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Bartholomew Fair
as Urban Arcadia:
Jonson Responds to Shakespeare
THOMAS CARTELLI

'Slid! here's Orpheus among the beasts, with his fiddle, and all! . . . And Ceres selling her daughter's picture, in gingerwork!

THE TITLE OF THIS ESSAY may seem rather fanciful to those who are suspicious of all attempts at yoking together such mighty opposites as Jonson and Shakespeare, much less such traditionally opposed words as "urban" and "Arcadia."! The title is, however, meant to provoke the kind of interest that has, in the past, been frequently lacking in our critical response to the plays and polemics of Jonson: an interest in the fact that

Jonson (self-professed and professing classicist though he might have been) was both conscious of and responsive to the dominant dramatic concerns of his time, and was, therefore, quite capable of exploiting those concerns for his own peculiar ends. In reading Jonson, we are too often apt to take him at his word when he derides past and contemporary dramatic usage in favor of the decorum of his beloved ancients: to accept the Jonsonian letter without probing too deeply into the Jonsonian spirit or into the psychological and professional circumstances that inform his compulsive (and seemingly compulsory) polemics. In negotiating my own departure from the Jonsonian letter, I have found that in Bartholomew Fair Jonson demonstrates an active preoccupation with the relatively recent romances and earlier comedies of his master and nemesis, Shakespeare, that is not unrelated to a simultaneous preoccupation—well-documented by Jonas Barish and Leo Salinger, among others—with adapting his characteristic dramatic concerns to a form intended to ensure a less qualified measure of success than his previous productions seem to have enjoyed.  

Robert Ornstein, Nancy Leonard, and, especially, Anne Barton have already taught us much about the interpenetration of what Leonard calls the comic forms of Shakespeare and Jonson. But it is to other critical voices that the present approach to Bartholomew Fair is more heavily indebted: an approach that involves seeing the play as working off and within a quintessentially Shakespearean pastoral/romance pattern of withdrawal and return in order to effect dramatic ends that are both satirical and satiric in orientation.


3. See note 1. Also see Anne Barton’s forthcoming book on Jonson to be put out by Chatto & Windus, a glimpse of which was given in her address—entitled Shakespeare and Jonson—to the International Shakespeare Congress at Stratford-upon-Avon, 4 August 1981. Professor Barton has advised me that a revised version of her address will be published in the volume of selected Proceedings of the Congress.

4. Jonas Barish was, to my knowledge, the first scholar to associate Bartholomew Fair with Shakespeare’s satirical comedy. He did so in the following passage from his early Bartholomew Fair and Its Puppets,” MLQ, XX (1959): “As in Shakespeare’s satirical comedy, pleasure, rather than learning or wisdom has become the touchstone” p. (15). This statement also appears in Barish, Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy (New York, 1970), p. 236.

Bartholomew Fair as Urban Arcadia

These critical voices belong to C. L. Barber and William Empson who have shaped so much of our present thinking about satirial comedy and the many versions of pastoral. Although Professor Barber did not (to my knowledge) specifically discuss Jonsonian satire in his many and varied critical pronouncements, he did discuss, if only in passing, the relation of satire—generically considered—to satirial comedy in the introductory chapter of Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy:

Satirical comedy tends to deal with relations between social classes and aberrations in movements between them. Satirical comedy is satiric incidentally; its clarification comes with movement between poles of restraint and release in everybody’s experience.

The satirical pattern, as Barber defines it, the movement “through release to clarification,” can, in other words, apply to satire when the subject of satire—“relations between social classes”—is sufficiently broadened to take up the question of the relations between men and women generally, independent of class distinctions. Empson strikes a kindred note in the opening pages of his essay on The Beggar’s Opera when he asserts that pastoral “describes the lives of ‘simple’ low people to an audience of refined wealthy people, so as to make them think first ‘this is true about everyone’ and then ‘this is specially true about us.’” In suggesting that this is exactly what The Beggar’s Opera does, Empson appropriates what he terms Swift’s “first conception” of the play and styles it “the pastoral method applied to Newgate.” The common element in Barber and Empson’s approaches is the attempt to bridge conventional notions of genre differences—between satirial and satiric comedy on the one hand, pastoral and mock-pastoral on the other—in order to come to a more broadly based understanding of specific artistic achievement and its general application to the world outside it. Empson is especially keen on this point:

Clearly it is important for a nation with a strong class-system to have an art-form that not merely evades but breaks through it, that makes the classes feel part of a

larger unity or simply at home with each other. This may be done in odd ways, and as well by mockery as admiration. 7

Barber comes to a similar conclusion in describing the over-all effect of saturnalian comedy: "Behind the laughter at the butts there is always a sense of solidarity about pleasure, a communion embracing the merrymakers in the play and the audience, who have gone on holiday in going to a comedy. " 8 In each instance, the movement of the respective art form is envisioned as a movement toward audience unification, premised on the theatrical dissolution of normative class differences: a process that makes it conceivable for a mockery of pastoral form to achieve the same ends as the idiom it denies and makes it possible for the social disruptions of satire to be healed by means of a saturnalian clarification that compels an audience to acknowledge its essential solidarity. 9

Although neither Empson nor Barber had Jonson's Bartholomew Fair in mind in making his formulations, the play clearly provides a common meeting ground for their relative positions: a satire that is "festo" or saturnalian in orientation, a pastoral that is both urban and Arcadian in its approach to theatrical experience, that mocks and upholds its theatrical mode at one and the same time. Jonson, in fact, promises as much in his Induction: that is, "a new sufficient play called Bartholomew Fair, merry, and as full of noise as sport: made to delight all, and to offend none; provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves" (Ind., ll. 79–85). 10 The play's fulfillment of its saturnalian promise has been convincingly established by Jonas Barish, John J. Enck, and Richard Levin, among others, who all discern in Bartholomew Fair a prevailing mood of benevolence and acceptance that represents a departure for Jonson from the more bitterly satiric spirit of most of his earlier productions. 11 What has not been noted is that the play's comparative benevolence is closely bound up with Jonson's ongoing attempt to "break through" and move beyond the "aberrations" that conventionally characterize the relations between social classes in purely satiric comedy; that the method employed by Jonson to effect this breakthrough into saturnalian clarification owes much to the methods employed by Shakespeare in his pastoral comedies (e.g., A Midsummer Night's Dream and As You Like It) and romances (especially The Tempest) to structure and organize his own breakthroughs; and that the play as a whole dramatizes Jonson's efforts at coming to terms with Shakespearean influence and his Shakespearean inheritance. 12

The common pattern that informs Shakespeare's pastoral comedies and romances is (as has often been noted) the pattern of withdrawal and return which effectively grounds the saturnalian movement through release to clarification. Although Shakespeare's application of the pattern as an organizing principle differs greatly in each play, it usually involves the movement of a select group of characters (either sinful, as in The Tempest, or more sinned against than sinning, as in Dream and As You Like It) away from a commonly perceived real or first world of care and anxiety into a green or golden world which is not completely care-less, but which is sufficiently removed from the real world to give its guests time and space in which to work out their problems, hostilities, and anxieties. Once these problems are satisfactorily resolved, the characters willingly (indeed, eagerly) return to their first worlds, changed to greater and lesser degrees

7. Ibid., p. 189.
9. As Empson, in his remarks on The Beggar's Opera, has it: "it is both mock-heroic and mock-pastoral, but these take Heroic and Pastoral for granted; they must be used as conventions and so as ways of feeling if they are even to be denied" (p. 185).
12. The latter point has its analogue in Barton's "The New Inn and the Problem of Jonson's Late Style." Barton, however, contends that Jonson "seems at last to have come to terms with Shakespearean comedy and with popular dramatic forms that he had earlier despised," not with the writing of Bartholomew Fair, but in "the plays written after Bartholomew Fair" (p. 417), mainly with The New Inn which "carries the situation of As You Like It and The Winter's Tale to the breaking point" (p. 401). In short, I see Jonson beginning to work out what Barton elsewhere calls his 'subtle rapprochement' with Shakespeare (stimulated by his 'Elizabethan nostalgia') much earlier, as a direct response to Shakespeare's retirement from the stage.
from what they were originally. As applied by Jonson, the pattern reveals only a few, but a crucial few differences. The play is structured around the movement of a collection of characters away from a first world of pretension, prejudice, and stupidity into a second, rather gray world (embodied by the Smithfield Fair) that is not without corruptions of its own, but which accepts them as common human imperfections and gives them free rein. The gray world of Smithfield is, in short, green enough to be relatively free of the first world’s pretensions and prejudices; abundant in experience of what the flesh is heir to, the natives of Smithfield judge not lest they be judged in a fallen world that accepts its fall graciously. Intensified involvement with these denizens of the social underworld ultimately brings the visitants into intimate contact with their own imperfections and compels most of them to acknowledge their previously denied citizenship in the commonwealth of human folly. Once this collective recognition is achieved, the Fair—proper—like Arden, the forest outside Athens, and Prospero’s isle—is effectively left behind, having been imaginatively annexed to the first world of reality by the fair-goers themselves who, when last we see them, are planning to “ha’ the rest o’ the play at home” (V. vii. 117–118). Although this summary clearly oversimplifies both Shakespeare’s and Jonson’s variations on the withdrawal/return paradigm, it sufficiently illustrates the nature of Jonson’s dramatic debt to Shakespeare and the nature of his divergence from him. Like Shakespeare, Jonson is very aware that all is not golden in the pastoral second world, whether that world be located in the forest of Arden or the Smithfield Fair. What Douglas Cole has said about Shakespearean pastoral can, in this respect, apply as well to Jonson’s appropriation of the pastoral mode: “For all its idyllic possi-

13. For the best appraisal to date of the play’s plot, see Richard Levin’s previously cited The Structure of Bartholomew Fair.

14. For similar estimates of Jonson’s attitude toward judgment in the play, see Barish, Prose Comedy, p. 256, and “Feasting and Judging,” pp. 28–30. For an opposing point of view, see Douglas Duncan, Bartholomew Fair and the Lucanian Tradition (Cambridge, Eng., 1979), who contends that Jonson’s “probing of the censorious mentality results in [his] most morally complex play, rightly compared with Measure for Measure as a comic parable on the text, ‘Judge not that ye be not judged’” (p. 205).

15. See Duncan’s association of Bartholomew Fair with The Praise of Folly in Lucanian Tradition, p. 212.


When 't comes to the Fair once, you were e'en as good go to Virginia for anything there is of Smithfield. He has not hit the humours, he does not know 'em; he has not convers'd with the Bartholomew-birds, as they say; he has ne'er a sword and buckler man in his Fair, nor a little Davy, to take toll o' the bawds there, as in my time, .

(Ind., ll. 10-15)

I call attention to this passage because it should remind the reader (as it probably served to remind its contemporary audience) that Jonson is, from the outset, quite conscious that his playworld version of the Smithfield Fair has a stronger basis in fantasy than fact; that it is, in other words, no less fictional, no less play-full, than the forest of Arden. Like Shakespeare, Jonson is aware that his green (rather, gray) world is a never-never-land of the dramatic imagination, 'a fantasy accommodated 'to delight all' who can 'think well of themselves'... a deliberate construct, demanding audience collaboration.' Indeed, by working within a pastoral/romance structural pattern that could be easily associated with Shakespeare, Jonson implicitly calls attention to the superficial resemblances between what he is doing and what Shakespeare has done. But he does so that he might better demonstrate that his distortion of reality—his "version" of pastoral, if you will—constitutes a more valid mode of dramatic representation than Shakespeare's: one that subverts and, in subverting, "corrects" Shakespeare's purportedly artless flights of fancy. In short, Jonson promises to present, if not "reality" itself, at least a theatrical facsimile which, however distorted, essentially remains faithful to its model or source: "Instead of a little Davy, to take toll o' the bawds, / the author doth promise a strutting Horse-courser, with / a leer Drunkard, two or three to attend him, in as good / equipage as you could wish" (Ind., ll. 119-122).


Jonson's argument on behalf of the fictitiousness of his dramatic recreation of the Smithfield Fair does not, in other words, preclude a concurrent argument against the fictitiousness of popular theatrical styles, especially those which, in his opinion, encourage audiences to remain stultified in their judgments, or present completely fanciful imitations of nature. His critique of the "constant" judgment of those who "will swear (that) Ierominio and Andronicus are the best plays yet" (Ind., ll. 107-108) is, for instance, motivated by his desire to have his audience set its sights exclusively on the present, on the here and now of a play that promises a marked departure from the primitivism of the past. Jonson's insistence on displacing his audience's groundedness can probably be attributed to his understandable anxiety about being judged by the same standards which had consigned many of his earlier productions to the limbo of underappreciated excellence. In order to disarm his audience of the expectations his earlier plays may have encouraged, Jonson attempts to fashion a reciprocal agreement with the audience, the terms of which involve his coming closer to its standards if it comes closer to his own: "It is further covenanted, . . . that / how great soever the expectations be, no person here is to / expect more than he knows, or better ware than a Fair / will afford . . . " (Ind., ll. 114-117). Jonson's intentions extend as well to exponents of more recent theatrical styles whom he accuses of demonstrating the same disregard for "Nature" as did the earlier purveyors of bombast, but with whom he promises to conform if conformity ultimately proves necessary: 19

... If there be never a servant-monster i' the Fair, who can help it? he says; nor a nest of antics? He is loth to make Nature afraid in his plays, like those that begat Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries, to mix his head with other men's heels; let the conciscence of jigs and dances reign as strong as it will amongst you: yet if the puppets will please anybody, they shall be entreated to come in.

(Ind., ll. 128-135)

In offering this rather unguarded critique of Shakespeare's recent productions, Jonson superficially reveals what we have come to recognize as

the characteristic blind spot in his estimate of his elder competitor. I say "superficially" because in this instance the attitude Jonson adopts toward Shakespeare seems more strategic than felt. As Harry Levin has noted, while "the attack on The Winter's Tale and The Tempest is fairly overt" and apparently consistent with Jonson's insistence on the primacy of art over nature, "The paradox is that Jonson, for once, was criticizing Shakespeare from the standpoint of nature rather than art." Given the paradoxical nature of Jonson's critique of Shakespeare, I think it safe to assume that pronouncements such as this one and the infamous "Shakespeare wanted art" later recorded by Drummond of Hawthorne can be considered rather advanced symptoms of a massive case of Bloom's anxiety of influence.21

Although my own reasoning might seem paradoxical to some, I see Jonson trying to claim a place for himself here that had recently been vacated by Shakespeare; and I see him staking his claim by subtly reversing his own critical categories in response to the changed nature of his position vis-à-vis the recently retired master of the stage. The point is that Jonson was not so muddled in his capability to distinguish between what Shakespeare discerned as fact and what Shakespeare presented as fantasy; indeed, as we have seen, he goes to great lengths in the first part of the Induction to relieve his audience of just such an affliction in regard to his own play. But he was strategically obtuse enough to misread Shakespeare (and to do so in public) for his own immediate ends, those ends being the displacement of what it pleases him to call in another context (the 1612 Preface to The Alchemist) an "art that is afraid of nature" by an art that presumes to give nature its due.22 Jonson was, moreover, sufficiently astute to recognize (also in public) that, in attempting to avoid mixing "his head with other men's heels," in trying to go beyond Shakespeare into dramatic territory Shakespeare had mined so well, he might well be engaging in self-defeating activity of a peculiarly ironic variety. And it is this recognition that informs the grudging concession which closes off his apparent blast against Shakespeare, 'yet if the puppets will please anybody, they shall be entreated to come in.'

What we have here is a Jonson of two interrelated states of mind: a Jonson who needs to clear out theatrical space for himself and needs, therefore, to make semi-arbitrary and self-serving distinctions between himself and the man he will later call his "Beloved Master"; and a Jonson who (however grudgingly) is finally willing to give the "grounded judgement" of the audience what it wants and who must, therefore, make some of the same concessions to popular taste for which he chides Shakespeare.23 The Induction as a whole suggests that Jonson intended to fulfill his artistic needs and desires by offering his public something in the way of a "naturalized" version of the two Shakespearean romances to which he alludes: a play populated by fictions drawn from the inner city of reality, rather than from the far reaches of the imagination or the latest animal show, "A wise Justice of Peace meditant, instead of a juggler with an ape" (Ind., II. 125–126). To do so, Jonson needed to have his audience retrospectively consider Shakespeare's dramatic usage in The Winter's Tale and The Tempest as akin to Epicure Mammon's attempts to "naturalize" against the "infections" of reality in The Alchemist. In the exchange Jonson found it necessary to adopt as his own Perdita's rather naive perspective

20. Harry Levin, p. 49.
21. In The Anxiety of Influence (New York, 1973), Harold Bloom contends that Jonson had "no anxiety as to imitation" (p. 27) and thus fails to register a most interesting case-study in the politics of influence. Indeed, Jonson's chronic imitation of his Roman masters conceivably served as a defensive buffer against the competing influence of his contemporaries upon his work, and constituted a complex strategy by which he might maintain distinction in his ongoing battle for recognition. As Anne Barton has recently observed, "During the 1590's, Jonson developed a distinctive poetic and, more particularly, a comic mode by reacting against a loosely defined Elizabethan norm" (in "Hacking Back to Elizabeth," p. 720). When he came to compose Bartholomew Fair, Jonson seems to have revised his strategy in order to exploit some of the same influences he had earlier "reacted against." He began, as Barton writes, "to use selected Elizabethan authors, Marlowe, Sidney, and Shakespeare, in the way he had long been accustomed to use Horace, Virgil, Seneca, or Quintilian: as guides to right ways of thinking and feeling" (p. 724).

22. See Ormstein, pp. 45–46, who presents two opposed conceptions of Jonson's attitude toward the "natural"; see also George Hibbard, "Jonson and Human Nature," in A Celebration of Ben Jonson, pp. 55–82.
toward the allowable commerce between nature and art—especially her opposition to “grafting,” which she considers equivalent to the making of monsters out of nature—in his ongoing battle against Shakespeare/Polixenes. 24 He thus counters what he seems to have needed to portray as an art “naturized” beyond the pale of Nature itself with an art that is completely attuned to and representative of the nature that is human. Although one may quarrel with Jonson’s (and my own) distinctions, it is this kind of logic that appears to have informed Jonson’s substitution of the Smithfield Fair—as the repository of infinite human variety—for Shakespeare’s superficially more “natural” greenworlds.

The long and the short of Jonson’s approach to his play is, to return to Empson, the pastoral method applied to Smithfield. In order to effect his public displacement of Shakespeare’s unnatural naturalism—what Anne Barton has called Shakespeare’s “ruralization of cities”—Jonson develops a dramatic strategy specifically geared toward the urbanization of experience; he attempts, in other words, to exploit what he perceives to be Shakespeare’s weaknesses by playing to his own characteristic strengths. 25 In the play proper, Jonson’s repeated allusions to Shakespeare’s comedies and romances constitute strong and purposive “counterblasts” to Shakespeare’s own most characteristic concerns. An especially illuminating example of just such an allusion is provided in the play’s second act when two Bartholomew-birds, Leatherhead and Joan Trash, are debating the relative merits of Joan’s wares:

LEATHER.

Sit farther with your gingerbread progeny there, and hinder not the prospect of my shop, or I’ll ha’ it proclaim’d i’ the Fair, what stuff they are made on.

TRASH

Why, what stuff are they made on, Brother Leatherhead? Nothing but what’s wholesome, I assure you.

24. My argument here owes much to Harry Levin’s comparative discussion of these three plays in “Two Magian Comedies,” pp. 47-50. See also Alvin Kernan’s note to II.i.64 of The Alchemist in his edition of that play (New Haven, Conn., 1974) where he suggests that “by naturized” Mammon means not a lesser form of nature but a more intensive ‘super-nature’, nature ‘firked up in its center’ . . .” (p. 209).

25. The remark attributed to Professor Barton was made in the course of her address, “Shakespeare and Jonson,” at the International Shakespeare Congress; see note 3.

What Jonson’s characters and, by extension, Jonson himself are alluding to here is, of course, Prospero’s “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” speech from the fourth act of The Tempest: a speech which, in our own time, is more often identified with Shakespeare’s prevailing attitude toward artistic creation than with the immediate context of the play in which it appears. Jonson, however, seems to be equally aware of both creator and context in making the allusion. By summoning up remembrance of the immediate occasion of Prospero’s remarks (that is, the conceivably grotesque Revels that now are ended) in the immediate context of his own remarks about servant-monsters in the Induction, Jonson tacitly compels his audience to compare Shakespeare’s inflation of “airy nothings” with his own leveling of material reality to the standard of “Nothing but what’s wholesome.” 26 Prospero’s impressive but tendentious masque of Juno and Ceres—a masque which, we may recall, is didactically devoted to the rather puritanical rooting out of premarital sexual impulses—is effectively brought down to earth and displaced by a stand of gingerbread which, appropriately, includes (as we later learn from Quarlus) a “gingerwork” of “Ceres selling her daughter’s picture” (II.v.10–11). I use the word “displaced” because Jonson’s motivation here—as throughout Bartholomew Fair—is not so much to bring Shakespeare down as to raise himself up to Shakespeare’s level, to balance Shakespeare’s preoccupation with the stuff of dreams by overasserting the priority of the stuff of reality, which, after all, may be as corrupt as Leatherhead suggests.

The fertility of this allusion to The Tempest should imply that there is more than may at first meet the eye in Jonson’s seemingly parodic “quotes” from Shakespeare which range from his virtual theft of the Aulolycus episode in The Winter’s Tale to his puppet-play burlesque of the Pyramus and Thisbe play-within-a-play in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

26. As Harry Levin has it: “Jonson, who well knew how insubstantial a pageant could be, would hardly have accepted Prospero’s masque as a paradigm of reality. Rather, it was what he had meant by antics that ‘runne away from Nature’—modes of escape no less evanescent, to him, than the wist-dreams of Sir Epicure” (p. 36).
Perhaps the most sustained allusions to Shakespeare in the play are the assumption by Adam Overdo of a stance toward the rooting out of enormity that is curiously consistent with Prospero’s attitude toward the rooting out of errant sexuality and evil in the Masque and Judgment scenes, and the transformation of character Overdo undergoes which echoes Prospero’s coming to terms with “the rarer action” that is mercy, rather than vengeance. Overdo’s movement away from the “cloud-cover” that hides him and his “black book” (Jonson’s version of the book Prospero “drowns”?) in Act II, scene i, and toward the evenhanded resolve initiated by his assumption of responsibility for the fate of Troubleall in Act IV, scene i, constitutes a direct dramatic re-enactment of Prospero’s movement away from a cautious voyeurism to an equally cautious but active involvement in the affairs of men near the close of *The Tempest*: “I will be more tender hereafter. I see compassion / may become a Justice, though it be a weakness, I confess; / and nearer a vice, than a virtue” (IV. i. 77–79).  

In re-creating this Shakespearean situation, Jonson is not, however, paying uncritical tribute to Shakespearean standards of judgment. Rather, by having Overdo himself recognize that he is “but Adam, flesh and blood,” Jonson presents us with a more humanly sympathetic character than the insensibly imperious Prospero, who may drown his book and bury his wand but can hardly be accused of harboring the egalitarian impulses with which Jonson endows the humbled Overdo at the close of the play. Perhaps Jonson, in correcting what he might have perceived as the later Shakespeare’s presumptuous grandstanding—that is, his attempt, through Prospero, to legislate from on high an acceptable reality out of the recalcitrant human material he had taken for his subject—is implicitly correcting an earlier Jonson’s own presumption in setting himself up as an unanswerable critic of manners and morality. Shakespeare conveniently becomes, in this process of transference, a surrogate student of the teacher who succeeds him.

To expedite this exchange of roles, Jonson may have been compelled to sacrifice his own characteristic imperiousness, the moral and aesthetic elitism which had heretofore distinguished him from his comparatively more genial contemporary. That is, for Jonson to fill the place vacated by Shakespeare, he may have found it necessary to exploit some of the same popular stereotypes which, according to Leslie Fiedler, permitted Shakespeare—especially in his festive comedies—to connect in a nonalienating way with his audiences.  

Such a reading is, at least, consistent with the recent approaches taken toward the play by Douglas Duncan—who views *Bartholomew Fair* as an ironic “comedy of accommodation”—and George Parfitt—who contends that the closure of the play represents somewhat of a moral compromise for Jonson, “an acceptance of the norm” that constitutes a grudging submission to his own prevailing “sense of man as an animal beyond the reach of his moral art.”  

I am not, however, completely happy with the condescendingly moral persuasions brought to bear on the play by Parfitt and Duncan which seem too rooted in the puritanism with which Jonson was so at odds throughout much of his dramatic career. Rather, I agree with Anne Barton who has recently suggested that “in *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson finally managed to get his entire world onstage at the same time” and that he “aimed here at an inclusiveness he never sought before.”

The real question seems to be, why now?, at this particular point in his dramatic career? And the answer appears to be profoundly tied to the retirement of Shakespeare, whose withdrawal from the stage gave Jonson his first real opportunity to write a play that did not have to suffer from

27. Instead of seeing thematic consistency between *The Tempest* and Jonson’s allusions to the earlier play, Jackson I. Cope argues that the symbolic “pattern is of a very different design in a world wherein the staff of quasi-omnipotence is carried by Overdo rather than Prospero,” in “*Bartholomew Fair* as Blasphemy,” *RmD*, VIII (1965), 135. I disagree. Although Overdo no doubt represents a “lower” species of character than the “powerful” Prospero, his acknowledgment of Troubleall as his own creation is, for instance, quite consistent with a symbolic pattern in which Prospero acknowledges Caliban as “mine own.” In short, Overdo operates in a lower but no less valid orbit than Prospero.

28. My reference to Fiedler is drawn from his contribution to a seminar on “Shakespeare and the Populist Tradition in Comedy” which convened on 4 April 1980 at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in Cambridge, Massachusetts.  
30. Duncan effectively falls into his own trap when he moralizes Jonson on the heels of his own judicious depiction of the evaluative habits of literary critics: “… most of us enjoy measuring fiction by more rigorous standards of morality than we normally apply in real life” (p. 3). On this count, see Barish’s review of Alan Dessen’s *Jonson’s Moral Comedy* in *MP*, LXXI (1973), 80–84.  
31. “*Shakespeare and Jonson.*”
the occupational hazards of deviance, defiance, and just plain difference that characterize all such oedipal rivalries in literature and life. In other words, Jonson may well have been able to accept, in Fiedler’s terms, the “new stereotype of equalized relations” upon which the success of Bartholomew Fair as “Jonson’s lone non-alienating play” is premised, because for probably the first time in his career as a playwright his own professional relations had been sufficiently equalized to allow him to place his own characteristic concerns in direct and responsive relationship with those of his powerful adversary.32

Richard Levin’s influential study of the structure of the play can be of help to us here since we are now ready to return to our own starting premises. In emphasizing the pivotal role played by the visitors to the Fair in determining the structure and significance of the play as a whole, Levin essentially describes (without naming it himself) the precise kind of dramatic pattern we tend to associate with Shakespearean comedy and romance:

The fair, . . . while it is the precipitating cause of much of the action, is not its center; that place is occupied by the visitors, whose careers demarcate the main stages of the plot: it begins when they decide to attend the fair, its central portion follows them through their day at Smithfield, and it ends when they agree to leave the fair and return, greatly changed, to their normal environment.33

The plot, as Levin describes it, recapitulates the movement from release to clarification that characterizes Barber’s conception of the saturnalian pattern. And it does so, as Empson might have it, not by simply focusing on the private transformations of Levin’s visitors to the Fair, but by bringing these visitors into productive relationship both with themselves and with the natives of the Fair-world itself: that is, by making the originally separate classes of visitors and natives “feel part of a larger unity or simply at home with each other.”

What Jonson is ultimately after in Bartholomew Fair is profoundly akin to what Shakespeare was after in plays as different as The Tempest and As You Like It: namely, the establishment of a human community out of disparate groups of disparate individuals, what Leo Salingar calls “a crowd.”34 Jonson, moreover, attempts to bring this community about with as much awareness of the tenuousness of human relationships as Shakespeare brings to bear on his own productions. Just as Shakespeare is aware in As You Like It that some people—namely, Jaques—must remain forever alienated from the human community, and even more aware in The Tempest of the danger of committing oneself to cohabitation with unregenerate members of that community (indeed, aware of the tenuousness of the very idea of community), so too does Jonson tread softly around the ragged edges of his social design. The likes of Troublell, for instance, can never really be reintegrated into even a more enlightened form of the community that has maddened him. Nor are we encouraged to trust in the permanence of the reformations of Busy, Overdo, and Dame Purecraft, least of all in the Iago-like vow of silence of Wasp. Littlewit’s wit will probably continue to do violence to plays, and Cokes will surely never be more than a sophomore in the great college of experience.

But for Jonson, all this does not now seem to matter. His sense of community appears to be more closely allied to the question “what to make of a diminished thing” than to Prospero’s quest to have fallen humanity conform to his ambitious designs. Having gained perspective from Shakespeare’s own exertions in this mode, Jonson sets his sights on more modest goals and, hence, imposes fewer demands on human nature in Bartholomew Fair. His idea of community is effectively embodied by the ad hoc community-sentiment of the otherwise anarchic Bartholomewbirds when they collectively rush to the aid of the scalded Ursula in Act II, scene V, or share the “vapour of experience,” among others, in Act IV, scene iv.35 Jonson does not, in short, really ask us to imagine that the supper to which all the characters are invited at the close of the play will

32. See note 28.
34. Salingar, p. 143. His statement reads, “Although it is a holiday occasion, [the characters] are not a community but a crowd.”
35. I completely endorse Barish’s response to those scholars who consider the game of vapors “degrading” or “anti-social”: “The vapors, . . . though they issue in quarrels, at the same time form a compelling reminder of the kinship between men” (Prose Comedy, p. 230). Indeed, the play as a whole could be considered an elaborate game of vapors in which Jonson expends his animosity against Shakespeare in order to establish his kinship with him.
establish a community that will last much longer than the first course, much less dessert. As Anne Barton has noted, the ending of the play "falls considerably short of the Shakespearean 'one feast', 'one house'." But it does so not, as Barton suggests, because Jonson is unable to achieve a full-blown Shakespearean reconciliation, but because for Jonson a community that is really no more than a temporary communion is sufficient and, perhaps, all one can hope for in the urban Arcadia that is at once the Fair, London, and, most notably, the theater itself.

In lowering his demands on human nature in *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson demonstrates a broadened appreciation of human nature in all its corrupt and hopelessly venal variety. And it is this, I believe, that serves to distinguish his achievement from Shakespeare's productions in the pastoral/romance mode, and makes more understandable the attitude toward those productions which Jonson assumes in the Induction. Where-as Shakespeare in his own versions of pastoral and romance often seems to need, as Robert Ornstein has noted, to smooth over the rough spots of his lower, comparatively vulgar characters and to need as well authority figures such as Theseus and Prospero to preside over the messiness of imperfect attempts at reconciliation, Jonson is, in *Bartholomew Fair*, more willing to allow human nature free-play and more interested in bringing authority down to the same level over which it presumes to preside. Jonson's commitment to free-play eventuates, for instance, in the admittedly surprising but comparatively believable marriages of Winwife to Grace and Quarrous to Dame Purecraft ("believable" when compared, say, with the marriage of Oliver to Celia in *As You Like It*, or the forced marriage-arrangements at the end of the problem comedies). These marriages, moreover, act as further to the purposiveness of Jonson's appropriation of Shakespearean pastoral conventions.

Rather than rely, as Shakespeare often relies, on the instant alchemy of love-at-first-sight or on questionable moments of epiphanic revelation when spurned characters are seen as if for the first time, Jonson treats love much as he probably found it treated in the workaday world around him: as a practical matter, gone into with business acumen, common sense, and a marked measure of supremely human perversity. This is not to suggest

that Jonson treats his love-matter in as cold and colorless a manner as some critics contend. Although there is little in the way of romance even the blandest sort in *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson manages to negotiate the dissolution of two misbegotten bethrothals by giving the ladies in question ample opportunity to make rearrangements of their own with the help of their own inner dispositions and the kind of fantasy-fulfillment which indulgence in the Fair affords. Perhaps even more notable is the way in which disinterested observance of the Fair cedes to all-out indulgence when two of the only characters in the play who belong neither to the category of gull or native—namely, Winwife and Quarrous—also exploit the Fair's invitation to Arcadian pastime and do so in a self-consciously Arcadian way:

**GRACE**

... You shall write, either of you, here, a word, or a name, what you like best; but of two, or three syllables at most: and the next person that comes this way (because destiny has a high hand in business of this nature) I'll demand, which of the two words he or she doth approve; and according to that sentence, fix my resolution, and affection, without change. . . .

**QUAROUS**

These conditions are very courteous. Well, my word is out of the *Arcadia*, then: 'Argalus.'

**WINWIFE**

And mine out of the play, 'Palemon.'

(IV.iii.48-54; 67-69)

Although Anne Barton has contended that "Jonson disapproved of romance literature" and that in Jonson's *Everyman Out of His Humour* "characters who are halfwits read the *Arcadia*," hence, that Winwife and Quarrous virtually "damn themselves" by choosing the roles they do, it seems clear from the context of the exchange that Jonson is doing no more with Sidney and "romance literature" generally than demonstrating how they can be gainfully employed in a sophisticated form of play. That the

36. "Shakespeare and Jonson."

37. See Ornstein, p. 43.

38. Jackson I. Cope, for instance, in his discussion of the quasi-legalistic chicanery that informs the marital disposition of Grace; see "Bartholomew Fair as Blasphemy," pp. 137-140.

39. "Shakespeare and Jonson."
otherwise worldly and cynical likes of Quarlous and Winnow choose this particular way of participating in the Fair appears, moreover, to validate Jonson's attempt in the play to portray a dramatic world cross-fertilized by both green and gray world concerns. For her part, Grace—whom Barish describes as "disengaged to the end, poised, judicious, and slightly inhuman"—in choosing how she wishes to be wooed, demonstrates a similar sense of playful release from the constraints of absolute predictability.40 Her first and motivating desire—as commonsensical as one could wish—is to be freed at all costs from her contract with the desplacably foolish Cooks. But she is not so prosaic as to enter into another contract without at least enjoying a mating game with men who obviously attract her and with whom, we assume, she has something in common.

The point is that, had he wished, Jonson could have written a mock-pastoral satire that might have taken on Shakespeare, Sidney, and the Marlowe of Hero and Leander all at once. In the process, he could have sufficed and dragged through the dirt every poetic standard and ideal regarding love, truth, and beauty that he considered beyond the pale of reality as it is constituted in this world. That he did not write such a play is, perhaps, a testament to the maturity that came to Jonson, not so much with age, as with the passage of sufficient time to allow him to deal constructively with his own anxieties about the achievement and influence of artists whom he may well have revered despite his comments to the contrary—"this side Idolatry."41

This is not to suggest that the parodic spirit does not also thrive in the rundown Arcadia that is Jonson's Smithfield. On the contrary, Jonson is clearly conscious (and makes us conscious as well) of the inadequacies of literary idealism and of the equally unacceptable vision of reality he attempts to uphold in its stead. His ironic reminder is embodied by the

40. Barish, Prose Comedy, p. 223.

41. Although Anne Barton reserves Shakespeare's pre-eminence in Jonson's writing for The New Inn, she makes the following provision about the active influence of the poet's Jonson's composition of Bartholomew Fair in "Jonson's Late Style": "In Epilogue, the degradation and decline of the present age had been measured through reference to the classical past. Bartholomew Fair subsequently, with its memories of Chaucer and Sidney and of Marlowe's Hero & Leander, altered the touchstone. It was English literature, especially the non-dramatic work of the early Elizabethan period, which sat in final judgement upon the debased activities of the Fair" (pp. 417-418).

Bartholomew Fair as Urban Arcadia

macman, Troubleall, who makes Grace's marital decision for her and then unwittingly plays Bottom to Dame Purecraft's Titania when the Puritan matron decides that her mate must be mad or no mate at all. Jonson carries his subversion of pastoral romance alliances one step further in his Bankside burlesque of Marlowe's Hero and Leander and reduces as well the legendary friendship of Damon and Pythias (a reference, perhaps, to our own two noble kinsmen, Argus and Palamedes?) to absurd proportions.42 But Jonson's interest in parody is easily exhausted and ultimately mastered by more constructive concerns. In a manner that is analogous to his over-all treatment of Sidney and Shakespeare in the course of the play, once Jonson has successfully deflated the romance-idylls of love and friendship, he turns his attention to bridging the differences between his opposing characters in order to make them, again in Empson's words, "feel part of a larger unity or simply at home with one another." Not insignificantly, he employs to this end the puppets' defense of proficiency and confutation of Busy: that is, a dramatic medium which, like the overarching version of pastoral that frames it, both mocks and upheld itself at one and the same time. In the process, Jonson transforms what starts out as a parodic impulse into wholesale acceptance of the same kind of theatrical extravagance which inspired his earlier diatribe against Shakespeare: "Let it go on. For I am changed, and will become a be-/holder with you" (V. V. 109-110), say the confused Busy and a reconstructed Jonson in the same surprisingly acquiescent voice.

Associating Jonson with Busy, as well as with the vituperative Wasp and the roister-out-of-enormities, Overdo, has become a predictable way for critics to respond to the dramatic reversals that occupy the closing movement of the play. I do not, however, think the associations should be underplayed, much less summarily discarded simply because they are easy to make. If Jonson was perceptive enough to see (as many others have seen) a Shakespeare in Prospero, he may well have been sufficiently astute to recognize (and expose) various images of himself in the trio of mystified demystifiers who define themselves in opposition to the puppet-monsters of invention embodied by the Fair and its unregenerate inhabitants. Similarly predictable, though no less crucial, is the notion that Jonson, in reforming this trio—or, if "reforming" be deemed too strong a word, in

42. See Barish, Prose Comedy, pp. 233-234.
driving these characters out of their respective "humours," through release into varying forms of clarification—may well be reforming himself as well: the "old" Jonson who, like the old Adam, sees enormity in every stone and pebble of human imperfection. At the very least, Jonson comes into a clarification of his own about the saturnalian potential of satire and the theatrical measures—puppets and all—a playwright may need to take to make his representations of reality both applicable and accessible to the workaday world around him.

This clarification is effectively acted out in the oft-noted benevolence of the play's closure which, in reconciling "butts" with "merrymakers" in the solidarity of pleasure, pays an obvious debt to the festive endings of Shakespeare's comedies and the redemptive endings of his romances. It is here that the mock-pastoral impulse, which probably started Jonson down this road in the first place, demonstrates its complete consistency with the very idiom it intends to subvert. When Quarlous suggests that the characters "drown the memory of all enormity" in Overdo's biggest wine bowl (a backhanded reference to the gracious waters of Lethe if there ever was one), mockery and acceptance are conjoined in a formula for reconciliation that has its closest analogues in Shakespeare's own artful attempts to drown "the critical faculty at large" in a warm bath of fellow-feeling. In effecting this conjunction, Jonson shapes a response to Shakespeare that is at once a declaration of independence from and a living memorial to the influence of his rival and master. Purged for the present of his competitive envy of Shakespeare and of the defensive contempt for his public that envy inspired, Jonson is free, at the close of the play, to endorse Overdo's Horatian maxim as his own standard for satiric art: "for correction, not destruction, building up, not tearing down."

43. Cf. Duncan's moralized estimate of Quarlous's gesture from which the quoted phrase has been taken (p. 211).