufficiently large; it is a world of poetic imagination.... He did not get the third dimension, but he was not trying to get it".  

Also, Jonson's 'image of the times', like that of the other Jacobean dramatists, is supposed to run the 'risk' that "the colours of what was once modern may fade in a few years, so that in the end nothing is left but an antiquarian interest". Jonson's plays certainly escape this fate by virtue of their universality of appeal which has made them permanently available.  

73. T.S. Eliot, Elizabethan Dramatists, p.81.  
to us. Jonson confronts the principal aspects and developments of the time, we must bear in mind, only with the assurance of sharing with his audience and readers 'an inherited code of human experience'. As Salingar points out, "though Jonson's plays, more than their contemporaries, reshape it in 'the light of a particular vision', the code was common as well as personal. Writing such as his - 'not because of what it describes, but because of what it embodies' - provides the best means of understanding the human problems of its time; and hence, a means of understanding our own". 75 Plays like Volpone and The Alchemist, for instance, will continue to be contemporary so long as greed and lust remain human vices. They are particularly relevant to the present age in which life has been turned into something resembling a 'usurer's paradise'. The Alchemist "is fundamentally concerned with the nature of man; alchemy is only its subject matter. It never will lose meaning, even in a golden atomic age, as long as men ludicrously try to get something for nothing". 76 Also, for commercial purposes modern techniques of advertisement indecorously exploit classical myths, 77 just as Volpone calls on the Greek pantheon to seduce a reluctant wife. Meercraft's device, in

77. "The great god Mercury has become the name of an automobile. Adonis and Atlas have degenerated into trade-names. Venus ... is now used to sell brassieres; and Medusa (with more appropriateness) to sell cement". (Edward B. Partridge, The Broken Compass, pp.236-37).
The Devil is an Ass, of offering his dupe, Fitzdottrel, a choice of fantastic get-rich-quick schemes is also almost completely intelligible in our own time, since it is the exact equivalent of persuading modern investors to put their money into dud companies or non-existent gold-mines. Again, as in Jonson’s world in our own times too religion is worldly and business hypocritical. Then, we still have with us our Bobadills and Busys, our Matthews and Stephens, our Fungosos and Sogliardos, our Mannions and Voltores, our Dappers and Druggers and even our Corvinos and Corbaccios. Besides, we still have our quacks and quackeries, our tricksters and gulls. Jonson can yet help us in taking a knowing laugh.

No doubt, some topical concerns of the early seventeenth century such as the debate between an orthodox catholicism and an evolving protestantism and some staple trends of the Jacobean society like the mushroom growth of monopolies, patents and projects, the rising capitalism and puritanism and particularly the prevalence of superstitious beliefs seemed less than vital issues to the centuries that followed.

Yet, from the perspective of the twentieth century we realise that what the Jacobians discussed is what we are discussing still. Their subjects are ours and they remain a vital voice even in our own lives today. On various levels - philosophical, psychological, political, social and religious - the Jacobians touched upon such abiding issues as man in the universe, why man does what he does, orthodoxy versus liberalism and
relativism, social order versus individual need, that we still must discuss, still must argue out. It is in this sense the Jacobean and Caroline dramatists are modern. They are relevant to our present condition and speak to the predicament we are involved in today. Hence, it is a tribute to Jonson's keen mind and sound judgement that his scale of values is not unacceptable today. Just as Shakespeare is 'timeless and universal', so, perhaps, Jonson can be. Jonson's plays, like all powerful dramatic symbols, remain alive or gain new life once they are experienced aesthetically.