The function of the English drama was traditionally didactic. Drama, after all, was brought into being only because it seemed, more than any other existing genre, an effective method of preaching to the people. The "ostensible purpose of dramatic production remained didactic to the end of the Medieval drama. Now the end of the Medieval drama almost coincided with the culmination of the Renaissance drama".1

The authors of the allegorical plays dedicate their works to the exaltation of virtue and the suppression of vice. Ulpian Fulwel, for example, exclaims in the preface to his play, Like Wil to Like (1568), that the reader may see therein, as in a glass,

The advancement of virtue, of the vice the decay: To what ruin ruffians and roisters are brought.2

Tancred and Gismunda is prefaced by a similar statement:

.... herein they all agree, commending virtue, detesting vice, and lively deciphering their overthrow that suppress not their unruly affections.3

Edwards introduces his play Demon and Pythias with a didactic statement:

References:
1. David Klein, Literary Criticism from the Elizabethan Dramatists, p.3.
In comedies the greatest skill is this, rightly to teach
All things to the quick ....

The moral function of art, specially of the comic art, is
inherent in all Renaissance critical doctrine. The entire
fabric of Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* is strewn with didacti-
cism. Spenser, in his discussion of poetic composition, allows
a high place for the didactic value of poetry. Nashe states
that poetry is

a more hidden & divine kinde of Philosophy, enwrapped
in blind Fables and darke stories, wherein the
principles of more excellent Arts and morall precepts
of manners, illustrated with diverse examples of
other Kingdome and Countries, are contained.

Then, Gascoigne in *Certayme Notes of Instruction concerning the
Making of Verse or Ryme in English*, Webbe in *A Discourse of
Englishe Poetrie*, and Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*,
stress the conventional theory that poetry should necessarily

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4. *The Dramatic Writings of Richard Edwards, Thomas Norton, and


Queene, Works*, eds. E.A. Greenlaw, C.G. Osgood, and F.M.


pp.250-251.

profit mankind.

The main forces tending to thrust the Elizabethan dramatist towards the didactic were not only the allegorical tendencies during the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods and the critical pronouncements of the Renaissance literary men, mentioned above, but also the Puritan attacks on the theatre. From the early Christian period to the Renaissance, a hostile attitude toward plays and players continued through the Church. And by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the denunciation reached a climax. The theatre was said to be a school of abuse and bawdry, the veritable nest of the devil. Plays were severely attacked on the ground that they taught and encouraged vice and sedition. They were also held responsible for spreading plagues and for robberies, seduction and murders. In a word, the plays were said to be the source of all evil.

Consequent on all these forces and influences, dramatist after dramatist insists that his drama, whether comedy or tragedy, is an indictment of vice and an attempt to improve society. Chapman, for instance, points out that

material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary (are the) soul, limbs, and limits of an authentical tragedy.12


Elbert M.S. Thompson, The Controversy between the Puritans and the Stage (Yale Studies in English, No.20).

Similarly Heywood pleads that comedies
discourse of Pantaloones, Vsurers that have vnthrifty
sonnes, which both the fathers and sonnes may behold
to their instruction; sometimes of Courtesans, to
dimulge their subtelties and snares, in which yong men
may be intangled, shewing them the meanes to auctoyd them.13

Massinger, defending comedy on moral grounds, says how plays

Decipher to the life what honours wait
On good and glorious actions, and the shame
That treads upon the heels of vice.14

But the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were also
subjected to a strong antidote for a strict moral theory.
Their plays had to be brought on the boards, and the Elizabethan
audience were very vehement in their likes and dislikes. They,
in turn, liked romantic improbability, disguises, battles, sword
play, broad farce and ribald jokes, quick wit-battles, and even
demanded blood, revenge and ghosts on the stage. Although the
dramatists were by no means pleased by the demands of the
audience, in their professional interest they had to reckon
with them. To give an example, in Chapman's Revenge of Bussy
D'Ambois, the Guise states the ideal end of tragedy:

I would have these things
Brought upon stages, to let mighty misers
See all their grave and serious miseries play'd
As once they were in Athens and old Rome.

(I, i, 319-322)

But Clerimont quickly reminds the Guise of the demands of the
audience:

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13. An Apology for Actors, Sig. F4r.
14. Plaut., ed. William Gifford and Francis Cunningham, I, i,
May, we must now having nothing brought on stages
But puppetry, and pied ridiculous antics:
Men thither come to laugh, and feed foot-fat,
Check at all goodness there.

(I, i, 323-326)

The Elizabethan dramatists could, however, read Horace's famous couplet,

aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae
aut simul et inaudia et idonea dicere vitae

(Ars Poetica, ll. 333-334)

and the Renaissance commentaries on it, which gave them the right to include material in their works for didactic as well as aesthetic purposes.

The Renaissance critical theory never forgot the injunction of Horace, which decreed that the poet was to provide moral instruction in a pleasing manner. Although Sidney considered the business of comedy to be a presentation of the common errors of life in a ridiculous and scornful manner, he allowed a place to laughter coupled with delight.15 Nash is only echoing the conventional thought of his age when he says:

In playes, all coosonages, all cunning drifts ouer gnylde with outward holinessse .... are most liuely anatomiz'd.16

Thus, the dramatists are to teach, but they are also to delight, since whatever they may have to say of profit will be more palatable, if it is turned out in a fictional guise - from which

an audience can derive pleasure.

The Horatian critical dictum which holds it to be the poet's duty to instruct and to entertain at one and the same time is evident in the theory and practice of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Marlowe shows himself characteristically at the meeting point of Mediaeval and Renaissance values. In his tragedies he shows how inordinate aspiration leads perversely to triviality. As Professor the Reverend W. Moelwyn Merchant rightly points out, "Marlowe is never more in accord with the orthodoxy of his intellectual origins than when he explores the patterns of sin and punishment in the cosmic order and to this pattern the plays all return at their conclusion." 17

Shakespeare's plays, it is true, do not formulate a judgment. Nevertheless a judgment is implicit. Although his comedies are rather concerned with ideals, with wooing and wedding than with day-to-day affairs of London life, Shakespeare seeks to affirm in them a generous, true and ordered mode of existence. We respond to their harmony, integrity, humour and beauty, and in thus responding we affirm ourselves. "In such an affirmation", as J.R. Brown points out, "there is a judgment upon life, a judgment which is only implicit but which may receive a wider hearing than the reproofs of a satirist or the precepts of a moralist. To such plays we may return again and again with profit and delight". 18

Heywood's comedies and tragedies easily lend themselves to moral and aesthetic interpretation. Dekker's plays give evidence of being modelled on moral and didactic theories. When Massinger in The City Madam ridicules the vain efforts of the ladies of Sir John Frugal's family to ape the style of the gentry "he is at one and the same time, setting before us an amusing piece of satiric portraiture, and making a perfectly serious social and moral criticism". However, it is to Jonson that we have to turn not only for a more comprehensive treatment of the didactic theory but also to find unity of didactic theory and practice in a greater measure.

That Jonson was not content with his early attempts to combine didactic and comic elements is evident from the change of his dramatic technique in every one of his first five comedies. From the composition of The Case is Altered (1597) to the completion of Volpone (1606) Jonson's comedies, we may say, are experimental. In no single comedy before Volpone is Jonson able to achieve his object of the fusion of the didactic and the comic. Either the satiric and didactic material is overshadowed by the Comic as in The Case is Altered, or the didactic material overshadows and almost obscures the comic material as in Every Man Out of His Humour.

Of Jonson's early plays only A Tale of a Tub and The Case is Altered are extant. A Tale of a Tub, unacknowledged by Jonson,

was written without any didactic or satiric content. It is in *The Case is Altered* that Jonson made an effort to divert his comedy towards didactic ends. Nevertheless, it is primarily a romantic comedy and the didactic content is quite subsidiary. The exposure of the follies of the gallants, Onion and Juniper, is, no doubt, laughable but it lacks any great didactic value. If the satire is embedded in the boisterous exuberance in which the play is steeped, it is lost in light and funny conversation. Avarice, embodied in Jaques de Price is, no doubt, an excellent vice for moralistic treatment. But there is little stress on the social effects of his avarice. Moreover, most of the scenes in which the miser appears are more comic than didactic. On the whole, the atmosphere of the play lacks moral consciousness.

In *Every Man in His Humour* Jonson begins to combine a considerable amount of satire with his comedy. He attacks the false social values by which the fashionable and would-be-fashionable gallants regulate their conduct. Through Matthew, Stephen, and Bobadil he parodies the elaborate terminology associated with fencing (*I*, iii, 184-229; *II*, iii, 123-153).

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20. *A Tale of a Tub*, originally written in 1596-97, was revised and licensed only on May 7, 1633. It is when Jonson finally revised the comedy that he inserted satiric material. This is made clear from the allusions in the play to Inigo Jones.

21. It is not for nothing that Jonson discarded *The Case is Altered* altogether later. The seeds of his discard undoubtedly lay in his lack of enthusiasm for romantic comedy as a medium for didactic material.
hawk (I, i, 28-56), quarrelling (I, i, 86-110; III, ii, 107-115; iv, 145-159), he ridicules the poor literary taste of pretenders to fashion (I, iii, 66-70; 125-152; III, iv, 22-102). Thus the action of the play is designed to exhibit the fatuities, the follies, the obsessions, the pretensions, and the absurdities of the different characters. The more serious threats to society - the breakdown in communication between generations (Knowells) and between husband and wife (Kitelys) - are eventually dissipated through the timely intervention of Justice Clement. And though the play "concludes amid reconciliation, rejoicing, and communal festivities, there remains the realization that were it not for the fateful, ordering presence of Doctor Clement, the follies would have continued and developed into serious social problems".

However, at least half of the play is concerned with nonsatiric matter, and even the satire the play contains is light as most of the material on the follies of the gallants is comic. The oaths of Bobadill, the swordplay of Matthew and Bobadill (I, iii, 195-229), and the argument over the virtues and evils of tobacco (III, ii, 107-116) - all this is essentially a theatrical stuff, causing a great deal of amusement.

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23. See Elisabeth Woodbridge's chart of the amount of space devoted to humorous characters in Every Man in His Humour, which gives an estimate of the satiric material. (Studies in Jonson's Comedy, pp.51-53).
to the audience. Jonson, however, has given so much of
importance to wit and humour in *Every Man in His Humour* that
his didactic purpose is pushed to the background. This he may
well have realised, perhaps, to his great dissatisfaction.

The result is a radical change of technique in the imme-
diately following play, *Every Man Out of His Humour*. The
satiric and didactic material does no longer take a secondary
place in this play which is moralistic to the core. The moral
purpose is to make men "fit for fair societies" by giving them
"pills to purge" them of their shallowness and of their false
social values.

The didactic material is embodied in the main characters -
Fastidius Briske, Fungoso, and Sogliardo. Fastidius, who is an
adroit in the art of speaking always of his friendships with the
great, is purged of his folly when he is confronted with the
severe punishment of confinement in a debtors' prison. He then
cries "O, heaven". Fungoso, who is a blind imitator of
Fastidius, is finally cured of his delusions and resolves never
to imitate

any more gallants either in purse, or apparel, but as
shall become a gentleman, for good carriage, or so.

(V, ix, 3-5)

Sogliardo, who is prepared to buy the name of a gentleman, is
finally exposed as

A swine without a head, without brains, wit,
any thing, indeed, rampling to gentilitie.

(III, iv, 65-66)

and is snatched out of his folly.
It is now manifest that Jonson's primary purpose in the creation of these characters is didactic rather than dramatic. Their portrayal is expository rather than theatrical. The shallow characters talk of their follies or display them rather than enact them. On the whole, the play is overweighted by matter. Jonson's dramatic sense is almost overshadowed by his intense desire to include didactic satire in the play.

In Cynthi.a's Revels again the didactic element overpowers the comic purpose. The play is at once a document of Jonson's intellectual idealism and a proof of his thoroughgoing scorn for the rampant follies of the court life. The "purpose" of the play is

   to correct,  
   And punish, with our laughter, this nights sport  
   Which our court-Pors so heartily intend:  
   And by that worthy scorne, to make them know  
   How farre beneath the dignitie of man  
   Their serious, and most practis'd actions are.

(V, i, 17-22)

To execute his purpose Jonson again changes his dramatic technique, choosing a mythical framework thereby representing the conflict between good and evil. Flawless Cynthia, virtuous Arete and Crites, the champion of wisdom and virtue - all Jonson's representatives of moral excellence - embody good. The corrupt, shallow, vain and silly courtiers - Amorphus, Anaides, Hedon and Asotus - and their ladies - Argurion, Philautia, Phantaste.

\[24.\] Herford and Simpson think that Jonson got the idea of mythical framework from Aristophanes's The Birds and The Clouds (Ben Jonson, Vol. I, p.399). But nothing prevents them from considering that Jonson got the idea as well from Lyly's Endymion which he was certainly acquainted with.
and Moria - represent evil. Building masque-like scenes, played by the antithetical characters, Jonson contrasts the good and bad elements in court society. Crites and Arete serve as foils to the false courtiers as well as to their ladies who talk of nothing more serious than their clothes, cosmetics and pages.

Jonson succeeds exceedingly well in his endeavour

to inflict just paines
On their prodigious follies ...

(V, I, 10-11)

The courtiers and their ladies are at last rid of their follies and are summoned to dry their

weeping eyes,
And to the well of knowledge haste;
Where purged of your maladies,
You may of sweeter waters taste:
And, with refined voice, report
The grace of CYNTHIA, and her court.

('Palinode', 11. 35-40)

All the persons who have bathed in the fountain of self-love find, in the end, restoration in the well of knowledge.

In Poetaster Jonson bends the historical matter of the Augustan age into a stout framework for his didactic and comic purposes. As the title implies, "the play is primarily a

25. Poetaster is often dismissed merely as a document in the War of the Theatres. David Daiches, for instance, thinks that the play is "a vindication of Jonson's own position against his enemies". (A Critical History of English Literature, p.315). This is not quite true inasmuch as Jonson is really contrasting poetasters with poets. Once we ignore the stage quarrel we can appreciate the play as Jonson's attempt to combine philosophical material on good poets with satire on bad poets.
dramatic defense of poetry, a theatrical and effectively written 
'ars poetica'". The moral purpose is to vindicate the true poets and to expose poetasters. As in Cynthis's hevels, Jonson here balances good characters - Horace, Virgil and the Emperor - with bad ones - Crispinus and Demetrius - and includes sententious speeches in order to emphasize the moral.

The entire action of the play is arranged in such a fashion as to lead to the arraignment of the poetasters for having most ignoently, foolishly, and (more like your selues) maliciously, gone about to depraze, and calumniate the person and writings of QUINTVS HORACIVS FLACCVS, ... poet, and priest, to the Muses.

(V, iii, 224-28)

Crispinus is relieved of the 'Crudities' in his poetic diction by means of pills administered to him by Horace. Finally, the Poetaster and his helpmate are bound over by an "oath of good behaviour". Jonson ultimately shows how

"Vertue, without presumption, place may take 
"Abouve best Kings, whom onely she should make.

(V, ii, 26-27)

But the serious substance of the play is interspersed with a great deal of comic element. By now Jonson seems to have realized the necessity for more comic material. Hence the inclusion of burlesque, farce, parody and dramatic enactments of follies in this comedy. These comic and theatrical devices manifest themselves mostly around Captain Tucca, Crispinus,

Albius, Chloe and Lupus. Several of the comic scenes are adroitly managed with extreme cleverness and vivacity. Particularly Chloe's entertaining of the poets and the scene in which an honest citizen's ambitious wife is eager for the fashions of the court are very amusing. But the most amusing character in the comedy is Tucca - a special type of the military bully distinct both from Bobadill and Falstaff. Also, the trial scene is quite funny as Crispinus with difficulty regurgitates words like "oblatrant", "furibund" and "prorumped".

It is in Volpone that Jonson demonstrated his didactic and comic techniques in their maturity. The experimental devices of the previous 'comical satires' are here eschewed. There is no chorus, Asper or Crites here, to explain the didactic function. The satire is implicit. The morality is pervasive but the moral accent is never distinctly or separately heard. It only qualifies the value of every note.

Jonson's moral purpose in Volpone is

to informe yong-men to all good disciplines,
inflame grown-men to all great vertues, keepe old-men in their best and supreme state.

(Dedication, ii. 24-26)

With his earnest purpose "to informe men in the best reason of living", Jonson builds the play on the power of wealth and its repercussions. Almost every scene is so designed as to exhibit the repurcussions of wealth, the insolence which it breeds and the infamies which are committed for excessive love of it. In short, Volpone is a powerful picture of moral depravity of the age.
Volpone is the embodiment of lust for sensual pleasures. Wealth is his instrument. The legacy hunters — Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino, the birds of prey — are motivated entirely by greed. Blinded by inordinate avarice for wealth, Corvino condescends to procure his own innocent wife, Corbaccio disinherits his own son by declaring him to be a bastard and Voltore perjures himself twice in the open court. "Society may depend upon its Moscas to outwit its Corbaccios, its Voltores, and its Corvinos, but it can only wait for the Moscas and the Volpones to betray themselves". The dénouement is brought about through Mosca’s own greed. Volpone, Mosca and the three legacy hunters are duly punished. Celia who is resistant to vice and Bonario who rescues Celia are saved. Though for the time being these two virtuous characters suffer, ultimately they are rewarded and vice is wors ted. The play closes on a didactic note:

Let all, that see these vices thus rewarded,  
Take heart, and love to study them. Mischiefs feed  
Like beasts, till they be fat, and then they bleed.

\[ (V, \text{xii, 149-151}) \]

Volpone provides as much delight as profit. Nevertheless, it is often said to be too forbidding a play to provide any amusement. "If Jonson ever sports here", we are told, "it is in the sombre and lurid fashion of his own 'sporting Kyd'.... The air is heavy and fetid with moral disease".28 "The satirical

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intensity", says Gregory Smith, "rarely, if ever, permits that laughter at vice". We cannot possibly fall in line with these views. Because, we know that Jonson meant Volpone to be a merry comedy. The last lines of his Prologue announce his goal:

All gall, and compresse, from his inke he drayneth,  
Onely, a little salt remayneth;  
Wherewith, he'll rub your cheeks, til (red with laughter)  
They shall looke fresh, a weeke after.  
(11. 33-36)

And there is every reason to suppose that Dryden would have included Volpone when he wrote: "To make man appear pleasantly ridiculous on the stage was his talent ... That Ben Jonson's plays were pleasant, he must want reason who denies".

Volpone is not, in any case, a too forbidding play. It does provide plenty of fun, mirth and innocent laughter. The play bubbles over with what may be called sardonic humour. Almost every scene is larded with dramatic poetry that is constantly imaginative, comic, and exciting. The comic phase of Volpone has not received the due attention because laughter is so integral a part of the terrible portrayal of greed that the reader is likely to overlook the variety of theatrical and ironic laughter. Also, the comic material of Volpone is such that it requires visual representation on the stage for its fullest expression and appeal.

The play is replete with a variety of comic scenes. Apart from the comic treatment of the gulls, "the gigs of Nano, Castrone and Androgyne, the mountebank scenes, and the action of Sir Politique and Lady Would-be consume some 900 lines out of 2400, or almost 38% of the first four acts." The scenes in which the legacy hunters appear to make their respective offerings to the magnífico and discover how bad his health is, are full of good theatrical stuff. Voltores pompous affability and self-complacent credulity render his folly laughable. Assured by Mosca that he is sole heir to Volpone's property, he bursts out in childish glee:

Happy, happy, me!
By what good chance, sweet MOSCA? M O S. Your desert, Sir; I know no second cause. V O L T. Thy modestie is loth to know it; well, we shall requite it.

(I, iii, 47-49)

Corbaccio is very funny. Reassured by Mosca of his succession to Volpone's riches, he croaks his joy at the imminence of Volpone's death and his prospective wealth. We cannot but laugh when such an old creature says:

I may ha' my youth restor'd to me, why not?

(I, iv, 129)

Next comes the "witty merchant" Corvino. It is amusing to watch Mosca overcome Corvino's prudence and spur him into shouting stupid insults into Volpone's ear.

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Then, the fantastic creatures - Nano, Androgyno and Castrone, whom Volpone maintains for his amusement make a good deal of comic appeal. The mountebank scene in which Volpone with "a starched beard" and "an old tilt-feather" sells patent medicine is out and out comic. Above all, the voluptuous visions which Volpone paints before the eyes of the distracted Celia are a provocation to the senses. Then, the last scene in which Volpone falls down on the floor pretending that he is possessed by a devil under the delusion that he will surely, in this manner, win Volpone's favour, is quite hilarious. All this suggests that the effect of the play is far from that of tragic foreboding.

However, Volpone marks a crucial phase of Jonson's development as a comic dramatist. The success of Volpone seems to have alleviated Jonson's bitterness over the failure of Sathanus and the three unsuccessful attempts to bring about a harmonious fusion of 'profit and delight'. Naturally his mood is relaxed. Besides, as his powers of realistic depiction have come into full play, his loudly proclaimed moral purposes are subdued. He now seems to concur with Shakespeare and Donne that good and evil, in this world, are matters of opinion. So to Jonson, mankind is subdivided, it now seems, not into good and bad men but into rogues and fools. Consequently, he seems to feel that his role as a comic playwright is not to judge but to observe. Therefore we may say with Harry Levin that after Volpone "Jonson's genius underwent a metempsychosis of its own
and, having died with a stern satirist, was reborn in a genial observer." 32

It is not surprising, therefore, if Jonson soon reverts to the light-hearted gaiety of *Every Man in His Humour* in *Epicoene*. 33 The play is "the most genial of the works of Jonson, the freak of a happy mood, written with a lighter pen and looser spirit, allowing his theme to develop of its own motion". 34 A different kind of comedy from the preceding plays, *Epicoene* flashes with an intense lustre.

The plot devices of the play are in tune with Jonson's assertions in the prologue. The plot follows with a wonderful union of the inevitable and the unforeseen. Jonson here presents "a man who is no man who marries a woman who is no woman". 35 The play grows more and more amusing as we pass from Act to Act. The high comedy of the collegiate ladies, the low comedy of the captain and Mrs. Otter, the braggart knights and the Latinest barber are all masterly strokes of comic genius. Such a play naturally stirs genial mirth in an ever increasing degree. The

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33. Also, *Epicoene* resembles *Every Man in His Humour* in that Dauphine, Clarimont and True-Wit, though more polished and sophisticated, are gallants of the same type as Knowell and Wellbred; Daw and La-Foole are improved versions of Stephen and Matthew and Captain and Mrs. Otter play another variation on the theme of marital warfare which in different ways Kitley and Mrs. Kitley, and Cob and Mrs. Cob represented.


manner and the conversation particularly of the young men - Clerimont, Dauphine and Truewit - are more entertaining than it is common with Jonson. Hence, it is not hyperbolical to say that "Epicoene will keep the reader or the spectator for whole scenes together in an inward riot or an open passion of subdued or unexpressed laughter".36

However, it is difficult to agree with Swinburne that "in Epicoene we have pure farce without a trace of moral tone".37 The moral tone of Epicoene is, no doubt, looser and more ambiguous than that of any other of his comedies, but Jonson has certainly not abandoned his moral purpose. Below the farcical surface action of the play can be found the serious themes of courtly affectation, unnatural sexuality and pretence to authority and literary achievement. There is abundant satire against the manners and affectations of the day. The fool, Sir John Daw, aspiring to be taken for a gentleman of the town, is a typical fool of fashion of the day.

In Epicoene we have a long attack on women. The collegiate ladies with their matchless mixture of pretension and profligacy hypocrisy and pedantry are made the butt of ridicule. Also, the vices of women in general are denounced when Truewit elaborates and particularizes on all classes and types of women:

0, a woman is, then, like a delicate garden; nor, is there one kind of it: she may varie, every hour; take often counsell of her glasse, and choose the best. If she have good eares, shew 'hem; good haire, lay it out; good legs, weare short cloathes; a good hand, discover it often; practise any art, to mend breath, cleanse teeth, repaire eye-browes, paint, and profess it.

(I, 1, 104-11)

Jonson, in this manner, "blazes away at the targets set up by countless misogynistic writers from classical times onwards: the lustfulness of women, their extravagance, their passion for clothes, their obsession with their own appearance, their desire to dominate men, and especially to tyrannise over their husbands, their unfaithfulness and deceit, and above all, of course, their incessant chattering and noise". 38

The conclusion of the play furnishes no punishments. Jonson seems to suffer his fools rather easily by allowing their pretensions to social, sexual, and literary achievement to go too largely unpunished. He now chooses the indirect path to satire - "the mock encomium and the paradoxical action of self-exposing folly". 39 Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of paradox is Jonson's mock celebration of folly. The gulls revel in absurdity and the wittier and more articulate characters praise folly in a way that ironically undercuts its glories.

The Alchemist is built on the double theme of lust and greed. The profession of alchemy at once notorious and obscure with its

38. J.B. Bamforth, Ben Jonson, p.94.
mountebank practices and its mystic pretensions, the most picturesque of social pestilences, was a matter best fitted to furnish forth the cosmos of Jonsonian typical comedy. The purpose of the play is the shaming of a variety of gulls victimized by the charlatan philosophy of the day, thereby hoping to "better men". The confederate swindlers, Subtle, Face and Dol Common bait and dupe Dapper, Dragger and Sir Epicure Mammon. The mere expectation of plentiful gold and the very sight of a lady enraptures Sir Epicure. Dapper and Dragger are lured by the prospects of easy money. Tribulation and Ananias, the hypocritical puritans, are overjoyed at the prospect of possessing gold. But, by dazzling their victims with a show of infinite riches and by exploiting their greed, the three partners cheat the gulls of their money. Jonson thus shows how the desire to become suddenly rich brings people into the sharper's clutches. While exposing a contemporary phase of imposture and its corresponding credulity Jonson, in The Alchemist, paints a picture which remains true to the permanent facts of human roguery and weakness.

Though soaked in satire, The Alchemist is not without its comic purpose. Just as the satiric is ingeniously woven into the purely comic world of Epicoene, the comic is adroitly introduced into the satiric world of The Alchemist, testifying to the fact that

When the wholesome remedies are sweet,
... in their working, gains, and profit meet,

(The Alchemist, 'Prologue', ll. 15-16)
In this essentially artistic play, the comic is ingrained in the very ingenuity of the plot, the liveliness of the action and the delightful delineation of manners. The satire unfailingly flavours the fun without destroying it. Laughter and delight are wrought into the composition of Dol, Face and Subtle, but the satiric, ironic quality is also there. They are shown on more than one level, as rogues, as insects or animals, and as higher beings, that they and others think they are. The simultaneous existence of multiple levels "helps create some of the humour and much of the irony which gather about a whore who thinks of herself as a 'republique', a quack who will 'thunder' a man in pieces, and a pander who wears a uniform and calls himself 'Captaine'". Hence it is as difficult to isolate the comic and the didactic in these characters as in that of the wife of Bath or in that of the boisterous rogues in The Beggar's Opera. Thus The Alchemist yields a world of profit and delight.

In The Devil is an Ass, after a gap of nine years, Jonson adopts the old devil lore for his didactic and comic purposes. The play is an attempt to heal the social and psychological evils attendant on a belief in witchcraft. Jonson's satirical exposure of the simulation of being possessed unequivocally lends itself to reformatory purposes, weakening the belief of the audience in supernatural occurrences. Jonson ultimately

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40. Edward B. Partridge, The Broken Compass, p.120.
succeeds in bringing about a realization that every knave is not to be credited with supernatural powers.

The ridicule and farce with which the fake possession is infested would certainly act as a corrective to any court and as an eye-opener to any lawyer like Ethersièe in the play who is inclined to credit such farfetched evidence. The play built on the vices of the citizens of London concludes conveying a moral lesson to all of them:

It is not manly to take joy, or pride
In humane errors (wee doe all ill things,
They doe 'hem worst that loue 'hem and dwell there,
Till the plague comes) The few that have the seeds
Of goodnesse left, will sooner make their way
To a true life, by shame, then punishment.

(V, viii, 169-174)

Jonson makes use of the old devil-lore to achieve comic effects also.\(^{41}\) The witches embodying Jonson's allegory serve well to heighten the pictorial effect of the play. Besides, the comedy is full of humour. Particularly the character of Fitzdottrel, provokes laughter throughout. Though perfectly gulled he refuses to believe that he has been so. On the other hand he glories in his credulity:

Let me alone, I would enjoy my selfe,
And be the Duke o' Drown'd-Land, you ha' made me.

(IV, vii, 82-83)

\(^{41}\) Jonson made considerable use of devil-lore in his masques particularly in *The Masque of Queens*, drawn from the Classical and Mediaeval periods as well as from the supernatural occurrences of his own day.
Furthermore, Meercraft, with his fantastic schemes for making twelve thousand pounds by a new method of dressing dogskins, twenty thousand by a new system of bottling ale, and an untold sum of money by making wine of raisins and another by serving the whole state with toothpicks, rouses laughter profusely. Above all, Pug provides a lot of entertainment from his entrance to earth to his exit with his prayers and pleadings in his state of affliction:

0, call me home again, deare Chiefe, and put me
To yoaking foxes, milking of Hee-goates,
Pounding of water in a morter, lauing
The sea dry with a nut-shell, gathering all
The leaues are faile this Autumn, drawing farts
Out of dead bodies, making ropes of sand,
Catching the windes together in a net,
Mustering of ants, and numbring atomes; all
That hell, and you thought exquisite torments, rather
Then stay me here, a thought more:

(V, 11, 1-10)

As Pug is thus imploring his master to relieve him from the agony of earth and take him back to "home again" the audience laugh irresistibly.

The didactic purpose of The Staple of News is to present at once the use and abuse of money. It is not as though Jonson had a contempt for money. He had contempt only for its blind worshippers. As an intellectual he believed in the right use of money and he tries to teach this to an unheeding age - the

... guilty race of men, that dare to stand
No breath of truth:

(V, vi, 3-4)
The main subject of the play is an allegory upon the use and abuse of wealth in which three Pennyboys serve and worship Lady Pecunia Do-all, who is the personification of wealth as a motive force in human affairs. The names of the characters themselves indicate the didactic foundation of the play. If Pennyboy Senior is a thoroughgoing spendthrift, Pennyboy Canter is out and out covetous and usurious. Pennyboy Junior, who acts as Jonson's surrogate, is a moderator. He preaches moderation and sometimes even goes to the extent of advocating a Stoic way of life. Through him Jonson proclaims the intended moral of the piece:

The use of things is all, and not the Store; Surfet, and fulnesse, have kill'd more than famine. The Sparrow, with his little plumage, flyes, While the proud Peacocke, over-charg'd with pennes, Is faine to swepe the ground, with his gowne traine, And load of feathers.

(V, vi, 26-31)

Furthermore, at the close of the play Jonson teaches all

The golden mean: the Prodigall how to liue, The sordid, and the covetous, how to dye: That with sound mind; this, safe frugality.

(V, vi, 64-66)

Thus the play ends with a variation of the traditional 'Plaudite' of comedy. The audience is asked not only for applause but to partake the newly-formed and reformed society. Jonson's ideal society, for a moment, is realised. Having learned to shun the extremities of self-indulgence and abnegation, the characters give promise of rational, temperate lives and decorous behaviour.
While there is a good deal of 'profit' from all sides of the play, we are far from being deprived of 'delight'. Jonson's Horatian promise is never forgotten. The moral allegory of the play is harmoniously combined in "a festive comedy written to celebrate life in general and the pre-Lenten carnival season in particular."42 The Staple of News, like Twelfth Night and the court masques, is a festive celebration.

Jonson sets the holiday-mood of the play from the outset. Mirth leads the Gossips on to the stage and announces her hope that the "Play will be a merry one!" (The Induction, 11. 13-14). As the play proper starts, we find Pennyboy Junior in a holiday mood. Being his twenty-first birthday day, it is a festive occasion. For a while he has a universal wish fulfillment. Then, we have a professional supporter of festivity in Lickfinger, the cook, whose vocation is to cater to the desires of festive celebrants. Because the season is carnival, there is much talk of good food - fish, poultry, custards, pies, relishes and sauces - in the play. The move to festivity reaches a climax when Pennyboy Senior declares a year and a day of Jubilee for Pecunia's Ladies.

Besides, dealing with the ridiculous office of the staple, the secondary plot of the play offers excellent fun. It


The play is closely tied to the season by a number of specific references to Shrovetide and Lent - Induction, 11. 11-12 and 11. 62-64; Intermean, II, 1. 63; III, ii, 83-84; V, v, 3"
delightfully depicts the mob's madness for published pamphlets of news with "no syllable of truth in them". We naturally laugh at such silly longing for false news. Perhaps, never before has such an admirable fun been made of the 'humours' of a newspaper office.

The purpose of The New Inn has been thoroughly mistaken. The theme of the play is not a romantic rhapsody, as has been thought of by some critics, but an ironic illustration of the disparity between appearance and reality. The central episodes of the play are the discourses on love and valour that Lovell delivers to Lady Frampul in the presence of the entire company. These episodes are generally interpreted as serious romantic exposition of Platonic love and Aristotelian valour. As Douglas Duncan has recently pointed out "though love and valour have been nominally romantic subjects, the treatment has been consistently either satiric or didactic". One can perceive that there is something absurd in Lovell's situation. While so solemnly delivering a highly Platonic discourse on disinterested and perfect love (III, ii, 91-112) he himself is consumed with passion for Lady Frampul. In other words, he is unable to act in accordance with the theory of love he propounds. Again delivering on the one side a highly articulate discourse on

43. See F.S. Boas, Introduction to Stuart Drama, p.127.
valour (IV, iv, 37-101) he coolly takes to his bed on the other-side, in an agony of unrequited love. Also the reactions of Lady Fampul are "ludicrously hyperbolical". The scenes thus show the inconsistency between appearance and reality.

The same is true of the characters themselves. As has already been indicated, Loveall appears to be in complete command of his faculties, but in reality he is not. Pru becomes sovereign of the festivities in the inn but in reality she is Lady Frampul's maid. The Host appears to be a professional innkeeper, but in reality he is not. The nurse appears to be an Irish beggar, but she is not. Frank appears to be a boy but in reality it is a girl. In this manner, nothing is what it appears to be.

However, having "meant to please" all Jonson has presented in this play

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   things fit,
   In all the numbers, both of sense, and wit,
    ('Epilogue', 5-6)
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The jovial host who

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    .... must ha' iouiall guests to drive my ploughs,
    And whistling boyes to bring my harvest home,
    (I, 1, 22-23)
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and whose philosophy of life is:

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    Be iouiall first, and drinke, and dance, and drinke.
    ... Be merry, and drinke Sherry;
    (I, ii, 14-29)
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is a source of great amusement to the audience throughout the play.
The comic purpose is further served by the low comedy supplied by Fly, Bat Burst, Sir Glorious Tipto and others. Particularly the vulgarities of Fly and Tipto who would

... rather choose to thirst: (for wine) and will thirst euer, Then leave that creame of nations, vn-cry'd vp.

(IV, 2, 25-26)

Keep the audience continually amused. Added to this, the quite useless intermezzo of Stuff, the tailor, and Pinnacia, his "richly habit'd" wife would entertain the audience well. Jonson has, thus, succeeded

To give the king, and Queene, and Court delight:

(Second 'Epilogue', l. 4)

The Magnetic Lady is the continuation and the conclusion of the series of Jonson's comedies. With love-intrigue as the central motive the play yields enough of entertainment. Placentia, the marriageable young niece of the magnetic lady, constituting the 'centre attractive' of the play, draws to her a diversity of guests of different 'humours'. The plan is delightfully carried out to the amusement of the audience.

Although thoroughly amusing, the play has its own didactic end. The purpose is to bring about the reconciliation of the individual humour to its original tenor as well as of the group to a reasonable and comfortable relationship. The avaricious characters - Sir Moth Interest, Mistress Polish, Mr. Bias, Mrs. Keepe, Mother Claire, Parson Palate, Doctor Rut, Tim Item, Silkworm, Practice - are attacked through their ridiculous follies - the fantastic tricks, the jealousies of rival suitors,
the plots and the counterplots of domestic factions, the opinionatedness of guardians and the crafts of the nurses. At last, after "the amends", all are reconciled to truth and peace is drawn on

This new discovery, which endeth all
In reconcilement.

(V, x, 133-34)

Thus the didactic purpose of the play is well served.

To sum up, with a growing sense of urgency to include in his comedy the philosophic material which should eternize it, Jonson switched over from the easy-moving, and light-hearted plays - The Case is Altered and Every Man in His Humour - to Every Man Out of His Humour and Cynthia's Revels for a better integration of character and action with the moral purpose, and succeeded only partially. But with Postastor, to some degree, and with Volpone, Epicoene, The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair consummately, he outgrew the heavy sententiousness of his "Comical Satyres". Jonson's diminishing emphasis on punishment of folly is clearly discerned in his mature plays except, of course, in Volpone. For, as moral attitudes become more closely integrated with artistic forms in these plays, "punishment serves increasingly as emotional resolution rather than as the execution of strict justice". This is the finally arrived method of Jonson, the serious moral realist and the comic artist.

Thus, Jonson succeeded well in his dogged determination to make comedy convey serious thought as well as serious laughter thereby achieving a harmonious fusion of "profit and delight". Comedy in his hands becomes a perfect communication between the author and the audience. Jonson, like Shaw later on, seeks to teach through pleasurable means right values of life. But, in doing so, he is not concerned with narrow morality or petty rules of conduct. It is not as though he was a doughty champion of didacticism. He is by no means a conventional moralist. The material of his plays is derived not from any abstract heights of theology but from the matter which interests him personally. Also, his treatment of good and evil and of social and economic problems in his plays is based not so much on the ethics of his own and preceding ages as on what he himself considers to be good and evil. Moreover, his failure, to mete out poetic justice to the miser in *The Case is Altered*, to censure the rogues in *Every Man in His Humour* and in *The Alchemist*, to give anything but sympathetic portrayals of low-life characters in *Bartolomew Fair*, and to preach sermons on drunkenness, is enough to indicate that he is more interested in achieving dramatic effects than in punishing the evil. It is now clear that Jonson is essentially a comic dramatist using the didactic theory for literary and dramatic purposes.