

JONSON'S AND SHAKESPEARE'S "COMEDY OF AFFLICTION"

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2011

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: August 23, 2011

AUTHOR: Jonathan Theodore Goossen

TITLE: Jonson's and Shakespeare's "Comedy of Affliction"

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: Department of English

DEGREE: PhD CONVOCATION: October YEAR: 2011

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To John Baxter, my teacher:

*“O give thyself the praise, if aught in me
Worthy perusal stand against thy sight.”*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relevance of recent studies of Aristotle's comic theory to the central dramatists of early modern England, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare. Applications of the *Poetics* to Renaissance English drama tend to treat Aristotle's theory historically, as a set of concepts mediated to England by continental redactions. But these often conflated the *Poetics'* focus on literary form with the Renaissance's predominant interest in literature's rhetorical effect, reducing Aristotle's genuinely speculative theory to a series of often pedantic literary prescriptions. Recent scholarship has both undone these misinterpretations and developed the comic theory latent in the *Poetics*. Ironically, these studies make Jonson's and Shakespeare's comedy look much more Aristotelian than do Renaissance ones. So rather than taking the *Poetics* simply as a possible source for each dramatist, I read it primarily as a literary theory that, when reinvigorated by modern scholarship, can explain structures and effects arrived at practically by these dramatists.

Three recent hypotheses are especially pertinent to Jonson and Shakespeare: that comic hoaxes aim to expose comic error, which is for Aristotle a deviation from the mean of virtue; that "righteous indignation" is the comic emotion equivalent to the "pity and fear" of tragedy; and that catharsis is a clarification, rather than purgation, of reason and emotion. In light of these, I offer detailed readings of four plays that demonstrate these authors' comic range: from Jonson's satirical *Every Man Out of His Humour* to the almost farcical *Epicoene*, and from Shakespeare's romantic *Much Ado About Nothing* to the tragicomic *Measure for Measure*. These plays demonstrate a variety of ways in which catharsis, the end of drama, results directly from the comic hoax and involves both the audience's and characters' experience of indignation and their comprehension of its relationship to the emotions of envy and pity. In each case, Aristotle's incisive but flexible theoretical framework enables an explanation of the emotional pain present in the these "comedies of affliction" and reveals remarkable similarities between dramatists usually described as direct opposites.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One is able to complete a project like this only with the help of many people and institutions. The Department of English at Dalhousie University has been a collegial and eminently supportive place in which to work. Of its faculty, I am particularly grateful to my committee members, Professors Bruce Greenfield, Ronald Huebert and Christina Luckyj, for agreeing to read a doctoral thesis during their summer holidays. Emeritus Professor Joel Altman from the University of California, Berkeley graciously agreed to serve as my external examiner. Their careful reports and insightful comments have significantly strengthened this thesis and will continue to guide me as I look toward its publication.

Professor John Baxter has been, simply and profoundly, my teacher. From this work's earliest stages, he has been as excited about it as I have, and it could not have been completed without his seasoned knowledge, keen perception, and warm friendship.

My research and writing have been financially supported by a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship, a Killam Pre-doctoral Fellowship, and Dalhousie University Faculty of Graduate Studies Research and Conference Travel Grants. Their funding has enabled me to give this project my full attention, for which I am very thankful.

I am also grateful to Rev. Dr. Roman Bonnel, who, by teaching me how to order my soul, has equally enabled me to complete this work.

Thanks are most especially due to my family. Long ago, my parents, Ted and Mary Goossen, taught me how to work and how to put my heart into my work. This project, I think, shows me to be their son.

My four children, Jacob, Luke, Madeleine, and Mark have given me the strongest motivation to work with discipline day in and day out. Their presence in the evening provided me first-hand experience of the laughter, love, and indignation about which I wrote during the day.

Finally, my wife Cindy Goossen has sacrificed much for my studies. Her indignation toward me would be righteous, but she has felt only compassion. In Donne's metaphor of the twinned compass, "thy firmness draws my circle just."

Δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός, ἡ ἐλπίς ἡμῶν, δόξα σοι.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Ben Jonson called Aristotle “the first accurate critic, and truest judge; nay, the greatest philosopher, the world ever had.”¹ Subsequent literary critics have generally agreed with the first of Jonson’s claims, and, if the superlatives are reduced to simple adjectives, perhaps even the latter two as well. But while we might acknowledge Aristotle’s achievement, it is only natural that the work of accurate criticism and true judging should develop and continue after him – an enterprise in which Jonson himself participated vigorously. What is less obvious is that understanding of Aristotle’s criticism itself has also grown. For various reasons, his difficult and laconic *Poetics* had very little circulation in the ancient world, all but disappeared during the middle ages, and, when it was finally recovered during the Renaissance, suffered a range of significant misinterpretations that continued well into the twentieth century. The last thirty years, though, have witnessed an unprecedented scholarly effort to explain and correct past interpretive errors. A particularly important aspect of this work has been speculation on the treatise’s relevance to comedy. The aim of this present study is to apply this newly refined understanding of Aristotle to the comedy of Ben Jonson and his greatest rival, Shakespeare.

“Sheer anachronism!”, may well be the cry that greets this declaration. While Jonson knew the *Poetics*, there is little proof that Shakespeare had of it anything more

¹ Jonson, *Discoveries*, 449. All subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

than second-hand knowledge. Regardless, the objection might continue, both dramatists could only have read the *Poetics* as mediated by the *Cinquecento* commentators who brought it to light for the rest of Europe, not as it has been reinterpreted by modern scholarship. Let me begin my defence of the project by pointing out that the Jonson passage just quoted was one he extracted from the 1611 *Poetics* commentary, *De tragodiae constitutione*, of the Dutchman Daniel Heinsius. While he was very much indebted to the great flowering of *Poetics* scholarship in the sixteenth century, Heinsius departed from what classicists have today identified as several of the *Cinquecento*'s most significant errors of interpretation. Stephen Halliwell asserts that "Heinsius' essay presented probably the purest and most illuminating statement yet achieved of some of the chief ideas of Aristotle's work" – especially those of unity of action, mimesis, and catharsis, which had been most frequently distorted.² As I shall argue, Jonson's theoretical writings follow Heinsius in anticipating several important conclusions of modern scholarship on these topics.

But even beyond this, and particularly relevant to the study of Shakespeare, is Jonson's assertion (again extracted from Heinsius) that before "either the grammarians, or philosophers...found out those laws [of poetry and drama], there were many excellent poets, that fulfilled them" (*Discoveries* 450). While great poets often agree with the theorists, in Jonson's estimation, they do not so much follow the rules laid down by perceptive critics or theorists as they arrive at them by other, practical means. I will work, then, from three premises: that Jonson and Shakespeare were masterful dramatists; that Aristotle was a masterful critic and theorist; and that modern scholarship has made sense

² Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 303.

of several crucial difficulties and lacunae in Aristotle's writing. If these things, along with Jonson's maxim, are true, it should at least be possible that in the process of writing comedy, Jonson and Shakespeare could have realized tenets similar to those of Aristotle, regardless of whether the former two ever read the philosopher, never mind his subsequent scholarly expositors. Indeed, Jonson could only have come to Heinsius' work on Aristotle after he had written much of his greatest drama, including the plays I will look at here. That what he found in Heinsius both illuminates and confirms central features of his drama is an example of the larger possibilities I aim to explore. As James Redwine argues, "Jonson seems to have found in Heinsius' redaction of Aristotle a succinct statement of what he had been suggesting about the dramatic fable all along."³

This will not be a historical source study, looking to reconstruct Jonson's knowledge of Aristotle and how he came by it, or to determine the degree of Shakespeare's acquaintance with the *Poetics*, though profitable work remains to be done on both fronts. By the same token, it is not primarily a survey of Renaissance interpretations of the *Poetics*' central ideas, though I will consider these in passing. Finally, it is not a study of classical comedy's relationship to that of Jonson and Shakespeare, which has most recently been done admirably by Robert Miola.⁴ As I alluded to, Aristotle's literary theory had surprisingly little circulation in the ancient world, and thus little evident influence on its comedy; indeed, much less than it came to have on the European continent by the neo-classical seventeenth century. Rather, this study remains primarily literary theoretical. Its primary theorist just happens to have written before the literature to which his ideas are applied. It seems to me that in the same way that theories

³ Redwine, *Ben Jonson's Literary Criticism*, xxxii.

⁴ See Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*.

which postdate Jonson and Shakespeare have regularly proven valuable in understanding their drama, so too might one which antedates it, especially when it has been significantly reinterpreted in recent times.

Some brief description of the *Poetics*' textual background is nonetheless helpful.⁵ Between its writing in mid-fourth century Athens and its resurrection in sixteenth century Italy, the *Poetics* seems to have gone largely unknown. As the state of the text makes painfully clear, it was one of Aristotle's esoteric or unpublished works, likely little more than his lecture notes on the topic. It was circulated in two books, of which our extant version is only the first. The second in all likelihood would have fulfilled the promise at the end of the first to treat comedy and lampoon. What modest circulation Aristotle's literary theory had in the ancient world was due largely to his *On Poets*, a published dialogue that seems to have popularized his theory for a wider audience than the more technical, less polished *Poetics* ever garnered. The *On Poets* is known only in fragments, but these demonstrate significant overlap with the *Poetics*. Among other things, the *On Poets* contained Aristotle's distinction of comedy from tragedy by the characters each represents, an explanation of tragic and comic catharsis, a survey of the history of several poetic genres, and the definition of poetry as *mimēsis*, or "representation." Horace most likely drew his knowledge of Aristotle from the *On Poets* when he wrote his *Ars Poetica* (c. 18 BCE), as did the Roman grammarian Macrobius (c. 430) and the neo-Platonic philosopher Proclus (412-485) at the end of antiquity. Book 2 of the *Poetics* was still known as the promised treatment of comedy to the earlier neo-Platonist Porphyry (c. 234-304), but had certainly disappeared by the sixth century. Book

⁵ The following account makes use of Richard Janko, "Reception," and Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 286-94. For a detailed examination of the *Poetics*' history in England, see Herrick, *Aristotle in England*.

1 only resurfaced briefly around 700 to be translated first into Syriac and then into Arabic in 923; this latter translation forms one of only three sources on which modern editions are based. The two other are Greek manuscripts of Byzantine provenance, dating from the 10th and 14th centuries. While the Arabic version was translated into Latin as early as the 13th century, it was not until Aldus Manutius published a Greek edition in 1508 in Venice that the *Poetics* began to gain a widespread scholarly audience. Its promulgation spread was aided especially by Pazzi's 1536 Latin translation, which was frequently reprinted. Often, translation (usually into Latin, but occasionally into Italian) and commentary were closely interwoven, as in the work of Robortello (using Pazzi's Latin, 1548) and Castelvetro (in Italian, 1570). Heinsius' 1611 translation and commentary in many ways depended on these earlier Italian studies, though in significant ways also departs from their interpretation. His work (rather ironically) became the basis of the French neo-classicism of the later seventeenth century.

Jonson certainly did have first-hand knowledge of the *Poetics*. He owned a copy of a 1619 Greek and Latin edition of Aristotle's *Opera*, in addition to Heinsius' 1611 Latin translation and commentary,⁶ from which he translates extended passages in the *Discoveries*. It is also possible that he read several of the Italian commentators. As we shall see, his prologues to *Every Man In His Humour*, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and *Volpone* all make explicit references to both genuine and pseudo-Aristotelian ideas. Though it is now generally assumed that Shakespeare would have been capable of reading the Italian

⁶ See Herford, *Ben Jonson*, 1: 265.

and Latin commentaries available in his time,⁷ there is no direct evidence of his knowledge of the *Poetics*. Notably, *The Tempest* self-consciously submits to the pseudo-Aristotelian “unities” of time and place (along with the genuinely Aristotelian concept of unified action). But more often, Shakespeare mentions the rules only in apologies for violating them. The Chorus in *Henry V* apologetically asks the audience to “Linger your patience on and well digest / Th’ abuse of distance,” referring to what was believed to be Aristotle’s prescription that a play take place in only one locale (2.0.31-32).⁸ The character Time in *The Winter’s Tale* implores the audience:

Impute it not a crime
To me or my swift passage that I slide
O’er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
To o’erthrow law.... (4.1.4-8)

And though he makes no such explicit mention of the rules in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in covering the events of ten years and shuttling between Rome, Greece, Parthia, and Egypt, the play seems deliberately to thumb its nose at the same two unities. All of this has resulted in the critical consensus that, in David Kastan’s words, “Aristotle is largely a red herring in regard to Shakespeare.”⁹ What recent studies of Aristotle demonstrate, though, is that Aristotle the pedantic law giver is the Aristotle not of the *Poetics*, but of *Cinquecento* commentators. Scholars of Renaissance English drama often remain surprisingly ignorant of this fact. Kastan unwittingly bases the summary judgement above on at least one such distortion of Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, while Ralph

⁷ See Shaheen, “Shakespeare’s Knowledge of Italian,” for an opinion on the topic described by his title. Baldwin’s “*Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*” remains the standard analysis of Shakespeare’s facility in classical languages.

⁸ With the exception of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Measure for Measure*, all quotations of Shakespeare’s plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare* and are cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.

⁹ Kastan, “Idea of Tragedy,” 7.

Berry's claim that "the appeal to Aristotle does not...recover much that is persistently useful in the discussion of Shakespeare" similarly follows the Italians in reducing the *Poetics* to a series of well-starched dogmas that look stodgy indeed when applied to Shakespeare.¹⁰

The reasons for the reductive codification of ideas Aristotle discusses in the *Poetics* are manifold, but the most significant was the habit of reading his work as Horace's *Ars Poetica* had been, as a rhetorical manual. This tendency located the "chief attributes of the poem in its effect on a reader or audience," explains Halliwell, and "exacerbated the drive towards a sharp definition of essential rules of literary composition."¹¹ In contrast, the "accent of Aristotle's theory falls on what he regards as the objective emotive properties of the well constructed plot" and the internal, formal organization of the poem, but the Renaissance frequently missed this fundamental quality.¹² The major effect of this, Halliwell concludes, was "one of simplification and coarsening, grounded as it was in a willingness to fragment Aristotle's ideas and assimilate them to formulations of doctrine found in the *Ars Poetica*."¹³ Robortello thus transmutes "probability" and "necessity" (1451b), Aristotle's central terms for describing the all-important relationship between the incidents of a unified plot, "into principles for relating the poem to nature and to the beliefs of the audience";¹⁴ philosophical and structural unity is reduced to the "jejune notion of the merely believable or

¹⁰ Berry, *Tragic Instance*, 12.

¹¹ Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 297.

¹² *Ibid.*, 296. These remarks are part of Halliwell's brief survey of the *Cinquecento's* rhetorical emphasis in the study of poetics. For more exhaustive accounts, see Herrick, *Fusion*, and Weinberg, *Italian Renaissance*, chs 3, 4, 9. Weinberg tends to read the *Poetics* in a New Critical manner, which Halliwell's more recent account avoids.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 297. Tigerstedt ("Latin West," 23) argues that it is more accurate "to say that Aristotle as well as Horace was read in the light of a common rhetorical tradition than to argue that Aristotle was interpreted through Horace."

¹⁴ Weinberg, "Pseudo-Aristotle," 100-1.

convincing.”¹⁵ Castelvetro later goes even further, subordinating unity of action (the only one that counts for Aristotle) to the unities of time and place, which he invents as rules necessary to the verisimilitude he believes to be Aristotle’s concern. “Aesthetic preoccupations have disappeared” from the *Poetics* in the hands of the Italians, concludes Weinberg, “and their place has been taken by rhetorical and physical concerns” of a much more rudimentary order.¹⁶ The unities are only the most notable of several important codifications that need to be undone. As I shall argue, Aristotle’s equally crucial concepts of mimesis and catharsis were also conflated with Horace and the rhetorical tradition. Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry*, for example, the first work in English to deal substantially with the *Poetics*, follows the pattern laid out by the Italians. He chides *Gorboduc* and other Elizabethan tragedies for being “faulty both in place and time,” rules urged “by Aristotle’s precept.”¹⁷ In his famous definition of poetry, he conflates Aristotle’s concept of mimesis with Horace’s end of poetry, doing away with catharsis: “Poetry therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimēsis*,...with this end, to teach and delight.”¹⁸

As we shall see, Jonson, like Sidney, regularly invoked both the unities and the Horatian *docere et delectare* maxim. In striking contrast, Shakespeare most often avoided these, resulting in the stock conception of the two dramatists’ diametrically opposed literary temperaments. Yet at the same time, observes Halliwell, “Jonson’s conviction

¹⁵ Halliwell, *Aristotle’s “Poetics,”* 298. This is a perennial misreading: Richard Hardin (“Encountering Plautus,” 812ff) has recently asserted that verisimilitude was a principle “carried over from Aristotle’s statements on tragedy” to the criticism of comedy in the Renaissance, and mistakenly asserts that in his scorn for audiences that most like a play that “runs from reason and probability” (*Discoveries*, 454), Jonson is referring merely to verisimilitude.

¹⁶ Weinberg, “Pseudo-Aristotle,” 101.

¹⁷ Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, 381.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

that the ancients are not timeless or infallible legislators” (a belief constantly evident in the *Discoveries*), enabled him to make “a much fuller and more accurate statement of the *Poetics*’ essential doctrine of unity of action” than many other ostensibly classicist thinkers would arrive at later in the seventeenth century.¹⁹ This paradox is what opens up the potential link with Shakespeare. If Jonson had already been thinking along lines similar to Aristotle, and after 1611 recognized these similarities in Heinsius’ account of the *Poetics* (in marked contrast both to the *Cinquecento* and later French neo-classicism), surely Shakespeare might also have done something similar – and even because of, rather than despite, his disregard for the “rules.” The possibility comes down to what one makes of Aristotle: either the arch rule-maker or a genuinely speculative theorist of drama.

The amount of *Poetics* scholarship in the latter decades of the twentieth century is truly remarkable: in English alone, no less than seven new translations and the groundbreaking studies of Leon Golden, Richard Janko, and Stephen Halliwell (to name only three of the *Poetics* leading scholars working in English) have all emerged since 1970.²⁰ Studies on the topic of Aristotelian comic theory must necessarily look beyond the *Poetics* to reconstruct what Aristotle might have said in its lost second book. Leon Golden uses the *Nicomachean Ethics* to expand the concept of comic *hamartia* nascent in Chapter 5. On the same topic, Richard Janko looks to a portion of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a tenth century Byzantine manuscript that he argues is a summary of the *Poetics*’ lost book. He pairs an analysis of comic error with the *Tractatus*’ discussion of the comic hoax, one of the genre’s crucial plot devices. Golden also finds in the *Rhetoric* a compelling argument

¹⁹ Halliwell, Introduction, 20.

²⁰ Classicist Malcolm Heath keeps a running bibliography of *Poetics* scholarship online at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/poetics/poetbib.htm>.

that the comic emotion parallel to the pity and fear of tragedy is *nemesan*, or “righteous indignation.” Finally, Golden, Janko, Halliwell, and Martha Nussbaum all contribute to a general consensus on the nature of dramatic catharsis by re-examining the *Poetics*’ internal arguments, looking backward from them to the term’s Platonic uses and forward to the work of late antique neo-Platonists who knew Aristotle’s more substantial discussion of catharsis in the *On Poets*. I aim not simply to survey and explain these developments, but to harmonize similar aspects of these disparate studies (something these scholars have been reluctant to do) before relating them to the comedy of Jonson and Shakespeare.

I have deliberately chosen a diverse range of plays by the two dramatists so as to demonstrate the capaciousness of Aristotle’s thought as described in these recent accounts. *Every Man Out of His Humour* is the first of Jonson’s three “comical satires,” and is throughout explicitly concerned with comic theory. It is in many ways a study (not always successful) of what separates dramatic comedy from the invective or lampoon that Aristotle argues it evolved from. *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*, provides a later example of Jonson’s most deft comic writing, and appears to eschew his earlier use of the genre to express a satirist’s indignation at folly. This makes *Epicoene* a challenging test case for the categories of *nemesan* and catharsis. Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* is similar in this challenge, and is the representative romantic comedy in this study. It also puts forward a preliminary understanding of the hoax, indignation, and catharsis that Shakespeare will later refine and complicate in *Measure for Measure*. There, he uses these categories to test the bounds of comedy, rather than simply to mingle it with tragedy.

This limited number of plays is deliberate. The perennial danger of theoretical approaches to literature is that the eager search for consonance between theory and

practice can blind one to points of dissonance. I have sought to mitigate this risk by exploring in significant detail the relevance of these Aristotelian concepts to a few plays, rather than only generally testing them on many. The result, I think, is a demonstration of just how comprehensive these concepts can be. A further difficulty is implicit particularly in theoretical studies of dramatic affect like this – namely, that of universalizing audience response. Critics have never been more conscious of the diversity of emotional responses that a play might evoke, both in its own time and in contemporary re-stagings or re-readings. Part of my claim, though, is that Jonson and Shakespeare evince an interest in examining particular emotions in their characters and in producing these in their audiences. If this argument holds, it should be possible to discuss the ideal emotional responses that the plays carefully aim at without denying that the same moments might also produce other effects. I have thus tried to be judicious in describing what and how “we” feel during these plays, but without going into contortions with the subjunctive mood to avoid offense or contradicting my argument about the primacy of certain affective responses over others.

My title, finally, emerges from these plays’ consistent linkage of error, hoax, indignation, and catharsis with emotional pain, both of the audience and the characters of the drama. Clerimont, one of Jonson’s young wits in *Epicoene*, flippantly describes the hoax he and his comrades play on the sullen old Morose as a “comedy of affliction”, but the phrase becomes a remarkable assessment of both the means and the end of the genre as posited by the previously mentioned Aristotelian categories and the plays here studied. These comedies, each in a very different way, consist essentially of moments of affliction, which in turn result in the comic end set out by Aristotle.

I begin my study with a survey of the *Poetics*' central concepts, read with a particular eye to their relevance to comedy. In addition to functioning as a refresher course on a text that most of us last hurried through as undergraduates, this first chapter regularly highlights important general changes that have recently occurred in classicists' understanding of the text. Following this, each of three chapters makes a detailed examination of the categories of error and hoax, righteous indignation, and catharsis, and then applies them to the interpretation of each of four plays. This arrangement will avoid extended passages of potentially arid theory. More importantly, the remarkably diverse uses to which Jonson and Shakespeare put these dramatic categories are best illuminated by immediate comparison. And if Jonson's claim about poets deducing principles independently of theorists is true, his and Shakespeare's dramatic uses of these ideas can, in my arrangement, even be seen to illuminate the ideas. As formulated by Golden, Janko, and Halliwell, these categories have received no consideration in relation to Renaissance English drama. Critics have made very occasional use of more general recent studies of the *Poetics*, particularly that of classicist Gerald Else.²¹ Several articles²² discuss his elucidation of *mythos* or plot, *hamartia*, and catharsis, but only in relationship to Shakespeare's tragedy. Else's ideas on the first two concepts have proven influential, but those on catharsis have in recent years been largely dismissed as too idiosyncratic.²³ Employing his discussion of *anagnorisis* or "recognition," Barry Adams has written substantially on both Shakespeare's and Jonson's comedy, and I have made some use of

²¹ See Else, *Aristotle's "Poetics": The Argument*.

²² See especially Black, "Aristotle's Mythos," and "Hamartia in Shakespeare." Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare*, glances at Lane Cooper's study (*An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*) of the *Tractatus Coislinianus*. Northrop Frye also makes regular and insightful (though not very systematic) use of the *Poetics* in *The Myth of Deliverance* and *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. I make regular reference to the latter two critics below.

²³ For a brief summary, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 356. Brian Vickers offers a more substantial refutation in *Towards Greek Tragedy*, Appendix 1.

his studies throughout.²⁴ His aim, though, is largely enumerative: to identify each dramatist's usage of the plot device of recognition, but not, ultimately, to read the larger plays in these moments' light. The paucity of work on the topic confirms, then, both my earlier allegations of English criticism's ignorance of the *Poetics*' evolution, and of the importance of undertaking such a study.

This critical lacuna also means that anyone attempting to fill it will likely be working well off the main thoroughfares of current critical discussion. Aristotle has looked stultifying for the last fifty years at least, especially when it comes to reading Shakespeare. Even genre theory more broadly has become rather dull, as an eminent Jonsonian recently told me, in the face of contemporary interest in socio-cultural modes of literary analysis. I could not disagree more, and make no apology for pursuing the topic. While I will interact with current approaches where they touch on mine, my larger intent is to contribute to the longer and broader discussion of how literary genres (in this case, comedy) function and what that function might be. I hope to demonstrate that there is still work to be done on the topic. Aristotle has had significant influence on what has already been said; it seems plausible, then, that by gaining a better understanding of his thinking, we might come to better understand the genres he described. In a small way, this is the goal to which I hope to contribute.

²⁴ See Adams, *Coming-to-Know*, and "Complex Plot."

CHAPTER 2

Aristotle's *Poetics* and Comedy

Perhaps the most important things to keep in mind when reading the *Poetics* – even more so than the classical Greek drama of Aristotle's day – are the ideas to which he is responding. His teacher, Plato, had attacked poetry's status in Athenian society as the chief educator of the people and asserted that its role belonged to philosophy. His attack consisted of four main accusations, summarized here by Richard Janko:

- (i) Poets compose under inspiration, not by using reason.
- (ii) Poetry teaches the wrong things.
- (iii) Poetry is a *mimēsis* (imitation), at two removes from reality
- (iv) Poetry encourages the emotions of those who perform or listen to it.²⁵

The first two charges, notes Janko, “refute claims that poetry is a skill...which can be learned, and from which we can learn.” In the *Republic*, Socrates recites the common ancient belief “that there's no area of expertise, and nothing relevant to human goodness and badness either – and nothing to do with the gods even – that...poets don't understand.”²⁶ Yet Homer, he continues, had no first-hand knowledge of the “warfare, tactics, politics, and human education” that he depicted, and so can hardly teach these arts. And instead of acquiring what knowledge he does have by reason and experience, the poet obtains it by divine inspiration, when he “goes out of his mind and his intellect

²⁵ Janko, Introduction, xi.

²⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 10.598. This and all subsequent quotations of the *Republic* are cited by book and Stephanus numbers; future quotations are cited parenthetically in the text.

is no longer in him.”²⁷ Moreover, what poetry does teach is often flagrantly immoral: it portrays both heroes and gods as dishonest, licentious, petty, and drunken, rather than exemplars of virtue. “No one will find his own badness reprehensible once he’s been persuaded that these things are and always have been done “by gods and their descendants” (*Republic* 3.391).

Plato’s latter two charges strike at the very nature of poetry, not simply its typical content. The visible material world, taught Socrates, is derivative of, and hence inferior to, the transcendental “Forms” that constitute true reality. His famous example is of a bed: while there are all sorts of beds in the world, they are all examples of the one type, which is the ultimate reality of the thing. A craftsman who makes a bed, then, makes something one step removed from this reality. A painter who paints a picture of a bed makes something not only derivative of reality, but a mere representation, derivative twice over, and thus hardly capable of expressing ideal truth.²⁸ Plato then presses further to assert that poetic representation is not merely frivolous, but dangerous. While “the best part of our minds is perfectly happy to be guided by reason,” poetry both represents and appeals to the emotions, the “petulant” part of us “which is incapable of listening to reason” (*Republic* 10.604). This is especially true of tragedy and comedy, which, unlike narrative poetry, are enacted and thus more fully mimetic. Their danger lies in the fact that “what a [tragic] poet satisfies and gratifies...is an aspect of ourselves which we forcibly restrain when tragedy strikes our own lives” (606). People tend to think that indulging in such vicarious emotion is harmless, yet Socrates insists that we “are bound to store the harvest we reap from others”: by watching a tragedy, we “feed the feeling of

²⁷ Plato, *Ion*, 534. I cite *Ion* by Stephanus numbers.

²⁸ Socrates and Glaucon discuss the bed example in *Republic* 10.595-598.

sadness until it is too strong for us easily to restrain it when hardship occurs in our own lives.” The same holds true for comedy, where one laughs at “amusing things which you’d be ashamed to do yourself.” Ultimately, Socrates concludes, “poetic representation...irrigates and tends to...things [which] should be left to wither, and it makes them our rulers when they should be our subjects.”

Plato was later to concede in Book 7 of the *Laws* that poetry might have a legitimate place in the less idealistic state he describes there, but it is primarily to the strong criticisms of poetry in the *Republic* that Aristotle responds in the *Poetics*. I will look first at what he says of tragedy and comedy jointly in his first five chapters. Then, focusing particularly on plot, I will consider how much of what he says about tragedy implicitly applies, with some adjustment, to comedy.

Aristotle immediately acknowledges and accepts Plato’s description of poetry as mimesis, of which tragedy, comedy, and epic (together, the focus of the *Poetics*) are specific sorts. But counter to Plato’s charge that the objects of poetic representation are things like war or statecraft, of which poets have little real knowledge, he insists that these genres “represent people in action.”²⁹ *Praxis* or “action” is a crucial term: “In Aristotelian philosophy,” explains Stephen Halliwell, “‘action’ denotes intrinsically *purposive* behaviour: in their actions, men engage in the distinctively human pursuit of aims, the realisation of intentions.”³⁰ Aristotle thus takes the focus off Plato’s concern with particular types of human activities and turns it toward the generalized, even abstract notion of “the fundamental patterns of life,” making the poet a philosopher and

²⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448a. Unless otherwise noted, this and all subsequent quotations of the *Poetics* are taken from Richard Janko’s translation and cited parenthetically by Bekker number in the text.

³⁰ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 75.

discerner of universals rather than a practical instructor of skills.³¹ Richard Janko asserts that action always results “from a rational decision, for which its agent is to some degree responsible.”³² Because it begins with a choice, action inevitably has a moral character, which is in turn closely linked to that of the character acting: “Since those who represent represent people in action, these people are necessarily either good or inferior. For characters almost always follow from these [qualities]³³ alone; everyone differs in character because of vice and virtue” (1448a). Like the English “character” which translates it, the Greek *ethos* can describe both personal moral constitution and a *dramatis persona*. Aristotle, though, describes dramatic character almost completely in terms of moral constitution, just as he does action. For him, character is not primarily the collection of psychological or personality traits with which we tend to associate the word, but “the sphere of ethical dispositions and choices, as these bear on, and are manifested in, action.”³⁴ Aristotle’s term for “good,” *spondaios*, “connotes a person we should take seriously in both social and moral terms”;³⁵ Leon Golden argues that “noble” better conveys the full sense of the term.³⁶ Its opposite, *phaulos*, designates a foolish or trivial person who is socially and morally ignoble, and hence ridiculous. It is on the basis of the sorts of characters each represents that Aristotle distinguishes tragedy and comedy: “comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are better” (1448a).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Janko, Commentary, 71.

³³ In this and all subsequent quotations of any of Aristotle’s works, words enclosed within square brackets have been added by the translator to clarify Aristotle’s laconic text.

³⁴ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 75.

³⁵ Janko, Commentary, 71.

³⁶ Golden, *Mimesis*, 66-67.

Having accepted Plato's definition of poetry as mimesis, Aristotle in chapter 4 goes on to complicate its meaning by linking representation not merely with the emotions it arouses, but with reason. "Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from other animals in this; man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation" (1448b). Janko points out that in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle had profoundly likened language, which represents ideas, to a poet's mimesis, which represents action and life.³⁷ He implies the same thing here by ascribing representation to rational human nature. Our delight in it, he continues, results from its appeal not simply to the emotional part of us, but, and most importantly, to our rational faculty: people "delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one" (1448b). That this is true even of images of fierce animals, for example, which would terrify us in real life, demonstrates that our delight is in the act of recognition – learning – and not simply in the representation itself. As this sort of learning is the result of mimesis in general, and *catharsis* (as Aristotle will later state) is the end of tragedy in particular, it follows that the two are closely related; this is a point to which I shall return. Moreover, the process of inference that Aristotle describes here requires by definition a degree of distance between the reality and its poetic representation. Aristotle had just alluded to this in his comparison of poets with painters (1448a). In representing noble men, the tragic dramatist is like Polygnotus of Thasos (likely the greatest painter of the

³⁷ "The poets were naturally the first to set in motion [study of verbal expression]; for words are imitations" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.1404a). I cite the *Rhetoric* by book and Bekker numbers parenthetically in the text, and unless otherwise noted, use George Kennedy's translation.

fifth century), while the comic dramatist is like the Athenian caricaturist Pauson.³⁸ He later elaborates on the first pair, describing how great portrait painters, “In rendering people’s particular shape, while making them [life-]like, paint them as finer [than they are]” (1454b). The relationship between the second pair will be especially important when we consider in more detail the nature of comic error. But Aristotle makes a subtle distinction here between the mere copying of reality, as Plato had charged, and the work of abstracting principles from it in which a poet engages.

Poetry therefore arose out of human beings’ pre-disposition toward representations, Aristotle continues. “[T]he grander people represented fine actions, i.e. those of fine people” in hymns and encomia, while “the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones” in invectives or lampoons, and audiences were likewise drawn to the different sorts by their natures (1448b). Comedy and tragedy are comparatively late forms of poetry and represent for Aristotle its fullest potential. Comedy evolved out of lampoon or invective, and this occurred because of two factors. The first is the decision of several authors “to relinquish the form of lampoon and compose generalised stories, i.e. plots” (1449b). While they appear to share the same objects of representation, the actions of inferior people, lampoon was content with representing and mocking individual persons, while comedy undertakes to represent hypothetical and general sorts of action. The second factor is introduced part way through his discussion of comic plot, where Aristotle pauses to clarify the object of comedy. Rather than mocking “every [kind of] vice,” as was the custom of Attic lampoon, Aristotle insists that in representing things inferior and ignoble, comedy limits

³⁸ See Janko, Commentary, 71.

itself to “the laughable,” which is only a part of the species “of what is ugly, . . . a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful and destructive” (1449a).

This restriction of comedy’s scope is a careful response to Plato’s complaint that comedy moved people to ridicule the gods and great men. Homer, in his (now lost) *Margites*, was the first to thus “indicate the form of comedy, by dramatising not an invective but the laughable” (1448b). “The laughable” is Janko’s translation of the abstract noun *to geloion*, the root of which means “laughter.” As with mimesis, Aristotle’s tactic is to posit a difference between real examples of particular sorts of character and action, and representations of them: the true poet represents not the example itself, but the abstract principle it embodies. Additionally, Halliwell reminds us of the “essential association of laughter with ridicule and denigration” in an ancient Greek culture “which possessed a strongly developed sensitivity to public reproach and dishonour.”³⁹ This potential edge of comedy remains even as Aristotle limits its range, and is perhaps better conveyed by Golden’s translation of *to geloion* as “the ridiculous.”⁴⁰ Moreover, this limitation may be less restrictive than it first appears. Malcolm Heath argues that Aristotle’s intent in apparently disallowing pain in comedy is not to make proscriptions for the genre, nor even to differentiate it from invective, but to distinguish its object from the *pathos* or suffering constitutive of tragedy, the genre he discusses before and after this passage on comedy. As such, pain need not be categorically disallowed in comedy. Indeed, Aristotle later alludes to this possibility when he describes comic plots ending in punishment for its wicked characters (1453a).⁴¹ Tying this definition of

³⁹ Halliwell, *Commentary*, 85.

⁴⁰ Golden, *Mimesis*, 89-90.

⁴¹ See Heath, “Aristotelian Comedy,” 353.

comedy's object to Aristotle's earlier account of its plot-based form, Halliwell affirms Heath, pointing out that for Aristotle, comedy still shares with invective a critical and thus partially painful intent, except that the "critical force directed against 'error and deformity' must be integrated within the design of a coherent and intelligible action."⁴²

At this point Aristotle leaves comedy behind to discuss tragedy, beginning with his famous definition of the genre:

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and fear⁴³ the catharsis of such emotions. (1449b)

Yet the way he introduces this is by declaring that his definition of tragedy's "essence...results from what we have said" in the introductory five chapters (1449b). He has indeed touched on every element of the definition except for the catharsis of pity and fear which is tragedy's end. Thus, if a definition of tragedy can emerge almost whole from his introduction, it follows that the same should be possible for comedy, the genre to which Aristotle's introduction devotes equal time. This makes especially his subsequent analysis of plot and character – the primary constituent parts of both genres – relevant to comedy, provided that proper adjustments are made for the key differences between the two genres that he has already identified. Immediately following the definition, Aristotle briefly outlines tragedy's six parts before explaining why plot, "the construction of the incidents," is more important than character (1450a). He refines his earlier statement that poetry represents "people in action" by stating more precisely that

⁴² Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 271.

⁴³ Janko translates *phobos* as "terror," "because it is the stronger word" (Commentary, 224). Nothing in the definition of the word requires this extreme sense, so I have emended Janko's translation to "fear," in keeping with most other modern English editions..

“tragedy is a representation not of human beings, but of action and life,” demonstrating that greater importance must be placed on what is done than on the doer. This is because in tragedy as in life, people attain their end, happiness, by “their actions,” not simply by being “of a certain sort” – a notion which is the starting point of his *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴⁴ If tragedy represents life, Aristotle’s teleological philosophy requires that it represent the pursuit of life’s end, at which all serious actions aim. Thus, the actors “do not act to represent the characters, but they include the characters for the sake of the actions” (1450a). This strong statement needs to be qualified, though, by Aristotle’s earlier acknowledgement that character is of enough significance to determine the genre of a play, and by the exceptionally close link that it maintains with plot even in Chapter 6. Incorporating Aristotle’s later description of character’s link with decision at 1450b, Halliwell aptly concludes that “Aristotle believes in a reciprocal relation between character and action – character motivating action, and action cumulatively helping to shape character.”⁴⁵

Returning to the beginning of the definition, what tragedy represents is a *praxeōs spoudaios* or “serious action.” In agreement with Janko, Halliwell insists that “the essential point of *spoudaios* here is ethical,” and it is not meant merely to describe the play’s tone: “the genre should portray agents engaged in the pursuit of the ethical goals of life.”⁴⁶ Golden’s preference for the term “noble” is helpful here, as it better reflects the emphatic distinction Aristotle makes between the noble and good (*spoudaios*) character and action of tragedy” (which he has already explained) “and the ignoble or bad (*phaulos*)

⁴⁴ “The highest of all goods” Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.1095a) calls *eudaimonia*, or “happiness,” which consists in “living well and doing well.” I cite the *Ethics* by book and Bekker number, and from this point forward, parenthetically in the text..

⁴⁵ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 94.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

character and action of comedy.”⁴⁷ That said, though, Aristotle’s earlier account of comedy’s developmental maturity relative to tragedy ensures that the distinction in no way denigrates comedy’s intellectual significance: the genre’s essential difference “lies in the opposed kinds of character and action both represent, and not in the circumstance that one is allegedly serious and the other allegedly nonserious.”⁴⁸ So instead of an action aimed at the proper ends of life, comedy’s *phaulos* action might then be ludicrously misguided or even apparently aimless, but in a way that still comments significantly on those aims.

The representation must also be “of a complete i.e. whole action which has some magnitude,” possessing a “beginning, a middle, and a conclusion” (1450b). By magnitude, Aristotle means a duration “that is easily seen as a whole” and “easily memorable,” like an animal whose body is neither too small to be seen nor too large to be observed in one glance (1451a). His apparently obvious definitions of “beginning, middle, and conclusion” actually invoke his most important notion of plot, probability and necessity. Each part of the action is defined by whether it necessarily results *from* or *in* other parts: a beginning has no necessary preliminary action but requires subsequent ones; the middle is a necessary result of the beginning and demands a conclusion; the conclusion marks the end of the chain of causality initiated by the beginning. For this reason, a plot that portrays “everything that happened to Odysseus” cannot be described as a “whole action,” because many of the events will not have a necessary relationship to others, and their portrayal will only result in the sort of episodic plot that characterized lampoon.

⁴⁷ Golden, *Mimesis*, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The poet's overriding concern with probability and necessity is what separates him or her from the historian. Where the latter is bound to write about "things that have happened," the poet's only requirement is to describe "things that may happen" (1451a). Putting it another way, "poetry tends to speak of universals, history of particulars. A universal is the sort of thing that a certain kind of person may well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity.... A particular is what Alcibiades did or what he suffered" (1451b). This concern with universals, which for the philosopher are of greater significance and more true than particulars, makes poetry "a more philosophical" or "speculative"⁴⁹ "thing than history."⁵⁰ Aristotle here answers Plato's charge⁵¹ that poetry is an inferior form of knowledge because it is concerned only with particulars. Instead, says Aristotle, poetry will treat universals if the action it represents is unified: made up of incidents linked by probability and necessity and arising out of particularity to attain a degree of universality. What Aristotle means by his oft-repeated phrase "probability and necessity" is only incidentally that the action bear a degree of verisimilarity to the real world – that certain sorts of characters do the sorts of things that such people would do in life. The given action of a play can be closely verisimilar to life and yet never be more than "a convincing simulation of particulars," as Halliwell observes.⁵² Rather, "probability and necessity" speak primarily of the internal relationship of a play's incidents to each other by cause and effect. Aristotle's regular use

⁴⁹ "Speculative" is George Whalley's translation (Commentary, 80n70) of the comparative *philosophōteron*, which he prefers to the literal "more philosophical," because the adjective need not imply the "exercise of logical and abstractive technique" characteristic of the formal discipline.

⁵⁰ Obviously, Aristotle's take on history here is reductive. Like a poet, the historian Thucydides had before Aristotle's time tried to peer through the myriad events of the Peloponnesian War to identify those bound together by cause and effect. Whalley ("Translating," 24) suggests that Aristotle means that the act of "poetry-making, not poetry itself, that is a more serious and 'philosophical' business than history-making."

⁵¹ Plato, *Republic*, 10.597B-598B.

⁵² Halliwell, *Commentary*, 109.

of the terms as a pair suggest that dramatic action lies somewhere between the two: its incidents are more than merely possible, but because they involve human beings, can never be fully necessary in the strict sense of the term.

Similarly, modern commentators tend to caution against taking the term “universals” in the sense of general, timeless human truths. Aristotle defines universality as “the sort of thing that a certain kind of person may well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity,” thus locating it squarely within the plot, as he had probability and necessity (1451b). “In other words,” paraphrases Malcolm Heath, “a ‘universal’ plot is an appropriately delimited series of causally consequent events.”⁵³ Heath concludes that “it is essential to grasp here the distinction between the universality (in Aristotle’s sense) of a comedy’s plot, and universality (in some other sense) in its comic point.”⁵⁴ Yet as I have argued, Aristotle’s description of comedy’s subject, the ridiculous actions of inferior, ignoble people, strongly implies a universal moral sense: their actions will logically result from a foolish choice which by its nature evokes our ridicule and laughter. No small part of the pleasure of viewing such actions will be in recognizing their likeness to our own experience. Aristotle’s stress on the internal requirements of plot is not meant to disallow this sort of inference and judgement, but only to insist that dramatic events must contain a concentrated amount of coherence lacking or at least obscure in life.⁵⁵ So while Aristotle’s definition is in one sense precisely limited, the category to which it is limited is one which opens up onto the much larger plane of human existence. Significantly, Aristotle suggests that the possibility of dramatic universality is best seen in

⁵³ Heath, “Aristotelian Comedy,” 348.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵⁵ Halliwell discusses this point in *Translation and Commentary*, 107-8.

comedy. Unlike tragic dramatists, who remained attached to (what were considered historical) stories, comic poets compose “a plot according to probability” and only afterwards “supply the names at random”; nor do they, “like the composers of lampoons, compose [poems] about particular individuals” (1451b). This is partly what Aristotle alludes to in Chapter 5 when observing that Crates was the first Athenian to depart from the episodic structure of lampoon for “generalised stories,” and he confirms here that comedy during his time had come closer to poetry’s full potential than had tragedy. In addition, exemplifying comedy like this confirms that much of the preceding discussion of tragic plot is equally relevant to comedy.

After this discussion of the nature of tragic plot, Aristotle goes on in Chapter 10 to delineate its different sorts. He prefaces this, though, with the observation that the structure he has just described must not simply portray a “complete action” but one which contains “pitiable and fearful” incidents if the tragedy is to achieve its purpose (1452a). These incidents are most effective when they “happen contrary to expectation but because of one another.” Aristotle thus refines his earlier account of probability and necessity, demonstrating that stories which foreground causality are not to be simply straightforward morality tales, where a character judges or acts wrongly and then pays the logical price for doing so. Rather, their investigations of causality must be surprising, and indeed “amazing,” without breaking the chain of events. Without getting into a consideration at this point of what the equivalent emotional response to comedy might be, we can certainly affirm that surprise is at least as crucial to it as to tragedy, and that comedy’s events must be linked in a similarly unexpected yet logical way.

Aristotle's categorization of plot types depends on the nature of what he calls the play's "transformation" or *metabasis* (1452a). The transformation is the play-long change of fortune for the main character from good to bad. Because he later describes the transformation from bad fortune to good as typical of comedy, Aristotle must have recognized the nature of the *metabasis* to be crucial to comic plot as well as the tragic. The way in which it takes place determines whether the play has a "complex" or "simple" plot. In a simple plot, "the transformation comes about without reversal or recognition" in a unilinear and unremarkable fashion, while in one complex, "the transformation is accompanied by a recognition, a reversal, or both." One of three parts of plot, a "reversal" or *peripeteia* "is a complete swing in the direction of the action, . . . conform[ing] to probability and necessity."⁵⁶ Aristotle's examples both make clear that the reversal must be a sudden change of fortune and action, and as such can be seen as a special instance or microcosm of the play long *metabasis*. His central example of this is the moment in *Oedipus Rex* when the messenger from Corinth reveals that King Polybus and Queen Mirope, whom Oedipus believes to be the parents he is fated to kill and marry respectively, are not actually his father and mother. Rather than putting his fears of the curse to rest, though, this announcement reveals that he has unwittingly committed the very crimes he so feared to do by killing Laius and marrying Jocasta. "The crucial factor" in a reversal, argues Halliwell, "is that the direction of the action is overturned, and gives rise to the very opposite of what it seemed set to produce."⁵⁷

"Recognition" or *anagnorisis*, the second part of plot, is a similarly sudden change, but one "from ignorance to knowledge, and so either to friendship or enmity, among

⁵⁶ I use Halliwell's translation of this sentence.

⁵⁷ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 117.

people defined in relation to good fortune or misfortune” (1452a). Furthermore, “a recognition is finest when it happens at the same time as a reversal, as does the one in the *Oedipus*.” While a recognition can also be of objects and things done or not done, the sort “that most belongs to the plot” is one of persons. Aristotle gives Iphigenia’s recognition (in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris*) that one of the Greeks she is about to sacrifice is in fact her brother Orestes.⁵⁸ The importance of recognition is not simply because it makes for a compelling plot device, but because of its nature: it is a particular, focused instance of the whole act of recognition that a spectator of the dramatic mimesis undertakes in watching a play. As such, it is intricately connected to the theory of representation that Aristotle elucidated as the basis of poetry.⁵⁹ In the same way, then, as *peripeteia* is a distillation of the overarching change of fortune, *anagnorisis* is a distillation, and indeed dramatization, of the play-long work of the audience. In addition to setting up events that “happen contrary to expectation but because of one another,” recognition and reversal’s concentrated nature might well be that from which they derive their potent ability to make “pitiable and fearful incidents” seem amazing. This capacity to produce the requisite emotions of tragedy is the reason why complex plots are inherently superior to simple ones, and it is precisely for this capacity that Aristotle values them. The logic of his argument throughout this section on plot is relentless: the purpose of tragedy is to represent a single, whole action that is pitiable and fearful so as to effect catharsis of the

⁵⁸ Some commentators have insisted that Aristotle’s definition of *anagnorisis* disallows the sort of sudden *self-realization* in a character of his or her own motives or moral responsibility that non-specialist readers of the *Poetics* have often assumed it to mean. While Aristotle does focus on recognitions of other persons, in the example of Oedipus, the recognition of others’ identity is also at once a recognition of his own identity and the failure of his lifelong motives and actions, and so appears to include some degree of internal, self-realization. Barry Adams (“Complex Plot,” 173-78) surveys the sweeping range of usage that *anagnorisis* has been put to by contemporary critics of English literature.

⁵⁹ Adams makes this point in *Coming-to-Know*, 15.

emotions it raises. A plot knit together by probability and necessity makes for the most unified action, and the devices of reversal and recognition, because of the amazement that their unexpectedness provokes, best produce the requisite pity and fear. Because plot is the structure of the representation, and reversal and recognition are aspects of plot, it is doubly affirmed as “the soul of tragedy” (1450b).

The third and final part of the tragic plot is *pathos* or “suffering,” which, not surprisingly, is “a destructive or painful action [like] deaths..., agonies, woundings, etc.” (1452b). Whalley points out the paradox implicit in this definition of suffering as an action:

Pathos (from *paschein*, ‘suffer’) primarily means something ‘suffered’, something that happens to a person – the complement to something done. Yet Aristotle says that a *pathos* is a *praxis*, an ‘act’. ...The paradoxical term *pathos-as-praxis* seems to imply that the crucial event is to be seen both as suffered and as inflicted.⁶⁰

Whalley thus translates *praxis* here as “transaction” in order to convey the dual agency Aristotle’s description implies. While the other two parts of a tragic plot, recognition and reversal, are not inherently tragic notions and can be found within comic plots, “deaths, agonies, and woundings” are by nature painful. Lane Cooper suggests, then, that the comic equivalent of this third part of the tragic plot might be “the comic incident” at the centre of many comedies, “an occurrence of a specially ludicrous or joyful sort.”⁶¹ Such occurrences, especially in the form of trickery or hoaxes, share the double nature that Whalley identifies in *pathos*: they are both actions done to or practiced upon another, but

⁶⁰ Whalley, *Commentary*, 90n112.

⁶¹ Cooper, *Theory of Comedy*, 197. Cooper’s examples of such an event include “harmless beatings or losses, gains and successful devices, victories in contests, marriages, feasts, and the like.” I will be particularly interested in the possibility of “devices” or hoaxes to form the third part of comic plot.

the victim's active response to them can be just as crucial to the subsequent action of the play.

When Aristotle moves from describing plot construction to analyzing how it can best achieve its function, he once again makes clear that much of his prior description is equally pertinent to comedy. He has already included in his description of recognition not only the movement towards enmity characteristic of tragedy but that towards friendship, which is intrinsic to comedy. He now goes on to consider the effect of the various sorts of transformations or changes in fortune. The tragic transformation should not show "capable" or "decent men"⁶² falling into misfortune, nor "wicked men" finding good fortune, because such occurrences evoke not pity and fear but shock (1453a). Interestingly, Aristotle also argues against portraying a "thoroughly villainous person" falling out of good fortune into misfortune: even though such a transformation is morally satisfying, it fails to evoke pity and fear.

"There remains, then," Aristotle concludes, "the person intermediate between these" who undergoes a change to misfortune not "because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error." "Error" is Janko's translation of *hamartia*, which was for a long time thought to be a "tragic flaw" or moral weakness that brings the character to ruin, a rendering no doubt influenced by St Paul's use of the term for "sin" in his epistles.

Aristotle, though, excludes "vice or wickedness" from *hamartia*, and in the *Nicomachean*

⁶² The translations of Aristotle's adjective *epieikēs* are Whalley's and Janko's, respectively. Both avoid the more common rendering, "good," so as not to confuse Aristotle's distinction here with his earlier description of the *spoudaios* ("good," "noble") character and action proper to tragedy. Either way, though, Aristotle appears to contradict his earlier statement that the tragic hero is "better than us." Halliwell suggests that Aristotle "wishes tragic figures to keep their traditional trappings of renown and distinction" that make them better than us, "for it is precisely to the outer fabric of their lives...that the damage of tragic affliction must be done; but at the same time he is concerned, for reasons which give a dramatic relevance to essentially ethical considerations, that tragedy should avoid the downfall of virtuous people." Commentary, 125.

Ethics, uses the word to describe an error committed in ignorance.⁶³ It is instructive too that he introduces the notion in the middle of a discussion of plot, not character:

hamartia, says Janko, “provides the probable or necessary link between a person’s original good fortune and the disaster that overtakes him.”⁶⁴ It is not an accident, which as a random occurrence would not be probable or necessary, nor is it a punishment, “but the result of actions performed with the best of intentions.” Golden points out that the suffering of Oedipus, for example, “is most intense...because the terrible deeds he performed were the very acts he devoted his life to avoiding and represent crimes that contradict his innermost nature.”⁶⁵ The *hamartia* must evoke and hold in tension pity and fear: it asks sympathy for the character who has acted in ignorance, yet because it is not merely an accident but a reasonable result of that character’s thought, it also moves us to fear him or her. Comic *hamartia*, as I will discuss, shares this crucial role in evoking the emotions proper to the genre, yet is more clearly rooted in the *phaulos* character of comedy’s characters.

Aristotle next introduces the possibility of a plot with two transformations, which “ends in opposite ways for the better and worse persons” (1453a). Despite its popularity in his time, Aristotle says that the double plot is inferior in tragedy because it does not provide “the pleasure [that comes] from tragedy,” but one that “is more particular to comedy.” As he had just before dismissed “wicked men [passing] from misfortune to good fortune” as “the most untragic of all” transformations, Aristotle must describe a good man’s vindication and a bad one’s punishment as the double plot that evokes a

⁶³ See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5.1135b.

⁶⁴ Janko, *Commentary*, 102.

⁶⁵ Golden, *Mimesis*, 89.

response proper to comedy. For one thing, this confirms the capability of comic plots to be complex. For another, this approval of the double plot, which ends in at least some degree of pain for the antagonist, qualifies from a different angle Aristotle's apparent prohibition of pain from the laughable subject matter of comedy. Heath develops his argument on this point: since Aristotle

did not regard all painful and destructive events as evocative of pity and fear (1452b34-3a7), he need not have thought that pain and destruction are always inimical to laughter. One would (it might be argued) have to take into account who suffers (their moral character and their role in the economy of the plot), and how the suffering is presented.⁶⁶

Obviously, such suffering would need to exclude *pathos* of a tragic scale, but Heath's argument opens the door to considering Jonson's vitriolic satire and Shakespeare's tragicomedy as genuinely comic drama in an Aristotelian sense.

Throughout this discussion, Aristotle derives his recommendations for plot from the criteria laid out in his definition of tragedy, that its ingredients must evoke and bring to catharsis the emotions of pity and fear. I will leave a discussion of this final part of the definition to later chapters, but acknowledge here that this idea of the catharsis of emotion is the centre of Aristotle's refutation of Plato. As Plato criticizes tragedy and comedy equally on this front, Aristotle's response must hold for both genres.⁶⁷ He not only makes an excuse for the fact that drama evokes strong emotion, but asserts that doing so is necessary to its effect. Indeed, Janko points out that "Aristotle's response to Plato's attack on poetry is also a response to Plato's view of the emotions" in general.⁶⁸ Where Plato insists that they must be eliminated from the soul, "Aristotle recognized

⁶⁶ Heath, "Aristotelian Comedy," 353.

⁶⁷ Halliwell (*Aristotle's "Poetics,"* 275n33) views this fact as "the decisive consideration" in arguing for the legitimacy of comic catharsis.

⁶⁸ Janko, "Catharsis," 342.

that well-balanced emotional reactions are a crucial factor in making correct choices and thus in forming and maintaining a settled good character. Sometimes one *should* feel such emotions as pity, anger, and fear.”⁶⁹ As we shall see, the essential problem with what has become the dominant understanding of catharsis is that it shares Plato’s scepticism about the emotions. Jacob Bernays, its originator, reduces Plato and Aristotle’s disagreement about drama to a question of whether it enflames or expunges emotion; either way, it remains a thing to be rid of, because essentially sub-rational and disruptive of the soul. Yet the *Poetics* consistently links the arousal of emotion with the audience’s rational comprehension of plot. As the result of these two actions, catharsis must in some way be a refining of the emotions, using them to bring us to rational understanding.

From this point, Aristotle moves on to discuss aspects of plot and character exclusively relevant to tragedy before giving brief attention to reasoning and diction. He finally concludes the *Poetics* with a discussion of epic; its relevance to comedy basically ends here. In summary, though, the real coherence of Aristotle’s thought needs to be reiterated. On the one hand, the text of the *Poetics* is notoriously corrupt. Less conservative editors than Janko and Halliwell have excised significant portions of it as scribal interpolation and have radically reordered other parts in an attempt to make the structure of the argument more visible. Aristotle regularly appears to have concluded a topic only to pick it up again, often without clear reason, at a later point in the text, making systematic elucidation of his argument very difficult. That said, though, when one is able to hold together all of its strands as they appear and disappear from view, there emerges a remarkably strong sense of necessity: accepting his main premises

⁶⁹ Ibid., 343.

demands his conclusions, and the result is a far more compelling and cohesive theory than is often allowed, especially by critics who have only given it an undergraduate's obligatory reading.

CHAPTER 3

Comic Error and the Hoax

An expansion of the concept of comic error must begin with Aristotle's explicit statements about it in Chapters 4 and 5 of the *Poetics*. He says there that people differ primarily "because of vice and virtue," and then defines comedy and tragedy on the basis of the sorts of people each portrays: "comedy prefers to represent people who are worse..., tragedy people who are better" (1448a). Chapter 5 refines his definition of the "worse" sort of people, calling them *phanloi* – "inferior" or "ignoble." Their inferiority is "not, however, with respect to every [kind of] vice," but only those that constitute *to geloion* – "the laughable" or "the ridiculous," which is "a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful or destructive." (1449a). "Error" here is *hamartēma*, a close cognate of *hamartia*. But where tragic *hamartia* is primarily a mistake in judgement, comic *hamartēma* is more squarely an aspect of character – a vice which, while mild, is nonetheless definitive of the person.

Golden points to the *Nicomachean Ethics*' famous account of virtue as a mean between extremes to explain exactly what Aristotle means by "vice."⁷⁰ Aristotle says there that virtues of character are "about feelings and actions, and these admit of excess, deficiency, and an intermediate condition" (2.1106b). We can have either too much or not enough of any given feeling, but "having these feelings at the right times, about the

⁷⁰ Aristotle summarizes virtues of character at 2.1107a-1109a before giving each a thorough analysis in 3.1115a-4.1128b. Golden argues the relevance of these passages to comedy in *Mimesis*, 91-92.

right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition.” Excess and deficiency “incur blame, whereas the intermediate condition is correct and wins praise” because it is “easy to miss the target and difficult to hit it. And so for this reason...excess and deficiency are proper to vice, the mean to virtue; ‘for we are noble in only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways’” (2.1106a-b). Those intermediate qualities that Aristotle goes on to list as virtues of character – courage, temperance, right self-opinion, wittiness, etc. – are descriptive of the *spoudaios* character of tragedy. On the other hand, the person who is cowardly, for example, lacks the virtue of courage, while the reckless person exceeds it. Virtue is right proportion; vice is disproportion. In the deviations from several of the virtues Aristotle lists, says Golden, we find “a virtual rogues’ gallery of comic archetypes”: the hedonist and the prude both deviate from temperance; the spendthrift and the miser, from generosity; the sycophant and the misanthrope, from friendliness; the braggart and the self-deprecator, from right self-opinion, and the buffoon and the boor, from wittiness. When these deviations are “not painful and destructive,” they constitute the ridiculous error that is the subject matter of comedy – something confirmed by later sources. The *Tractatus* gives three of these as examples of comic character types, and Aristotle’s pupil Theophrastus composed his *Characters*⁷¹ on this model of error; both appear to be at least extrapolations, if not borrowings, from the *Poetics*’ second book on comedy.

Ben Jonson’s theoretical musings also demonstrate a very similar understanding of what makes for comic error. In the prologue to *Every Man In His Humour*, he acknowledges with Aristotle that comedy “sport[s] with human follies, not with

⁷¹ A series of written sketches of thirty common character types, dating to the early third century BCE.

crimes.”⁷² Jonson gives us his own rogue’s gallery” in the *Discoveries*, observing that in comedy, one can find “some, insulting⁷³ with joy; others, fretting with melancholy; raging with anger; mad with love; boiling with avarice; undone with riot; tortured with expectation; consumed with fear...”(450). All of these types deviate ridiculously from the virtuous mean that Aristotle describes. Jonson’s tone in these examples is notably extreme, and he acknowledges this by summarizing such characters as not simply ridiculous, but as suffering “perturbations” in the wild “affections of the mind” (450). “Perturbation” is an apt term for a state of being that borders on the painful, and Jonson prefaces this list by declaring that the comic poet “comes nearest” the orator, “because, in moving the minds of men, and stirring of affections, he chiefly excels” (450). Robortello also makes room for perturbation in comedy: in his 1549 attempt to extrapolate a comic theory from the *Poetics*, he states that the genre is an imitation “not only of low and trifling affairs,...but also of disturbances,” because “human actions...always have in them something troublesome or distressing.”⁷⁴ A generation earlier, Trissino had alluded to much the same thing in his *Poetica*. All three readers of the *Poetics* here seem to agree with Heath that Aristotle doesn’t mean completely to exclude pain from comedy.

These commentators all concur with Aristotle, but in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he goes further than they do by insisting that these vices are not simply failings of self-control. Terence Irwin points out that for Aristotle, virtue does not consist merely in properly controlling irrational impulses, but “demands harmony and agreement between

⁷² Jonson, *Every Man In*, Pro. 24. All subsequent references to the play will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.

⁷³ L. *insultare*, “to leap or prance about.”

⁷⁴ Robortello, “On Comedy,” 232.

the nonrational and rational part [of the soul], under the guidance of the rational part.”⁷⁵ In other words, virtue goes beyond restraining or forcing oneself to act rightly to a state in which one’s emotions have been rationally trained to arise at the right time, towards the right object, and to the right degree, thus cooperating with the will. Vice, then, is not simply the deficiency or excess of a virtue, but a more general dissonance between emotion and reason, which, in the virtuous person, are in harmony. Comic error will necessarily be characterized by this general dissonance as well as a more specific disproportion.

In the *Philebus*, Plato provides further insight into what might constitute comedy’s laughable error. “The ridiculous,” declares Socrates, “is in short the specific name which is used to describe the vicious form of a certain habit; and of vice in general it is that kind which is most at variance with the inscription at Delphi, . . . ‘Know thyself.’”⁷⁶ This sort of self-ignorance is common to all of Aristotle’s examples of vice, and may thus be an integral to comedy’s *phauloi* characters. In most cases, especially of those vices most germane to comedy, the *phaulos* person is likely to think of him or herself as embodying the virtue from which he or she actually deviates: the braggart believes what he says about himself, the buffoon believes his continual joking apt and appreciated, and the spendthrift thinks himself merely generous. The more convinced each is of the virtue of what is really his or her error, the more ridiculous each will seem. As both Plato and commentators after Aristotle discuss the importance of self-ignorance for comedy, it seems unlikely that it would not have formed a part of Aristotle’s theory, especially when he identifies its crucial role in tragic *hamartia*.

⁷⁵ Irwin, Introduction, xviii.

⁷⁶ Plato, *Philebus*, 48C. I cite *Philebus* by Stephanus numbers.

What emerges thus far is that comic *hamartēma* is a definitive component of comedy located squarely within character. Robortello declares flatly that it is “character, upon which almost the whole art of the comic poet depends.”⁷⁷ In contrast, tragic *hamartia* is primarily an element of plot, which makes comparing the two sorts of error complicated. Both Janko and Gerald Else assert that “comic error is the counterpart of tragic error in Aristotle’s thinking,” but provide little proof of this,⁷⁸ failing to acknowledge that each belongs respectively to a fundamentally different part of play structure. That said, contrasting the two does reveal some instructive differences. The *phaulos* person in comedy will certainly make a mistake like the tragic hero. But because error is definitive of his or her character, that mistake will be plainly in keeping with his or her nature. In contrast, the error of the *spoudaios* person of tragedy will be contrary to character: his demise occurs not “because of vice and wickedness...but because of great error” (1453a). There remains, though, something of an ironic relationship between character and tragic error, clearly seen in Oedipus. The error he makes in killing Laius and marrying Jocasta occurs because his virtue demands that he react strongly against the prophesy by banishing himself from Corinth. With Othello, Shakespeare uses a similar sort of irony: the loyalty, imagination, and decisiveness that make him a great general lead him to believe that killing Desdemona is a virtuous act. Tragic error thus runs counter to character even as it expresses a crucial facet of it. As such, it is more complicated than comic error, which has a direct and non-ironic relationship to character.

⁷⁷ Robortello, “On Comedy,” 236.

⁷⁸ Janko (*Aristotle on Comedy*, 208-9) does state that the discussion of comic error in the *Tractatus* occurs in a section that closely corresponds to tragic error’s place in the *Poetics*, but makes no comparison of the actual concepts..

The reason for comic error's importance is also seen in contrast with the defining trait of tragic characters – their virtue. As we have seen, Aristotle distinguishes comedy from tragedy on the basis of the characters and actions, either *phaulos* or *spoudaios*, that each portrays. Within the bounds that Aristotle sets for it, *hamartēma* is by its nature comic: especially when inflated by self-ignorance, the braggart, the sycophant, and the prude, for example, are all innately ridiculous. Though it is the corollary to comic vice, the virtue of the tragic hero is *not* innately tragic: the *spoudaios* character and his or her normally virtuous actions do not in and of themselves bring about pity and fear. To do so, virtue must inadvertently depart from itself in a way that brings about *pathos*, that which necessarily evokes pity and fear and is thus tragic by nature. This fact invites a comparison instead of comic error with *pathos*, the two definitive ingredients of their genres. Marcus Tierney argues just this point, suggesting that in the definition of comedy in chapter 5 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle intends to contrast comedy's painless error with the pain involved in tragic; *pathos*, then, “is the opposite to the comic *geloion*.”⁷⁹ There is a further corollary here in that *pathos* is definitive of tragedy because, more than any other part, it evokes pity and fear, the catharsis of which is the aim of the genre.⁸⁰

There still remains, though, an incongruity between *to geloion* – an aspect of character – and *pathos* – a part of plot. Like recognition and reversal, the other two parts of plot, *pathos* can be seen as a concentrated summary of a tragedy's whole plot, and it has at its centre the noble tragic hero. The ridiculous, on the other hand, has no necessary relationship to plot: Aristotle defines primitive invective as the mockery of

⁷⁹ Tierney, “Aristotle and Menander,” 245.

⁸⁰ It would follow, then, that the emotions aroused by *to geloion* in comedy are those that undergo comic catharsis, the goal of comedy. I will take up this possibility in the next chapter.

faults without any unifying plot line, which inevitably remained a series of character sketches. Something additional is needed to tie *to geloion* to the probability and necessity constitutive of plot. The *Tractatus Coislinianus* provides an answer to this crucial question when it observes that the part of plot that most brings about laughter are “incidents” of “deception.”⁸¹ Its examples of these include tricks and disguises of various sorts taken from myth and from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. In the Italian Renaissance, Castelvetro concluded the same thing in his commentary on the *Poetics* when he observed that the chief examples of “the ludicrous” with respect to comedy are “deceptions, as when a person is made to say, do, or suffer what he would not say, do, or suffer unless he were deceived.”⁸² Such deceptions, especially in new comedy, are “due to the machinations of men or to chance.”⁸³ Deceptions occurring within a play thus require a central figure to enact them. The *Tractatus* later confirms this and then specifies a motive for the trickster: “The joker wishes to expose errors of soul and body.”⁸⁴ This provides a crucial link between plot and character, suggesting that the deceptions practiced in the play have the errors or laughable aspects of a *phanlos* character as their object. Such deceptions could aptly be described as hoaxes, dramatic devices which play off of a character’s particular folly. Importantly, the joker’s use of a hoax to expose errors is by definition indirect: a hoax is not a blatant attack because it still requires characters and audience to make an inference about why it is being employed. Aristotle elsewhere suggests that jokes become plain abuse when they go too far,⁸⁵ an observation Theophrastus corroborates when he

⁸¹ *Tractatus Coislinianus*, 44.

⁸² Castelvetro, *Art of Poetry*, 214.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁸⁴ *Tractatus Coislinianus*, 45.

⁸⁵ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.1128a.

asserts that “a joke [is] a concealed criticism of an error.”⁸⁶ Moreover, this idea of “concealed criticism” holds true for comedy as a genre. Whereas invective “details without concealment the bad [qualities and actions] attaching to people, . . . comedy requires the so-called innuendo” in exposing people’s folly.⁸⁷ The *Tractatus* here both confirms Halliwell’s assertion that comedy retains a critical intent and expands on Aristotle’s observation in chapter 5 that comedy has a generalized plot. George Puttenham says much the same thing in his *Arte of English Poesie* when he observes that comedy retains invective’s intent to “carp at the common abuses,” but instead of direct attack, “in a certain generality *glanc[es]* at every abuse.”⁸⁸

Several considerations arise from all of this. First of all, the comic hoax better compares with tragic *hamartia* and *pathos* than does comic error, because like them, it is squarely an element of plot. Where *hamartia* is an action committed in ignorance, the comic hoax depends on and plays off of another person’s ignorance. The most compelling tragic errors are related ironically to the tragic hero: in an unexpected but probable way, they show that character’s virtue working against him or her. While the hoax arises more directly out of a *phaulos* character’s error, the unique dynamic of a given comedy is often closely related to the joker’s ingenuity in crafting a surprising yet plausible hoax out of the error he seeks to expose. Jonson identifies this quality in the *Discoveries* when he attempts to separate genuinely comic error from objects of scorn or mockery. While he admits that mere lampoon does garner laughs, “the moving of laughter [is not] always the end of comedy, [but] is rather a fooling for the people’s

⁸⁶ Quoted in Janko, *Commentary*, 167.

⁸⁷ *Tractatus Coislinianus*, 45.

⁸⁸ Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 120, 122 (italics mine).

delight, or their fooling” (453).⁸⁹ An audience’s delight in it ironically depends on the degree to which the form lacks the probability and necessity fundamental to true comedy: “The farther it runs from reason, or possibility with them, the better it is.” In contrast with such petty “stage jesting,” Jonson advocates the sort of joke that “savour[s] of equity, truth, perspicuity, and candour,” judiciously perceiving and justly exposing the errors at which it is aimed. Moreover, he insists in the prologue to *Volpone* that to best accomplish this, the discerning poet’s “jests” are not “stolen from each table,” but he instead “makes jests, to fit his fable,” and thus “presents quick comedy, *refined*.”⁹⁰

At the same time, including the category of the hoax with Aristotle’s other parts of plot brings out more clearly the difference between comic and tragic error. The hoaxes relationship to *pathos* is especially interesting. As *pathos* in tragedy results from *hamartia*, the comic hoax is caused or motivated by comic error. So too, as *pathos* is the aspect of the plot that defines the play as tragic, the hoax is a part of plot that is definitively comic, fabricated out of the raw material of people’s ridiculous vices. *Pathos* is ostensibly a much more concentrated event than the hoax, of course, occurring in an instant rather than over the course of much of the play. But Whalley’s observation that Aristotle calls *pathos* a *praxis* or “action” is important here: *praxis* is the same word Aristotle uses to describe the overarching action of the whole play.⁹¹ The moment of suffering in a tragedy might be seen, then, as only the beginning of a process of suffering

⁸⁹ Jonson here follows Heinsius’ misreading of *Poetics* 1449a-b. Sidney (*Defence of Poetry*, 383) seems to share this opinion when he complains that “our comedians think there is no delight without laughter; which is very wrong, for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight.” Clearly, Jonson was not opposed to properly-motivated laughter: see, for example, *Every Man In* Pro. 28; *Every Man Out* Ind. 214-15; *Volpone* Pro. 34-35.

⁹⁰ Jonson, *Volpone*, Pro. 27-29, italics mine. All subsequent references to the play will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line numbers.

⁹¹ See Whalley, *Commentary*, 90n112.

that, like the hoax, works itself out over the remainder of the play. And again, “the paradoxical term *pathos-as-praxis* seems to imply that the central event is to be seen both as suffered and as inflicted,” a “transaction” that establishes a relationship not unlike that between the hoaxer and his or her victim.⁹²

While its relation to the error of its victim is more direct and less ironic than the relationship of *pathos* to *hamartia*, the hoax’s potential for real dramatic complexity emerges from its inherently metadramatic nature. It is by definition a staged action occurring within the larger staged action of the play. The joker must act as a spontaneous poet and director, fashioning a fictional plot united by probability and necessity, and assembling a cast to play various parts in it. Yet no small part of its power comes from the reaction of its unknowing victim. The joker aims to expose this character’s error, but cannot be sure whether it will occur, and if it does, what else might unexpectedly happen alongside exposure. The hoax thus reflects what Whalley is at pains to call the “processive” nature of mimesis generally and of Aristotle’s discussion of it particularly.⁹³ Aristotle, he claims, is not simply “talking about epic, tragedy, comedy, etc. as genres or art-forms: he is talking about the making of them.”⁹⁴ Though it is latent within the text of the play, the action represented “is traced out and realises itself before an audience (though the tragic effect *can* come about through reading).”⁹⁵ Perhaps even more fully than the play itself, which at the time of performance usually has its conclusion fixed, the comic hoax, as experienced by the characters of the drama, manifests the nature of mimesis as something partly fixed but partly indeterminate, dependent upon enactment,

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Whalley, Commentary, 44n6.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 44n5.

⁹⁵ Whalley, “On Translating Aristotle’s *Poetics*,” 23.

and requiring a conclusion that can come about only by the unique interaction of all the characters and factors involved. If the hoax is indeed something of a concentrated version of a play, its potential might most effectively be realized if the joker crafted it according to the guidelines Aristotle has sketched for dramatic plot: in accordance with probability and necessity, yet involving things unexpected through the use of reversal and recognition, and ultimately bringing forth some form of catharsis for those involved. This possibility is realized to some extent by Jonson, but seems to be at the very heart of several of Shakespeare's hoaxes.

3.1 “Laid flat” in the “flame and height of their humours”

While obviously playing off that of its precursor, *Every Man In His Humour*, the title of *Every Man Out of His Humour* is nevertheless misleading. The greater part of the play is given not to the portrayal of “dishumored” characters, but to the tableau-like display of the all-too-wildly humorous. Anne Barton calls the play's structure “eddying and circling, . . . designed entirely for the display of eccentricity. There is no end in view, of the kind normally predicated in comedy.”⁹⁶ Mitis, one of the play's frame-narrative commentators, agrees, asking how the dramatist “should properly call it *Every Man Out of His Humour*, when I saw all his actors so strongly pursue and continue their humours.”⁹⁷ Indeed, Jonson gives us scene after scene of fools parading their folly with almost no apparent dramatic direction until well into Act 4, earning for the play its reputation as

⁹⁶ Barton, *Ben Jonson*, 65.

⁹⁷ Jonson, *Every Man Out*, 4.5.164-66. All subsequent quotations of the play will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number. Ostovich's edition (which I use throughout) differs from the standard Herford and Simpson text in using the 1600 quarto as copy text; Herford and Simpson use the 1616 Folio. For a discussion of their differences, see Ostovich, Introduction, 1-11.

interesting theoretically but a failure dramatically. Yet this extravagant display and the meta-dramatic frame of the play afford a unique look at Jonson's emerging understanding of the nature of comic error and the emotional responses it can evoke. As the plot finally picks up speed in the final act, these responses are dramatized, resulting in a brief bit of fast and riotous action that prefigures Jonson's later major comedies.

Herford's observation still holds, that *Every Man Out* demonstrates "Jonson's predilection, which struck deeper root in every successive drama, for an allusive and symbolic type of incident."⁹⁸

The Induction provides Jonson's most explicit statement of what we are to understand by the "humours" which so thoroughly determine his comic characters in this and many other of his plays. Asper, who we learn is the frame-tale playwright, bursts onto the stage and, throwing off his restraining friends Cordatus and Mitis, rails wildly and in verse against "this impious world," "cracked with the weight of sin," and those who, "puffing their souls away in perj'rous air / ...cherish their extortion, pride, or lusts" (Ind. 2-5; 33-34). Mitis begs him to control himself, warning that "this humour will come ill to some. / You will be thought to be too peremptory" (71-72). Instead of heeding his warning, Asper seizes on Mitis's casual use of the term "humour" and propounds an account of its original medical meaning as a substance that "hath flexure and humidity, / As wanting power to contain itself" – namely "choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood" (94-97). Dutton notes the critical tendency "to gloss this passage with long disquisitions

⁹⁸ Herford, Introduction, xxiii.

on Galenic theories of psycho-pathology and of the relationship between key bodily fluids and temperamental disposition.”⁹⁹ But for Asper’s purposes, the term

may *by metaphor* apply itself
Unto the general disposition;
As when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
In their confluxions all to run one way.
This may be truly said to be a *humour*.
But that a rook, in wearing a pied feather,
The cable hatband, or the three-piled ruff,
A yard of shoe tie, or the Switzer’s knot
On his French garters, should affect a humour,
O, ’tis more than most ridiculous! (101-12, italics mine)

From the physical condition of a liquid that does not contain itself emerges the metaphorical notion of a person in which one particular trait overflows its bounds and “doth draw / All his affects, his spirits, and his powers / ...all to run one way.” To be of a particular humour is to have each aspect of one’s life – affections, desires, and mental faculties – coloured and motivated by one particular quality, resulting in imbalance and excess rather than a complementary balance.

Asper has no time for those who declare their fashionable whims to be unalterable “humours” that inexorably dictate their entire bearing and appearance. Throughout the play, the aspiring gentleman Sogliardo is the chief example of this. He appears on stage very shortly after Asper’s declamation against the false use of the term, declaring fervently to Carlo that being a gentleman “is my humour now” (1.2.6). The newness of the acquisition undercuts his assertion that if “I take a humour of a thing once, I am like your tailor’s needle: I go through” (10-11). He has just bought a title for himself and spends the play gathering up the necessary accoutrements for it: a coat of

⁹⁹ Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism*, 116.

arms, skill with tobacco, and hangers-on, all by the sarcastic advice of the mocking Carlo. If anything, though, his real humour is the use of the word, causing even meek Mitis to break out in exasperation, “Why, this fellow’s discourse were nothing, but for the word ‘humour’” (2.1.68-69).

On the contrary, a genuine “humorist” (as Asper later calls Macilente, the character he will play, Ind. 212) acts compulsively or neurotically, as one “possess[ed].” Gail Kern Paster states that this sort of person “might have some small power of self-regulation over his disposition, except that Jonson-Asper describes him as ‘possessed’ by a quality.”¹⁰⁰ This, she assumes, means that “such a person has no real choice about how or who to be.” But while employing pathological terminology, the play demonstrates that Jonson and Asper hold such humorists morally responsible for their obsessions by forcing them “to confront their own vacuity.”¹⁰¹ “Asper is not a psychologist, not even a sixteenth century one,” James Redwine argues, “he is a moralist”¹⁰² whose hand “Was made to seize on vice, and with a grip / Crush out the humour of such spongy souls / As lick up every vanity” (Ind. 143-45). By using “vice” and “humour” synonymously, Asper insists that as compulsive as his characters will show themselves to be, they remain culpable for allowing inclination to overpower reason; they have acted foolishly so often as to *become* compulsive.¹⁰³ By offering an implicit explanation of how character is formed, Jonson expands our earlier description of comic error as inhering primarily in character, not plot. Comic error remains a matter of personal, ethical disposition for him, but character for Aristotle is “the sphere of ethical dispositions and choices, as these bear

¹⁰⁰ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 199.

¹⁰¹ Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism*, 119.

¹⁰² Redwine, “Beyond Psychology,” 319.

¹⁰³ I here paraphrase Redwine, *Ibid.*, 321.

on, and are manifested in, action.”¹⁰⁴ For both writers, the relationship between character and action is thus inevitably reciprocal. The fundamental responsibility that characters therefore bear for their humours justifies Asper’s (and Jonson’s own) intention to correct and even punish them. If “Jonson’s theory of humours...begins with psychology,” Redwine concludes, “it gets rather quickly into moral philosophy, where (one supposes) it was headed all the time.”¹⁰⁵ James Bednarz points out that this understanding of humours is one of the crucial differences between this play and its titular twin, *Every Man In His Humour*. In agreement with Paster’s conclusion, Bednarz argues that the earlier play’s title “suggests that consciousness is comprised of ineradicable compulsions[, and] implies a benign and self-deprecating acceptance of ‘humour’ as a universal condition of subjectivity.”¹⁰⁶ The phrase “Every Man *Out* of His Humour,” however, “implies that ‘humour’ induces a false consciousness that must be purged for a potentially ideal human condition to emerge.”¹⁰⁷

Humour as compulsive moral failing, then, is at the heart of the comic error that we see embodied throughout the play. Carlo Buffone is the joker who does not know when to stop. “He will sooner lose his soul than a jest, and profane even the most holy things to excite laughter,” says Cordatus (Ind. 353-55). Fastidious Brisk is a would-be courtier who has spent all his effort and money on perfecting his outward appearance and manners while completely neglecting his mind and judgment. Puntarvolo similarly is all archaisms, faux chivalry, and elaborately-worded formality. Deliro is the citizen money-lender who has provided Brisk with the means to his aspirations and is slavishly

¹⁰⁴ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 75. See also *Poetics* 1448a, 1450a-b.

¹⁰⁵ Redwine, “Beyond Psychology,” 325

¹⁰⁶ Bednarz, *Poets’ War*, 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

devoted to doting on his implacable wife Fallace, who is herself intent on seducing Brisk. These characters are further surrounded by other humorists who, each in his or her own way, are governed by their humours, and like the main characters, seem to persist wilfully in their excesses and ignorance of them until very nearly the end of the play.

Each of the fools in the play can be seen as an example of what Aristotle calls the *phaulos* character central to comedy, and his or her particular humour accords closely with Golden's description of what makes for comic error. "All to run one way" in accordance with one's humour is to miss the mean of virtue, which is in turn to be *phaulos*. With Aristotle and Golden, Jonson is keenly interested in how folly is at once a social and moral failing. Carlo's incessant jesting is not merely an aspect of personality, but a lack of what Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* calls the virtue of social "dexterity" or adroitness: he "cannot resist raising a laugh, and spares neither himself nor anyone else if he can cause laughter, even by making remarks that the sophisticated person would never make" (4.1128a). Likewise, Sogliardo's adopted companion Shift follows in the footsteps of *Every Man In His Humour's* Captain Bobadill as one with a wildly inflated opinion of himself – a braggart soldier like Aristotle's *alazon* or "boaster," who "seems to claim qualities that win reputation, though he either lacks them altogether or has less than he claims" (4.1127a). The others each resemble to varying degrees other vices identified by Aristotle: Fastidious, Saviolina, and Puntarvolo think themselves magnanimous while spending their effort on vain trivialities; Fungoso is a thorough-going prodigal with every penny he gets, solely in the name of vanity; Fallace errs in both excess and deficiency regarding temperance, boorishly deriving no pleasure from her husband's lavish gifts while completely giving herself over to the anticipated pleasure of a liaison with Brisk.

Janet Clare notes the similarity of Jonson's use of comic typology to that of Theophrastus in his *Characters*, but then demonstrates that the former's focus in *Every Man Out* "is much more socially precise."¹⁰⁸ She concludes that, "with the emphasis on class identity, embracing the farmer, merchant, knight, and student, Jonson...is less concerned with moral abstractions" of Aristotle's and Theophrastus' sort "than with types who are identifiable with a specific social milieu."¹⁰⁹ More precisely, I would suggest, Jonson's genius is especially seen in his combination of these categories: he finds in the social types of late Elizabethan London – the wheedling "ruffler,"¹¹⁰ the aspiring courtier, and the citizen's wife – the perfect match for moral types – the boaster, the prodigal, and the intemperate. In every case, Jonson ascribes moral culpability to characters who fail socially to find the mean of adroitness. In this, he follows what Sidney noted as Terence's example of "a niggardly Demea, of a crafty Davus, of a flattering Gnatho, of a vainglorious Thraso": all are types combining a social position (a miserly father; tricky slave; parasite; braggart) with a moral vice.¹¹¹

Of all the various types of characters in *Every Man Out*, even the most stupid at some point take on the role of trickster. Sordido spends half of his time attempting to deceive the authorities regarding his grain horde; Puntarvolo and Fastidious Brisk gleefully dupe Saviolina into believing in Sogliardo's gentility; Shift's pompous bill posted in Paul's walk is an attempt to gull the newly-moneyed, even if he partially believes the

¹⁰⁸ Clare, "Courtly Compliment," 30. Clare notes that the *Characters* had been translated and published by Isaac Casaubon in 1592, and that Jonson's borrowing from it in *Every Man Out* is most obvious in the brief character descriptions that follow the *Dramatis Personae*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ostovich (Commentary, 108) finds the term in John Awdeley's 1561 tract, "The Fraternity of Vagabonds": "A Ruffler goeth with a weapon to seek service, saying he hath been a servitor in the wars, and beggeth for his relief; but his trade is robbery, open or disguised."

¹¹¹ Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, 362.

claims he makes for himself. Yet each of these, with the exception of Sordido, is more importantly the object of hoaxes by their intellectual betters, Carlo Buffone and Macilente. Macilente in turn ultimately tricks Carlo, emerging as the comic mastermind behind the main action of the play who succeeds in dishumoring everyone else by publicly exposing their errors. That Macilente is himself put “out of his humour” by play’s end, though, asks for a consideration of the dramatist Asper as joker before examining the characters of the central narrative. This question is further raised by the similarity between the aims of the satirist, with whom Asper is already associated, and the comic joker. “[W]ith an armèd and resolvèd hand / I’ll strip the follies of the time / Naked as at their birth,” Asper vows in his opening lines (Ind. 14-16). His target, like that of the *Tractatus*’s joker, is “errors of soul,” as his subsequent list of vices indicates. His goal, stated in vivid metaphor, is to expose them bare to the world: their nature, or the shape they had “at birth,” has been occluded by general familiarity, and Asper’s method will be to abstract these errors from their everyday milieu so that we can see them for what they are.

Cordatus explains this notion of representation as exposure later in the play. Because Asper’s comedy is a recognizable and realistic portrayal of the London his audience knew well, Mitis becomes uncomfortable and wishes Asper had opted for a more Shakespearean tale of romantic “cross-wooing” instead of something “thus near and familiarly allied to the time” (3.1.520-21). The point of this familiarity, though, chides Cordatus, is not merely to replicate daily life but to enable the play to function as an “*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*” – an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth – which concentrates reality even as it mirrors it, and by

abstracting it, works for “the correction of manners” (3.1.526-29). That Asper’s violent opening declamations initially cause us to doubt that the play will be equally “pleasant and ridiculous throughout,” as Cordatus continues his definition of comedy, is a result of his nature as a satirical dramatist. Jonson, though, undercuts Asper’s more virulent intent by having him give us a comedy which, in spite of the latter, portrays only types, and not the individuals typically aimed at by more aggressive satire. Asper’s ridiculous humours characters and their ultimate dishumorings, though, are all used to fulfill his original intention to expose error.

His chief agent in the play for doing this is, of course, Macilente, the character he plays. But Macilente’s role as the play’s chief trickster is barely hinted at until remarkably late in the play, when he suggests to the others that they dupe Saviolina. Prior to this, he is always found only on the periphery of the action, silently observing and privately agonizing over the other characters. When he does finally begin to set up his hoaxes, he takes over the role from Carlo, who has from the very beginning of the play been playing tricks on most of the characters whom Macilente will eventually dupe. Carlo’s primary object is the bumpkin Sogliardo, whom he tutors in “all the rare qualities, humours, and complements of a gentleman” (1.2.26-27). He urges all manner of conspicuous consuming and conversing, capped with the recommendation that Sogliardo get himself a coat of arms. His pupil is only too easily convinced of all this, quickly and proudly procuring for himself a coat with as many colours as fool’s motley and crested with “a boar without a head, rampant” (3.1.220). Indeed, Carlo’s jokes seem likely to go on endlessly, until his mouth is abruptly sealed with wax by the exasperated Puntarvolo late in Act 5.

It is precisely in his incessant mockery that Carlo's deficiency as a comic joker becomes clear. The buffoon is, of course, a classic comic type. Aristotle identifies *bomoloxia* or "buffoonery" as an excess regarding "sources of pleasure in amusements" (*Ethics* 2.1108a). The person at the mean is "witty, and the condition wit," while the excess is "buffoonery and the person who has it a buffoon." The *Tractatus* also notes that, along with the ironist and the boaster, the buffoon is one of three major comic types. Later, Aristotle describes how such people "go to excess in raising laughs:" unlike one properly witty, buffoons will "stop at nothing to raise a laugh, and care more about that than about saying what is seemly and avoiding pain to the victims of the joke" (4.1128a). Cordatus warns us early on of this fault in Carlo, declaring him to be "an impudent common jester" who will "sooner lose his soul than a jest, and profane even the most holy things to excite laughter" (Ind. 350-55). Everything down to his habits of speech demonstrate this incessancy. Jonas Barish points out how Carlo's "running fire of insult" is based "chiefly on the simple device of apposition, which allows him to improvise as many abusive afterthoughts as possible on any theme."¹¹² Speaking of Sogliardo to Macilente, for example, Carlo continues on indefinitely, calling him "A trout. A shallow fool. He has no more brain than a butterfly. A mere stuffed suit. He looks like a musty bottle, new wickered: his head's the cork" (1.2.199-202).

As Cordatus prophesied, Carlo's inability to stop soon verges on the painful; as McDonald points out, though, "follies often become crimes."¹¹³ Carlo's advice to Sogliardo eventually goes beyond the merely ludicrous to the genuinely immoral, reinforcing the moral culpability of the humorous man. "Now you are a gentleman," he

¹¹² Barish, *Prose Comedy*, 105.

¹¹³ See McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 70-71

urges Sogliardo, you must “be exceeding proud, ...and scorn every man. Speak nothing humbly. ...Love no man. Trust no man. Speak ill of no man to his face, nor well of any man behind his back. ...Spread yourself upon his bosom publicly, whose heart you would eat in private” (3.1.260-70). When Carlo, Puntarvolo, and the notary who is to draft their wager are all together at Puntarvolo’s lodgings, Carlo boasts about bringing “some dozen or twenty gallants this morning” to view Sogliardo’s lessons in tobacco from Shift. There, by looking in “at a keyhole,” they all saw “Sogliardo sit in a chair, holding his snout up like a sow under an apple tree, while th’ other opened his nostrils with a poking-stick to give the smoke a more free delivery” (4.3.90-95). Interestingly, Puntarvolo is not as amused as Carlo, sensing that the latter has crossed a line in his spying: “Out, pagan! how dost thou prick the vein of thy friend?” (100-1). But Carlo only confirms his lack of social decency, snorting, “Friend? Is there any such foolish thing i’ the world?...Pish, the title of a friend, it’s a vain idle thing, only venerable among fools. You shall not have one that has any opinion of wit affect it” (102-11). In the final act, Macilente spurs Carlo on against Puntarvolo, who is mourning the death of his dog. He suggests that Puntarvolo have the animal skinned and stuffed, or rather, “if you like not that sir, get me somewhat a less dog and clap it into the skin. ...’twill be so much the warmer for the hound to travel in, you know” (225-30). Puntarvolo finally retaliates, beating Carlo with the hilt of his rapier, forcing him to the floor, and sealing Carlo’s lips with hot wax like a letter.

Ultimately, Carlo’s lack of discretion seems to arise precisely from his lack of what the *Tractatus* specifies as the comic joker’s necessary motive – a desire to expose error. Like the humours of Fastidious and Fungoso, Carlo’s jesting has no meaningful or

effective purpose; it is entirely self-serving. He pursues laughter for its own sake, as Fastidious does opinion and Fungoso clothes. By the law of diminishing returns, this sort of self-indulgence must escalate, becoming shrill and painful as it increases. Yet it can never really escape its own inevitable tedium; if left up to Carlo, we would have no plot at all, only an endless series of increasingly painful jokes. His failure to apply his jesting to any purpose finally leads, ironically enough, to the exposure of precisely this error, in his own dishumoring at the hands of the one in the play who most certainly does have a purpose for his tricks, Macilente.

As I have suggested, that Macilente allows Carlo to be the play's primary trickster until quite late in the play results in the static plot lamented by many critics. But when he finally does move to unseat Carlo, his hoaxes are brilliantly conceived and managed. Macilente, like Brainworm in *Every Man In His Humour*, manifests Jonson's nascent genius for having his *phauloi* characters essentially undo themselves with little more than well-timed encouragement from the joker. We can already see in Macilente's plots the principle later declared by *Volpone's* Mosca: "What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself" (1.4.142-43). He acts like a bellows to the glowing embers of the fool, merely producing more of the flame that is already present and which in turn destroys the thing it feeds on. Moreover, Macilente's unique genius is to frequently use one character to enflame another. The first of his dishumorings is initiated by his quiet suggestion to Fastidious, Puntarvolo, and Carlo that Saviolina's humour of self-conceit "may easily be made to forsake her" (4.5.62-62). They become interested, and he takes them aside to explain his plan: they will present Sogliardo to her as a learned gentleman who has a special talent for playing the rustic, then see if she can "discern any sparks of the

gentleman in him when he does it” (5.2.43-44). She confidently asserts that “in the carriage of his eye and that inward power that forms his countenance” his nobility appears “as clear as the noonday” (71-77). It is only at this point that Macilente enters the conversation, gleefully declaring to Saviolina that Sogliardo “is a very perfect clown,” and showing her his palms, rough “with holding the plough” (110-15). Disgraced, she storms out, likening them to a pack of hunting dogs.

In the meantime, Macilente has poisoned Sir Puntarvolo’s dog, which was to have made the voyage to Constantinople with him. Macilente suggests to Puntarvolo that Shift stole it, and the knight begins to threaten him. This elicits Sogliardo’s warning that Puntarvolo “take heed...he hath stabbed forty for forty times less matter” (172-76), but Shift only drops to his knees in servile fear: “Pardon me, good sir. God is my judge, I never did robbery in all my life,” he abjectly confesses (190-91). Sogliardo is first shocked – “What? Kneel to thine enemy?” – then enraged: “Now out, base *viliaco!*...By this light, gentlemen, he hath confessed to me the most inexorable company of robberies....You never heard the like! – Out, scoundrel, out! Follow me no more, I command thee! Out of my sight!” (190-211). Macilente’s initial plan for this latter occurrence was only to reveal Puntarvolo’s ridiculousness in setting five-to-one odds on the head of a dog by simply killing the creature. Yet out of it he manages not only to dishumour Puntarvolo but to have him expose Shift’s ludicrous claims of intrigue precisely by placing him in a stand-off that ought to call forth his much-vaunted bravado. In addition, Macilente also sours Sogliardo’s enthusiasm for acquiring in the future the hangers-on he once thought the proper trappings of a gentleman.

As we have already considered, the exposure of Carlo by Sir Puntarvolo at The Mitre is another example of Macilente prodding a fool to undo himself with his own foolishness. And as with Puntarvolo and Shift, Carlo's dishumoring also has the unexpected result of frightening Fungoso out of his humour: after the brawl settles down, he alone is left to pay the outstanding bill. Macilente's ultimate work of exposure, involving Fastidious, Deliro, and Fallace, functions similarly. He has for some time had Deliro as convinced of Fastidious's frivolity as Fallace is of his sophistication, and finally spots an opportunity to undo all three. After the uproar at The Mitre has broken up, Macilente suggests that Deliro might endear himself to Fallace by paying the tab there that Fungoso has been left to pay. When he hurries off, Macilente convinces Fallace that he merely tricked Deliro into going so as to clear her way to a meeting with Fastidious, who has just been incarcerated for his part in the brawl. After she rushes out, Macilente in turn meets Deliro and suggests that this is the perfect opportunity to "clap your action on Brisk, and your wife, being in so happy a mood cannot entertain it ill by any means" (458-62). Macilente thus brilliantly uses Fallace's infatuation with Fastidious, Fastidious's long history of padding his vanity with money borrowed from Deliro, and Deliro's slavish desire to please the implacable Fallace to set up the catastrophic meeting that dishumours them all. Fallace enters the prison and passionately kisses Fastidious. Just as he is about to return her favour, Deliro enters to the shock of all but Macilente, who croons at his success. Thus, from the point at which Macilente finally decides to take on the role of comic joker, he is incredibly efficient in working towards the trickster's goal. He is an early example of what F. H. Mares notes of Jonson's later tricksters: their

intense “pleasure in the process, enjoyment in the successful operation of skill, and gratification in doing...down” their victims.¹¹⁴

In his glee, Macilente almost loses sight of the moral purpose that Asper had originally laid out for the play, only returning to it as an afterthought in his rebuke of Brisk:

This it is to kiss the hand of a countess, to have her coach sent for you, to hang poniards in ladies’ garters, to wear bracelets of their hair, and, for every one of these great favours, to give some slight jewel of five hundred crowns or so. Why, ‘tis nothing! Now, monsieur, you see the plague that treads o’ the heels of your foppery. (563-69)

It is fitting that as Fastidious returns to his cell and Macilente is at the height of his humour, he is suddenly dishumored himself. Whether at the sight of the virtuous queen (in the original stage version) or quite on his own (print versions),¹¹⁵ Macilente finds himself “at peace,” and “as empty of all envy now / As they of merit to be envied at” (Appendix A.I.1-3). In as much as he, unlike Carlo, deliberately aimed to expose the errors of others, he has effectively achieved his end as a comic joker should. But because he was motivated in no small way by his own humour of envy, he too has been exposed, and in the process of exposing others. Macilente’s hoaxes, however, still come off without a hitch, providing vindication of sorts for him. It is significant that as Jonson moves forward in his career toward *Epicoene*, his tricksters’ hoaxes frequently begin to unravel before they reach their conclusion – an effect that to varying degrees questions the tricksters’ moral authority. This is partly the case with *Mosca* and *Volpone*, and with *Face* and *Subtle* in *The Alchemist*. But where *Volpone* violently punishes its tricksters and *The Alchemist* lets them entirely off the hook, *Epicoene* subtly undermines its wits,

¹¹⁴ Mares, “Comic Procedures,” 106.

¹¹⁵ I will discuss Jonson’s different endings in the next chapter.

ultimately subverting what they believe to be the play's central hoax to one much more sophisticated.

There is a significant similarity between the motives of the three jokers Asper, Carlo, and Macilente, and the indignation of Asper, Sordido, and Macilente. Feeling a strong but righteous anger, Asper forms something of a mean between Sordido, who felt unfounded malice, and Macilente, who, while having motive for indignation, felt envy more strongly. Here Asper gives us a middle ground as one whose hoaxes have a basically altruistic aim: he writes his play to teach those in his audience who have ears to hear, and this altruism gives him a certain moral authority to do what he does. Carlo, on the one hand, has no real purpose in mind beyond his own pleasure. He accomplishes little, but neither does he have authority to do more. Macilente, on the other hand, has a clear intention for his hoaxes, but it is only minimally noble. His actions are largely rooted in his own humour and as such, lack the full authority of Asper's.

The hoax and its purposes thus function, like indignation and its derivatives, as structuring ideas for Jonson as he delineates his characters. In his newly-coined genre of comical satire, though, his hoaxes are not visibly united by the "probability and necessity" that so effectively govern the action of his later plays. They don't happen "because of one another" nor come about "contrary to expectation" (*Poetics* 1452a). The fools themselves are, of course, surprised by them, but the audience is not. Mitis implicitly complains about this when he observes at the end of Act 4 that, contrary to the plot development implied by Asper's chosen play title, "all his actors so strongly pursue and continue *in* their humours" (4.5.165-66, italics mine). Cordatus' justification, that the somewhat random first four acts have allowed the fools' humours to grow to "pride and

fullness,” demonstrates that Asper-Jonson’s greatest efforts have gone into characterization, not plot. It is, then, in the relationship of the hoaxes to the characters on whom they are played that we find the greatest degree of probability and necessity in the play: each fool’s own humour is used for his or her undoing. *Epicoene* is much more convincing in its use of apparently random hoaxes because in it, Jonson will not only link character to hoax, but also individual hoaxes to each other in a way that surprises both characters and audience.

3.2 “Twere sin to reform them”

Every Man Out of His Humour owes much of its structure and characterization to verse satire. *Epicoene*, written in 1610, is a long way from this and Jonson’s other comical satires. It functions throughout by inverting key aspects of comedy. The play begins with a marriage, instead of leaving it for the end, and concludes with a divorce. Generational strife motivates, rather than blocks, marriage, and its very lop-sided resolution enables the concluding divorce. The play is bookended by discussions of preparation for death and funerals. Not only are comedy’s festive elements inverted, but so too is Asper’s concern to expose and purge the folly of his audience. His *saeva indignatio* seems to have been replaced in *Epicoene* by a farce-like disregard for moral correction; indeed, of the two aims expressed by Jonson’s customary axiom, *docere et delectare*, only the latter seems invoked in the play’s first prologue.

While *Epicoene*’s more elaborate plot distances it from the tableau-like effect of *Every Man Out*’s satire, its characters share the humours basis of those in the earlier play. The consideration of this common ground is an informative place to begin

understanding Jonson's developing sense of comic error. As in *Every Man Out*, Jonson again takes pains to show how these humours or errors are deliberately adopted. He does this with the theme of "painting" and disguise that run throughout the play. The opening scene provides a discussion between two of the play's three wits on the topic of women's cosmetic painting. Clerimont is about to hear his page sing a song he has written extolling the "grace" of unadorned "simplicity" in women's appearance when his friend Truewit enters.¹¹⁶ His opinion is the opposite of Clerimont's: women ought rather to "practise any art to mend breath, cleanse teeth, repair eyebrows" (107-8). "Paint and profess it," he concludes, in a phrase whose first imperative at least is metaphorically heeded by almost all of the play's fools. Sir Amorous La Foole, the first of these whom we meet, is eager to describe his family coat of arms, and it sounds very much like that of Sogliardo: it is "yellow, or *or*, checkered azure and gules, and some three or four colours more, which is a very noted coat and has sometimes been solemnly worn by divers nobility of our house" (1.4.39-45). Such a fantastically colourful arrangement, Dutton comments, sounds just like the "motley of the stage fool or jester, who would not, of course, wear it 'solemnly,' even 'sometimes.'"¹¹⁷ Noting his house in the increasingly fashionable Strand, James Loxley calls La Foole "a model consumer of the luxury goods that excited Volpone and a typical inhabitant of the leisured, moneyed society that is sustained by such consumption."¹¹⁸ His "inseparable" companion, Sir John Daw, wears his learning as ostentatiously as La Foole does his nobility (2.4.100). He denounces the likes of Aristotle ("a mere commonplace fellow") and Homer ("a prolix ass"), and

¹¹⁶ Jonson, *Epicene*, 1.1.96. All subsequent quotations of the play will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number. Richard Dutton (the editor of this edition) prefers to modernize the spelling of *Epicene*.

¹¹⁷ Dutton, *Commentary*, 137.

¹¹⁸ Loxley, *Complete Guide*, 74.

confidently asserts that “*Syntagma juris civilis, Corpus juris civilis, Corpus juris canonici*, [and] the King of Spain’s Bible” (all four are titles that he seems only to have gleaned by reading the books’ spines¹¹⁹) are the only ‘people’ worthy the name of author (2.3.61-79). Like La Foole’s nobility, Daw’s learning is little more than a poorly-fitting cloak – snatches of quotations, titles, and names – worn without altering the ignorance that lies beneath it. Clerimont uses exactly the image of clothing to deride the pair of knights: “Was there ever such a two yards of knighthood measured out by time, to be sold to laughter?” (2.4.151-52). Truewit agrees and points out the hollow man the cloth is to cover, calling Daw a “fellow so utterly nothing, as he knows not what he would be” (154-55). Moreover, in the hoax that the wits will later play on the knights in Act 4, Jonson exposes the elaborate “painting” of each while showing that they have nonetheless been completely duped by the pretensions of the other. The effort that each puts into maintaining appearances has precluded his ability to perceive those of the other; inflated opinion of oneself results in equally inflated opinions of another.

Captain and Mrs. Otter are literary descendants of Deliro and Fallace, and demonstrate another important aspect of the errors Jonson portrays: they are inversions or opposites of commonly accepted virtues and customs. The only (legitimately) married couple we see in the play, the Otters turn upside down any notion of a normally ordered Jacobean marriage. When we first encounter them, Captain Tom has been planning to bring out his three drinking cups, shaped like “bull, bear, and horse,” for a round, but Mrs. Otter will have none of it. She reminds him of his vow to her at their marriage, “that I would be princess and reign in my own house, and you would be my subject and

¹¹⁹ Moreover, *syntagma* and *corpus* are Greek and Latin respectively for “body”; Daw is confusing the same book.

obey me” (3.1.31-33). She has “composed their prenuptial agreement as a script in which her role is regal,” notes Robert Watson.¹²⁰ She goes on to ask her husband witheringly, “Is a bear a fit beast, or a bull, to mix in society with great ladies? ... Must my house, or my roof, be polluted with the scent of bears and bulls, when it is perfumed for great ladies?” (17-30). To all of this, the brow-beaten Captain meekly responds “under correction.”

Yet in her stern attack on him, Truewit rightly perceives her to be the one who most resembles the ferocity of Tom’s low-brow sports: “For God’s sake,” he urges Clerimont and Dauphine, “let’s go stave her off him.... She’ll worry him if we help not in time” – twice using verbs drawn from the bear pit. Jonson gives us a barely restrained “Amazon” (as Truewit later calls her, 5.4.230) and her unmanned, trembling mate, whose only relief is to go to the bear gardens and cheer on animals whose predicaments resemble his own. Importantly, this upside down marriage reveals Jonson’s use of inversion as a way in which to depict error, which is closely linked to Aristotle’s paradigm of error as deviation from a mean. Jonson continues to use this model of humours, but complicates it by pairing characters who err differently with regard to the same virtue. Neither of the Otters knows moderation with regard to anger: the meek Captain “holding back when one is being foully insulted,” and Mrs. Otter “getting angry ... in circumstances in which one ought not, and more than one ought, and more quickly, and for a longer time” (*Ethics* 4.1126a).

The formidable Ladies Collegiate, to whose ranks Mrs. Otter aspires, are an elaboration of her excesses. Like Mrs. Otter, they are inversions of usual gender roles,

¹²⁰ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 106.

especially in Truewit's initial account: they are "A new foundation,...here i' the town..., that live [away] from their husbands and...cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or fashion, with most masculine, or rather hermaphroditical authority" (1.1.72-79). Watson notes that "they envision themselves as something like a female version of Shakespeare's Gentlemen of Navarre," less the initial resistance to sexuality.¹²¹ Critics debate Jonson's attitude toward the sexuality of the Collegiates,¹²² but the follies the Ladies evince are very similar to those of Daw and La Foole. Like La Foole, they overvalue their social position and so become disgruntled when they are not invited to Morose's wedding. Like Daw, they pretend to learning and delight to air opinions which are thoroughly fickle. Like him too, Mavis uses the appearance of wit as a means of seduction. Their College is an inversion of organized intellectual discussion, an attempt to dignify the exchange of "their arbitrary and fluctuating opinions,"¹²³ best seen in the way they go from scoffing at Dauphine as Morose's "keeper" and "a very pitiful knight" to attempting to get him into bed (4.4.152-55).

Morose, Dutton claims, "is the most typical and sustained 'humours' character that Jonson ever created."¹²⁴ He is almost entirely ruled by his revulsion to noise (at least to that of others). Clerimont describes how he has outfitted "a room with double walls and treble ceilings, the windows shut and caulked" (1.2.183-84). When Morose first appears on stage, he runs through a checklist of tasks his servant has to have performed: hanging "a thick quilt or flock-bed on the outside of the door, that if [callers] knock with

¹²¹ Ibid., 107.

¹²² McLuskie (*Renaissance Dramatists*, 164-71) and Howard (*Social Struggle*, 106-10) think Jonson and the play staunchly misogynistic; Newman (*Fashioning Femininity*, 129-44) and Swann ("Refashioning Society") see greater subtlety.

¹²³ Leggatt, *Ben Jonson*, 104.

¹²⁴ Dutton, Introduction, 67.

their daggers or brickbats, they can make no noise”; oiling the door hinges and locks; and lining the stairs with quilting (2.1.11-13). Like the Turks whom he regards so highly, he insists his servant go about in silence: “Speak not, though I question you. Answer me not with speech but by silence,” he orders, insisting that his servant only gesture a response “with your leg” (6-14). Watson notes that Morose has often been seen “as a degraded figure of the Jonsonian satirist, full of tirades on the stupid impertinencies of all those around him, hiding in horror from the ways of the world.”¹²⁵ His humour, says Loxley, “sets him against all the features of the urban and urbane world he has the misfortune to inhabit,” yet he seems deliberately to have chosen a house on the same street as the likes of Sir Amorous La Foole.¹²⁶

Morose’s penchant for silent retreat is further qualified: “All discourses *but my own* afflict me,” he allows, and we quickly see in his elaborate commands to his servant and his interminable monologue to his prospective bride his love of his own voice (4, italics mine). So on the one hand, Morose is a continuation of Jonson’s tradition of characters whose humour causes “them all to run away,” a lopsided caricature of a man. On the other, the strong irony that he introduces by making Morose a participant in the noise and social chaos he so resents from others emphasizes Morose’s responsibility for his humour. Where characters like Sogliardo or Macilente were at least consistently under the influence of their humour, in all places and situations, Morose is so only in regard to others. It is not noise so much as people that he can’t abide, and it is himself, not silence, that he loves.

¹²⁵ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 108.

¹²⁶ Loxley, *Complete Guide*, 75.

The nature of Morose's error and the relationship of his lopsided excess to the principle of inversion is perhaps most clearly revealed when he explains his desire for silence by describing his upbringing. He recalls his father's instructions, "that I should always collect and contain my mind, not suffering it to flow loosely; that I should look to what things were necessary to the carriage of my life, and what not, embracing the one and eschewing the other" (5.3.48-52). From this reasonable mean, though, Morose has deviated widely, at once cutting himself off completely from society while eschewing the self-knowledge that such quietness and discipline ought to yield. This lopsided excess then causes him to initiate the central thematic inversions of the play. He seeks to marry not out of love or a desire for children, but to spite his nephew. The "unconscionable" sort of marriage he desires (as even Truewit recognizes, 4.4.43-44) leads him to mistake a boy for a woman. It is likewise his excessive pursuit of silence that motivates him not only to seek divorce but to declare himself "no man" in the process (5.4.43). In this, Morose is paradigmatic of the relationship between characters' errors of deviation from and inversion of a virtuous mean.

In keeping with Cordatus' insistence that comedy ought to function as an "*imitation vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*," the effect of most of the hoaxes in *Epicoene* is to reflect, both to other characters and to Jonson's audience, the particular nature of the hoaxes' victims. And like those of *Every Man Out*, *Epicoene's* hoaxes accomplish this merely by providing the play's various fools with a scenario or circumstances that lead them happily to expose themselves; the jokers only fuel a pre-existing fire. When La Foole first comes on stage, Dauphine simply alludes to his lineage, sending him off on his description of the motley La Foole coat of arms and his dubious

personal history as a “page [plaything?] in court to my Lord Lofty and after my Lady’s gentleman-usher” (1.4.43-60). Daw, whom Dauphine and Clerimont subsequently visit, is no less happy to expose himself. When Clerimont asks Epicoene about Daw’s poetry, the knight immediately grabs his limping madrigals out of Epicoene’s hand to read them to the wits, and then proceeds to heap scorn on what he declares to be the unlettered tediousness of the great ancients. The slightest of baits is all that La Foole and Daw require to publish their rather questionable merits. So too, Tom Otter takes only a little liquor and suggestion to begin railing that his wife is little more than his “cook, a laundress, a house drudge, that serves my necessary turns” (4.2.49-50). “I married with six thousand pounds,” he scoffs as Truewit leads in Mrs. Otter to overhear him (76).

The play’s funniest hoax, where Daw and La Foole are each brought to fear that the other is seeking his life, is also the most complete example of fools eagerly exposing their own folly with the joker’s careful instigation. Truewit sets up the whole scene as would a director, and identifying the lobby of Morose’s house as his stage, the production, “a tragicomedy,” and assigning Clerimont and Dauphine to be the “chorus behind the arras” which will “whip out between the acts and speak” (4.5.30-33). Truewit then simply fabricates a scenario, which he tells to each knight, that the other is wildly incensed at him and seeks his life. Manfully assenting to Truewit’s assertion that fortitude consists “*magis patiendo quam faciendo, magis ferendo quam feriendo*,”¹²⁷ Daw willingly promises La Foole (through Truewit) “any satisfaction, sir – but fighting” (72). For his part, Foole happily pledges first to “hide himself,” and then to run “away into the country presently” (159, 181-82). Like Macilente to Fallace and Fastidious, Truewit suggests to them

¹²⁷ “more in suffering than in doing, more in bearing up than in striking.”

alternative responses that even more thoroughly disgrace their knighthoods. Daw eagerly agrees to receive “six kicks” from La Foole (“What’s six kicks to a man that reads Seneca?”, 280-1), and though he won’t beat his head against the hilt of Daw’s sword (“I cannot endure to shed my own blood”), La Foole is happy to suffer “tweaks by the nose *sans nombre*” (300-1, 314). Even Truewit is amazed at them; when Clerimont peers out to ask what Truewit has done to Daw, he declares, “He will let me do nothing, man, he does all afore me” (123). The whole drama is capped when Daw emerges from his hiding spot blindfolded to willingly bend over and receive six kicks from Dauphine (whom he believes to be La Foole), and then La Foole, in a similar state, offers his nose to Dauphine’s tweaking. The wits thus use the knights’ own imagined reputation for chivalric wit and bravado to undo them. Citing Jonson’s obvious borrowing from Shakespeare’s mock-combat between Viola and Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, Watson suggests that the audience is expected to acknowledge Truewit’s verve: in “looking for a showy device to turn [Daw and La Foole] against each other[, Truewit] remembers the same literary precedent” they do.¹²⁸

I have left Dauphine out of the charge of lacking dramatic intent because from first to last he is driven by a very clear goal – that of securing Morose’s estate for himself. While Truewit and Clerimont amble from episode to episode merely enjoying themselves, Dauphine crafts a unified plotline with a clear beginning, middle, and end that work toward a definite conclusion. It involves a fair amount of improvisation, to be sure, but he carefully presses each unexpected alteration or addition to his plot into its service, rather than letting it distract him from his ultimate end. That he employs many

¹²⁸ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 105.

of Truewit and Clerimont's hoaxes to serve his own, and ultimately tricks even them when he pulls off Epicoene's peruke is a judgement of their casual nonchalance. Harmless fun, however witty and clever, is easily made to serve the designs of one who plots with an end in mind. If in this Truewit resembles Carlo Buffone, Dauphine recalls Macilente. The latter two are happy enough to spend much of the play in the company of and sharing jests with the other two, but near the end of the play emerge as the more effective and important jokers.

Dauphine does differ from Macilente in that his plot to groom Epicoene as a bride for Morose precedes the play. But apart from his initial arrangement with Cutbeard to report Epicoene to Morose as a prospective bride, he, like Macilente, is remarkably quick in the way he goes about bringing his plot to a conclusion. He seems merely to tag along with Truewit and Clerimont for most of the play, including Morose's divorce proceedings. Only when these founder does he step forward to declare, "Come I see a plain confederacy in this doctor and this parson, to abuse a gentleman. You study his affliction" (5.4.147-49). It is then Truewit and Clerimont's turn to be silent as Dauphine, after getting Morose to sign off on a contract to give him a third of his income during life and the rest of it afterwards, triumphantly removes his confederate's wig and declares, "here is your release, sir: you have married a boy: a gentleman's son that I have brought up this half year at my great charges, and for this composition which I have now made with you" (198-201). Also like Macilente, Dauphine stands somewhat apart from Jonson's implied judgment, and so functions to a degree as the dramatist's representative in the play. This link is strengthened both by *Epicoene's* lack of a metadramatic stand-in for the author (such as Asper) and by the fact that Dauphine's trick dupes not only the

other characters of the play, but us, their audience. And as a trick, it is deliberately metadramatic: in pulling the peruke off, Dauphine quite literally, not merely dramatically, reveals a boy. Jonson thus makes a customary and universally accepted bit of stage deception into a trick on his audience. His aim here is less revolutionary and more subtle than to have his audience question “how can we in all integrity make prescriptions about what constitutes a proper normality in gender-relations and sexual behaviour,” as Richard Cave rather too excitedly asserts.¹²⁹ Rather, this double hoax is at the centre of Jonson’s cathartic intentions – a discussion I shall leave to the fourth chapter.

The series of jests that the three wits make at old Morose’s expense demand separate attention because, with the exception of the final proceedings, they are not quite hoaxes in the same sense as were their other jokes. When Truewit and Clerimont first contrive to have La Foole’s feast shifted to Morose’s house, Clerimont declares that the result of assembling the whole noisy company in the house of a man who detests noise “will be an excellent comedy of affliction” (2.6.35-36). His phrase warrants consideration. As we have seen, most of the other hoaxes in both *Every Man Out* and *Epicoene* work by encouraging and inflating a particular humour. While ignorant of what is being done, the fool happily goes along with and furthers the suggestions of the joker. While the jokers certainly provide Morose an opportunity to behave in a similarly hyperbolic and inflated manner, they act on him not by way of suggestion and encouragement but abrasion and affliction. His excesses of behaviour arise from his suffering, not from blindly accepting the joker’s carefully made suggestions. The result

¹²⁹ Cave, *Ben Jonson*, 71.

Jonson carefully produces from this is the arousal of pity, indignation's opposite, in his audience, an effect I will take up in the next chapter.

3.3 "Fashion"ing the match

Much Ado About Nothing is frequently grouped with Shakespeare's central romantic comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. While it certainly ends, as they all do, with multiple marriages, it gets there with far greater realism than do the other three plays: as Sheldon Zitner notes, it is written largely in prose, excludes any pastoral or preternatural "green world," and employs only incidental disguises or cross dressing.¹³⁰ All of these factors, combined with the characters' unabashed mingling of love with concerns of money, rank, and social convention, make *Much Ado* surprisingly similar to a play like *Epicoene*, even if it is not quite so cynical about marriage. Like *Epicoene*, *Much Ado* is built around a series of hoaxes that often aim to expose and shame error. It never employs the language of humours comedy, and its characters do genuinely change in response to the hoaxes played on them, but it nevertheless posits comic error as both deviation from a virtuous mean and self-ignorance. And just as *Epicoene* expands the range of Jonson's humours comedy by linking individual humours with a meticulously portrayed social milieu, the errors of *Much Ado*'s characters are largely defined in relation to the social conventions of Messina and early modern England more generally.

¹³⁰ Zitner, Introduction, 1-2. While masks are used briefly in the ball scene (2.2), they are almost always seen through.

Shakespeare's term in the play for this elaborate code of behaviour is "fashion," which functions as both noun and verb and appears prominently throughout the play.

Kiernan Ryan suggests that the word

serves in *Much Ado* as shorthand for the myriad ways in which human beings are formed and deformed, physically, mentally, and emotionally, by the culture in which they find themselves at a particular moment in history. "Fashion" is the ideal term for this onerous task, because in its routine sartorial sense it's the most obvious, graphic proof of how tightly people are defined by their world and time.¹³¹

Ryan wants to show that the effect of fashion is omnipotent, an insidious discourse from which no one can escape. The play's portrayal of it is more complex than this, however: even as social conventions coerce and efface individual identity, they also symbolize the community's highest visions of love and virtue. Especially in the first two acts, a character's adherence to "fashion" or social conventions functions as shorthand for his or her virtue. In one of the first uses of the word, Don Pedro first greets Leonato by self-deprecatingly suggesting that he has forced his host to deviate from fashion: "Good Signor Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it."¹³² But Leonato corrects him, declaring, "Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace; for trouble being gone, comfort should remain. But when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave" (1.1.95-98). He adroitly counters Don Pedro's charge by demonstrating that he is in fact doubly in alignment with custom to welcome the Prince: not only is it his social duty, but he delights to do it. Obviously there is a degree of obsequiousness in his words, but the undeniable elegance, even beauty, of the exchange must at least partially check our

¹³¹ Ryan, *Shakespeare's Comedies*, 169.

¹³² Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1.1.92-94. Subsequent citations of the play will be made parenthetically in the text.

compulsive suspicion of power relationships. Shakespeare sets Leonato up as a character who deftly occupies the virtuous mean of sociable behaviour that fashion can also represent. Their subsequent banter about Hero's paternity is actually, I would suggest, another example of this. Though Don Pedro and Leonato will eventually show that cuckoldry is a deep-set fear, it is introduced here as a standard, even proper, jest, and any hint of its being true is soundly put to rest: "Truly," concludes Don Pedro about Hero's resemblance to Leonato, "the lady fathers herself" (1.1.106-7). These men's ability to jest lightly about a deed brought about by women's proverbial sexual looseness indicates their assurance of their own moderation.

Soon afterwards, Claudio demonstrates what for the play is an equally important form of fashion, behaviour according to literary convention. When Claudio reveals that he has been smitten with love for Hero, his justification of his feelings – expressed in the play's first passage of verse – is that they fit the pattern of the stock soldier-lover: before, he only "looked upon her with a soldier's eye, / That liked but had a rougher task in hand." Now that the war is finished, "soft and delicate desires, / All prompting me how fair young Hero is," have taken over his mind (1.1.287-93). Don Pedro quickly recognizes the pattern, declaring, "Thou wilt be like a lover presently, / And tire the hearer with a book of words" (295-96). He jests here about Claudio's conventionality, but also takes it as a sign of the propriety of his sentiment, promising to speak on his behalf to Leonato and using his status as prince to arrange a marriage. Benedick later confirms that Claudio is indeed become the very picture of the romance hero overcome by love: he is suddenly concerned with clothing, has changed his taste in music, and turned from "speaking plain and to the purpose" to "orthography," using words that

“are a very fantastical banquet” (2.3.19-21). Just as Leonato carefully but elegantly holds to the mean of social convention, Claudio doesn’t deviate from the literary.

The propriety demonstrated in the opening two acts by Leonato, Don Pedro, and Claudio forms the mean from which three other characters, Benedick, Beatrice, and Don John, deviate. From her first words to the messenger at the beginning of the play, Beatrice draws down and deflates the social conventions or fashion that others observe in their speech. She twists all his praise of Benedick into its opposite: rather than a man nobly “stuffed with all honourable virtues,” as the messenger claims, she deems him to be indeed “stuffed,” but with the straw of a scarecrow (1.1.54-56). The vigour and length of her attack are excessive in relationship to the standard of dialogue that has initially been established, and this only continues upon the entrance of Don Pedro and his men. Hero will later identify Beatrice’s satirical temper in precise terms as being “from all fashions” (3.1.72).

Benedick introduces himself very similarly, getting into a “skirmish of wit” with Beatrice after they have shared the stage for only twenty lines (1.1.60). Its intensity strongly exceeds that of the genial banter that bookends it. John Traugott summarizes their roles succinctly: “Benedick plays the braggart and Beatrice plays the shrew of the old comedy,” both stock humours characters.¹³³ The compulsiveness of Benedick’s response makes this exchange as incongruous with the easy grace of this part of the scene as Beatrice’s dialogue with the messenger was with the first part of it. While undeniably humorous, Benedick too comes off looking like part buffoon, part boaster, a

¹³³ Traugott, “Creating a Rational Rinaldo,” 170.

“character possessed by a humour that must be purged.”¹³⁴ Ruth Nevo observes that Beatrice and Benedick function in the play’s early scenes as “a distorting mirror” and “parody” of Claudio and Hero’s conventional love that thus confirms the latter couple’s “soberer ways.”¹³⁵ In addition to her obvious violation of the convention of the silently virtuous woman, this second appearance of Beatrice’s vitriol – “I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you” – casts her as something of a “mechanical comic humour,” as Northrop Frye suggests.¹³⁶ Beatrice and Benedick’s dissonance is further reinforced by the fact that though they appear to be the lowest ranking of the major characters, their voices frequently dominate the scenes they are in. Throughout the first half of the play the other characters always happily indulge Beatrice and Benedick’s jesting and lack of social decorum, to be sure, but its effect is to mark the pair off as deviants from an established social norm.

While his humour is the opposite of theirs, Don John similarly refuses to moderate himself to social convention. Illegitimacy only reinforces his lack of social graces. His first words after curtly thanking Leonato for his hospitality plainly declare his sullen humour: “I am not of many words,” he pronounces before once again falling silent. His discussion with Conrad shortly afterward is completely dissonant with much of the first scene’s tone, only excepting the serious edge in Beatrice’s two exchanges. When Conrad urges Don John to be more agreeable for his own sake, he refuses “to fashion a carriage to rob love of any man” (1.3.27-28). Ironically, the character who most refuses to submit to “fashion” is also the most stiffly formal in his speech: Alexander

¹³⁴ Richman, *Laughter, Pain, and Wonder*, 46.

¹³⁵ Nevo, *Comic Transformations*, 162-63.

¹³⁶ Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 81.

Leggatt notes that he speaks “the most heavily patterned prose of the early scenes.”¹³⁷ In Aristotle’s terms, Don John is like Sordido and Morose, the boor deficient in the charm or wit of the moderate person whom Leonato and Don Pedro exemplify: in social circumstances “he contributes nothing himself, and objects to everything” (*Ethics* 4.1128b). Beatrice and especially Benedick sit on the opposite extreme as examples of the buffoon “who cannot resist raising a laugh,” and who “spares neither himself, nor anyone else if he can raise laughter.”¹³⁸

As any reader of the play will know, however, fashion and those who adhere to it do not go unquestioned. In *Every Man Out*, the mean from which the humours characters deviate is best represented by Asper. His standard goes largely unquestioned in the play. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, however, Shakespeare sets up the mean of fashion but then inverts it – not unlike what Jonson does to his three wits in *Epicoene*. I have already argued that the device of the hoax is what links comic error, an element of character, with plot, and thus has the crucial role of lifting comedy out of mere lampoon. The hoaxes in *Much Ado About Nothing* all depend upon character’s understandings of “fashion” and the degree to which they feel obligated to submit to these. More particularly, Shakespeare uses hoaxes to complicate fashion, something first seen in the masque of Act 2. Masquers are obligated by the conventions of the event to disguise themselves, even as it is just as much a part of these conventions that the disguises are to be seen through. The masque in *Much Ado* reveals convention to have two poles, benign and malignant, and between these, a complexity of which only a few realize the potential. We can measure characters in the play by the degree to which they realize this

¹³⁷ Leggatt, *Shakespeare’s Comedy of Love*, 156.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1128a.

complexity. The first three pairs who move to the front of the stage clearly know who their partners are, but playfully hide this knowledge for the sake of the convention. Beatrice and Benedick also recognize each other, but they use the convention more subtly: each tries to elicit information from the other by pretending they are not themselves, yet they do this presupposing the other's knowledge of their pretence. At the ball's conclusion, Don John approaches Claudio and gets him to believe that he (Don John) believes him (Claudio) to be Benedick. Wrongly believing Don John to be genuinely mistaken, Claudio is thus taken in by Don John's message, and believes Don Pedro to have wooed Hero for himself.

The ball thus subtly introduces Aristotle's complementary category of comic error, self-ignorance. Shakespeare already begins this complication early in the play. Interspersed between moments already discussed are hints at the self-ignorance that dutiful adherence to fashion can hide. Benedick's refusal to take Claudio's initial declaration of love for Hero seriously, for example, is partly an aspect of his buffoonery, but his jesting also aims at Claudio's refusal to think of his love apart from convention. He asks for Benedick's "sober judgement" of Hero, but when Benedick declares her only average, Claudio refuses his verdict as a jest, asking instead, "Can the world buy such a jewel?" (1.1.165-75). He counters Benedick's realism with conventional literary phrases so insistently that it becomes clear he is not even hearing Benedick. Ironically, he prefaces his request for Don Pedro's help in making the match with his own bit of bald-faced realism: "Hath Leonato any son, my lord?", he asks, looking to ascertain her inheritance before proposing the match. Then he just as quickly returns to his conventional romantic narrative of how his love came about.

That Claudio's feeling is tenuous at best is demonstrated by how quickly it dissipates when Don John convinces him at the ball that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself. He hastily relinquishes Hero, declaring that "beauty is a witch / Against whose charms faith melteth into blood" (2.1.180-81). His almost instantaneous switch here from conventions of love to those of female perfidy reveals that both have taken the place of a personal experience of love and loss, and, more importantly, that Claudio is unaware of this. So while fashion can represent a virtuous mean to which moderate characters adhere, Don John's first hoax demonstrates that it can also be indicative of self-ignorance. It also suggests that Claudio, in his stock declarations of love and its betrayal, may be as mechanically humorous as Beatrice and Benedick in their rejection of fashion.

Don John's next hoax on Claudio essentially recapitulates his first one, but with higher stakes. It functions in a way remarkably similar to the hoaxes of Jonson, identifying and inflating Claudio's dominant comic *hamartēma*. He has already put his finger on this error in his first hoax, what we might call Claudio's compulsive conventionality. Unlike Jonson's tricksters' hoaxes, though, Don John's doesn't backfire on him or result in unforeseen circumstances that expose something about him. He remains a "plain-dealing" stock villain for the duration of the play (1.3.30).¹³⁹ Nor do we get from Don John any more specific statement of intent than that he is "sick in displeasure to [Claudio]," and will take malicious pleasure in "any bar, any cross, any impediment" to his marriage. That Shakespeare only gives us second-hand accounts of

¹³⁹ Don John seems a retrenchment after Shakespeare's experiment with a more realistic villain in Shylock. Leggatt (*Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, 151) calls *The Merchant of Venice* an "explosive and not fully controlled extension of the range of Shakespearean comedy."

the balcony trick seems meant to draw a parallel between Claudio's earlier alacrity to believe himself betrayed and that which he demonstrates here.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, his mind is made up before he has seen anything: at Don John's merest insinuation of Hero's unchastity, Claudio determines that "if I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow, in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her" (3.2.117-19). Even Don Pedro, who has to this point been representative of convention's mean, is quick to be taken in. Leggatt observes that the verbal style of both men becomes "stiffly patterned, and their expressions of intent are not only arbitrary, but pat and perfunctory. Claudio and Don Pedro are now moving as Don John moves, simply as figures in a story, engaged in conventional roles."¹⁴¹ The arbitrary nature of especially Claudio's change of mind regarding Hero is a result not only of his ready acceptance of fashion, but more deeply, his complete self-ignorance of his tendency to do so.

Borachio's drunken commentary on Claudio and Don Pedro's hasty belief in Hero's lasciviousness again highlights the double nature of fashion as both mean and deviation. On the one hand, "all the hot-bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty" pursue fashion because it is a standard against which they want to be measured (3.3.131-32). At the same time, though, it is "deformed," a deviation from a mean, that functions as a "thief," stealing its devotees away from themselves in their focus on outward appearance. This is exactly Claudio in his self-ignorance: at the very moment he believes himself to make decisions in accord with moral and social propriety, he most deviates from that standard. When Claudio subsequently sets about to expose Hero by way of his

¹⁴⁰ Michael Friedman ("The World Must be Peopled," 95-96) describes how directors of the play frequently seek to mollify audience reaction to this hastiness by staging some aspect of what Borachio describes.

¹⁴¹ Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, 157.

own hoax, Shakespeare makes this irony acute. Claudio carefully scripts his hoax to allow Hero the opportunity to expose herself: “Know you any Hero?”, he questions after the Friar asks for impediments to their marriage to be declared (4.1.15). When she offers none, what began as a hoax becomes little more than a public shaming; this, rather than the exposure of error by means of innuendo, is Claudio’s real intention. He throws her back at Leonato, declaring her a “rotten orange” who is “but the sign and semblance of her honour” (32-33). In his alleged defence of personal honour and public morality, Claudio attacks Hero’s resultant blushes as “exterior shows” that mask her knowledge of “a luxurious bed” (40-41). Custom, which would read her reaction as a mark of innocence, cannot now be trusted; indeed, Hero’s alleged vice distorts and subverts it. After a long and increasingly hyperbolic rant against her and appearance generally, Claudio grimly concludes:

For thee I’ll lock up all the gates of love,
And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang
To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,
And never shall it more be gracious. (104-7)

The irony brought about by his self-ignorance is that at the very moment he most strongly claims to reject convention, promising henceforth to see life through the lens of “conjecture,” he is most completely acting in accord with its malignant inverse side. His rhetoric throughout is stiffly patterned, and his central trope of false seeming, well-worn. Just as his first verse declarations of love and betrayal in the first two acts broke away from the easy prose dialogue that preceded them, so here he departs strikingly from the

tone of what Leggatt calls the natural, easy family affair [the wedding] that everyone was taking for granted” to deliver his shrill, high register denunciation.¹⁴²

By this time, Don Pedro has already joined in and confirmed Claudio’s attack on Hero. After they exit, Leonato demonstrates that along with his noble guests, he too has abandoned the easy civility of fashion and now represents its malignant potential. He turns on his daughter even more virulently than did Claudio, inveighing, “Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes,” and declaring that if her shame isn’t strong enough to kill her, “Myself would.../ Strike at thy life” (123-27). Though Don John offers no clear statement of motivation, his hoax brilliantly exposes not only Claudio’s but Leonato’s compulsive, humorous adherence to fashion by inflating it: like Jonson’s tricksters, he simply provides the pair with a stronger object for their humour to seize on (women’s proverbial lasciviousness) and lets them expose themselves. By making the possibility of Hero’s unfaithfulness highly unlikely, Shakespeare foregrounds the compulsive nature of their belief in Don John and, at the same time, emphasizes their complete ignorance of this. All three move from a standard of fashion that represents a refined and virtuous mean of sociability to its flip side, emblematic of their self-ignorance.

Don Pedro’s hoax is set up directly parallel to that of his brother and ostensibly works similarly by pressing its victims, Beatrice and Benedick, into conformity with social fashion. Certainly this has been the dominant critical view of their relationship in recent years. Jean Howard is representative in seeing his tricks on the pair as a sinister attempt to “create love where its existence seems impossible and thus to control the

¹⁴² Ibid., 160.

social world around him.”¹⁴³ Using “theatrical functions as instruments of power and as a means of compelling belief in [his] particular view of truth,” Don Pedro succeeds in “producing their love.”¹⁴⁴ But if, as I have argued, social convention is not a malignant monolith but a scale with both mean and deviation, and if Claudio moves from the mean to an excess of it, it may be that Beatrice and Benedick shift from positions of deviation to moderation. Shakespeare early on gives us glimpses of at least Benedick’s potential for self-awareness in his relationship to fashion. He begins his description of Claudio’s unthinking adoption of courtly love conventions by declaring what seems to be his genuine “wonder” at it (2.3.8). He then turns this wonder on himself, asking, “May I be so converted and see with these eyes?” His first answer to this question, “I cannot tell,” indicates a self-consciousness we never see from Claudio, who is only ever certain of his thoughts. Indeed, the uncertainty about himself that Benedick here expresses is indicative of genuine self-awareness, the opposite of the ignorance of which comic error consists. In addition, the simple fact that Benedick in his private moments is far less antagonistic to the possibility of marriage than he is in public demonstrates that Don Pedro’s hoax does not have as far to go to convince him of marriage as Howard thinks.

By comparison with those hoaxes penned by Jonson, Don Pedro’s is fairly rudimentary. In aiming to bring Beatrice and Benedick “into a mountain of affection,” his tactic is only partly the use of subtle innuendo (2.2.362-63). After the false account of the other’s love is introduced to each, Don Pedro and his accomplices shame them in an attempt to get each to receive the other’s love. Don Pedro chides Benedick for having “a contemptible spirit” that would only scorn Beatrice’s love, and wishes “he would

¹⁴³ Howard, “Renaissance Antitheatricality,” 178.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady” (2.3.182, 206-7). Hero’s rebuke of Beatrice is much sharper, as she says to Ursula:

nature never framed a woman’s heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
.....
She cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear’d. (3.1.149-56)

Hero then describes how Beatrice compulsively “turns...every man the wrong side out” and is always with them thoroughly “odd and from all fashions” (68-92). Where Jonson’s tricksters and Don John inflate and further the tendencies of their victims, Don Pedro and his accomplices directly aim to reverse or mute Beatrice’s and Benedick’s conventional humours by making them feel shame for appearing deficient in love and pushing them to accept the moderating convention of marriage.

Both of these things do happen, of course, but in a way that is far from Don Pedro’s pedestrian vision. Instead, his hoax brings them to recognize their most serious errors, even though his aim was only to embarrass them into a certain behaviour. Benedick has already revealed his openness to the possibility of marriage, and after Don Pedro’s charade, recognizes that pride – the moral heart of his comic humour – is what keeps him from it:

Love me? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her. They say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud. Happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. (2.3.22-27)

His tone throughout this speech is not that of someone embarrassed into social acquiescence, but one of genuine amazement at what he has just heard – “Love me?” This is especially expressed by his disjointed style, as he regularly interrupts himself for

the first half of this speech before resolving that “I will be horribly in love with her” and refusing to succumb to whatever mockery he might endure for his about-face.

Beatrice’s response is at once more succinct and more intense. Even more deeply than Benedick, she feels the sting of criticism as “fire...in my ears,” but like him, identifies her central error not simply as being “from all fashions,” but “pride and scorn” (3.1.107-8). She too expresses genuine amazement at what she has heard before firmly deciding to amend her faults and reciprocate his love:

Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu.
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And, Benedick, love on. I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand. (109-12)

While her final trope is a stock one, it is one in which she carefully retains her agency: she will tame her own heart. The balance she strikes between acceptance of convention and her own conviction is best represented by the ten lines of this speech: she packs her thoughts into the form of a sonnet, that conventional (and, by 1598, clichéd) vehicle of romantic expression, but retains her own forthright style by disposing of the first quatrain. Moreover, this is the only soliloquy we get from the very private Beatrice, and only here does she let down her guard enough to address Benedick with the intimate second person singular pronoun. It is thus a remarkably unguarded and uncoerced moment. So while Don Pedro is technically successful in getting Benedick and Beatrice to depart from their anti-marriage humour, he also brings about their self-realization, something that will result in their later discovery and embodiment of the ideals to which fashion at its best points.

At the aborted wedding, Beatrice and Benedick continue these first steps away from their previous excess even as they reject the unquestioned conventions on which

Claudio's hyperbolic accusations depend. Wonder, the same posture of mind that earlier opened Benedick to the possibility of love, here keeps him on stage after Claudio and the Princes storm off: "I am so attired in wonder / I know not what to say," he claims, after trying to calm the irrational and vengeful Leonato (4.1.144-45). This openness both enables him to pity Hero ("How doth the lady?", he asks after her accusers leave) and to perceive that if Claudio and Don Pedro "be misled in this / The practice of it lives in John the Bastard" (112, 187-88). Most importantly, it moves him to approach Beatrice after everyone else has left the stage, kindly asking, "Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?" (255). In short order, Benedick confesses to Beatrice that "I do love nothing in the world so well as you," and with a little coaxing, she replies, "I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest" (267, 286-87). I will look more closely at this part of the scene in subsequent chapters, but what is important here is that their mutual declarations of love are at once in accord with the fashion into which Don Pedro's hoax was meant to press them, and yet far surpass his simplistic method of eliciting them. After confessions, Benedick eagerly steps into the convention of the courtly servant-lover, rapturously declaring, "Come, bid me do anything for thee," but failing to perceive the self-sacrifice that such a role ideally demands. Beatrice doesn't, though, and demands that he "Kill Claudio" (288-89). To declare this demand the intrusion of "hatred" into a "moment of what would seem the total victory of love," as does Robert Hunter, is to miss the point.¹⁴⁵ Beatrice's request tests Benedick to see if he perceives the substance

¹⁴⁵ Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, 97.

behind the conventions of love that he has just taken up, or whether they are to him only as they were to Claudio, fashions to be worn and discarded at will.¹⁴⁶

This falseness of fashion is precisely what Beatrice laments when she declares that “manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones, too. He is now as valiant as Hercules who only tells a lie and swears it” (319-22). By lamenting the deceptions of fashion, though, she upholds the ideal that these conventions of manhood are meant to represent.¹⁴⁷ This is what Benedick realizes after his initial refusal of Beatrice’s demand nearly costs him her regard. By the end of the scene, he declares, “Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him” (331). The twin hoaxes of Don John and Don Pedro come together here to bring about a result that neither expected. Each utilized an opposite convention of romantic love and sought to press their victims into its mould. Benedick and Beatrice reject the malignant one that Claudio unthinkingly adopts. This joint rejection provides the venue in which they can adopt Don Pedro’s more benign form. But they do this not simply because of shame or coercion, but perceiving the real meaning and importance of what the convention of romance at its best represents.

Leggatt points out Shakespeare’s ingenuity in combining a stock love story with psychological realism:

At the bottom of this episode lies a conventional love story pattern: Benedick must prove his worthiness as a lover by proving his manhood. This is something more basic – more primitive, even – than the conventions of the Claudio plot. But it is worked out largely in

¹⁴⁶ Claudio and Don Pedro demonstrate this attitude perfectly when, after paying their respects at Hero’s “tomb,” Don Pedro urges Claudio, “Come let us hence, and put on other weeds, / And then to Leonato’s we will go” for the second wedding attempt (5.3.30-31).

¹⁴⁷ Philip Collington (“All Honourable Virtues,” 299) makes this point with particular reference to Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*.

psychological terms, through a subtle examination of the tensions and uncertainties of the characters' minds.¹⁴⁸

Beatrice is not interested in Benedick's "manhood" in a conventional or even "primitive" sense, though. She wants to see if he shares her conviction of the inseparability of love from justice and is willing to act on it by challenging injustice. The fact that she, and eventually he, both perceive and are willing to counter one of Messinian society's deepest conventions denies Ryan's and Greenblatt's claims that by falling in love, the pair becomes the pawn of those conventions.¹⁴⁹ This remarkable and unexpected response to the hoaxes illustrates what Whalley means by the essentially "processive" nature of mimesis.¹⁵⁰ He suggests that we think of a play's action "as a sort of trajectory traced by a projectile, implying a certain amplitude, direction, velocity, momentum, target." Yet at the same time, "the nature of the projectile matters very much, because it is a man who...makes choices, determines the flight, is not simply propelled, is not a mere victim."¹⁵¹ Functioning as plays within the play, the hoaxes – especially Don Pedro's – achieve the end laid out for them, but, because they depend upon the responses of two deeply intelligent and complex characters, can be said to arrive at Don Pedro's end only in a technical sense. In significant ways, they take charge of the trajectory upon which the hoax launches them.

Interestingly, it is the hoax directed at Claudio to fake Hero's death and the method that the Friar lays out for it that best describe what Beatrice and Benedick realize in this scene. Unlike Don John's attempt to inflate error and Don Pedro's intent to

¹⁴⁸ Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, 179.

¹⁴⁹ See below, 207, 209.

¹⁵⁰ Whalley, Commentary, 44n6.

¹⁵¹ Whalley, "On Translating Aristotle's *Poetics*," 25.

coerce by shame, the Friar aims directly at Claudio's "errors of soul." He is not at all concerned to prove Hero's innocence, even to "change slander to remorse," but seeks instead to have Claudio realize that his compulsive acquiescence to trite romantic custom has prevented him from realizing the ideal of personal love that it at its best represents. I will look at the Friar's description of his hoax in greater depth later, because of its remarkable proximity to recent accounts of catharsis. But suffice it here to say that it contains the most powerful vision of a hoax's potential to expose deep-set errors of psychological and spiritual perception.

3.4 "Seeming! Seeming!"

There is no difficulty in describing *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Epicoene*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* as comedies. *Measure for Measure*, however, is different. Critics from Samuel Johnson onward have faulted the play for failing to function as the comedy the Folio editors asserted it to be, and its current critical status as a tragicomedy in significant ways only develops Johnson's observations. The threat of death hangs over most of the play and serious moral issues are debated but never really resolved, lending to (at least in the first half) an intensity more typical of tragedy. Verna Foster identifies Vienna's anti-fornication statute as the sort of "fantastic law" common to later Jacobean tragicomedy, a device meant "to place the characters in an extreme situation that will produce an intense emotional response in them, and to an extent, in the audience as well."¹⁵² This law sets up the inevitability of "a tragic and ironic action apparently headed

¹⁵² Foster, *Tragicomedy*, 56.

for unmitigated disaster,” a sense heightened by the extremes of character visible in Angelo and Isabella.¹⁵³

Yet all of these tragicomic features are, in principle, equally features of comedy. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for example, begins with Egeus’ harsh insistence on dictating his daughter’s marriage partner and Theseus’ unyielding enforcement of his paternal prerogative, both of which combine to bring about the apparently insoluble dilemma which must find an unlikely resolution in the forest. Extremes of both character and situation are, in fact, essential to Aristotle’s definition of comic error, and figure prominently in each play we have considered thus far. *Measure for Measure* certainly pushes beyond the boundaries of these other plays, but this itself suggests that the play might just as profitably be viewed as an expansion of comedy than as a pairing of two genres. Shakespeare seems to encourage this approach to the play and its characters by making its weightiest scenes to be most demonstrative of comic error. Lucio’s discovery of Claudio’s incarceration is paradigmatic of the more intense scenes that follow it. Claudio grimly declares that his arrest results

From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty.
As surfeit is the father of much fast,
So every scope by the immoderate use
Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue,
Like rats that raven down their proper bane,
A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die. (1.2.124-28)

There is certainly a tragic inevitability to his claim that human beings only use their freedom to destroy themselves, but at the same time, his dilemma is brought about by excess and self-ignorance, qualities that constitute comic error. In subsequently cracking a joke about Claudio’s dire straits – “If I could speak so wisely under an arrest, I would

¹⁵³ Frye, *Myth of Deliverance*, 24.

send for certain of my creditors” – Lucio finds its equally comic dimension (130-31). In this, he suggests the larger pattern of the play, locating the comic within the tragic, rather than simply juxtaposing or mingling the one with the other.

Where comic error in *Much Ado About Nothing* was most clearly seen in characters’ relationships to social and literary “fashion,” that in *Measure for Measure* is more intensely psychological, and best seen in the degree to which characters pair their reason with emotion. While much could be said about many characters in this respect, I will restrict my analysis to the two who are most directly objects of the Duke’s hoaxes, Angelo and Isabella. The Duke gets at this relationship at the outset of the play, when he installs Angelo as his deputy. “Mortality and mercy” – the two poles of justice – “in Vienna / Live in thy tongue and heart,” he declares to him, implying a similar polar relationship between the tongue that speaks the reasoned word and the heart that tempers its precision (1.1.45-46). Just before this, the Duke had suggested that Angelo thinks his “spirit...finely touched,” sensitive to subtleties of mind and heart (36).¹⁵⁴ As with Angelo’s other virtues, though, the Duke suspects that they have lain dormant, and gives him the opportunity to exercise them.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, we find out later that the Duke’s misgivings about Angelo are not only due to his inexperience. He confides in Friar Thomas that

Lord Angelo is precise,
Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses
That his blood flows, or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone. (1.3.50-53)

¹⁵⁴ I follow Bawcutt’s rejection (Commentary, 89) of the common critical reading of “touched” as a coining metaphor. He points out the play’s subsequent use of the verb as “emotionally aroused” at 2.2.54, 71.

¹⁵⁵ Louise Schleiner (“Providential Improvisation,” 227-29) discusses the Duke’s relationship to the “testing master” in several of Christ’s parables.

The Duke here complicates his earlier account of Angelo's inexperience by stating that his moral development has been lopsided: he has given rigorous attention to study and to his outward image and behaviour, but has never had this proven in situations that arouse his "blood" and "appetite," and thus require their management. This imbalance identifies Angelo as potentially *phaulos*, but it is one opposite to that of others like Fastidious Brisk, Daw, and La Foole, whose stunted thought and behaviour are thoroughly governed by desire.

The Duke's diagnosis of Angelo's error is confirmed when we first witness his governance. He has just had Claudio arrested and sentenced to death for fornication when Escalus tries to convince him of the harshness of this. Urging the extenuation of Claudio's punishment, he cautiously suggests that Angelo consider:

Had time but cohered with place, or place with wishing,
Or that the resolute acting of your blood
Could have attained the effect of your own purpose,
Whether you had not sometime in your life
Erred in this point, which now you censure him,
And pulled the law upon you. (2.1.10-16)

Escalus' argument asks Angelo to consider past experiences of his own passions' arousal, but Angelo's response is exclusively rational as he makes a carefully reasoned argument against involving feelings in the task of judgment. His response demonstrates remarkable legal acumen, but he fumbles Escalus' actual point, that sympathy must qualify reason. Angelo's lack of feeling is reinforced shortly afterward when he charges the Provost to give Claudio's very pregnant fiancée Julietta (the "fornicatress") "needful but not lavish means" (22).

The comic quality of Angelo's lopsided psychology comes into clearer focus in the intervening scene. Constable Elbow leads in Pompey and Froth on the charge that

they have dishonoured the latter's wife. Where Escalus throughout the conversation enjoys the ridiculousness of the trio, Angelo first fails to perceive Elbow's propensity to malapropisms ("Benefactors?...Are they not malefactors?") then falls silent (2.1.50-51). The raucous prose dialogue lurches on until Angelo gives up on the case, condescendingly declaring in verse to Escalus that

This will last out a night in Russia,
When nights are longest there. I'll take my leave,
And leave you to the hearing of the cause,
Hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all. (128-31)

His rigidity, again springing from a lack of sympathy, recalls that of Morose and Don John, who were both too self-absorbed to interact meaningfully with others.

Isabella also tries to soften Angelo's emotional rigidity when she pleads with him for Claudio's life. When he claims to be unable to countermand his execution order, she asks if it might be possible if "your heart were touched with that remorse / As mine is" for Claudio (2.2.54-55). All of her subsequent arguments follow those of Escalus in asking Angelo to consider how he would feel in Claudio's place. He steadfastly refuses her request, though, going only so far as to consider "my kinsman, brother, or my son" in Claudio's place, and even this thought does not move him (82). After her increasingly powerful rhetoric silences Angelo's objections, Isabella makes one final plea:

Go to your bosom,
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault; if it confess
A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life. (138-43)

Considered apart from its later results, Angelo's response is comical: when he finally agrees to Isabella's urgings and goes "to his bosom," he finds exactly the passion Isabella

suggests he will, but one with her, not a hypothetical scenario, as its object. Her request, in other words, works too well: “She speaks,” he marvels, “and ’tis / Such sense that my sense breeds with it” (144-45). Isabella asks him to temper his rigid rationality with human compassion, and Angelo veers instead to the opposite extreme of uncontrollable passion.

As has been frequently discussed, Isabella’s moral rigidity and inexperience closely resemble Angelo’s. She is introduced immediately following the Duke’s description of Angelo as “precise,” when she tells the nun Francisca that she would prefer “a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood” she is joining as a novice. Her subsequent entrance with Lucio to plead for Claudio’s life puts two fastidious moralists into the ring with a libertine as their coach: Isabella can’t bring herself even to name Claudio’s deed, Angelo’s responses are those of a bureaucratic machine, and all the while Lucio is needling Isabella with consistently sexual innuendo to seduce Angelo to get what she wants. Northrop Frye describes the two of them as “manoeuvring around each other like a couple of knights who are in such heavy plate armour that they can’t bend a joint,”¹⁵⁶ and goes on to identify the scene’s initial effect as “that of a sombre Jonsonian comedy of humours.”¹⁵⁷ Anne Barton calls Angelo and Isabella a pair of “virtuous absolutist[s],”¹⁵⁸ characters whose humours, in Jonson’s terms, cause them “all to run one way.” Isabella does certainly warm as the scene progresses, and her increasing rhetorical intensity sobers the meeting’s initial humorousness. She demonstrates for the time being a remarkable balance between careful reasoning and warm emotion,

¹⁵⁶ Frye, *On Shakespeare*, 146.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Barton, Introduction, 580.

challenging Angelo again and again to do the same. Lucio's continuing bawdy interjections, though, easier to ignore on the page than the stage, keep the scene from fully attaining tragic intensity, and prepare us to take Angelo's subsequent arousal as the equal and opposite of his initial comic error.

When Isabella returns the next day to hear Angelo's decision, she is the one who rather dully misses the point of Angelo's questioning. He has decided to have her any way he can, and begins by attempting, in his awkwardly cerebral way, to seduce her. After reasserting his moral disdain for Claudio's act, he raises the hypothetical possibility of her body as bribe to save his life. Then, when she steadfastly remains in the subjunctive mood, he tries to locate in her the propensity for passion that he has recently discovered in himself: "We are all frail," he hints, before more pointedly observing that "women are frail too" (2.4.122-125). She happily agrees with him, missing the fact that he is urging her to "put[] on the destined livery," and succumb to the passions that make one frail. Her disbelief at what feeling can lurk inside a person is further demonstrated by the complete dispassion she expects from Claudio when she tells him of Angelo's proposition:

Though he hath fallen by prompture of the blood,
Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour
That had he twenty heads to tender down
On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up
Before his sister should her body stoop
To such abhorred pollution. (179-84)

Like her requests that Angelo "go to his heart," his statement, "Plainly conceive I love you," is meant to draw forth reciprocal emotion from her. Her utter shock when she finally realizes what he means is not unjustifiable, but confirms her emotional naivety –

one that results, as Katherine Maus suggests, from a “denial of her own complexity.”¹⁵⁹ This denial results from self ignorance, the heart of comic error. Like Angelo’s, her remarkable intellectual ability is incongruous with her emotional development. Both claim that they would act well in hypothetical situations, and then don’t when those situations become reality. Both can reason carefully and use language compellingly, but are emotional juveniles, something Angelo demonstrates by leaping over the mean of genuine fellow-feeling in his progress from emotional coldness to heated lust. Isabella’s feeling of and appealing to strong emotion without realizing its relationship to more extreme forms demonstrates the same immaturity. The stakes involved for both are, of course, high, but their joint error, considered in and of itself, remains comic.

Lucio keeps us cognizant of this, because he demonstrates a very similar pair of errors. While no legal logician, his incredibly quick tongue reveals mental acumen of the same order as Angelo’s and Isabella’s. His wry remark to Claudio’s solemn meditation on liberty and restraint and continual asides in the final act are second to none of Shakespeare’s jesters. Yet he too is emotionally juvenile, eagerly leaping to self-serving lust while remaining cold to human suffering. When he sees Pompey, who has repeatedly arranged for the satisfaction of his lust, led into the prison, he callously mocks him and remains deaf to his cries for bail. Lucio comes close to feeling pity when he sees Isabella in tears after learning of Claudio’s “death,” declaring, “O pretty Isabella, I am pale at mine heart to see thine eyes so red” (4.3.149-50). Yet this inkling of genuine sympathy quickly passes as he begins to muse on his usual cupidity and its intolerable containment: “I am fain to dine and sup with water and bran; I dare not for my head fill my belly, one

¹⁵⁹ Maus, *Inwardness*, 167.

fruitful meal would set me to 't" (150-52). As in Angelo and Isabella, a highly developed mind is paired with unrefined emotional capacity.

Measure for Measure prefigures *The Tempest* in that the entire action of the play is predicated upon a hoax: The Duke pretends to leave Angelo entirely in charge of Vienna, but in reality, carefully manages and guides the action towards a conclusion that Angelo cannot see. His hoax has a two fold purpose. The Duke is suspicious about the apparent virtue of his younger statesman Angelo, and so puts him into a situation that tests his mettle. His other purpose, though, is to clean up Vienna's moral corruption. The city has "strict statutes and most biting laws," but these "needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds" have for fourteen years gone largely unenforced, explains the Duke to Friar Thomas (1.3.19-20). As a result, "liberty plucks justice by the nose, / The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart / Goes all decorum" (29-31). The Duke's intention, then, on both a personal and communal level is the exposure of "errors of soul," – a moral aim clearly symbolized by the friar's habit in which he supervises his hoax's development. To the extent that this latter purpose is realized in the play, it comes about by way of the former. Angelo's cold rationality and crude emotional capacity are obviously exposed, but in the process, so too are the errors of Isabella, Lucio, and Pompey. Angelo's position, given him by the Duke's trick, brings about Isabella's re-entry into Viennese society and the realization of her own imbalance. Pompey is by the same token brought into the action as Angelo initiates the destruction of Mistress Overdone's brothel, and Lucio's interest in both occurrences results in his persistent involvement in the action. The Duke's hoax is thus a fine example of shaping comic errors, which are elements of character, into a complex plot bound together by probability and necessity.

Unlike the hoaxes of Don Pedro and Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Duke's hoax on Angelo is remarkably Jonsonian. It inflates Angelo's pre-existing humour by giving him the scope and power to thoroughly demonstrate it; like Jonson's *phauloi* characters, he exposes himself. Uniquely in this play, though, it is the direct encounter with others' error (whether mild, like Claudio's, or more serious, like Pompey's) afforded him by his position and power that exposes his own error. He responds to Claudio's intemperance with cold condemnation, but greets the discovery of his own passions with heated alacrity. Isabella's similar error is likewise exposed by her own encounter with the error of another. Also like Jonson's jokers, the Duke has a definite outcome in mind for this hoax beyond exposure. He clearly suspects Angelo's humour and sets up an open-ended trick in order to see where it will lead, providing it the necessary scope to expand as the play progresses.

As a result, the Duke is often described as representative of the comic dramatist, a surrogate for Shakespeare. Interestingly, though, he is frequently judged to be inept because of the way his initial hoax produces results he does not foresee. Anne Barton's tone is critical when she calls him a dramatist "trying to impose the order of art upon a reality which stubbornly resists such schematization. As such, he is continually being surprised by the unpredictability, not to mention the rank insubordination, of his elected cast of characters."¹⁶⁰ The Duke's central hoax, though, hardly imposes order; indeed, it radically upsets the status quo of Vienna, and then responds, episode by episode, to the results. To test Angelo's character, the Duke's primary aim, requires that he be given the appearance of power, while any potentially tragic results of that power are contained.

¹⁶⁰ Barton, Introduction, 581.

The Duke sets this up, and while not surprised that Angelo comes down harshly on marginal criminals, he cannot foresee the particular results of this: that Angelo will condemn Claudio, who has a sister with tendencies similar to Angelo's and a friend named Lucio who frequents brothels and talks a lot. Protecting Claudio while still keeping up Angelo's belief in his power requires first a substitute body for Isabella's, and when that fails, a substitute head. Barnardine fails to provide this, and so the Duke also becomes interested in the circumstances of Isabella, and, as with Angelo, wants to see how she will respond to a particular sort of test. All of these effects are indeed surprising, as Barton points out, but this is what Shakespeare and Jonson are perennially interested in: that dramatic action, of which the hoax is representative, takes on a life of its own which the dramatist must follow, not simply create. This is what Jonson refers to when he says that "it behoves the action in tragedy, or comedy, to be *let grow*, till the necessity ask a conclusion." (*Discoveries* 456, italics mine). Whalley's metaphor of dramatic action as a trajectory, at once determined and open, is again apt here. Perhaps like no others that we have considered, the Duke's hoaxes depict the processive nature of mimesis, generating scenarios that while following "probability and necessity," are nonetheless unexpected. The Duke, and his "imperfect problem solving" then, may well be "unreliable," as Verna Foster complains, but only because the results of any hoax must be partly unpredictable.¹⁶¹

Critics of the Duke's dramaturgy also point out the ineffectiveness of the spiritual advice he tries to offer to various prisoners.¹⁶² He gives Claudio a long speech on being "absolute for death," which Claudio initially determines to do, but soon abandons when

¹⁶¹ Foster, *Tragicomedy*, 55.

¹⁶² See, for example, Hunt, "Comfort," 216-17; Riefer, "Instruments," 159-60; and Barton, Introduction, 581.

Isabella tells him of Angelo's proposal to save him (3.1.5). Pompey is happily unmoved by the Duke's harsh rebuke at his incarceration, and Barnardine flatly refuses the Duke's urging that he "look forward on the journey you shall go" (4.3.55). Yet all of these counsels, while delivered in the habit of the Friar, are just that – counsels, not tricks. With the characters he seems most interested in, Angelo and Isabella, the Duke almost entirely eschews counsel and relies instead upon hoaxes to expose their errors. These are at the heart of his dramatic methodology, while his lectures demonstrate the dramatic ineffectiveness of ideas not embodied in action.¹⁶³

The Duke's central hoax is one that takes in nearly all the characters of the play. While most of the other tricks in the play are set up to further this one, though, that which he plays on Isabella in Act 4 is unique. Bringing her to believe that Claudio has indeed been executed has no clear relationship to his desire to test Angelo. Neither is it open-ended like the hoax on Angelo, but has a particular, if cryptic, aim. The Duke has just arranged to save Claudio from the block when Isabella enters the prison to see if Angelo has commuted Claudio's sentence. He hastily decides, "I will keep her ignorant of her good, / To make her heavenly comforts of despair / When it is least expected" (4.3.106-8). He seems to have identified an error in her that he wants to correct by means of sorrow over her brother's death. As I will consider later, his plan here closely resembles Friar Francis's plot to bring about Count Claudio's catharsis by way of pain, which, while introduced relatively late in the play, quickly comes to have a significance equal to the main hoax. The hoax played on Isabella works similarly, beginning as a

¹⁶³ Marcia Riefer ("Instruments," 159) argues that the Duke is only a poor "parody of his more successful, mostly female predecessors" in the role of surrogate dramatist because he lacks "(1) a consistent desire to bring about sexual union ..., and (2) a sensitivity to 'audience'" – an interesting point, but tangential to mine.

development apparently tangential to the main plot, but soon becoming closely integrated with it. There is also a close parallel between Angelo's and Count Claudio's responses to the hoaxes played on them, and the responses of Beatrice, Benedick, and Isabella: the former pair seem little altered, while the latter group experience a catharsis of the central emotions they feel in the play.

CHAPTER 4

Indignation

To go seeking after the emotion Aristotle thought comedy evoked might seem a little foolish. He himself admits what everyone knows: comedy makes us laugh. But while the ancients came close to calling laughter an emotion,¹ it is still difficult to consistently identify what feeling lies behind the outward, physiological expression of the laugh. We chuckle with light-hearted delight at small children playing, and guffaw with derision at those who take themselves too seriously; the emotions underlying these reactions differ widely from each other. For this reason, very few interpreters of Aristotle have been willing to stop with laughter as an answer to the question of what emotion comedy evokes. The one notable exception to this is the epitomator of the *Tractatus*, whose definition of comedy has the genre “accomplishing by means of pleasure and laughter the catharsis of such emotions. It has laughter as its mother,” in contrast with the “pain” that gives birth to tragedy.² Perhaps the most striking contrast between the *Tractatus*’ identification of emotions and that in the *Poetics*’ definition of tragedy is the generality of the former: if laughter can arise from a range of sources, pleasure is an even more general experience. In contrast, Aristotle’s identification of the “pity and fear” evoked by tragedy is strikingly specific, leaving us to question the *Tractatus* on this point. Golden follows several earlier commentators in objecting that pleasure is the general

¹ See Janko’s defence of the *Tractatus*’ claim that “pleasure and laughter” are the emotions aroused by comedy, *Commentary*, 169.

² *Tractatus Coislinianus*, 44.

emotion aroused by all *mimeses*, not just comedy. The *Tractatus* thus requires the “pleasure” of comedy to be derived from “pleasure and laughter” – which, he concludes, is “nonsense.”³ Janko defends the *Tractatus* on the grounds that pity and fear in the definition of tragedy need not exclude a much wider range of painful emotions that could parallel comedy’s range of pleasurable ones.⁴ While the *Poetics* does allow for this, it is still unlikely that Aristotle, after deciding to be so specific in his definition of tragedy, would be almost carelessly general in his central statement on comedy. Of the main sections of the *Tractatus*, this is the one that has taken the most consistent criticism.

Certainly, though, laughter must be incorporated in some way into a description of comedy’s effect. At the beginning of chapter 5, Aristotle identifies *to geloion* (“the laughable” or “ridiculous”) as “ugliness” of a certain sort. The word he uses here, *aischos*, carries strong connotations of shame. Halliwell notes “the essential association of laughter with ridicule and denigration, and its use against targets regarded as ‘shameful’” that Aristotle means to set up with this description.⁵ This link between laughter and shame, he says, “would have commanded wide assent from Greeks, since it ties comedy to the observable function of derision in a culture which possessed a strongly developed sensitivity to public reproach and dishonour.”⁶ So the subject matter of comedy is laughable at least in part because it is mildly shameful and worthy of reproach.

Golden refines this general understanding of comic emotion by recalling that Aristotle distinguishes comedy from tragedy on the basis of the sorts of people each represent: the *phaulos* person of comedy is the opposite of the *spondaios* person of tragedy.

³ Golden, *Mimesis*, 99, citing an earlier article by Kendall Smith.

⁴ See Janko, *Commentary*, 83.

⁵ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The reason Aristotle makes the careful prescriptions he does for the *spondaios* tragic hero is to ensure that his actions properly evoke pity and fear. Aristotle explains in the *Rhetoric* the close relationship between these two emotions. Pity is “a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful event happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer” (1385b). Our reaction to the latter possibility is what Aristotle then describes as fear: “people pity things happening to others insofar as they fear for themselves” (1386a). In summary, says Golden, “pity and fear are the obverse and reverse of the same emotional experience”: in the same situation, we feel pity for others and fear for ourselves.⁷

After effectively unifying the tragic emotions, Golden goes on to point out that Aristotle’s antonymic distinction between *spondaios* and *phaulos* is paralleled by “another he makes [in the *Rhetoric*] between pity (*eleēin*) and righteous indignation (*nemesan*).”⁸ Therefore, “Since tragedy and comedy are placed by Aristotle in polar opposition concerning the kind of action and character they represent, the identification of *nemesan* as the antonym of pity provides a suggestive clue for recovering an important aspect of the Aristotelian theory of comedy.”⁹ The *Rhetoric* asserts that “what is most opposed to pity is what people call being indignant; for it is in some way opposed to feeling pain at undeserved *mis*fortune,” and is instead to be “pained at undeserved *good* fortune” (1386b). The *Nicomachean Ethics* expands this definition, calling indignation a virtue not of character but of feeling which is nevertheless a mean between extremes: “Proper indignation is the mean between envy and spite,” or malice (1108b). The justly

⁷ Golden, “Pleasure,” 382.

⁸ Golden, *Mimesis*, 92.

⁹ Golden, “Pleasure,” 381.

“indignant person feels pain when someone does well undeservedly; the envious man exceeds him by feeling pain when anyone does well, while the spiteful person is so deficient in feeling pain that he actually enjoys [other people’s misfortunes].” In addition, Aristotle asserts in the *Eudemian Ethics* that indignation includes not only “feeling pain at undeserved adversities and prosperities” but “pleasure at those that are deserved; hence the idea that Nemesis is a deity.”¹⁰

That comedy might aim to arouse indignation, an essentially painful feeling, is a surprising suggestion, but it need not contradict Aristotle’s clear concern to restrict the sorts of errors and vices comedy depicts to those relatively painless. This restriction would only keep our feelings of indignation from becoming too painful and intense. “The translation of ‘indignation’ will be misleading,” says Golden, “if we fail to remember that this emotion, like all emotions, admits of degree and nuance.”¹¹ Moreover, just as with the more painful pity of tragedy, the comparably mild pain of indignation “will be incorporated into the essential intellectual pleasure” of learning and inference “that all forms of *mimēsis* generate.”¹²

Not only is *nemesian* the opposite of pity in the same way as *phaulos* is opposed to *spoudaios*, but it is a subtle description of what the laughable aspects of the *phaulos* person evoke from that character’s audience. Golden cites E. M. Cope’s commentary on the *Rhetoric*, which observes that *nemesian* describes that feeling “arising from a sense of the claims of justice and desert, which is aroused in us by the contemplation of success without merit, and a consequent pleasure in the punishment of one who is thus

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 3.1233b. I cite this text by book and Bekker number.

¹¹ Golden, “Pleasure,” 384.

¹² Golden, *Mimesis*, 93.

undeservedly prosperous.”¹³ Aristotle links this feeling especially with “[undeserved] wealth and power and such things as, in general, good people are worthy of” (*Rhetoric* 2.1387a). We determine desert, says Aristotle, on the basis of the laws of “proportion and appropriateness”:¹⁴ what is fitting for people is that which is analogous and appropriate to their characters. When they enjoy success that violates this law, we feel indignation. In that such people are portrayed in comedy as self-ignorant and believing themselves to be deserving, they certainly also evoke the laughter of ridicule, but that reaction is hardly unique to comedy: a lampoon devoid of plot could just as easily arouse it. These requirements for indignation, however, complicate Aristotle’s description of *phauloi* characters by moving beyond the category of character to that of plot arrangement: their success is made manifest by the social role they occupy in the play. The requirement of analogy and propriety is very much in keeping with Aristotle’s definition of universals as qualities that result from a person’s character or action “in accordance with probability and necessity” (1451b). A well-drawn *phaulos* character in a play will certainly have a degree of universality, saying and doing the sorts of things such a person is likely to say or do in life. The success or position that he or she enjoys in the play, though, will violate propriety to some degree, thus causing the audience the mild pain of indignation until the situation is rectified. The tension thus generated between the character’s internal consistency (as he or she says and does things that fools are likely to) and the inconsistency of this with the character’s social success might be a further source of comedy’s unique effect, as we are both given and denied the “analogy and proportion” our minds seek.

¹³ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴ Golden’s translation (in “Pleasure,” 382) of *Rhetoric* 2.1387a.

The importance of disproportion for evoking indignation recalls the earlier definition of comic error as excess or deficiency – disproportion – with respect to a virtue. Aristotle states that excess and deficiency by their nature incur blame. It is plausible that this blame might contain indignation aroused merely by the violation of proportion that undeserving people manifest. The desire to correct or rectify this disproportion is part and parcel with the perception and blame of error: even as it makes us laugh, disproportion arouses the desire for just proportion, whether in success or in internal ethical disposition. Aristotle affirms this in declaring that those most likely to feel indignation are those who are “worthy of the greatest advantages,” “virtuous and serious,” and “ambitious in regard to things that others are really unworthy of” (*Rhetoric* 2.1387b). In other words, indignation is the emotion of the superior towards the inferior; “the servile, the worthless, and the unambitious are not given to indignation. Where the audience of tragedy associates itself with the suffering tragic hero, who is to be “a person like [ourselves]” (*Poetics* 1453a), the audience of comedy must feel a marked separation from characters who are “inferior” to them.

Renaissance commentators regularly identified this difference: calling this a crucial aspect of the didactic power of both genres, Trissino notes that “where tragedy carries on its teaching by means of pity and fear, comedy teaches by deriding and censuring things ugly and vile.”¹⁵ Sir Philip Sidney describes this distancing effect of comedy more explicitly when he states that “the Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life,” represented “in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so

¹⁵ Trissino, *Poetica*, 224.

as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.”¹⁶ Rather than linking ourselves with the fools of comedy, says Sidney, we deliberately dissociate ourselves from them. Once again, this response involves ridicule, but it is more complex than that. Castelvetro suggests that our laughter at those in a comedy who are self-deceived about their folly is rooted in envy, because we “take pleasure in the ills of others as we do in our good fortune.”¹⁷ Envy, though, requires some hope of personal gain at the cost of another. As such, Aristotle describes it as a vice, whereas indignation arises primarily from a disinterested perception of disproportion, and is a virtue. As the *Ethics* notes, envy is an excessive and distorted form of indignation at any success, deserved or not. To feel indignation is implicitly to acknowledge an external standard of just proportion, whether in social position or in internal disposition. This is what Cope recognizes when he observes that the whole idea of *nemesis* is of a genuinely “‘righteous indignation’ arising from a sense of the claims of justice and desert.”¹⁸ Those who feel it thus take “a consequent pleasure in the punishment of one who is... undeservedly prosperous,” because punishment is a restoration of just proportion.

Interestingly, Sidney identifies the same effect of comedy when he defends the genre against the accusation that portraying folly is to advocate it: “there is no man living but, by the force truth hath in nature, no sooner seeth these [*phauloi*] men play their parts, but wisheth them *in pistrinum*” (“put to the mill”).¹⁹ Implicit in Sidney’s statement is the qualification that Cope makes, that the desire for punishment is not simply vindictiveness. We don’t desire the fool to be ruined, only put to some good and fitting

¹⁶ Sidney, *Defence*, 362.

¹⁷ Castelvetro, *Art of Poetry*, 214.

¹⁸ Cope, *Rhetoric*, 2.108 (italics mine).

¹⁹ Sidney, *Defence*, 363.

use (in this case, milling grain). Even Jonson, who certainly can be vindictive, asserts that the punishments found in both ancient comedies and his own are there because it is “the office of a comic Poet, to imitate justice, and instruct to life.”²⁰ The feeling of pain at injustice and disproportion, moreover, is in keeping with Halliwell’s earlier claim that comedy retains the “critical force directed against ‘error and deformity’” that lampoon has: however light-hearted, it has an axe to grind, vice to expose.²¹

The central role of propriety and justice in comedy pairs not only with the emotion of indignation, but with the “double” ending Aristotle identifies as proper to comedy. We have already seen how, in tragedy, Aristotle disapproves of this sort of conclusion that “ends in opposite ways for the better and worse [persons]” because it does not provide “the pleasure [that comes] from tragedy, but is more particular to comedy” (1453a). In Aristotle’s example of the *Odyssey*, the essential quality of the double ending is that justice is finally served: Penelope’s long wait is vindicated, Telemachus attains his rightful place as his father’s heir, and the suitors are punished for their greed and presumption, satisfying the indignation that their undeserved prosperity has aroused.

The moral satisfaction of the double ending raises an important point about indignation that Golden’s account does not address. If comedy portrays not simply injustice and disproportion but, in some way, its rectification, any description of an audience’s response must account for this shift. In other words, our indignation must not only be aroused, but, by play’s end, satisfied in a way that does not occur with the pity and fear of tragedy. This satisfaction seems crucial to the overall sense of pleasure we

²⁰ Jonson, *Volpone*, Dedication 112. All subsequent quotations of the play will be cited parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line number.

²¹ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 271.

derive from comedy. Indeed, one of the most obvious arguments against Golden's suggestion of indignation as the comic emotion is the simple fact that unlike the unrelenting pain of pity and fear, comedy's final effect is directly pleasurable. Golden partly answers this by pointing out that error and disproportion are intrinsically unsettling topics, and so our response must inevitably be one of at least mild pain. Aristotle's definition of indignation does admit of this sort of attenuation: it need hardly be as virulent as the *saeva indignatio* aroused by the satirist or lampoonist. This idea of a carefully bounded indignation is frequently present in Jonson as well, such as when he promises of himself in the prologue to *Volpone* that "All gall and coppers from his ink he draineth, / Only a little salt remaineth" in his intent (ll. 33-34), or when he offers us the paradoxically "fair correctives" in the prologue to *The Alchemist* (l. 18). Ultimately, Golden asserts that this residual pain "will be incorporated into the essential intellectual pleasure that all forms of mimesis generate by means of "learning and inference."²² This is the same paradoxical means by which we are able to take pleasure from tragedy's painful emotions of pity and fear. As Aristotle states, "we delight in looking at the most detailed images of things which in themselves we see with pain" (1448b).

Yet the fact remains that part of comedy's pleasure is also direct and immediate: its action and characters are often pleasant by nature and do not require only the transmutation of mimesis to bring about pleasure. The two-fold movement of indignation's arousal and satisfaction, though, accounts for both the pain and the direct pleasure that result from comedy. The verbal jests directed at foolish characters work to affirm the justice of our indignation by identifying folly as such. By ridiculing folly, jests

²² Golden, *Mimesis*, 93.

put it, at least verbally, in its place, thus providing a degree of satisfaction. The hoax, which is partly an extension of verbal jesting but also an integral aspect of plot, has an even more significant role in relation to indignation's satisfaction. I have argued that one of tragedy's principal means of arousing the emotions of pity and fear is *pathos*, and that the closest parallel to *pathos* in comedy is the hoax. It would be logical, then, for the hoax to have an equally prominent role in arousing the indignation of comedy. As a device of plot, it pairs naturally with indignation's need for a particular sort of plot arrangement – the *phaulos* character enjoying unmerited success. Occasionally, the hoax is found in the hands of the *phaulos* character, who, by using it to further his or her own ends, arouses indignation in both the audience and his or her victims. The *Tractatus*, at least, shows a preference for another arrangement when it states that “the joker wishes to expose errors”: the hoax is used by the smarter characters to dupe the *phaulos* character. By so exposing the character's error and divesting him or her of unmerited success, our indignation is satisfied. To expose the undeserved nature of a *phaulos* character's success or position is also to expose the internal, ethical disproportion which is the reason their success is unwarranted. The hoax works like a jest, then, to confirm the rectitude of the pain we have felt regarding that character. So too, in subsequently remedying the external disproportion, indignation finds the satisfaction that it has sought. Things disproportionate and in error have been corrected or at least clearly identified as such, resulting in a sense very much like that which Aristotle identifies as pleasure: “a settling, sudden and sensible, into our proper nature,” a feeling of which the pain of disorder is the opposite (*Rhetoric* 1.1370a).²³ This double movement of emotion in comedy differs

²³ The translation here is that of Richard C. Jebb.

markedly from the pity and fear aroused by tragedy, as those emotions receive no resolution or response from the progress of the plot. This lack of resolution is what Aristotle seeks to maintain in tragedy when he says that the double ending is inappropriate to it. In comedy, though, such resolution is integral to the plot, because the correct evocation of emotion depends on it.

It needs to be mentioned that Golden does not clearly limit indignation to the audience. His theoretical discussion seems for the most part to assume this, but the examples he uses to illustrate this clearly imply that indignation is equally aroused in the plays' more respectable characters and in the audience.²⁴ Since characters in a play are often spectators like us, or even victims, of the characters and actions that provoke indignation, it would make sense if the emotion could be located both inside and outside the play. This is all the more likely in comedy, where, by playing a hoax, the joker explicitly makes those characters cognizant of it into an audience of sorts for his or her dramatic production. In her discussion of catharsis, Martha Nussbaum suggests that characters within a play model to the audience the effect that the play might have on them.²⁵ This potentially double location of indignation will prove especially fruitful in considering the comedy, and particularly the hoaxes, of Jonson and Shakespeare.

4.1 The "right *furor poeticus*"

In his opening lament, Macilente lets us in on just why the antics of a crowd of fools ought to concern us – or at least why it certainly concerns him. He sees that

²⁴ Golden gives the example of the duped Strepsiades in Aristophanes' *Clouds* in both *Mimesis*, 95-97 and "Pleasure," 384. In an earlier article, he includes Knemon in Menander's *Dyskolos* as one who similarly arouses indignation in those characters around him. See "Aristotle on Comedy," 288-89.

²⁵ See Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 390-91.

this man is great,
Mighty, and feared; that, loved and highly favoured;
A third, thought wise and learned; a fourth, rich
And therefore honoured; a fifth, rarely featured;
A sixth, admired for his nuptial fortunes. (1.1.19-23)

In short, the elaborate facades and ridiculous obsessions of such as populate the play have gotten for them not ridicule but respect and admiration. The sheer injustice of this “unproportioned frame of nature,” especially when Macilente contrasts it with his own “lank hungry belly [that] barks for food,” provides the motive for and justification of his concern to expose their foolishness for what it is (1.1.28,15). More particularly, that their good fortune is wildly disproportionate to and incongruous with their moral characters is what Aristotle describes as the cause of indignation, and it is with just such incongruous characters that Macilente keeps company for the rest of the play.

A finely-layered example of this is Sogliardo’s relationship with Shift. Our introduction to the latter is by means of the bill he posts for himself in Paul’s Walk, advertising his ability to teach to “any young gentleman..., whose friends are but lately deceased, and whose lands are but new come to his hands...the most gentlemanlike use of tobacco” and “all the delicate sweet forms for the assumption of it” (3.1.137-45). When he happens upon Shift’s bill, Sogliardo has just returned from acquiring further proof of his gentility in the form of a coat of arms and is instantly “resolute” to add Shift to his retinue (207). It is not long before the two of them are holed up in Sogliardo’s lodgings, blowing smoke rings together like the best of friends. When they next encounter the others, Sogliardo is all formality and deference as he introduces Shift as “the tallest man living within the walls of Europe,” who had “swaggered e’en now in a place where we were” (4.3.254-55). As the others suppress their laughter, Sogliardo goes

on to recount in all earnestness and high regard Shift's purported robberies and jail-breaks. Macilente can only scoff at Sogliardo as "a fit trumpet to proclaim such a person" (280): one who has nothing but money to make him a gentleman, in order to learn how better to affect this identity, takes on a follower who himself has no skill or knowledge beyond pipe smoking and then attempts to verify this latter's feigned deserts and accomplishments by vouching for them "upon my gentility" (245). Ironically, Sogliardo makes the proof of Shift's identity and worth his own identity and worth; the complete disproportion of the latter to his claims is verified by the incongruity of the former with his presumptive status. Each combines the imbalance of his humour with a place in society that is wholly dissonant with it.

Fittingly, the emotion that motivates both Macilente's speech and Asper's preceding rant is righteous indignation. It is, as we have seen, the natural response of a superior to the unchecked foolishness and undeserved fortune of an inferior, and has in it by nature a degree of painfulness readily apparent in Macilente and Asper. The central object of Asper's indignation is the deliberate self-ignorance of the "prodigies" that overpopulate the earth (Ind. 10). On the one hand, their vices are "innate and popular" – so ubiquitous as to have become normal (27). Yet, he insists, there is "not one of these but knows his works, / Knows what *damnation* is, the *devil*, and hell" (30-31). Despite this knowledge, they act incongruously with it: "hourly they persist, grow rank in sin, / Puffing their souls away in perj'rous air / To cherish their extortion, pride, or lusts" (32-34). Asper's indignation is thus aroused in accordance with Aristotle's definition of the emotion as he asks who can be "so patient of this injurious world / That he can check his spirit" or keep "his lips sealed up?" (2-3, 11).

Macilente's similar reaction is brought out primarily by the general good fortune that almost all in the play but he enjoy. At the same time, though, his own error begins to emerge as he delivers his opening speech. Despite Asper's earlier declaration that he would be playing "a humorist" in the play, we still expect that someone who begins the play in solitary contemplation of his sufferings to have moral gravity (212). And so Macilente does here, for the most part. Yet his curious need to pile up example after example of unjustly prosperous men – "a fourth," "a fifth," "a sixth" – is indicative of something that becomes manifest following his speech. After hearing him wish, with great angst, that the world could be destroyed on account of those he rails against, we are introduced to two specimens of them in Carlo and Sogliardo, who discuss the qualities necessary to a gentleman. "Nay, look you, Carlo, this is my humour now...I will be a gentleman whatsoever it cost me," Sogliardo declares before he begins to quiz Carlo about whether his name, "Insulso Sogliardo" (meaning "tasteless" or insipid and "hoggish"²⁶) befits a gentleman (1.2.6-15). In an aside, Macilente calls Sogliardo a "prick-eared hind," and yet could still, he says, "eat my entrails / And sink my soul into the earth with sorrow" at the sight of his wealth. This double reaction brings out not so much the sort of incongruity that Macilente was originally lamenting but rather one between the high register of his near-tragic verse and the rather harmless reality of what he declaims. Asper's earlier rant likewise arises from just such a double reaction. The curiously skewed perception of each which prompts this gets at what is their shared comic error.

²⁶ Ostovich, Commentary, 107. Ostovich takes her translations from John Florio's Italian-English dictionary *A World of Words* (London, 1598).

On the one hand, the essential harmlessness of characters like Carlo and Sogliardo recalls Aristotle's description of comic error as ridiculous but mild and painless vice; indeed, such vice is characteristic of almost all of the play's fools. With them, Jonson stays squarely within the usual limits of comedy. Yet on the other hand, what Asper and Macilente describe are characters extracted from tragedy: wicked villains whose actions have "cracked" the earth and split open "hell" itself and cause the few righteous in the land to wish they could tear out their eyes so as to end the sight of such evils (Ind. 5-6). I would suggest that it is the two of them who are out of place in comedy. Their reactions to the comic vice that fills the play around them seem borrowed from other literary genres, and as such constitute their own comic error. As I will argue, Asper's virulence remains fundamentally *nemesan*, or righteous indignation, without the self-interest that we will investigate in that of Macilente. His distance from the play and the fact that the fools are his literary creation and not his peers certainly help with this, but these facts also push us to consider him in light of the curious genre that Jonson himself assigns to the play on its original title page – that of "comical satire."

By 1599, verse satire had been wildly popular in England for a decade, but it was not yet a dramatic mode. Originally based on the two classical models of "Juvenal's crude vituperation and Horace's more tolerant and playful irony," English satire had by the end of the sixteenth century become so violently Juvenalian that the archbishops of Canterbury and London banned it in June of 1599.²⁷ As *Every Man Out* took the stage only several months later with the "comical satire" label, it is clear that Jonson intends for satire's conventions to structure the play, "most obviously in the figure of the satirist,

²⁷ See Ostovich, Introduction, 11-12.

the parade of fools and knaves,” and the intemperate railing of Asper and Macilente.²⁸ *Every Man Out*, according to Cordatus, is a play that is “strange and of a particular kind by itself, somewhat like *Vetus Comoedia*” or old comedy (Ind. 227-8). In the *Poetics*, Aristotle uses the phrase to describe the first stage of comedy’s evolution out of mere lampoon toward the “generalized stories, i.e. plots” of drama (1449b). It reaches its zenith in the work of Aristophanes, and, on the authority of Horace, the Renaissance traced satire’s lineage back to Greek old comedy.²⁹ It remained, though, replete with abusive personal attacks and obscenities: as Jonson himself noted of it in the *Discoveries*, “scurrility came forth in the place of wit” (453). By limiting comic error to the impersonal and painlessly ridiculous, Aristotle was deliberately rejecting the principles of old comedy. Asper, then, is a satirist who seems intent on giving us a vicious bit of dramatized Juvenalian satire; certainly this is what he has communicated to his friend Cordatus and what his own introductory rant sets us up to expect. His motivation for writing is indeed righteous indignation, but not of the comic sort; his is the “*saeva indignatio*” (as Scaliger labelled Juvenal’s own motive) more proper to the serious errors exposed by satire, not the painless ones of the comedy that *Every Man Out* by and large turns out to be.³⁰ Asper is a satirist who ends up undercut by the less virulent comedy of his own author.

Russ McDonald suggests that Jonson “does not move back and forth between comedy and tragedy but combines the stuff of both into the hybrid form of comical

²⁸ Ibid., 12. Watson (*Parodic Strategy*, 239n10) suggests parallels between Macilente and Piers Plowman, Nashe’s Pierce Penilesse, and several other Renaissance dramatic malcontents. The thesis of James Bednarz’s *Shakespeare and the Poet’s War* is that *Every Man Out* occasions the infamous war, and that it was “in opposition to Shakespeare that [Jonson] designed comical satire to displace romantic comedy” (13).

²⁹ See Jackson, *Vision and Judgment*, 39.

³⁰ Braund, Introduction, 20.

satire.”³¹ If Asper is one example of this, leaning slightly toward comedy, Macilente is another, but inclining to tragedy. Of course, he too qualifies as a satirist, if one even more fierce and vindictive than Asper. In the introduction to her Loeb edition of Juvenal’s satires, Susanna Morton Braund explains that Juvenal’s “particular innovation is to forge for his satire a ‘Grand Style,’ [making] his satire challenge and rival epic discourse” by borrowing from and parodying its conventions, and, to a lesser extent, those of tragedy.³² About half a century later, the rhetorician Hermogenes developed these ideas in his *Art of Rhetoric*. This text was highly influential in the Renaissance,³³ and offered “detailed instructions for this style under the headings of ‘Asperity,’ ‘Vehemence,’ and ‘Vigour,’...advocating a mixture of Olympian diction with gutter language, head long rhythms, jagged, discontinuous and ‘stabbing’ phrases,...and harsh degrading epithets.”³⁴

This sort of “grand style” is prominent in almost all of Macilente’s speeches. When giving soliloquies or longer asides, he always speaks in blank verse, contrary to everyone else but Deliro (who uses the form as a doting lover) and Sordido (whom we shall consider presently). In epic high register, he wishes “that the engine of my grief could cast / Mine eyeballs like two globes of wildfire forth / To melt this unproportioned frame of nature” (1.1.26-28). At the sight of Sogliardo’s presumption to gentility, he bursts out:

Torment and death! Break head and brain at once
To be delivered of your fighting issue!
Who can endure to see blind Fortune dote thus?

³¹ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 84.

³² Braund, Introduction, 20-21.

³³ See Patterson, *Hermogenes and the Renaissance*, chs 1, 4.

³⁴ Parker, “Problem of Tone,” 55.

To be enamoured on this dusty turf?
This clod? A whoreson puckfist? O God, God, God, God!
(1.2.156-60)

Sordido's wretchedness likewise draws from Macilente the anguished question:

Is't possible that such a spacious villain
Should live and not be plagued? Or lies he hid
Within the wrinkled bosom of the world,
Where heaven cannot see him? (1.3.67-70)

Even as the similarities to Juvenal's grand style are obvious in these and many other examples – the hyperbolic references to Fortune, death, violence, heaven, and earth, and his virulent disgust with all of these – they also set up Macilente as the protagonist of the more familiar dramatic genre of tragedy. His regular apostrophes to and disavowals of his senses, asking them, “Why lose you not your powers and become / Dead, dull, and blunted with this spectacle,” are stock tragic conceits (1.3.35-36). So too his continual complaints to the gods for what he is forced to endure: “O partial Fate!” he moans (1.1.100), then decries both the whole lot of “muffled Fates” and “that dog called Chance” (2.2.6,9), recalling, for example, Hieronimo's questioning of the “heavens” throughout *The Spanish Tragedy*.³⁵

Different from Asper, though, it is the quality of the indignation behind these words that most clearly reveals Macilente as a tragic malcontent, instead of merely a satirist. The play, from its initial character description of Macilente as being in “an envious apoplexy,” consistently portrays his humour and motivation as being envy, and not the *saeva indignatio* that moves Asper (19). When he first walks out on stage, Mitis immediately recognizes him as “your envious man, Macilente” (Ind. 364). Macilente admits as much himself when, after observing Sordido, he chides his resulting angst:

³⁵ See, for example, 2.5.24, 3.2.5ff, 3.7.45ff.

“thou, in envy of him, gnaw’st thyself” (1.3.85). As we have seen, the *Nicomachean Ethics* identifies envy’s close relationship to indignation as a “feeling of pain when anyone does well” (2.1108b). Aristotle expands this definition in the *Rhetoric* by noting that while both are opposed to pity in being “agitated pain...directed at success,” envy is particularly felt toward “an equal and a like” – one’s peers – where indignation is “of someone who is unworthy” of their fortune (2.1386b). The difference, then, is that envy has a personal, subjective dimension. Indignation’s concern is incongruity or injustice for its own sake, because it is unjust; envy’s interest is in how that incongruity relates to oneself. This seems exactly Macilente’s situation: his reaction to the incongruities between the play’s *phauloi* characters and their good fortune is not the indignation of comedy nor satire, which arise primarily out of a sense of injustice, but rather envy – seeing their vices as painful mainly because allied with the prosperity he lacks. Their vices are an affront to *him* as much as to a universal and impersonal sense of justice. Cordatus points out that towards a character like Carlo, who possesses nothing enviable, the emotion Macilente feels actually “comes nearer the nature of hate than envy, as being bred out of a kind of contempt and loathing” (1.3.169-70). As such, notes Gabriele Jackson, “he represents only a powerful (if meanly motivated) agent of correction, not any form of satiric author” motivated by righteous indignation.³⁶ Contrary to O. J. Campbell’s claim, envy is not “the emotion most competent to effect the exposure and derision of human folly,” because its interest is only in gain, not correction.³⁷

At the same time, that Macilente does keep one eye on justice and is not ruled by pure malice ensures that he resembles a tragic protagonist instead of antagonist. The

³⁶ Jackson, *Vision and Judgment*, 46.

³⁷ Campbell, *Satyre*, 59.

closest equivalent to this latter in the play is the miser Sordido, a character relative to Macilente as Macilente is to Asper. If Macilente feels a version of Asper's indignation, but vitiated with envy, then Sordido feels a version of Macilente's envy stripped entirely of its vestigial concern with justice – mere malice. Like Macilente, Sordido speaks regularly in verse, which he spends almost exclusively on the simultaneous plotting of his own success and his poverty-stricken neighbours' ruin. Sordido demonstrates what Aristotle calls the malicious person's extreme disregard for justice, to the extent that "he actually enjoys [other people's misfortunes]" (*Ethics* 2.1108b). When he receives a precept demanding that he sell some of his hoarded grain to make up for a local shortage, he scoffs:

When I have neither barn, no garner,
 Nor earth to hide it in, I'll bring it, but till then
 Each corn I send shall be as big as Paul's.
 O, but (say some) the poor are like to starve.
 Why, let 'em starve. What's that to me? (1.3.99-103)

He pledges to hide all that he has from the "searchers" and only bring in the grains that are so ridiculously large – "as big as Paul's" – that he cannot possibly hide them (132). Likening the poor to snakes who are "Bred (by the sloth of a fat plenteous year) /...in heat of summer out of dung," he declares that the occasional famine is actually a good thing, because it "Purges the soil of such vile excrements, / And kills the vipers up" (109-114). At the same time, both his glee at the prospect of his neighbours' crop failures (as predicted by his dearly held almanac) and his scorn for their suffering are hyperbolic, making of him not simply a tragic antagonist with a sort of motiveless malignity, but one who remains squarely a character in a comedy. His vicious intentions are never carried out and he inflicts no harm on anyone; like Macilente, he remains always a caricature,

rather than the real thing (in Sordido's case, a villain). This parallel with Macilente helps make sense of Sordido's otherwise confusing presence in the play. He has almost no dialogue with any other central character and both plots his wickedness and repents of it without bearing on any but the equally marginal rustics. Most critics have acknowledged this problem only with their silence. Here, though, Sordido is a foil to Macilente, revealing the latter's deviation from indignation into envy with his own diversion into malice.

That Macilente is left on stage by himself after all the others have been exposed and dishumored is, on the one hand, indicative of his moral superiority. Yet as I have argued, his own humour of envy is more painful than those of the rest. Cordatus explains to Mitis just what motivates Macilente as he puts his first hoax into action:

Now does he...plot and store up a world of malicious thoughts in his brain till he is so full with 'em that you shall see the very torrent of his envy break forth and, against the course of all their affections, oppose itself so violently that you will almost have wonder to think how 'tis possible the current of their dispositions shall receive so quick and strong an alteration. (4.5.153-60)

Cordatus detects malice and envy, but not indignation. Ironically, Macilente's intention to expose others derives from his own humour. His reactions to the successes of his hoaxes demonstrate how he comes increasingly under the influence of envy. When Puntarvolo and Fastidious appear to claim some of the credit for disgracing Saviolina, Macilente can only grumble to himself, "O, this applause taints it foully" (5.2.145-47). His mood is noticeably improved, though, after Puntarvolo, Shift, and Sogliardo are all made fools of: "O how I do feed upon this now, and fat myself!" (213). His metaphor is apt in the uncertainty it leaves us with as to whether his demonstrative pronoun refers to his jests or to his victims.

In the play's final scene, his own humour reaches its full height at the same time as his efforts to divest others of theirs culminate. As Deliro stands stunned at the sight of his unfaithful wife, Macilente gleefully mocks him:

“Why, how now, Signor Deliro?...Hath Gorgon's head made marble on you?...I told you you might have suspected this long afore....If you could persuade yourself it were a dream now, 'twere excellent. Faith, try what you can do, signor. It may be your imagination will be brought to it in time. There's nothing impossible. (5.3.520-32)

Bednarz perceives in this scene one of Jonson's essential differences from Shakespeare, in whose comedies “social conflict is routinely resolved by conceding error, subjectivity, and the contingency of perspective. Macilente dares Deliro to assume the role of a Shakespearean lover by claiming that what he sees was caused by ‘some enchantment,’...‘a dream’”; instead, “Delirio [*sic*], the delirium of desire, recognizes his fallacy or Fallace.”³⁸ Not only does Macilente mock Deliro's (now quite abandoned) doting, but vindicates his own prior and unheeded warnings to him about the possibility of the scene he now witnesses.

By the time he gets to informing Fastidious about Deliro's imminent foreclosure, Macilente's repetition of phrases gives away that he is nearly beside himself with delight. “Signor Deliro has entered three actions against you, three actions, monsieur: marry, one of them (I'll put you in comfort) is but three thousand mark, and the other two, some five thousand pound together – trifles, trifles....These be things will weigh, monsieur, they will weigh” (551-61). Significantly, Macilente's repeated attacks recall Carlo's incessant laughter at Puntarvolo and his dead dog several scenes earlier. Neither has any intention of stopping once he gets going; in fact, the intensity of their jesting and of their

³⁸ Bednarz, *Poets' War*, 64, 63. I deal more fully with Bednarz's comparison of the two dramatists in the conclusion.

delight in it only increase as they continue. In each case, even when their work of exposure or dishumoring is complete, their victims lying at their feet drained of blood, as it were, they continue to twist the knife. Moreover, what in Carlo might be described (generously, perhaps) as only an extreme lack of tact or over-the-top buffoonery, in Macilente veers quite near to malice, to delight in another's pain. He presses harder against people whose marriage is foundering on the rocks and are likely to spend the next ten years in debtors' prison than Carlo does against a man who has merely lost his dog. Indeed, Macilente comes remarkably close to Sordido reading his almanac and chortling at the ruin it predicts for his neighbours.

The exposure of all the play's fools certainly satisfies the indignation their folly has raised in the audience. Our attitude toward Macilente, though, is more complicated. On the one hand, his envy and malice arouse a desire for their correction. Given the moral authority he still possesses in the play, though, his exposure must be more subtle than those of the others – he can't be merely exploded and left to disappear. Jonson thus gives us our only look at a character who has come out of his humour and lives to tell about it. In both versions of the conclusion,³⁹ Macilente finds miraculously that “envy is fled my soul,” and “my stream of humour is run out of me” (5.4.9, 12). As if to confirm this, he concludes the play by reverting to Asper, who is now “nothing so peremptory as I was in the beginning” (58). This dissolution of his humour doesn't necessarily satisfy our indignation as clearly as had the fools' come-uppance, but his self-realization mollifies it enough, I think, to hear his concluding exhortation. Angus Fletcher asserts that “when Asper's voice issues from Macilente, it suddenly becomes very difficult to

³⁹ I discuss the play's different endings below, 178.

separate the pious playwright from the twisted manifestation of his wrath [Macilente]”; rather, I will argue, Jonson’s complication of indignation’s satisfaction here provides for the possibility of comic catharsis.⁴⁰

4.2 Leaving “stoicity” alone

Like those in *Every Man Out*, all of *Epicoene’s phauloi* characters enjoy at least a moderately privileged place in society. La Foole has rents in the country that fund his prestigious “lodging in The Strand” (1.3.36) – a location that in 1610 was “not only the most desirable address” in London, but “a focus of the commerce in luxury goods.”⁴¹ As hollow as Daw’s genuine knowledge is, Clerimont is initially incredulous at Truewit’s mockery of him, insisting twice that “the world reports him to be very learned” (1.3.78). The Otters too live just off the Strand, and Mrs. Otter, “the only authentical courtier that is not naturally bred one” (in Truewit’s mocking phrase, 3.2.28-29) has enough ready money to see and be seen in the district’s fashionable china import shops and to spend “eighteen pound at one time” on a damask tablecloth (3.2.66-67). The Ladies Collegiate are all noble, and regularly referred to as “great ladies” by other characters (though this is as often with sarcasm as without). Somewhat perversely for one who hates noise, even Morose has taken a house in the Strand, symbolically placing himself at the centre of a world he nevertheless despises.

Given all of this, we might reasonably expect there to be at least one character, like Macilente or Asper, who takes umbrage and feels righteous indignation towards the recipients of all this unmerited good fortune and position. That there is not, even among

⁴⁰ Fletcher, “Unsnarling of the Satyr,” 252.

⁴¹ Dutton, Introduction, 11.

the three wits from whom we might expect it, is a crucial fact, and one which sets *Epicoene* off from Jonson's earlier drama. Indeed, this curious lack of indignation is a prime indicator of Jonson's departure from the satirical structure that governs *Every Man Out*. Whether the cantankerous playwright has mellowed or merely despaired of his earlier program of ethical reform, *Epicoene* certainly feels like a lighter, more flippant play, a series of "light hearted exposés" in contrast with the "searching moral comedy" he had earlier written.⁴² "It almost seems," muses William Slights, "as though Jonson took the marginal, topical, frequently cut subplot of Peregrine swooping down on the tortoise from *Volpone* and made it into the main action of his next play."⁴³ The tricksters from whom we most expect indignation most lack it. Indeed, Leo Salingar bases his argument for taking *Epicoene* as farce on the belief that "Truewit is the principal spokesman of the play, and Truewit is *farceur* rather than satirist."⁴⁴ Ian Donaldson also sees Truewit's plays as farces, and moreover, the essence of the play.⁴⁵ Interestingly, the definition of traditional comedy's aims from which Salingar pushes off is an Aristotelian one suggested by Marcus Tierney. In terms quite similar to those of Golden, Tierney suggests that comedy effects "a catharsis of envy and malice," and "establishes the just mean of *nemesis*, which we might almost call 'the instinct for fair-play,'" in their place.⁴⁶ Salingar perceives that "to judge from the ending of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, [this definition] might well have attracted Ben Jonson."⁴⁷ But *Epicoene*, he concludes, "comes nearest in

⁴² Dessen, *Jonson's Moral Comedy*, 107.

⁴³ Slights, *Art of Secrecy*, 78.

⁴⁴ Salingar, "Farce and Fashion," 35.

⁴⁵ See Donaldson, "Martyr's Resolution."

⁴⁶ Tierney, "Aristotle and Menander," 253.

⁴⁷ Salingar, "Farce," 35.

style as in substance to farce.”⁴⁸ One of farce’s fundamental traits, observes Jessica Milner Davis, is that it deliberately “avoids moral comment or social criticism,” and by having “little reforming zeal – or even much despair – for the ways of the world,” it “rarely seek[s] to point out any particular lesson,” whether to its characters or audience.⁴⁹

Dutton also emphasizes the play’s farcical elements, and parallel to Salinger, asserts that “Jonson repeatedly flags his identity” with Truewit and his friends by “making them self-conscious dramatists” and allowing them to “acquire a degree of credit for Jonson’s own ingenious plotting.”⁵⁰ Truewit’s plotting, though, remains tellingly amateur: he crafts a series of hoaxes that while very entertaining, are almost entirely disconnected. The reason for this, I would suggest, is his lack of motivating indignation. From the outset, he and Clerimont drift in and out of scenes, capitalizing on the random opportunities for a joke with which the others continually present them. Their hoaxes do expose the errors of their victims, of course, but only incidentally; their exposure is unintended. Truewit’s central trick on Daw and La Foole, which reduces them to covering idiots before the Collegiates, has no greater end than to win over the ladies’ affections to Dauphine, whom the two knights have slighted. And even this end is sought simply to win a locker room-style bet that Truewit had earlier made with Dauphine.

On the one hand, the wits’ spontaneity is a key aspect of their admirably quick minds, enabling them instantly to transmute the dull stupidity of others into shining comic gold – an ability that Jonson must certainly have prided in himself. Yet it also

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Farce*, 2, 3.

⁵⁰ Dutton, Introduction, 59.

precludes the possibility of any sustained dramatic meaning in their hoaxes. It links them with the ancient lampoonists whose work, claims Aristotle, was inferior to genuine dramatic comedy because their plots were merely episodic, not structured with a “beginning, middle, and end” unified “in accordance with probability and necessity” (1450b, 1451b).⁵¹ Jonson’s longest extract from Heinsius is the latter’s commentary on this very passage, in which Aristotle describes the need for unity of dramatic action. A play’s “fable” or plot “should be one, and entire,” writes Jonson, and even as it is “composed of many parts, it begins to be one, as those parts grow, or are wrought together” (*Discoveries* 456). This sort of unity of action is impossible in “plays not composed of parts, which[, when] laid together in themselves, with an equal and fitting proportion, tend to the same end” (456). This end for Jonson is the exposure of error motivated by indignation, and this motive Truewit completely lacks. Because of this, his dramaturgy violates what is for Jonson the most crucial tenet of drama, unity of action.⁵² In this, his hoaxes are remarkably similar to those of Carlo Buffone, whose continual but pointless jesting soon becomes monotonous and reveals him to be only a more intelligent fool than the others in *Every Man Out*.

Yet Jonson makes regular enough suggestions of the possibility of indignation in the play to pull us back from reading it simply as farce. Alexander Leggatt uses the term “anti-comedy” in another context to describe a comedy “in which the outlines of the genre appear but light and shade are reversed to create a negative image.”⁵³ Rather than simply mocking comic conventions, as does farce, anti-comedy inverts them, and by so

⁵¹ Aristotle also discusses the development of comedy out of lampoon at 1448b-49a and 1449b.

⁵² Unity of action is a central theme in many of Jonson’s dramatic prologues. In *Volpone*, for example, he insists (in the third person) that he has not imported hoaxes piecemeal from other writings “To stop gaps in his loose writing... / Nor made he his play, for jests, stolen from each table, / But makes jests to fit his fable” (23-28).

⁵³ Leggatt, *English Stage Comedy*, 151-52. This passage refers directly to *Measure for Measure*.

doing keeps them ironically at the centre of the play. While there is enough straightforward comedy in *Epicoene* to problematize the label “anti-comedy,” it is nonetheless an apt term to describe what Jonson does with comic indignation, and it runs parallel to his use of inversion as a principle of error. In this light, it is notable that at both the beginning and end of the play, Truewit does speak from something resembling indignation. In fact, the play’s first scene begins with Truewit’s charge that Clerimont is wasting his life:

Why, here’s the man who can melt away his time and never feel it! What between his mistress abroad and his ingle at home, high fare, soft lodging, fine clothes, and his fiddle, he thinks the hours ha’ no wings or the day no post-horse. (1.1.22-26)

The choice that Truewit suggests lies before him is to continue dallying with pleasures that occlude time’s inevitable movement towards its end, or to act with an end – *the* end – in mind:

Well, sir gallant, were you struck with the plague this minute or condemned to any capital punishment tomorrow, you would begin then to think and value every article o’ your time, esteem it at the true rate, and give all for ’t. (22-30)

Catching sight of the end of one’s life, Truewit says, has a way of ordering what remains of it in a deliberate and serious way. Clerimont, though, waves him off: “thou hast read Plutarch’s *Morals* now, or some such tedious fellow, ...’twill spoil thy wit utterly” (61-63). He prefers that Truewit “Talk [to] me of pins, and feathers, and ladies, and rushes, and such things, and leave this stoicity alone till thou mak’st sermons” (63-65). Truewit only too cheerfully obliges: “I’ll do good to no man against his will” (67-68). Matthew Martin, after carefully analysing the theme of time in this passage, claims that death by

execution or plague would be “unexpected” and hence “irrational.”⁵⁴ Rather than being ironic, Truewit’s flippant response highlights “the impossibility of preparing for such an irrational death,” and makes “Clerimont’s disregard for the plague...not seem so unreasonable.”⁵⁵ Yet Truewit’s counsel and the whole *ars moriendi* tradition it summarizes urge sober reflection on one’s death precisely because it *can* come unexpectedly. As if to reinforce this, Eustace Manly picks up the metaphor of the plague at the conclusion of *The Devil is an Ass*, declaring that though everybody commits errors, “They do ’hem worst that love ’hem, and dwell there, / Till the plague comes.”⁵⁶ Clerimont and Truewit delight in and love their flippancy, rather than believe it to be reasonable response to the possibility of death. In light of the real possibility of the plague, both within *Epicoene* and in early 1610 London,⁵⁷ Clerimont and Truewit’s disregard for it all the more ironic.

Their easy dismissal of moral imperatives here might be reasonable or even farcical if the play’s humourous characters didn’t do exactly the same thing. The Collegiates pursue many of the same self-indulgent pleasures of Truewit and Clerimont and like them, are blithely aware of time’s passing. Haughty warns her new protégé Epicoene: “The best of our days pass first,” and after that, “who will wait on us to coach then? or write, or tell us the news then? Make anagrams of our names, and invite us to the cockpit, and kiss our hands all the play-time, and draw their weapons for our honours?” (4.3.39-48). Yet also like the wits, their response to this impending decline is to ignore it: Centaure keeps a “coach and four horses,” “a French cook,” and a “plurality of servants [*i.e.* lovers], and do[es] ’em all graces,” while Haughty merrily spends her days going “to

⁵⁴ Martin, “Wasting Time in *Epicoene*,” 101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, 5.8.170-72.

⁵⁷ Dutton’s discussion of *Epicoene*’s date (Introduction 1-9) provides an account of the plague’s severity in 1609 and 1610.

Bedlam,⁵⁸ to the china-houses, and to the Exchange”(20-30). Martin rightly observes that “the collegiates’ awareness of temporal finitude produces not the stillness of the Stoic,” that Truewit had earlier recommended, “but the motion and expenditure of the shopper.”⁵⁹ So too, when the wits trick La Foole into believing that Daw is plotting his death, his only concern is to arrange for a hideout equipped with “a cold venison pastry, a bottle or two of wine, and a chamber pot” (4.5.189-90). He would rather give Daw “any satisfaction, . . .any terms,” than face the prospect of eternity (214-15).

If Truewit is cavalier in his treatment of things that in *Every Man Out* aroused indignation, he is never more in earnest than when expressing opinions that can hardly be taken seriously. From here until the end of the play, Truewit offers a series of set-pieces that share the authoritative tone of this first exhortation but argue instead, and in deliberately inflated language, for the folly of marriage, the virtues of cosmetics, and the best ways to seduce women. The ludicrousness of especially the last speech is confirmed by comparing what Truewit says there to Jonson’s source for much of it, Ovid’s *Arx Amatoria*. Anne Barton expands on the observation first made by Jonas Barish, that “the distressing clutter of false teeth, deodorants, and artificial eyebrows” that Jonson adds to his source “turns what in Ovid had seemed elegant and accomplished into a sordid art, one that condemns itself despite all that Truewit can urge in its favour.”⁶⁰ Our inevitable rejection of what Truewit earnestly argues here asks us to reconsider seriously things he elsewhere dismisses, rather than simply categorizing those pronouncements as farcical.

⁵⁸ Dutton notes (Commentary, 144) that “Viewing the inmates at Bedlam was a popular amusement; a small fee was charged.”

⁵⁹ Martin, “Wasting Time in *Epicene*,” 91.

⁶⁰ Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 127, citing Barish’s classic essay (“Ovid, Juvenal”).

Though he says a lot less than Truewit during the play, Clerimont very much follows him in this ironic lack of indignation. When his boy gives an account of Haughty's sexual attempts on him, Clerimont pronounces a disgusted "pox on her autumnal face, her pieced beauty" (1.1.83). Yet at the same time he is getting ready to pay her court and attempt to have her open the "door" so far "kept shut" against him (18). And when he sees her all painted up for the occasion at Morose's, he begins to change his mind about what he had earlier scorned: "Methinks the Lady Haughty looks well today, for all my dispraise of her in the morning. I think I shall come about to thee again Truewit," he says, referring to his friend's earlier defence of cosmetics (4.1.32-34). Again, it is this sort of ironic self-contradiction that both highlights the wits' lack of indignation and pushes us to consider it an error in them.

That Jonson certainly intends for us to consider the role of indignation felt towards folly is further reinforced by the only two characters, Dauphine and Morose, who feel anything close to it. Their strongest feelings are not reactions to the folly of the knights or Collegiates, though, but responses to each other. This antagonism is revealed almost immediately in the play. Clerimont's first mention of Dauphine focuses on his melancholy, which Truewit attributes to his being "Sick o' the uncle" (1.1.140). For his part, Morose is equally sick o' the nephew, who, quite against his uncle's will, is set to inherit his estate. Morose's search for a wife, from whom he hopes to have a son to displace Dauphine, shapes the overarching action of the play. Critics have often simply accepted the three wits' judgment of Morose's intent in this as accurate. "Morose's mistaken valuation" of Dauphine makes the latter's duplicitous acquisition of the

former's estate to be "desired and just," says Mark Anderson,⁶¹ and Douglas Lanier affirms that Jonson wants us to side with the younger generation in its struggle for respect from the older.⁶² But Morose's disdain for Dauphine is because his nephew "would be knighted, forsooth, and thought by that means to reign over me" (2.5.104-5). Presumably expecting Morose to cover the costs associated with gaining his knighthood, Dauphine thus feels slighted by a man whose actual obligation to him is dubious at best. In making them not father and son, but uncle and nephew, Jonson deliberately weakens Dauphine's claim, especially to the allowance of one third of Morose's income that Dauphine has long been pestering Morose to provide him. This is what Morose is getting at in his gleeful rant against Dauphine by referring to his nephew only as his distant "kinsman" (2.5.113).

That said, Morose feels a great deal more than indignation. He contemptuously uses the archaic third-person possessive pronoun for Dauphine: after his nephew is disinherited, Morose prophesies, he shall "fright all *it* friends with borrowing letters" for lack of money (2.5.114-15, italics mine), and "the best and last fortune to it knighthood shall be to make Dol Tearsheet or Kate Common a lady, and so it knighthood may eat" (131-33). Dauphine, he hopes, will be forced to marry a prostitute and subsist on her earnings. While at least partly more justified, Morose's clear scorn for Dauphine recalls Sordido's malice towards his neighbours. Morose takes delight not in a reasonable settlement with Dauphine but in the thought of his complete ruin. This desire is precisely what Aristotle identifies in the *Ethics* as falling "so far short of being pained {at injustice,

⁶¹ Anderson, "Successful Unity," 351, 362.

⁶² See Lanier, "Masculine Silence."

which would be indignation} as to be delighted” by it (2.1108b).⁶³ Interestingly, then, Morose errs on the same side of indignation as do Truewit and Clerimont. Like him, the wits feel no pain at the unmerited fortune of the fools. While not going to the extreme of Morose’s gleeful malice, the wits clearly delight in the exposure of the fools, a delight that is not based on the satisfaction of righteous indignation. Aristotle’s terms thus reveal an interesting parallel between detached self-indulgence and outright malice: both result from a lack of ethical motivation for action.

If Morose’s indignation toward Dauphine is tainted by malice, Dauphine’s toward Morose clearly smacks of envy. He thinks himself to be Morose’s equal, deserving of a portion of Morose’s income, and is thus pained when his uncle refuses to recognize their parity. Truewit’s comment about Dauphine being “sick o’ the uncle” recalls the “greensickness” of envy. That Dauphine is quickly incited to suspicion and laying blame is also indicative of a person who believes himself to be others’ equal, but is not treated that way. He reacts throughout the play particularly to the haughty self-assurance of Truewit (who several times calls him “lad”). He lambastes Clerimont for letting Truewit in on his plan for Epicoene: “come, you are a strange open man to tell everything thus. . . . With the fewer a business is carried, it is ever the safer” (1.3.1-11). Later at Morose’s house, Truewit reports to Dauphine (with some inflation) the slanders that La Foole and Daw have been spreading about him. He becomes livid and vows, “Let ’em not live, I’ll beat ’em. I’ll bind ’em both to grand madam’s bedposts and have ’em baited with monkeys” (4.5.14-16). Truewit’s central hoax on the knights begins taking shape soon after, and Daw, in mortal fear of what he believes to be the enraged La Foole, offers his

⁶³ Braces enclose my insertion in the text.

left arm for peace. Dauphine declares in all seriousness, “Take it by all means” (126). Truewit is appalled: “How! Maim a man for ever for a jest? What a conscience hast thou?”, but Dauphine insists, saying “Tis no loss to him: he has no employment for his arms but to eat spoon-meat” (127-30).

This same unmitigated aggression governs his final dig at Morose. Even after he has stripped his uncle of all his wealth, he chillingly dismisses him: “Now you may go in and rest, be as private as you will, sir. I’ll not trouble you till you trouble me with your funeral, which I care not how soon it come” (5.4.210-12). At this moment, Dauphine’s motivating envy changes into malice, the emotion which earlier had so thoroughly shaped Morose’s plan to marry and disinherit his nephew. Moreover, his rather vicious gloating is very like that of Macilente as he one by one ruins the fools of *Every Man Out*. The chief difference between the two, though, is again best understood in the quality of their emotion. While Macilente had called his humour “envy,” and it was aroused by his own poor fortune, it was also due partly to a disinterested sense of justice. He keenly perceived that the good fortunes of the various fools were unmerited. This sense of justice, this appeal to a standard outside of and at least partly unrelated to himself indicates in him a degree of genuinely comedic indignation, not simply envy. That this indignation is an important ingredient in his actions is shown by the fact that he gains nothing by bringing the play’s fools to ruin; in fact, he most likely loses the modest patronage that Deliro had begun to bestow upon him. By the time he is left alone on stage, his envy has been bled off and his indignation satisfied, and he finds himself actually feeling pity towards his victims – just the sort of indulgence and reconciliation that typically closes a comedy. But Dauphine’s sense of his uncle’s injustice and his

success in gaining what he thinks he deserves ultimately leads not to the dissipation of his envy, but to its intensification and metamorphosis into a more vindictive malice. His animosity is remarkable for this ostensibly light-hearted comedy, one much more in earnest than the ultimately humorous rancour of Morose. While Dauphine's envy still functions (like indignation) as a motive for exposure and enables his hoax to trump those of Truewit and Clerimont, it prevents the audience from seeing him as Jonson's surrogate in the play. As I shall argue in the next chapter, the dramatic effectiveness of his envy is more of a warning than an example to us.

The "comedy of affliction" that the wits put on Morose does not cause him to realize the folly of his humour. What is altered, though, is the malice he had felt toward Dauphine at the outset of the play. He goes from denigrating his nephew as a petty child only distantly related to him, to appealing to and depending on him as his only hope to escape further affliction. So too, when Truewit reminds Morose that he had tried to warn him about the result of marriage, Morose is equally contrite: "Alas, do not rub those wounds, Master Truewit, to blood again; 'twas my negligence. Add not affliction to affliction" (4.4.25-27). This repentance, however selfishly motivated, invites from the audience a degree of pity, even though none of the characters of the play extend this to him. Jonson has done this before, most notably with Celia and Bonario in *Volpone*, who are made to suffer at the hands of husband and father respectively, and Volpone and the Avocatari corporately. In that play, though, he insists on keeping their pain as a sort of ironic emblem of injustice, making their virtue just shrill enough to preclude any real pity. But from Act 4 of *Epicoene* onward, though, Jonson gives us consistent cause to pity (however mildly) old Morose. Following his earnest if still self-deluded admission of

error, Morose humbly throws himself upon Truewit and Dauphine for help in finding a way out of his marriage: “Do your pleasure with me, gentlemen; I believe in you, and that deserves no delusion” (4.7.31-32). When that aid arrives in the form of the disguised Cutbeard and Otter, Morose’s account of his father’s advice moves further pity in two ways: first, by adding a third dimension to an otherwise two-dimensional humours character, making him a human being with a wise father who tried to raise his son well; and second, making Morose the only character in the play who has even a remote desire to act virtuously and wisely, however far removed his actions are from that motive. Dauphine’s cold-as-ice dismissal of the old man at play’s end thus comes as further confirmation that Jonson wants us to feel at least a little sympathy for Morose.

Moreover, pitying an afflicted man requires that we concurrently feel some indignation towards his afflictors. In that Morose remains largely a fool at whose expense we still laugh throughout Act 5, I think that arousing this subsequent emotion is Jonson’s primary aim for first evoking pity. It makes us reconsider the actions and motives of the wits which, up until the end of Act 4, have appeared to be merely a good lot of fun. But pity and its concurrent indignation suggest again, from a different angle, that Truewit and Clerimont’s aimless and continual plotting of hoaxes might be as obsessive as the humours of the other fools. Pity is thus a means by which Jonson turns the tricksters’ tricks back on themselves to inflate and fuel them in a manner similar to the fools they dupe.

4.3 "Kill Claudio."

Much Ado about Nothing demonstrates what Leon Golden describes as indignation's potential range of feeling. Claudio's rant against Hero and Beatrice's strong denunciation of male weakness shows an extreme intensity of the emotion, but almost drowns out the more genially comic and moderate sort with which the play begins. As Beatrice and Benedick are quickly established as the shrew and braggart soldier types of humours comedy (however likeable), the comments of their companions display a desire to have the pair's social deviance righted. Leonato lightly chides Beatrice's quick attack on the messenger's opening report of Benedick, saying, "Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much" (1.1.44-45). When Benedick shortly after mocks Claudio and Don Pedro's discussion of Hero's marriageability, Don Pedro declares, "Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty," and promises him, "I shall see thee ere I die look pale with love" (2.2.26-27, 238). This genial pressure continues up until after the ball, when Don Pedro finally concocts a plan to prime Beatrice and Benedick for marriage, bringing them into line with this social mean that has already been well-established in the play. This desire need hardly be what Jean Howard construes as Don Pedro's heavy-handed "display of power" that checks "the socially subversive impulse their refusal to marry implies";⁶⁴ rather, it seems a playful expression of indignation, the subtle pain one naturally feels at disproportion. At the same time, Howard is right to perceive a degree of subversiveness in Beatrice and Benedick's eccentric social position. The others take a slightly hesitant delight in them, much the same as they do in the jokes of cuckoldry that

⁶⁴ Howard, "Renaissance Antitheatricality," 178, 176.

riddle the play; both represent a subtle threat to the established social order that makes them objects of fascination.

It seems to me that the reactions of Don Pedro, Leonato, and the others to Beatrice and Benedick in the first two acts are meant to mirror that of the audience. Their mild dissonance with the other characters is, on the one hand, the major source of humour and delight in these acts, and serves to define other characters by way of contrast. Beatrice especially is genuinely amicable in her jesting, making critical descriptions of her as “the embodiment of pride,” and “a crippled personality”⁶⁵ who fails to “arouse in the audience...warmth of feeling”⁶⁶ seem thoroughly crabbed. On the other hand, I think we are meant to take anticipatory pleasure in the plan to make Beatrice and Benedick better fit into the still genial society of the play – this provides the satisfaction of indignation that forms, as I have suggested, the second half of the emotional experience of comedy.

Balthazar’s song continues the play’s indulgent attitude towards the deviation represented by Beatrice and Benedick and the regular references to cuckoldry. He introduces, interestingly enough, a woman’s version of the latter trope, urging them:

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more.
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into hey nonny, nonny. (2.3.63-70)

⁶⁵ Everett, “The Unsociable Comedy,” 68, quoting J. R. Mulryne.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, quoting R. A. Foakes.

Men, it turns out, are as fickle as they presume women to be, but just as men can make light of cuckoldry, women ought also to trade their “sounds of woe” for an indifferent “hey nonny, nonny.” The song also depicts something of Beatrice and Benedick’s initial attitude toward the hypocrisies of marriage and society which they consistently point out. Rather than refusing, like Don John, to “fashion a carriage” and cutting themselves off from society on this account, they take lightly and without indignation the folly that these can represent. At the same time, though, by its very urging to nonchalance, the song implies that the violation of the social codes that unfaithfulness represents might well be a source of more significant pain, and particularly that of righteous indignation – “let them go,” the song urges women of the sort of men who arouse their ire. The continual imperatives of the song ask us to wonder why ostensibly commonplace events require such strenuous indifference. Indeed, the potential for the pain of indignation that the song introduces is one of Shakespeare’s chief alterations to his primary source, Bandello’s twenty-second tale in his *Novelle*. Sheldon Zitner points out that in Bandello, “the seduction and betrayal of women are merely to be expected,” and are “irrelevant grounds for judging” a man’s moral character.⁶⁷ With Balthazar’s song, then, Shakespeare gives us our first strong hint that his version may differ, as it soon comes openly to do.

Indeed, the song recalls a similar edge that has already been present in Beatrice’s comments about and to Benedick, an edge that one might at first ignore as part of her mildly shrewish humour. She first brings up the topic of Benedick’s valour with Don Pedro’s messenger, but as soon as he begins to praise Benedick’s reputation for valour, she attacks it as undeserved: his “good service...in these wars” was, she claims, only to

⁶⁷ Zitner, Introduction, 9. See pp. 6-14 for a general discussion of sources, and Prouty, *Sources*, for one more exhaustive.

help eat the army's "musty victual" (1.1.46-48). She demonstrates in this and many subsequent scenes what we might call a rhetoric of indignation: in any praise of a person or convention (primarily marriage, which is lauded by being urged on her), she picks out words with double meanings and chooses the more derogatory understanding. From the man "stuffed with all honourable virtues," she pulls out the stuffing and declares it to be the straw of a scarecrow or dummy: "He is no less than a stuffed man. But for the stuffing – well, we are all mortal" (1.1.54-57).

When at the ball the masked Benedick digs for a compliment on his wit by asking Beatrice of himself, "Did he never make you laugh?", she reduces his wit to folly, declaring him "the Prince's jester, a very dull fool. . . .None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit but in his villainy" (2.1.135-40). Indignation at what she perceives to be undeserved praise motivates her to turn it back on itself and deflate it. Interestingly, it is a gesture that Benedick also makes regularly, especially towards the "fashion" of others. When Claudio exclaims of Hero, "Can the world buy such a jewel?", Benedick punctures his high courtly rhetoric by (obscenely) literalizing it: "Yea, and a case to put it into" (1.1.176-77). Hero, he says, will be for Claudio little more than a purchased possession to be kept and displayed. John Traugott demonstrates how Beatrice and Benedick consistently use the levelling effect of comedy to undercut other characters' aspirations to the genre of romance.⁶⁸ Indignation at the inflated conventions and tropes of romance, it seems, motivates much of the exercise of their wits.

The only other character to critique Messina's social milieu is Don John. His initial grumblings to Conrad evince a more sullen indignation than that of Beatrice and

⁶⁸ Traugott, "Creating a Rational Rinaldo."

Benedick. “I am trusted with a muzzle, and enfranchised with a clog,” he complains of Don Pedro’s suspicion of him. More often, though, he seems motivated by what Aristotle describes as the extremes of indignation, malice or envy. He is always on the lookout “for any model to build mischief on,” but is consistently drawn to Claudio, rather than his brother or Benedick (1.3.44-45): “That young upstart hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way,” he declares, still able to pun even while dour (63-65). Even though he perceives the artificiality of fashion just as Beatrice and Benedick do, he feels envy and malice against it rather than indignation, and this is what makes him a villain and subsequent threat to Messinian society.

If Don John demonstrates Shakespeare’s interest in varying degrees of indignation, the events of Act 4 show him exploring indignation’s relationship with its opposite emotion, pity. In Claudio’s tirade and others’ responses to it, Balthazar’s allusion to the pain of infidelity is fully realized (though Claudio refuses his recommendation to join the ladies in a chorus of “hey nonny, nonny”). His hasty, even eager, decision to shame Hero at the most dubious suggestion of her unfaithfulness confirms that the nonchalance of the song and the regular jests of the play about cuckoldry actually mark a deep-seated fear of women and their sexuality, as Carol Cook first described in detail.⁶⁹ When this fear is realized, or even just thought to have been realized, the emotional response of Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato is virulent indignation at having been “dishonoured” (4.1.64). At the same time, though, Beatrice and eventually Benedick feel an opposite indignation toward the three noblemen that is

⁶⁹ Cook, “Sign and Semblance,” 187-90.

integrally related to the pity they concurrently feel for Hero. From this point forward, Shakespeare uses indignation and pity as gauges by which we can measure the degree of characters' error, and particularly of their self-understanding.

The common thread that runs through the indignation expressed in turn by Claudio, Don Pedro, and Leonato at the aborted wedding is self-interest. All three are like Morose in this, so focused on their own aims and desires that they lose sight of the foolishness, even ridiculousness, of their actions. Indeed, Zitner suggests that Benedick's joking interjections into Claudio's denunciation ("How now! Interjections?"; "This looks not like a nuptial" [4.1.21, 67]) are meant to function as "verbal lightning rods" to "draw off incipient laughter" at Claudio's pomposity.⁷⁰ Besides ensuring that Hero will never be able to live down his accusations, Claudio's special theme in his attack is on letting his hearers know just how much he is suffering. When Don Pedro speaks, he confirms that the root of his indignation is a similar self-interest: "I stand dishonoured, that have gone about / To link my dear friend to a common stale" (64-65). Claudio concludes his display with a tragic expansion of his earlier denunciation of beauty as a "witch":

For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,
And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang
To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,
And never shall it more be gracious. (104-7)

Not only has the dissonance between her appearance and reality cost Hero a husband and her reputation, but most importantly, he will forever be painfully suspicious of any beauty he sees – surely a plea for pity if ever there was one.

Leonato, though, outdoes Claudio in short order. His first words after Claudio concludes attempt to twist others' attention to him: "Hath no man's dagger here a point

⁷⁰ Zitner, Introduction, 57.

for me?”, he howls (108). People remain inexplicably focused on Hero, though, and so Leonato makes plain in his subsequent lament (Zitner calls it “a creaky echo of *Kyd*”⁷¹) the grievous injustice that Hero has done to him. His tell-tale use of the first person singular pronoun – twenty four times in the course of fifteen lines – finally rises to a crescendo with his repeated use of the possessive: to his chagrin, Hero is no foundling whose sin he might disown,

But mine, and mine I loved, and mine I praised,
And mine that I was proud on; mine so much
That I myself was to myself not mine,
Valuing of her – why she, O she is fallen
Into a pit of ink.... (136-40)

For all three men, the dominant shade of their indignation is its *self*-righteousness, and this has, as its inevitable corollary, self-pity. In addition to his resolution of the plot against Hero, Dogberry serves to distill the essentially ridiculous nature of their indignation. When Conrad scornfully calls Dogberry an ass during his arraignment, his own self-pitying indignation will not let go the insult, and he bitterly laments that the sexton is no longer present “to write me down an ass” (4.2.74-75). He obsessively brings it up again before Don Pedro after Borachio’s confession: “do not forget to specify, when time and place shall serve, that I am an ass” (5.1.249-50). His indignation at the slander laid upon him renders him completely ignorant of the derogatory effect of its expression. Dogberry does obviously and laughably what Claudio and Leonato do with more sobriety. In each, self-righteous indignation is integrally related to self-pity, and both are indicative of self-ignorance.

⁷¹ Ibid., 56.

In direct contrast, Beatrice and Benedick's first response to Hero's denunciation is genuinely outward-looking pity. After his initial jests about Claudio's tirade, Benedick turns seriously to Beatrice, who is trying to rouse the fainted Hero, and asks, "How doth the lady?" (4.1.112). Beatrice's concern too is solely for her cousin. After Leonato hysterically takes over where Claudio left off, Benedick finally silences him and begins to reintroduce reason to the event, looking to Beatrice for proof of Hero's innocence. Pity and reason together motivate his later promise to keep secret the Friar's hoax, even though, he says to Leonato, "you know my inwardness and love / Is very much unto the Prince and Claudio" (245-46). Benedick's shift in allegiance here is crucial, but is often mistakenly attributed only to his love for Beatrice. Certainly in her subsequent demand that he "Kill Claudio," the "bond with a woman *does* disrupt Benedick's bonds to men," as Howard notes,⁷² but Benedick initiates this break *before* confessing his love to Beatrice, and because of pity for Hero. After it becomes clear that Hero is recovering from her shock and all have agreed to the Friar's hoax, Benedick remains on stage with Beatrice and turns his pity toward her tears: "Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?", he asks her. Just as Claudio's, Don Pedro's, and Leonato's self-pity makes manifest their latent suspicion of women, Benedick's genuine pity confirms the openness to love that he first described just before the hoax played on him.

Hero's accusers had earlier rejected Balthazar's suggested response to betrayal, and Beatrice very quickly does the same after initially responding to Benedick's show of pity. The thoroughly unmerited success of the noblemen's attack on her cousin draws out from her a fierce indignation that demands the satisfaction of death. I will closely

⁷² Howard, "Renaissance Antitheatricality," 180.

consider this interaction of pity and indignation in the next chapter, but for now, it is important that the gravity of it is kept carefully in check by our prior knowledge of Borachio's capture and by the immediately subsequent comic relief of his arraignment by Dogberry before the sexton.

The mild indignation that Beatrice's and Benedick's humours-like dispositions arouse in the first two acts is largely satisfied by their confessions of love at the end of Act 4. This also marks the completion of Shakespeare's work to shift his audience's indignation from this pair's mild error to the more serious self-ignorance and compulsiveness of Claudio, a shift that begins when we see him so willingly accept Don John's suggestion of Hero's duplicity. This indignation builds quickly with Claudio's denunciation of her and is compounded by Don Pedro's and Leonato's complicity. Beatrice and Benedick's contrasting sympathy for her finally enables the audience to focus all of its indignation on those involved in Don John's plot. As with Beatrice's indignation, Shakespeare guides the audience between potential laughter at the stock nature of Claudio's and Leonato's rants on the one hand, and intense pain on the other, that might especially arise from seeing a father turn so violently against his daughter, if we were not already aware of Borachio's prior capture.

By the end of the wedding scene, Shakespeare has also provided us with two options of how the satisfaction of this indignation might be brought about. Beatrice's suggestion – Claudio's death – is certainly the most compelling, and while a pitched duel would be exciting (both Claudio and Benedick would have to die, of course), Shakespeare has already made it clear that we are dealing with a comedy. The Friar's option, then, is more plausible: Claudio's realization of his mistake will effect his genuine

remorse and self-aware repentance, and thus enable a fine comic reconciliation which will convince us to give over our indignation towards him. We get the reconciliation, of course, but Shakespeare deliberately withholds the repentance. The next chapter will look closely at how this happens, but Claudio remains completely untouched by remorse for Hero's "death" until Borachio confesses Don John's plot. He then accepts Leonato's request to perform obsequies for Hero and marry his niece, but largely out of a concern to clear his own honour. Again, this tactic seems part of Shakespeare's intent to negotiate a fine line, this time between observing the conventions of comedy and interrogating a character who is their embodiment. The thus inescapably off-note sounded by Claudio and Hero's reunion muffles the satisfaction of indignation that it ought to have produced.

Shakespeare attempts to resolve this inconclusiveness with the scapegoating of Don John, who is first denounced by Benedick during the wedding scene, and then promised "brave punishments" (5.4.128). The indignation that Claudio's dubious penitence leaves as residue in the audience is thus displaced onto the character who, it is affirmed by all, is the real cause of the whole problem. The scapegoating of Don John is, I think, much less problematic than that of Shylock was in *The Merchant of Venice* because of Shakespeare's carefully unambiguous portrayal of him from first to last in the play. To feel sympathy for him as a victim of the social stigma of bastardy requires an act of psychologization on our part that the play simply does not ask for. Yet Don John is not merely a device for satisfying indignation, but a further aspect of the play's portrayal of social convention. Simply put, Messinian society needs a Don John because from Don Pedro to Dogberry, its members are self-ignorant. They see adherence to convention as

their primary obligation, and Don John uses exactly this belief against them by providing Claudio the needed stimulus to exchange his opening role as courtly lover for the subsequent one of innocent cuckold. Yet this blind adherence to convention also backfires on Don John, because it equally exonerates Claudio when his adopted role turns out to be the wrong one. He insists to Leonato that he was only following proper protocol, and thus only sinned “in mistaking” (5.1.68). He repeats the move he had earlier made when he believed Don Pedro to have betrayed him in the wooing of Hero, deflecting blame onto the “witch” beauty rather than questioning his dutiful loyalty to Don Pedro.

Beatrice’s and Benedick’s indignation, Claudio’s half-hearted repentance for his mistake, and the willingness of everyone to lay the blame for the whole affair almost entirely upon Don John, shows Shakespeare testing the notion of the double ending that Aristotle posits as proper to comedy. He technically adheres to the convention by having *Much Ado* end “like the *Odyssey*...in opposite ways for the better and worse [persons]”: Don John and his henchmen are punished, Hero vindicated, and Claudio made to admit his error and be reincorporated into the society of the conclusion. Curiously, Shakespeare keeps to comic convention here in a play that stylistically, in its easy prose banter, is his most strongly realistic comedy to date. Convention and psychological reality, then, are not only central themes of the play, but deeply inform its structure. Shakespeare’s success in this play with theme and style seem to me remarkable. The play is a major achievement for his prose, which portrays characters at once relaxed, lively, and witty, and wholly engaged in the ordinary business of domestic life. His verse passages, especially in the mouth of Claudio, contrast the prose with form that is,

however, never merely stiff and formulaic. And bridging these is Don John's formal confession of his unconventionality and Beatrice's feeling and delicate confession of love within the strictures of a sonnet-like soliloquy.

With respect to his structural experimentation, his success seems more ambiguous. Beatrice's example of feeling genuinely painful pity and indignation at Claudio's denunciation of Hero, and Benedick's subsequent affirmation of these feelings, prevent us from laughing them off as the harmless ravings of a humourous character. Likewise, indignation would be more easily satisfied by Claudio's merely formal repentance if the Friar had not suggested the possibility of a genuinely spiritual event of self-realization and repentance. Shakespeare's question seems to be one of how much a formal and structural satisfaction of indignation, where good characters are exonerated and bad punished, can be paired with a psychologically realistic portrayal of *phauloi* characters and their comic errors. With psychological realism comes moral culpability. Claudio's self-ignorance mitigates this to a certain degree, but both the Friar and Beatrice nonetheless hold him responsible for his actions. The audience is likely to follow their lead, desiring that in some fashion Claudio be "*in pistrinum*" ("put to the mill") for his error.

What finally preserves the comic tone of the play at its end, though, is that the initial indignation aroused by Beatrice and Benedick's humourous is clearly satisfied: from their witty attacks on the folly of love and marriage conventions at the beginning, they are brought to act first as courtier and mistress, and ultimately as husband and wife. Shakespeare thus makes them congruous with the society they mocked, and when the satisfaction we derive from this is paired with their apparent acceptance of Claudio's

repentance and Don John's guilt, we should be able to go along with them. Once again, though, the realistic portrayal of the wonder and self-awareness evinced by Beatrice's and Benedick's responses to Don Pedro's hoax makes their amendment of error to be remarkably subtle and unexpected, even as it holds a recognizable shape.

4.4 "Justice! Justice! Justice! Justice!"

Measure for Measure develops *Much Ado About Nothing's* tactic of using characters' indignation as a means to arouse the same emotion in other characters and the audience. In *Much Ado*, however, characters' reasons for feeling indignation are not especially complicated. Claudio's indignation is strongly self-righteous, unlike Aristotle's *nemesan*, and Benedick realizes something of the latter's relationship to pity, but the play's portrayal of both does not require much deliberation about whether the emotion is justified or not. This, though, is a question very pertinent to *Measure for Measure's* depiction of indignation. The play presents instances of the emotion that frequently mix genuine *nemesan* with the self-interested indignation previously felt by Macilente, Morose, and Claudio. Because of the underlying threat of death in *Measure for Measure*, the indignation it raises is also stronger and more nearly painful, but it is at the same time consistently checked by morally complicating its sources and by the comic error that marks its central characters throughout.

Before Angelo evokes strong indignation from either Isabella or the audience, he feels it himself. In his crackdown on sexual impropriety in Vienna, he fails to indict real offenders like Pompey, but exacts the harshest penalty from Claudio, whose guilt is slight. Claudio suggests that the harshness of his punishment is due to Angelo's desire to

make an example of him, thus demonstrating the ideals of his new regime, but the discrepancy smacks of indignation. Pompey's station in life fits his moral behaviour, but Claudio, who "had a most noble father," possesses a social status incongruous with what is to Angelo his low-life moral character (2.1.7). Angelo thus deliberately shames Claudio by insisting that the Provost "show [him] to the world," leading him manacled through the city on a roundabout way to prison (1.2.115). Juliet too he brings low by first keeping her in prison and then only grudgingly letting her out to give birth, for which he only allows "needful but not lavish means" (2.2.24). They are hardly a pair of libertines, though, and Angelo's obvious misjudgement is our first indication that his indignation may be strongly tainted by self-righteousness: Claudio may be something of a social equal, but he is certainly not his moral peer. After Angelo realizes his capacity for the sort of passion that doomed Claudio, his indignation increases rather than softening, coming to resemble the malice that Aristotle identifies as an extreme form of *nemesian*. In his second discussion with Isabella, he is far more antagonistic to Claudio than in the first, cursing his "filthy vices" and likening his crime of begetting an illegitimate child to murder (2.4.42). After Isabella reacts to his subsequent proposition with outrage, the malice in his self-righteousness becomes patent: he pledges that if Isabella refuses him, he "shall his death draw out / To lingering sufferance" and "prove a tyrant to him" (2.4.167-170). His initial pain at Claudio's unmerited social position ultimately becomes delight in the prospect of his suffering.

The extremity of Angelo's indignation arouses concurrent indignation in the audience. Indeed, even the moderately favourable way that Shakespeare introduces Angelo works to make this response intense. When the Duke announces his intention to

make Angelo his deputy, the younger man is hesitant about his fitness for the task: “Now, good my lord,” he pleads, “Let there be some more test made of my mettle / Before so noble and so great a figure / Be stamped upon it” (1.1.48-51). But when Mistress Overdone announces in the next scene that Claudio has been arrested and will soon have his head removed by Angelo’s warrant, his self-awareness begins to appear woefully incomplete. Angelo’s about-face makes audience indignation stronger, and is further fuelled by the remarkable self-ignorance Angelo displays when Escalus pleads with him for Claudio’s pardon. While Angelo’s counter-argument is not unreasonable, he misses Escalus’ essential point: that Claudio’s crime is one that many men would commit given the right circumstances. Angelo lacks sympathy because he does not know himself, and this presumption therefore produces in the audience a stronger indignation than the much more genial sort that the errors of Beatrice, Benedick, or even Count Claudio evoke.

Shakespeare again uses this pattern of making Angelo sympathetic and then repellent in his discussions with Isabella. Isabella’s initial visit causes him to realize the truth of Escalus’ assessment of Claudio’s crime. His sudden and malignant desire for Isabella genuinely shocks him, and he draws from it the same conclusion Escalus had earlier urged: “O let her brother live! / Thieves for their robbery have authority / When judges steal themselves,” he declares,⁷³ rejecting his previous conclusion that the moral character of the judge has nothing to do with the judgements he makes (2.2.178-80). Self-realization’s immediate result is pity, both in Angelo for Claudio, and, I think, in us for Angelo. But this is only momentary: by his next meeting with Isabella, he has decided

⁷³ Katharine Maus (*Inwardness*, 162-64) offers a nuanced reading of Angelo’s thinking in these scenes, but misses this interim moment of pity between his malice toward Claudio and then toward Isabella.

not only to refuse Claudio a pardon, but to pressure Isabella into giving him his desire. Before, Angelo's mere self-ignorance had aroused our indignation; here, his deliberate duplicity can only escalate it. Moreover, it is corroborated and fed by Isabella's indignation, which has the same cause as ours.

At the same time as Angelo evokes this remarkably painful response, other aspects of the play deliberately work to temper it and keep it within comic bounds. I have already pointed out the humorous qualities that both Angelo and Isabella evince in these scenes. As well, we learn of the Duke's suspicion of Angelo and his plan to return in disguise to Vienna immediately after Claudio is dragged off to prison. There is thus never a moment where we are left to think that Angelo is in control of either Vienna or the play's plot. His exposure is never in doubt, only the timing and the means that the Duke will employ to effect it. In addition, Shakespeare goes out of his way to make many of Angelo's arguments reasonable. Where both Escalus and Isabella urge him to judge others in light of himself, his assertion that "it is the law, not I, condemn your brother" is actually much closer to most Western systems of law. N. W. Bawcutt observes that

a sentence made by due process of law on adequate grounds could hardly be appealed against on the grounds that the judge himself had subsequently been discovered to be guilty of the offence for which he had sentenced the prisoner. The response would surely be that the judge himself must now stand trial, but his verdict need not be overturned.⁷⁴

Moreover, Angelo's harsh justice does not arouse indignation in other characters, something Deborah Shuger points out as one of the play's most curious aspects: "the good people in this play take the issues of sexual morality and sexual regulation with deep seriousness," and for this reason, "the characters ranged against the 'precise' Lord

⁷⁴ Bawcutt, "The sword of heaven," 94.

Angelo...do not seem to be on the right side, but rather on a different wrong side.”⁷⁵

Escalus grudgingly admits that Angelo’s severity “is but needful” (2.1.269), the Friar-Duke consistently defends his deputy (provided he remains “as holy as severe” [3.1.516]), and though he calls him “bitter,” the Provost is never indignant at him (4.2.78). And Isabella only becomes so when she learns of Angelo’s duplicity. All of these factors, but especially Angelo’s often reasonable arguments, keep our indignation towards him from ever becoming tragically painful.

Isabella’s plea for him at play’s end and the Duke’s eventual pardon suggest that the principle Escalus and Isabella urge Angelo to employ in judging Claudio – that he imagine himself in Claudio’s circumstances – is one they, and we, must employ in judging Angelo. He is an inexperienced, self-ignorant man in whom undue “power change[s]” previously noble (if naive) “purpose” (1.4.54). This plea from Isabella remains remarkable, though, because as I mentioned, she is the only major character in the play (besides the Duke) who knows of Angelo’s hypocrisy. As a result, she shares the position of the audience, and her indignation at his hypocrisy parallels that aroused in us. Indignation arises in her when Angelo becomes undeserving of his high status by propositioning her: the disproportion between his office and his character is what evokes her cry of “Seeming, seeming!” (2.4.151). But before this point, she has shared something of Angelo’s indignation at Claudio’s vice. When she first comes to plead for him to Angelo, no small part of her evident discomfort with the role stems from the conflict of her love for Claudio with her concurrent indignation toward him:

⁷⁵ Shuger, *Political Theologies*, 35.

There is a vice that most I do abhor,
And most desire should meet the blow of justice;
For which I would not plead, but that I must,
For which I must not plead, but that I am
At war 'twixt will and will not. (2.2.29-33)

Indeed, this conflict, not her suit, is the subject of this opening statement, giving one the feeling that her indignation is only very narrowly beaten out by love. When Angelo quickly dismisses her, she seems almost relieved, and reasserts her allegiance to the law that condemns sin: "O just but severe law! / I had a brother, then" (41-42). Her tendency here to distance herself from Claudio also indicates that like Angelo's, her indignation is not pure *nemesian*, but is tainted with self-righteousness. This comes out more clearly when she prepares herself to tell Claudio of Angelo's offer. She tries to forget that Claudio "hath fallen by prompture of the blood" by asserting that he retains "such a mind of honour / That had he twenty heads to tender down / On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up" before he'd let her be defiled. She associates herself with him on the grounds that his sin was not an innate human weakness but an accident, and so assumes that he will clearly see the infinitely greater value of her purity than of his life.

Claudio doesn't, of course, and when Isabella realizes this failure, her self-righteousness bleeds into malice just as had Angelo's. Steven Marx agrees, pointing out that she becomes guilty "not because of her choice to preserve her chastity and refuse the cruel bargain, but because of her righteous malice that now, like Angelo's, would condemn her brother to death."⁷⁶ When Claudio begs, "Sweet sister, let me live," her earlier reluctance to associate herself with him becomes an outright denial of kinship:

⁷⁶ Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*, 87. Marx's phrase "righteous malice" is a little careless.

“Heaven shield my mother played my father fair, / For such a warped slip of wilderness / Ne’er issued from his blood” (3.1.144-46). She would rather think that her mother cheated than that she and Claudio shared a father, and so spits at the bastard prisoner before her:

Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I’ll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee. (3.1.147-150)

Just as Angelo had hyperbolically condemned Claudio, so here does Isabella, and in even more extreme terms. Gregory Lanier suggests that this is a demonstration of Isabella’s “tendency to tragic excess” which the Duke will work to cure with “comic temperance,”⁷⁷ but both her and Angelo’s excesses correspond more closely to their lopsided comic humours, which can feel only an extremity of indignation for one who ought to evoke their pity. As well, the very extremity of her emotion, combined with our knowledge of the Duke’s presence on the opposite side of the stage, holds this moment back from the inevitability of tragedy and leads us to expect the unravelling of the comic knot that is here finally tied.

Nonetheless, Isabella’s fury does seem meant to arouse a degree of indignation toward her in the audience, building on what the play has already aroused. The Duke’s first description of Angelo’s comic error is immediately succeeded by Isabella’s lopsided fixation with the regulations of cloistered life: “And have you nuns no farther privileges?” (1.4.1). This juxtaposition elicits the sort of mild indignation that Beatrice and Benedick’s introduction did in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Her initial discussion with Angelo, especially in its awkward early stages, sustains this mild indignation, but her

⁷⁷ Lanier, “Tragicomic Structure,” 26, 30.

intelligence and eloquence keep it well in check, even when, in their second discussion, Angelo's plot intensifies our indignation toward him. But the malice that she shows Claudio in the next scene once again connects her and Angelo and thus brings out a much stronger form of indignation. This feeling desires, it seems to me, that Isabella's hyper-rational and uncompassionate view of sin and law be corrected. Brian Gibbons suggests that the effect of this and the preceding highly emotional scenes is to "sweep audiences away on an emotional switchback" in a manner characteristic of tragicomedy.⁷⁸ Emotional ebb and flow is certainly portrayed, but I think that her and Angelo's excessive indignation invite a corresponding but more genuinely righteous *nemeses* that rejects, rather than follows, their emotional deficiencies and desires their correction. And at the same time, this indignation is not without the amusement provided by Count Claudio's sort of hyperbole: "the adolescent transparency" of Isabella's feelings, perceives Arthur Kirsch, brings about in the theatre a unique "combination of sympathy and incipient amusement in our response" to her.⁷⁹ Once again, the Duke's concealed presence throughout this scene and our continuing expectation of his intervention (which comes immediately) "necessarily disengages us to some extent from the action, ...and modulates our response to potentially tragic situations."⁸⁰

The Duke's chief tactic in disabusing Angelo and Isabella of their comic error is to manipulate their excessive indignation. He has a first hand look at Isabella's virulence in her discussion with Claudio. At the same time, her report of Angelo's duplicity combines with the Duke's pre-existing suspicion of him to give him a clear

⁷⁸ Gibbons, Introduction, 46.

⁷⁹ Kirsch, *Experience of Love*, 103.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

understanding of Angelo's error. He perceives that the rationalistic legalism and pitilessness that motivates the malice of each requires no less than Claudio's death for its satisfaction. Isabella says explicitly to Claudio what Angelo must also think: "Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade... 'Tis best that thou diest quickly" (3.1.152-54). So the Duke gives to each at least the semblance of what they desire, sending a substitute head to Angelo to confirm Claudio's execution and telling Isabella that he has been unable to save her brother. He seems to guess, though, that this will ultimately satisfy the malice of neither, and so provides cause for them to redirect their indignation at Claudio toward each other, and then gives each the opportunity to have it satisfied. In Act 5, the Duke gives Angelo scope to prosecute his accuser and Isabella the chance to see Angelo paid back for his corruption. While I will save a detailed investigation of this for the next chapter, the Duke's consistent interest in his dealings with both of them is to determine what, ultimately, will satisfy their indignation.

Just before Angelo's indignation against Isabella arises in Act 5, though, there is a brief but remarkable scene in which he genuinely feels the justice of her cause. After making arrangements with Escalus for the Duke's return, Angelo again displays the remarkable self-awareness he had demonstrated just before blackmailing Isabella. "This deed," he says of his crime against her,

unshapes me quite, makes me unpregnant
And dull to all proceedings. A deflowered maid,
And by an eminent body that enforced
The law against it! But that her tender shame
Will not proclaim against her maiden loss,
How might she tongue me! (4.4.18-23)

Angelo feels indignation here at his own deed before he feels it toward Isabella for trying to expose him. Moreover, the emotion is enabled by an act of pity or empathy: he steps

outside of himself to consider his crime through the eyes of another. This posture, though, also produces a fear of Claudio's indignation toward him:

[Claudio] should have lived,
Save that his riotous youth with dangerous sense
Might in the times to come have ta'en revenge
By so receiving a dishonoured life
With ransom of such shame. Would yet he had lived!
Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,
Nothing goes right; we would, and we would not. (26-32)

It is ultimately this fear of another's indignation that overpowers his own indignation at himself. Profoundly, when a tragic emotion trumps the comic one within Angelo, the result is a belief in tragic necessity ("we would, and we would not") just at the moment when the Duke's hoax is poised to bring about a comic sort.

For now, though, and for us, Isabella's heartfelt sorrow over Claudio when she learns of his "death" are sufficient to satisfy our indignation towards her. Her tears are explicitly mentioned almost immediately after the Duke tells her that Claudio is dead and then regularly until she exits. That she has let go of her indignation towards Claudio is further demonstrated by the alacrity with which she transfers it to Angelo, who is certainly a more worthy object of it – "O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!" (4.3.117). The audience, I think, is meant to follow this twofold motion, its indignation toward Isabella satisfied and that toward Angelo sustained. This latter is carefully checked, though, by the knowledge that the Duke has saved Claudio and consistently prevented Angelo from actually exercising his power, even against Barnardine. As a result, the Duke's apparent decision to sentence Angelo to death in Act 5 appears too harsh for what he has actually done. This brief sense of excess makes the Duke's eventual pardon more palatable. In asking for it, Isabella provides the paradigm necessary for our

indignation toward Angelo to be satisfied, one that Marianna has previously suggested to her. Her plea describes Angelo as a *phanlos* character whose error is essentially comic. By citing the “due sincerity [that] governed his deeds / ‘Till he did look on me,” she labels his error as self-ignorance, not malice (5.1.447-48). In putting Claudio to death, Angelo did nothing outside the law, she argues, and his unlawful intentions toward her were only those of a foiled fool which “must be buried but as an intent / ‘That perished by the way.” (453-54). J. W. Lever points out that in this, Angelo is only a more extreme form of the play’s other comic characters: “*Measure for Measure*...is concerned with error, not evil; with correction, not retribution.... It is in the nature of the play that Isabella’s personality, like the personalities of Claudio and of Angelo, should seem neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, but basically self-ignorant.”⁸¹

Even as the play recommends Isabella’s comic forgiveness of Angelo to us, though, it also provides impediments to it. As with Count Claudio’s, Shakespeare goes out of his way to make Angelo’s repentance to be at best only partial. But unlike *Much Ado About Nothing*, there is no scapegoat figure whose punishment can provide the satisfaction of indignation not afforded by other characters’ pardons. Alan Bloom notes that “the Duke’s justice...leaves no one with the satisfactions of indignation, of getting back at offenders,” even after he has clearly tempted Isabella and Angelo with this prospect.⁸² What the Duke does offer, he suggests, are the “natural satisfactions” of marriages and reunions, and I think there is more to this than Bloom makes of it.⁸³ In a profound way, Shakespeare takes the central theme of the play, justice and mercy, and

⁸¹ Lever, Introduction, lxxxii.

⁸² Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, 76.

⁸³ Ibid.

works his conclusions on that thematic level into the concluding emotional effect of the plot. To demand punishments that directly satisfy our indignation would be to follow the initial example of Angelo and Isabella, something which the plays suggests will inevitably implicate us. But even though Angelo is not punished for his crime, there are consequences for it: he is publicly shown to be the worst sort of hypocrite, and he may well believe that death is better than having to live down this shame. He is also forced to rectify the one thing he has indeed done, breaking off his engagement to Marianna. Because the marriage is desirable to her and economically beneficial, I think Shakespeare asks his audience to find this non-retributive justice satisfying on a deeper, poetic level. Angelo gets what he deserves, but it is also something (potentially, at least) good for him.

Increasingly in the last thirty years, the Duke has also been felt to arouse audience indignation. Marcia Riefer was one of the first to challenge from a feminist perspective the benevolent status that previous critics had usually bestowed on him; Jonathan Dollimore, from a cultural materialist one.⁸⁴ Recent stage productions especially have taken up their suspicion of the Duke's virtue. Most analyses of this sort depend upon reading the Duke fairly realistically, and contrary to the allegorical vogue that held critical sway for several decades prior. Certainly there are strongly realistic aspects to the portrayals of Angelo and Isabella, especially in the play's first half. Much of my argument in the last chapter, though, demonstrates that there remains in each a surprising degree of comic conventionality. This has important ramifications for reading the Duke. If Angelo's and Isabella's humours keep this play from ever really becoming tragic, I think the strongly conventional and metadramatic aspects of the Duke help check suspicion of

⁸⁴ See Riefer, "Instruments," and Dollimore, "Transgression."

him. Lucio is the character in the play who treats him most realistically, suggesting to the Friar all manner of personal compulsions and weaknesses that have motivated the Duke's previous legal laxity and current absence. In light of these speculations, he might well be seen to recommend such a realistic approach. The play's conclusion, though, shows Lucio's charges to be almost certainly false: to the undisguised Duke he rattles off a very similar list of Friar Lodowick's vices which we know to be patently false, thereby discrediting the most slanderous of his earlier hypotheses about the "Duke of dark corners" (4.3.154-55). Northrop Frye suggests that Lucio is representative of the "vestigial realism"⁸⁵ that stays with us through the course of any drama, but especially the sort which asks us "to accept folktale conventions in the plot, where a ruler, like Harun al-Rashid, moves disguised through his people, and in which a pious friar talks a pious young woman into a very dubious scheme designed to immobilize her seducer."⁸⁶ As a result, "we do not wholly lose sight of the fact that in real life the Duke would be an intolerable snoop," but neither is that knowledge supposed to dominate our understanding.⁸⁷ The Duke remains, as I will show more clearly in the next chapter, first and foremost a dramatist working towards a particular comic ending, but not entirely sure how to get there. Certainly he induces pain in his unwitting actors along the way, but if this fact alone arouses our indignation, it may be because we have forgotten what he is trying to teach his actors: that it is a worse thing to be in error and self-ignorance than to suffer pain.

⁸⁵ Frye, *On Shakespeare*, 153.

⁸⁶ Frye, *Myth of Deliverance*, 24.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

Comic Catharsis

Aristotle offers little direct help in understanding the term *katharsis*. It occurs only once in the text of the extant *Poetics*, and yet that occurrence makes it the end or purpose of tragedy: “Tragedy...accomplishes by means of pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions” (1449b). As a result, the word has suffered all manner of speculation. With only a little exaggeration, Gerald Else lamented in 1957 that “Every variety of moral, aesthetic, and therapeutic effect that is or could be experienced from tragedy has been subsumed under the venerable word at one time or another.”¹ This fact has naturally led to calls (few but regular) for debate about catharsis to be given up as an interminable exercise in futility. After reproachfully surveying the vast array of theories that have been built upon this very small patch of ground, Kenneth Bennett concludes that it is time for dramatic criticism to search out other foundations than catharsis: “Instead of belabouring the problem of purgation or purification, we need to ask different, more penetrating questions about the whole emotive aspect of literature.”² While Bennett’s declaration is not without value, the thirty years since his article have seen neither a further fracturing of opinion on catharsis nor cessation of the discussion, but the emergence of a significant general consensus on the meaning of the term among a group of leading *Poetics* scholars. Their work does indeed address Bennett’s call for inquiry into

¹ Else, *Aristotle’s “Poetics”: The Argument*, 439.

² Bennett, “Purging,” 211.

literature's emotional affect, but does so by digging deeper into Aristotle's theory, rather than by abandoning it. Moreover, where most discussions of catharsis have focused exclusively on tragedy, this work explores more fully than before the nature of comic catharsis.³

To the best of our knowledge, serious discussion about the meaning of Aristotle's catharsis begins with Cinquecento commentators who, with the Horatian dichotomy between *docere* and *delectare* "firmly fixed in their minds,...looked for an answer to the question, on which side does Aristotle stand."⁴ Catharsis, most assumed, was Aristotle's account of the *utile* of drama. Robortello, the first to deal in detail with the term, argued that catharsis involved gaining emotional fortitude to withstand the misfortunes of life; Bernardo Segni, that it was simply one of the means by which literature teaches its inevitable moral lesson; Vincenzo Maggi (Madius), that catharsis involved the removal of a host of vicious emotions, for which pity and fear are only the conduit.⁵ While the twentieth-century interpretations I will consider certainly do not discount the moral dimension of catharsis, "it was in the belief that *katharsis* entailed a straightforward moral proreptic that a majority of [Renaissance] interpreters reduced the idea to an inappropriately basic level of didacticism."⁶ This tendency was wholly adopted by the 17th century French formulators of neo-classicism, and held sway until well into the 19th century.

³ Catharsis is explicitly linked only with tragedy in the *Poetics*, leading scholars like Gerald Else (*The Argument*, 447) and Elder Olson (*The Theory of Comedy*, 36) to conclude that Aristotle did not think comedy effected a catharsis. As I discuss below, however, Golden, Janko, and Halliwell argue for the fundamental place of catharsis in Aristotle's understanding of *all* dramatic mimeses, not just tragedy.

⁴ Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 300.

⁵ For brief accounts of each of these, see Kostić, "Renaissance Poetics," 63-64.

⁶ Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 300.

This didacticism is precisely what Jacob Bernays took issue with in his seminal 1857 paper *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama*. Bernays based his argument against the prevailing opinion on Aristotle's use of the term catharsis in the *Politics*. In the context of discussing the education of children, Aristotle there observes that music, another form of mimesis, has several different benefits:

It should be pursued for the sake of education {*paideia*} and for the release of emotion [*katharsis*] (the sense of that term will be explained more clearly in our lectures on poetics, but may be left to speak for itself at the moment): a third is to live in a cultivated way {*diagōgē*}, that is with a view to recreation and relaxation from strain.⁷

He then goes on to illustrate this cathartic effect by describing the ecstasy induced by the music accompanying Corybantic ritual:

The feeling of being possessed by some sort of inspiration is one to which some people are particularly liable. These people...are affected by religious melodies; and when they come under the influence of melodies which fill the soul with religious excitement they are calmed and restored as if they had undergone a medical treatment and purging {*katharsis*}. (8.1341b)

Insisting that because Aristotle's *Politics* explicitly cross-references his "lectures on poetics," Bernays describes the catharsis of tragedy as closely parallel to this account of catharsis from music. This comparison thus disallows the opinion of past commentators, "according to which the theatre is an offspring and a rival of the Church and an institution for moral improvement," and posits a position "neither moral nor purely hedonistic" (as Goethe had argued) but instead "pathological": "ecstasy turns to calm through orgiastic songs as sickness turns to health through medical treatment."⁸ Aristotle, he claims, has transferred "from the physical to the emotional sphere" a term

⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 8.1341b (insertions of Greek terms in braces are mine). I cite the *Politics* by book and Bekker number, and all subsequent quotations are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Bernays, "Effect of Tragedy," 157-9.

describing “the sort of treatment of an oppressed person which seeks not to alter or to subjugate the oppressive element but to arouse it and draw it out, and thus to achieve some sort of relief for the oppressed.”⁹ Catharsis becomes an answer to Plato’s charge that by arousing emotions, drama subjects people to them; instead, people are purged of potentially excessive emotions and freed from their harmful effects. Bernays was thus a precursor to Freud (his uncle by marriage) in shifting explanations of human emotional experience from the moral realm to the psychological and pathological realm.

Bernays’s opinion has held “almost universal assent” until recently.¹⁰ Gerald Else was one of the first to identify fundamental problems in it by questioning the relevance of the *Politics* passage to the *Poetics*’ concept of catharsis. Bernays’s view, he asserts, presupposes that like participants in the ecstatic Corybantic rites,

we come to the tragic drama as patients to be cured, relieved, restored to psychic health. But there is not a word to support this in the *Poetics*, not a hint that the end of drama is to cure or alleviate psychological states. On the contrary it is evident in every line of the work that Aristotle is presupposing *normal* auditors, normal states of mind and feeling, normal emotional and aesthetic experience.¹¹

There is a fundamental difference between the audiences of each event: the state of ecstatic possession to which the Corybantic devotee is driven by music would make impossible the conscious cognition of plot and character that Aristotle sets up as the primary requirement for dramatic catharsis. If earlier commentators had made of the drama “a moral house of correction,”¹² as Bernays claimed, he replaces it “with an alternative vision of it as a psychiatric clinic.”¹³

⁹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Articles on Aristotle*, viii.

¹¹ Else, *Aristotle’s “Poetics”: The Argument*, 440-1.

¹² Bernays, “Effect of Tragedy,” 155.

¹³ Halliwell, *Aristotle’s “Poetics”*, 198.

Moreover, this pathological account of catharsis shares Plato's negative view of the emotions as faculties to be subdued, and reduces Aristotle's quarrel with him to a question of whether drama enflames or expels them. But as we have already seen in the discussion of comic error, proper feeling is integral to Aristotle's account of the virtuous person. Janko questions Bernays on just this point, noting that "Aristotle recognized that well-balanced emotional reactions are a crucial factor...in forming and maintaining good character," and not harmful entities from which the soul needs to be purged and liberated.¹⁴ Implicit throughout Aristotle's account of how the carefully structured plot arouses emotion is the belief – remarkable in contrast to Plato – that when properly trained, "emotions such as pity and fear are consistent with reason and are a reflex of its judgments," rather than antagonistic to it.¹⁵ The problem with Bernays's argument, then, is not simply his reading of catharsis, but of Aristotle's understanding of the place of emotion in the fully developed person. Where Bernays would have emotion purged away as harmful, Janko insists that Aristotle's point is that "sometimes one *should* feel such emotions as pity, anger or fear, if they are felt towards the right object, to the proper degree, in the correct way, and at the right time."¹⁶

In his etymological account of the term *katharsis*, Bernays insists that it can only mean one of two things: ritual purification (which he rejects) or the relieving of a sort of sickness. Golden, however, points out a previously unacknowledged possibility for the term as describing the "intellectual clarification" that results from philosophical investigation. Both Epicurus and Philodemus used the term in this sense, and in the

¹⁴ Janko, "Aristotelian Mean," 343.

¹⁵ Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 196.

¹⁶ Janko, "Aristotelian Mean," 343.

Sophist, Plato writes an extended discussion that uses *katharsis* to describe an intellectual process. In their dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus agree that there are two sorts of catharsis or “purification”: of the body and of the soul.¹⁷ They agree that it is the removal of evil that constitutes catharsis of the soul, and that this is accomplished through philosophic instruction. The purification of instruction cannot be received, though, until self-ignorance has been expelled by *elenchos* – “cross-examination” or “refutation” (230D). Just as medical doctors purge impediments to proper digestion before administering healthful food, claims the Stranger, so those who purify the soul believe

that it will not have the benefit of the learnings to be applied before one puts, by way of refutation, the one examined into a state of shame, takes out the opinions that are impediments to the learnings, and shows him forth pure and believing he knows just the things he does know and no more. (230C-D)

Because of this, he concludes, “refutation is after all the greatest and most authoritative of purifications” (230D). While there are obvious differences between this sort of catharsis and that to which Aristotle alludes in the *Poetics*, the term is “just as much part of an intellectual tradition in which it signifies learning and clarification as it is part of a medical tradition in which it represents purgation.”¹⁸ Martha Nussbaum not only affirms Golden’s assertion, but presses his point further by considering more broadly the *katharo-* family of words and its uses: “It becomes quite evident that the primary, ongoing, central meaning is roughly one of ‘clearing up’ or ‘clarification,’ i.e. of the removal of some obstacle (dirt, or blot, or obscurity, or admixture) that makes the item

¹⁷ Plato, *Sophist*, 227D. This and all subsequent quotations of the *Sophist* are cited by Stephanus numbers; subsequent quotations are cited parenthetically in the text

¹⁸ Golden, *Mimesis*, 24.

in question less *clear* than it is in its proper state.”¹⁹ Moreover, Nussbaum observes that throughout its history of usage, never does “the process-word *katharsis* get semantically separated from the family; it designates simply the process that yields a *katharos* [clear, pure] result, the removal of obstacles whose absence gives that result.”²⁰ The medical use of the term for a physiological “purgation” which Bernays advocated is thus a specialized, rather than primary, meaning.

That Aristotle means us to understand dramatic catharsis as related to this intellectual tradition is demonstrated by his early statement that the pleasure we derive from *mimeses* results from learning and inference: “learning is most pleasant,” and people “delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one” (1348b). Golden argues that if drama is essentially and necessarily a representation whose end is catharsis, then catharsis must be integrally related to this experience of learning and inference that the representation brings about. Underlying Plato’s whole discussion in the *Sophist*, says Golden, is the belief that “there is a cathartic dimension to the art of making distinctions” – just the action implied by Aristotle’s learning and inference.²¹ This view is also urged by Aristotle’s introduction to his definition of tragedy, where he says of tragedy that “the definition of its essence...results from what we have said” (1449b). If the preceding introductory chapters have already introduced us in some way to the key aspects of the definition, then catharsis – the only part of it to deal with the goal or result of tragedy – would logically pair with Aristotle’s previous discussion of learning and

¹⁹ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 389.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

²¹ Golden, *Mimesis*, 23.

inference as the effect of representation generally. In addition, Aristotle once again locates learning and inference at the heart of tragedy's nature when he later claims that it deals with "universals," not simply particulars (1451b). The movement from the particular actor and action on stage to the universal types they represent, argues Golden, once again crucially involves cognition and learning. In each case, Aristotle identifies a cognitive response as essential to *mimesis*. So when in the definition of tragedy he doesn't do so explicitly, these other statements of drama's effect, combined with the whole usage tradition of the term *katharsis*, still point to "intellectual clarification." Ultimately, then, tragedy "leads us from an encounter with some particular pitiable or fearful event to the philosophical comprehension of the universal nature of pity and fear in human existence."²² That the same must be said for "tragedy and comedy," Golden continues, "results from our earlier argument that *katharsis* as 'intellectual clarification' is a function of all mimetic activity for Aristotle."²³ Indeed, the *Poetics*' first five chapters, which provide this introduction to catharsis, devote equal time to describing tragedy and comedy. "It is *mimesis, qua mimesis*," Golden concludes, "that generates the intellectual pleasure in learning and inference," which form the basis of catharsis.²⁴

On the one hand, Golden's account has real potency as a response to Plato's rejection of poetry. For a Platonist, says Nussbaum, "it would be profoundly shocking to read of cognitive clarification produced by the influence of pity and fear: first, because the Platonic soul gets to clarity only when no emotions disturb it; second, because these

²² Ibid., 26.

²³ Ibid., 98.

²⁴ Ibid.

emotions are especially irrational.”²⁵ On the other, the most consistent charge that has been levelled against Golden is that “intellectual clarification” implies thinking about emotion more than actually feeling it. Aristotle’s definition of tragedy states that the catharsis is accomplished “by means of pity and fear” – the emotions themselves – rather than by intellectual comprehension of them. Golden sidesteps this fact by translating *di’ elēon kai phobou* (“by means of pity and fear”) in the definition of tragedy as “through the representation of pitiable and fearful events,” thus excluding emotion from the play’s central effect. While not an impossible rendering of the phrase, it is highly strained, and since its introduction by Else in 1957, has gained almost no critical support.²⁶

Just as importantly, Golden’s description of just how catharsis transpires betrays an unrealistic understanding of how one perceives drama. Watching a tragedy, he believes, requires that we

process intellectually the flow of data from the drama whose carefully structured beginning, middle, and end is linked by dramatic and psychological necessity and probability. We must make judgments about...character and action..., ...determine whether the mistake made by the hero is morally corrupt or venial, ...and as a result...come to a decision as to whether pity and fear or other emotions are appropriate to the circumstances we have witnessed.²⁷

Golden is obviously trying to dissect what is a compressed, nearly instantaneous experience, but his description makes watching tragedy an activity akin to analyzing an argument in an undergraduate philosophy class. Instead of feeling emotions that the plot aims to arouse, we “make judgments, “we determine,” and we “come to a decision” about the play. These activities are all important to fully comprehending a play, of

²⁵ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 390.

²⁶ See Sifakis, *Function*, 102.

²⁷ Golden, *Mimesis*, 31.

course, but they are in no way prior to the amazement, pity and fear, and general pleasure that Aristotle everywhere identifies as the immediate effects of tragedy. We don't *decide* upon a reaction to a play, we *have* one, and only afterwards, consider its propriety. This is why Aristotle places such stress on the play's plot arrangement: if it is properly structured, it will necessarily arouse in the attentive audience the proper response. Conversely, badly structured action will inevitably arouse an improper response. Janko points out that Aristotle identifies this sort of failed reaction as *miarōn* - "shock" or "revulsion" (1453b). The term literally means "'dirtiness' – the opposite, surely, of *catharsis*, which means 'cleansing' or 'purification.'"²⁸ In such an experience, "our feelings are not worked through and made comprehensible."²⁹ Golden has the audience critically assizing the play's success before we have felt its effect.

While supportive of his central argument, Nussbaum parts ways with Golden at this point, arguing that his view becomes "unnecessarily Platonic" in its minimalization of actual emotion.³⁰ To be fair, Golden's literary examples of catharsis involve feeling, not simply contemplating, emotion, and this sort of inclusion is more prominent in his later accounts of his theory than his original ones.³¹ Nonetheless, Nussbaum counters that just as in the *Antigone* "Creon's learning came by way of the grief he felt for his son's death, so, as we watch a tragic character, it is frequently not thought but the emotional response itself that leads us to understand what our values are."³² Emotions precede and even enable rational understanding, opening up previously unrealized possibilities for

²⁸ Janko, Introduction, xvii.

²⁹ Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 142.

³⁰ Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 391.

³¹ Nussbaum (ibid., 503n18) acknowledges this.

³² Ibid., 391.

thought and “giv[ing] us access to a truer and deeper level of ourselves.”³³ Moreover, even to respond with pity and fear is “valuable, and a piece of clarification concerning who we are” – a recognition “no less important than the perception of our intellect.”³⁴ Nussbaum thus opens up the potential of Golden’s argument about clarification that his own application misses, linking intellectual clarification to rightly stimulated emotion in a more consistently Aristotelian way.

Both Halliwell and Janko concur with Nussbaum on the importance of the relationship between reason and emotion in catharsis, and their fuller explanations therefore further Golden’s preliminary insights. In doing this, both return to the *Politics* 8 passage central to Bernays’s argument, which Golden dismisses as unrelated to dramatic catharsis. With Else and Golden, Halliwell rejects the relevance of Corybantic catharsis to drama, but insists that the *Politics*’ explicit cross-reference to the *Poetics* demands explanation. In that passage, he explains, Aristotle contrasts the effects of different sorts of music on different sorts of people. The effect that the most intense forms of music have on the most intensely emotional people he identifies as catharsis, while more moderate music, “expressive of character,” is used for the moral education of youth (*paideia*, 1341b). These different effects, though, have a crucial point of similarity. Religious melodies “fill the soul” of the ecstatic devotee “with religious excitement,” after which “they are calmed and restored as if they had undergone a medical treatment and purging [*katharsis*].” The music used for education instead provides students with “images of states of character...– images of anger, and of calm, of courage, and of temperance, and of their opposite feelings,” with the aim of habituating listeners to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

“forming right judgements on, and feeling delight in, fine characters and good actions” (8.1340a). Both sorts of people are thus led, by different sorts of music, to attain a just mean in their emotions. Halliwell argues that as both experiences lead to clarity with respect to right emotion, and the more moderate sort of people are much closer to the audience Aristotle envisions for drama, “*katharsis* may after all be in some cases compatible with the process which Aristotle characterises in *Politics* 8 as a matter of habituation in feeling the emotions in the right way and towards the right objects.”³⁵ Not only do we gain a “philosophical comprehension of the universal nature of pity and fear in human existence,” as Golden describes it, but those emotions are themselves trained or educated in some fashion. The intellectual self-awareness resulting from *elenchos* is thus paired with a concurrent development of the emotions.

Janko expands Halliwell’s observations about *paideia* by incorporating Aristotle’s designation of *diagōgē*, “cultivated” or “educative entertainment,” as a third use of music (8.1341b). Childhood *paideia* is “a means to the {*diagōgē*} they will be able to enjoy when they reach their full growth as adults,” says Aristotle (8.1339a). Janko points out that *diagōgē* thus performs “for adults the function which *paideia* performs for children, i.e. training of both the emotions and the intelligence,”³⁶ but in an especially pleasurable way. This training occurs, I would add, in a way that is incidentally, not primarily, didactic. This is implied by what Aristotle describes as the inevitability of learning from the various sorts of *mimeses* that we see: they cause us to learn and infer by their nature as *mimeses*, not because of an author’s intent. Catharsis involves the habituation of emotion and judgement, as Halliwell asserts, but in a way that is distinctly pleasurable.

³⁵ Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 195-96.

³⁶ Janko, “Catharsis,” 345.

Janko provides significant evidence that this is how Aristotle's dramatic catharsis was understood in antiquity, and that it was believed to apply equally to tragedy and comedy. The Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (ca. 280-340 AD) writes that "in both comedy and tragedy," our emotions "are briefly put into activity, and brought to the point of due proportion"; they thus "give delight in moderation, are satisfied and purified."³⁷ The *Tractatus* echoes this idea of "due proportion" in one's emotions when it states (rather awkwardly) that "There wishes to be a due proportion of terror in tragedies and of the laughable in comedies."³⁸ In both cases, "due proportion" is Janko's translation of *symmetria*, a word with clear relevance to Aristotle's idea of the virtuous mean in emotion, and to which, Halliwell argues, drama can bring us. The later Neoplatonist Proclus (412-485) directly refers to Aristotle's quarrel with Plato over drama when he describes an experience similar to that spoken of by Iamblichus. Proclus makes explicit the connection between catharsis and emotional education, stating that by means of

tragedy and comedy...it is possible to satisfy the emotions in due measure, and, by satisfying them, to keep them tractable for education.... It was this that gave Aristotle, and the defenders of these [kinds of] poetry in his dialogue against Plato, most of the ground for their accusation [against him].³⁹

Proclus here refers to Aristotle's argument in the lost *On Poets*, that both tragedy and comedy exercise the emotions in a way that at the same time allows for the intellectual cognition of learning. Proclus implicitly acknowledges the volatility of the emotions and their propensity to prohibit understanding, but suggests that Aristotle saw drama as a

³⁷ Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 59.

³⁸ *Tractatus*, 45.

³⁹ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's "Republic,"* 60. Words within square brackets are Janko's insertions.

way to involve emotion in the training of the soul. It is interesting to note that both Iamblichus and Proclus nod towards catharsis as purgation, or an alleviation of emotion, but only so far as it moderates, rather than expels, emotion. The purpose of catharsis in their accounts, summarizes Janko,

is not to drain our emotional capacities..., instead it is to predispose us to feel emotion in the right way, at the right time, towards the right object, with the right motive, and to the proper degree.... Catharsis 'brings our emotions nearer to those of a good and wise man,' i.e. to equilibrium or emotional balance, the Golden Mean. The restoration of balance naturally causes pleasure.⁴⁰

As Golden and Halliwell's work makes clear, the intellect is at all times concurrently involved in this process. It is crucial to recall that for Aristotle, plots which best evoke emotion are necessarily the ones that most engage our intellects in the act of philosophical inference. Tracking a play's action, its cause and effect, and the moral status of its characters and their choices all require the work of the intellect. We are at every turn recognizing, inferring, and questioning, even as these turns arouse our emotions. The connections we make influence our emotions even as our emotions reveal or enable further connections. The rational causality flashes before the mind at the same time as the emotion wrenches the gut. The deeply practical and experiential knowledge we gain from this pairs with the habituation our emotions receive, and the natural corollary of this is pleasure. Catharsis is thus akin to the high intellectual pleasure we derive from representational art *and* to the learning of moral lessons, just as Golden insists. At the same time, though, this pleasure arises from the experience of emotion and the learning and inferring such an experience both responds to and prompts.

⁴⁰ Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 141, citing Humphrey House.

The essential difference between this understanding of catharsis and that advocated for the most part in the Renaissance is that the latter makes catharsis “synonymous with direct ethical teaching or protreptic”:⁴¹ drama teaches by example, warning us away from vice or exhorting us to virtue by representing the results of each. Amongst such reductive accounts, though, were several that prefigured contemporary accounts. Pietro Vettori, in his 1560 Latin translation and commentary, was the first person after late antiquity to see that catharsis was a central part of Aristotle’s argument with Plato about the emotions. Several years later, Alessandro Piccolomini’s vernacular commentary first linked catharsis with Aristotle’s broader ethical system, declaring that catharsis was the reduction of excessive passions to the just mean of virtue.

Building on these, Heinsius’ Latin translation and commentary of 1611 offers the most subtle Renaissance account of catharsis. Halliwell calls his work “the purest and most illuminating statement yet achieved of some of the chief ideas of Aristotle’s work,”⁴² but only refers to it in passing; Janko and Golden seem unaware of it. Following Piccolomini, Heinsius links catharsis with Aristotle’s larger theory of the emotions’ valid place in the soul by explaining it as Aristotle’s response to Pythagoras and Plato’s suspicion of the passions. To Aristotle, though, emotions “are neither virtues nor vices,” but when “admitted according to the rule of reason,” they are conducive to the sort of “habit that...can make a man wise.”⁴³ In the form of habit, then, “virtue...springs from the passions,” which in turn are aroused by “representation in tragedy.”⁴⁴ While Heinsius does not explicitly refer to the passions’ ability to enable and clarify thought, the passage

⁴¹ Halliwell, *Aristotle’s “Poetics”*, 351.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴³ Heinsius, *On Plot in Tragedy*, 11-12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

just quoted is written particularly to refute Pythagoras' assertion that the passions inhibit the highest intellectual labour of contemplation. His subsequent examples of emotional habituation implicitly attribute to emotion the ability to clarify judgment and thought: "just as anyone who, with long practice, has readied himself for performance, properly executes a given art, so by a certain conditioning to the objects by which the passions of the soul are stimulated, their mean is induced."⁴⁵ Like Janko, Heinsius returns to Proclus' description of catharsis as the "refin[ing]" of passions: "When these have attained their mean and hold the measure they should, they are conducive not only to understanding virtue, but also to *imbibing knowledge*."⁴⁶ An experienced battlefield surgeon, he suggests, is motivated but not overwhelmed by pity for a wounded man; a veteran soldier's mind is sharpened but not ruled by fear of the imminent battle. "This is what the things exhibited in the theatre must answer to, because it is a kind of training hall for our passions which (since they are not only useful in life but even necessary) must there be readied and perfected."⁴⁷ He thus not only suggests with Golden and Nussbaum the clarifying potential of emotion, but expands with well-conceived examples Halliwell's and Janko's accounts of the habituation of emotion. Heinsius' was the leading voice of a small but compelling Renaissance minority who realized that there is indeed a moral dimension to catharsis, but that it is realized not by explicit example or teaching, but indirectly, through the experience and comprehension of emotion.⁴⁸ The current critics

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13, italics mine.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Paul Sellin ("Sources") argues that Milton derived the account of catharsis in his introduction to *Samson Agonistes* from Heinsius. Milton (Introduction, 3-6) there explains that tragedy was described "by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated."

recover this tradition, long buried by Bernays's a-moral, pathological explanation of drama's effect, which has come to look increasingly like a product of the times rather than of Aristotle's philosophy.⁴⁹

Most treatments of catharsis, whether Renaissance or recent, focus on tragedy. It is not hard, though, to extrapolate several principles from these that would describe the comic catharsis of indignation. First of all, it cannot be equivalent to the satisfaction of the indignation that a comedy initially arouses. As I have argued, such satisfaction is a part of the arousal of indignation that precedes catharsis, a two-fold emotional movement not paralleled in tragedy but proper to comedy because of its typically double ending. Catharsis must instead involve both the arousal and satisfaction of indignation towards a suitable object, to the right degree, and in the right way. As with tragedy, this is done by way of the plot, but comedy will also rely heavily upon the folly of its central characters, which Aristotle describes as of special significance for comedy. Comedy will require keen intellectual attention to causality and the nature of folly even as it arouses and satisfies indignation, resulting both in some realization about the nature of this emotion and in its tempering and moderation.

Though Janko accepts the *Tractatus*' assertion that "pleasure and laughter" are the emotions of comedy, his conclusion about their catharsis is still helpful: "we can attain the mean concerning [pleasure] by purifying our tendency to excess or deficiency in laughter and amusement."⁵⁰ Jonson's comments on comedy in the *Discoveries* and several of his dramatic prologues suggest a way that laughter, this central concern of Janko and

⁴⁹ It is the greatest of ironies that Heinsius, who in this and several other important instances (especially the whole idea of unified action) perceived the truly speculative nature of the *Poetics*, should become the godfather of the French neo-classical movement, which did even more than the *cinquecento* to reduce Aristotle to the dramatic rule-maker *par excellence*. For a summary account of this, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 301-8.

⁵⁰ Janko, "Catharsis," 352.

the *Tractatus*, relates to the intellectual seriousness of the plot. We have seen how he thinks that laughter can be little more than “a fooling for the people’s delight, or their fooling,” a distraction from the real point of comedy (453). The reason for this, interestingly enough, is that the aspect of a comedy that most arouses laughter from “the beast, the multitude” is that which most “runs from reason, or possibility” – mere “stage jesting, and relishing a play-house, invented for scorn and laughter,” foregrounding “scurrility...in place of wit” (453-54). Jonson associates the most raucous laughter with the most primitive forms of comedy. These lack the reasonable necessity of plot structure and thus lack a larger purpose. Fully developed comedy’s effect, then, must result from close attention to elements of plot, an effect which is for Jonson clearly corrective. He thus implicitly provides a sketch of comedy resulting in emotional and intellectual correction by means of a carefully wrought plot – something quite close to Golden’s argument about catharsis.

This correction, though, must still include or be brought about by the laughter that Jonson promises to evoke in the prologues to *Every Man In His Humour* and *Volpone*, and at the end of the *Every Man Out* induction. Jonson is most explicit about how this happens in *The Magnetic Lady*, where the author’s boy explains to Damplay that the effect of good comedy’s jests on the audience is to “steep their temples, and bathe their brains in laughter, to the fomenting of stupidity itself”⁵¹ – James Redwine calls this “a sort of comic catharsis, a purgation of the stupidity which custom induces.”⁵² Jonson thus implicitly recognizes what Nussbaum argues, that the emotion – a legitimate description

⁵¹ Jonson, *The Magnetic Lady*, 1.Chorus.46-47.

⁵² Redwine, *Ben Jonson’s Literary Criticism*, xxxviii.

of laughter in Jonson's use here – aroused by the drama brings about realization and enable right judgement.

While in these instances Jonson is not explicitly concerned with indignation, the plays from which they come all evoke indignation towards their objects of laughter. Regardless, Jonson's image, like Heinsius' account earlier, resembles Golden's account of intellectual clarification, as well as Halliwell's and Janko's concept of emotional education. This realization and attainment of the mean could go in one of two ways, depending on the sort of comedy from which it results. We might come to see the genuine need for indignation towards an event or character that had initially seemed harmless and merely foolish but which the play reveals to be serious. Emotionally, such a play might habituate one to avoid deficiencies of indignation that result in injustice. These functions would be especially relevant to satirical comedies; indeed, Golden's one example of comic catharsis is of this sort. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Strepsiades has foolishly submitted to the new learning that his son Pheidippides has imbibed from the sophist Socrates. "After having endured a beating from his son on grounds of filial piety, Strepsiades is filled with great indignation at Pheidippides' outrageous offer to palliate that action by beating his mother."⁵³ He finally realizes that Socrates' influence on his son is a corrupting one, and burns down the Phrontisterion as the home of this sophistry. "Thus, the comic framework of 'success without merit' comes crashing down to the ground...and the spiritually redeemed and morally reborn Strepsiades...is emancipated from its influences."⁵⁴ Golden's reading is quite rudimentary, but it illustrates the point. It is interesting to note that, as with his account of indignation,

⁵³ Golden, *Mimesis*, 96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

Golden in this example finds catharsis occurring within the play, as an experience of its characters: “Aristophanes has guided Strepsiades, as well as the audience, to an insight into the evil inherent in the sophistic world view.”⁵⁵ This parallel between characters and audience is one that will recur in each of the four plays we go on to examine.

Conversely, we might also be brought to realize the proper limits of indignation when the person or actions that arouse it are not as serious as they initially seem. Excessive indignation in us would then be tempered and brought to a mean not primarily by poetic justice, but by realizing the importance of softening the often harsh demands of the law – the function of festive comedy. Both types of comedy answer well, though, to Halliwell’s conclusion that catharsis “conduces to an ethical alignment between the emotions and the reason.” Plato’s fear was that the emotional impulse of the ridicule and laughter induced by comedy would overwhelm one’s ability to judge folly accurately in real life. But Aristotle defends against this by insisting that the good playwright keeps our minds continually engaged in the act of discernment, and that he uses the emotions he arouses to aid and enable our judgments: catharsis, says Halliwell, “tends to harmonise [our emotions] with our perceptions and judgements of the world.”⁵⁶ All of this, which is rather general in theory, comes to life in the following dramatic examples.

5.1 “Checked by strength and clearness”

In the Induction to *Every Man Out*, Asper uses two separate images to describe his purposes in penning the play that is about to be performed. He initially promises to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 201.

...strip the ragged follies of the time
Naked as at their birth...
...and with a whip of steel
Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs. (14-18)

Borrowed directly from verse satire, this image of the exposure and punishment of folly is his dominant one, closely resembling the work he does as Macilente. Cordatus expands Asper's account of such punishments when he explains to Mitis why Asper has left the catastrophe until so late in the play. It is in this delaying that

his art appears most full of lustre and approacheth nearest the life, especially when, in the flame and height of their humours, they are laid flat. It fills the eye better, and with more contentment. How tedious a sight it were to behold a proud, exalted tree lopped and cut down by degrees when it might be felled in a moment! (4.5.167-73)

This is, on the one hand, a bit of Jonson's self-justification for a plot that bears the mark of its author's youth, and so it is difficult to take entirely seriously. On the other, Cordatus is right to say that the technique succeeds in building up our desire for the characters to be "laid flat." Such a desire is a direct result of indignation: while the characters' follies have obviously made us laugh, Cordatus also expects that the incongruity of these with the good fortune they often enjoy will pique our sense of injustice and impropriety. The pleasure that we will ultimately take from their dishumoring, then, is the satisfaction of our indignation, not the experience of catharsis.

Similarly, the characters who arouse indignation hardly come to any sort of catharsis themselves. Their "purgation," argues McDonald, "is less an inevitable result of what has gone before than an act of authorial prestidigitation. Clearly Jonson wills his fools into recognition and correction."⁵⁷ The moral transformations Shakespearean comedy may have led us to expect never really happen because their prerequisite self-

⁵⁷ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 73.

realization is itself, as Lawrence Danson puts it, “a kind of catastrophe”: Saviolina, Sogliardo, Shift, Puntarvolo, Carlo, Fungoso, Deliro, Fallace, and Fastidious all slink off the stage after the explosion of their humours, never to be heard from again.⁵⁸ Mitis’s earlier objection to the play’s title are never really answered: we actually see almost none of the characters “out of his humour.” Danson finds that in the play, the “fragile, discontinuous, . . . contingent self, though native to tragedy, has found its way into the alien landscape of Jonsonian comedy.”⁵⁹ Instead of self-realization leading to amendment and reconciliation, it leads or is equivalent to self-destruction.

Asper’s second description of his satirical aim, though, is directed to the wise, not the foolish in his audience:

. . .to these courteous eyes [I’ll] oppose a mirror
 As large as is the stage whereon we act,
 Where they shall see the time’s deformity
 Anatomized in every nerve and sinew,
 With constant courage and contempt of fear. (115-19)

“Anatomization” of this sort is accomplished both by the play’s plot structure and by Asper’s method of inflating his humour characters to the point of bursting by means of Macilente’s hoaxes. The “circling, eddying” plot described by Barton gives the audience opportunity to see each character and his or her controlling humour from a variety of perspectives, especially in the ways each variously interacts with others. Being presented with such multiple perspectives, Ostovich suggests, “frees us from [the] subjective tunnel-vision which Jonson satirizes as ‘humours,’” enabling us to “hone our judgements by acquiring the habit of looking at the same thing from a variety of perspectives.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Danson, “Social Self,” 180.

⁵⁹ Danson, 180.

⁶⁰ Ostovich, “Seeing and Judging,” 81.

Sogliardo, for example, is with Carlo the over-eager student of gentility, adopting his every suggestion and then fervently vowing that that behaviour is in fact an irrevocable humour. With Shift, he becomes the confident social superior, declaring to him upon their meeting, “you shall stay and dine with me, and we’ll not part in haste. I am very bountiful to men of quality” (3.1.478-80). He is at his most ridiculous when conversing with Saviolina. All style, he inadvertently calls her a handsome wench in his bastard Italian and asks what is new: “How does my sweet lady? Hot and moist? Beautiful and lusty? Ha?...In health? *Bona roba, queso que nouvelles? Que nouvelles?* Sweet creature” (5.2.64-69). Each successive scene combines to form a detailed portrait of his humour until it meets its fitting end at Macilente’s hands. The other *phauloi* characters are treated similarly. In each case, the indignation which their unmerited favour arouses in us, Jonson’s audience, is satisfied and its nature clarified by their come-uppance, closely resembling Golden’s link between “learning and inference” and catharsis, realization about the “universal nature” of the emotion aroused by the play. In keeping with Asper’s mirror metaphor, this resulting picture is to be subsequently understood as representation of the world the audience inhabits. Cordatus’ expansion of Asper’s metaphor when he defines comedy as an “*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*” makes the effect of this picture to be the “correction of manners” (3.1.526-29).

The relationship of such “correction” to catharsis is better understood from Asper’s subsequent plans for those in his audience who require similar correction. Shortly before leaving the stage, he asks Mitis to keep an eye on the sort of “gallant” in the audience who loves “to be thought one of the judicious” (Ind. 158-59). These aspiring critics are “more infectious than the pestilence,” Asper complains, “and

therefore would I give them pills to purge, / And make 'em fit for fair societies" (173-75). We can infer that Asper's "pills" work homeopathically: the sight of fools on the stage who are similar to this hypothetical gallant in the audience should work to purge him of his own folly. Here, Asper aims to bring about the self-realization denied to most of his characters: for the play to "purge" folly and "profit" the audience, they must recognize something of themselves in this mirror. Purgation by way of recognition has obvious parallels with Golden's account of catharsis: Asper describes his play as a representation from which spectators are meant to learn and infer parallels with themselves and their world. The resulting realization, though, is brought about without the explicit involvement of the emotions. Jonson's account in this sense remains somewhat rudimentary, not unlike the then-dominant Italian understanding of catharsis as moral lessoning. F. H. Mares's assessment of Jonson's drama is particularly relevant to *Every Man Out*: While the playwright clearly has designs on his audience, "we remain outside, intelligent lookers-on, like noble Roman children, edified by the observation of drunken slaves. We are not involved sympathetically in a process of emotional discovery and intellectual development."⁶¹ Mares's tone is rueful, apparently wishing Jonson to be Shakespeare, but he nevertheless perceives what we might call the cerebral nature of audience catharsis that Jonson aims at in this early work.

What Jonson-Asper does with cathartic correction in two of his characters, though, is more complex. *Sordido*, surprisingly, is the first of these. His initial and virulent (if comical) malice soon mingles with despair when his almanac's prognostications prove false. If "my hunger and thirst for riches shall not make them

⁶¹ Mares, "Comic Procedures," 111. Mares is directly referring to *The Alchemist*.

hunger and thirst with poverty [and] my sleeps shall be broken and their hearts not broken,” he laments melodramatically, then “’tis time that a cross should bear flesh and blood, since flesh and blood cannot bear this cross” (3.2.3-8). So, cursing the almanac and vowing that his “son and daughter shall starve” before they find his well-hidden treasure, he puts his head into the noose he has thrown up and leaps from his ladder (63). Much to his dismay, several local rustics happen by just then and cut him down before the noose can do its work. “You threadbare, horsebread-eating rascals,” he curses them, “if you would needs have been meddling, could you not have untied [the noose], but you must cut it? And in the midst too?” (87-9). When this absurd parsimony causes them to recognize him, the rustics begin to berate the one who saved “the caterpillar Sordido” for thereby perpetuating the pain of the poor (90).

Because of their denunciations, though, Sordido sees something he has never seen before:

What curses breathe these men! How have my deeds
Made my looks differ from another man’s,
That they should thus detest and loathe my life?
Out on my wretched humour! It is that
Makes me thus monstrous in true human eyes. (101-5)

Just as the malice which has ruled him to this point reaches its height, he sees its nature in the mirror of the rustics and their blunt-but-true comments. As a result, Sordido takes the “pills to purge” given him, as it were, by the rustics and becomes, just as Asper hopes for the foolish in his audience, “fit for fair societies.” Ostovich concurs, incorporating catharsis with Cordatus’ earlier definition of comedy as a mirror: the “mirrors which [the rustics] hold up to Sordido effectively purges [*sic*] him because they are clearly incapable

of deceit.”⁶² The almost instant result of this clarification is his amendment: “Pardon me, gentle friends,” he says to the rustics, “I’ll make fair ‘mends / For my foul errors past, and twenty-fold / Restore to all men what with wrong I robbed them” (106-8). Sordido outdoes the biblical Zaccheus (who also employed a tree) by offering “twenty-fold” in restoration, and concludes, “Now I prove / No life is blessed that is not graced with love” (120-21). His malice, which had previously and groundlessly been directed towards his poor neighbours, is here converted to a more fitting pity for their plight. This recognition of the error in his malice and subsequent alignment of the proper emotion, pity, to its object resembles what Janko and Halliwell identify, and Asper hopes for, as the emotional habituation of catharsis. Notably, Sordido’s catharsis is brought about without the usual comic hoax. Even the rustics’ foiling of his suicide, an inadvertent trick of sorts, doesn’t expose to him his errors, but only their subsequent descriptions of him as someone who should have been left to die finally have the necessary power to bring him to realization.

Barton argues that the farcical aspects of Sordido’s conversion indicate that Jonson cannot “take drastic change of personality seriously,” and that the bumbling rustics serve “to trivialize and undercut a repentance that already seems oddly stilted and artificial.”⁶³ The rustics certainly add humour to an admittedly sentimental scene: the second one vows to “get our clerk to put [Sordido’s] conversion in the Acts and Monuments,” while the fifth marvels at how Sordido’s tears rolled down his cheeks “like Master Vicar’s bowls upon the green” (125-30). Yet the stilted quality of his repentance is not something which the strain of a shallow repentance puts on Sordido; it has been

⁶² Ostovich, “Rudimentary Masque,” 320.

⁶³ Barton, *Ben Jonson*, 67.

present in him from his first appearance in the play in his ridiculous high register speech and scorn for his children. His repentance is only as comical as his preceding villainy and suicide attempt. Watson suggests that the whole *Sordido* sub-plot consists of “systematic attacks on the standardized expectations of both the characters and the audience,” and manifest Jonson’s “deliberate failure[] at conventional dramaturgy.”⁶⁴ While his assessment is partly accurate, the fact that Jonson essentially repeats this pattern with *Macilente*, and in a more serious way, requires that we consider *Sordido*’s conversion to prefigure a catharsis that goes beyond mere farce.

As with the nature of his errors, *Macilente*’s catharsis is an experience more complex but nonetheless parallel to that of *Sordido*. He seems for most of the play to be little different from the other characters in being ruled by his humour. Certainly, he is more intelligent than they are and can see through their affectation and posturing. Yet up until the final scene, his every action is motivated by envy – a humour in many ways more genuinely vicious than those of the others. It reaches its climax as he gloats over *Fastidious*’s ruin in the prison. As the latter leaves the stage, we might well expect a vindictive and self-congratulatory closing speech from the former. In both endings that Jonson wrote for the play, though, we have something markedly different. In the original conclusion, *Macilente* finds to his astonishment that “Envy is fled my soul” (5.4.9); in the revised, that “I am as empty of all envy now / As they of merit to be envied at” (Appendix A.II.1.2-3). Like the former objects of his envy, *Macilente* has been completely and unexpectedly dishumored.

⁶⁴ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 58.

Both of Jonson's conclusions reward consideration. When originally performed at the Globe by Shakespeare's Lord Chamberlain's Men in late 1599,⁶⁵ the play concluded with an actor dressed as the Queen passing over the stage. "The very wonder of her presence," Jonson's stage direction notes, "strikes Macilente to the earth, dumb and astonished" (5.4.0.2-4). After recovering, he finds that

...in her graces
All my malicious powers have lost their stings.
Envy has fled my soul at sight of her,
And she hath chased all black thoughts from my bosom. (5.4.7-10)

This experience of being put into a state of wonder by the unexpected presence of virtue is remarkably similar to that of Sordido with the rustics. While their virtue is not that of the queen, there is behind their comic bumbling and even their cursing of Sordido an unaffected and genuine humanity; they act out of kindness and speak truthfully. As a result of their actions and words, Sordido declares, "I am by wonder changed" (3.2.119). Macilente is similarly shocked out of his envy and "black thoughts." Recalling Asper's opening descriptions of humours as those things which, "in their confluxions" cause one "all to run one way" (Ind. 106) and Cordatus's account of Macilente's envy as a "very torrent" that will "break forth" and "oppose itself...violently" against the other characters (4.5.156-58), Macilente likens his "passions" to "our city's torrent [sewer ditch] bent t'infect / The hallowed bowels of the silver Thames" (5.4.13-18). This torrent, though, is miraculously "checked by strength and clearness of the river," symbolic of the Queen's goodness:

⁶⁵ Ostovich, Introduction, 39.

So in the ample and unmeasured flood
Of her perfections are my passions drowned,
And I have now a spirit as sweet and clear
As the most rarified and subtle air. (14-20)

McDonald complains about the “artificiality” of this ending, which asks us to “exchange doubt for faith, despair for hope, contempt for charity.”⁶⁶ It is and does that, but entirely on purpose, as Ostovich argues:

The dramatic impact of this moment is immediate and stunning. Its masque-like quality causes the play to shift out of its hitherto dominant mode of satirical farce into a completely different blend of illusion and reality: comedy apparently untouched by the complex ironies governing earlier scenes.⁶⁷

Rather than being brought to realization of his error by seeing himself in the mirror of a hoax, Macilente gains self-awareness in the face of a symbol of virtue. The result of this “recasting of action as symbol”⁶⁸ is not realization leading to annihilation, as with the other humours characters, but realization leading to change. What is changed in Macilente is precisely his emotions: “malicious powers,” “envy,” and “passions” go from being “stinging,” “black,” and sewage-like to “sweet and clear” and “as pure as fire” (21). His similes at once evoke the image of catharsis as purgation or cleansing, and as clarification. There is also a sense of the moderation of what was before excessive and out of control by ways of its contact with virtue. The Queen, Ostovich concludes, thus “becomes an emblem of the perfectibility, or at least corrigibility, of man.”⁶⁹

In this original conclusion, Macilente makes no further mention of those towards whom his emotions have been so violent. In the revised version, though, written for the

⁶⁶ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 73.

⁶⁷ Ostovich, “Rudimentary Masque,” 316.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 332.

quarto of 1600, he reflects directly upon them. In a preface to the revision, Jonson grumbles that “many seemed not to relish” the original conclusion, “and therefore ’twas since altered” (Appendix A.I.2-3). He still included the original as an appendix, though, and prefaced it with the preceding defence. Ostovich’s edition of the play restores this original conclusion and relegates both the quarto’s revised ending and that of the 1616 Folio (itself a further altered version of the Quarto’s revision) to an appendix. She describes her decision to use the original catastrophe as an attempt “to convey Jonson’s conception [of the play] as it was initially written and performed in 1599.”⁷⁰ At the same time, that Jonson – hardly one to bow meekly to public preference – used the revised conclusion in both print editions of the play must indicate at least a grudging admission of the original’s weaknesses, and certainly a belief in the validity and appropriateness of the revised ending to the play. In it, the Queen is absent, and Macilente’s change comes unexplained: after Fastidious has left the stage, Macilente simply begins:

Why here’s a change! Now is my soul at peace.
 I am as empty of all envy now
 As they of merit to be envied at.
 My humour, like a flame, no longer lasts
 Than it hath stuff to feed it, and their folly,
 Being now raked up in their repentant ashes
 Affords no simpler subject to my spirit. (Appendix A.II.2.1-7)

In part, Macilente’s change in this version is not quite the radical reversal that it is in the original catastrophe: his “peace” is as much a result of the success of his envious plotting as of a rejection of it. His envy has been satisfied by stripping the other characters, at least temporarily, of the respect and position which he envied in them, and whatever remains intact in them hardly merits his continued antagonism. Yet after

⁷⁰ Ostovich, Introduction, 9.

confirming this, he notices within himself a new emotion: “I am so far from malicing their states / That I begin to pity ’em” (8-9).

By feeling pity towards those whom he had previously envied, Macilente makes precisely the emotional turn made by Sordido, who began to pity, rather than scorn, the poor after his conversion. This makes Macilente’s change something more than the mere exhaustion of his envy. Throughout the play, he and Sordido have been the characters most out of place in this comedy, resembling instead figures out of a tragedy. In their conversions, each exchanges the respective emotions that mark them off as such for pity, the emotion that tragedy evokes in those who witness, rather than instigate, it. Macilente’s similarity as joker to a comic dramatist particularly suggests this analogy. The remainder of his speech expresses the result of his new pity:

It grieves me
To think they have a being. I could wish
They might turn wise upon it, and be saved now,
So heaven were pleased. (8-13)

Rather than merely have the others “laid flat” and annihilated as was his original intent, he hopes that his hoaxes might affect in them genuine change, that “they might turn wise upon it, and be saved.” In so desiring, Macilente becomes less of a harsh satirist, and even less a tragedian, and instead a more genuinely comic joker, working towards the reformation of the characters he tricks. Though he does not give it consideration (a point to which I shall return), his own catharsis involves the tempering of his envy with pity, thus leading it back to the virtuous mean and comic norm of indignation. Again, he does not explicitly mention indignation in his closing speech, but its presence in him can be inferred by his refusal to retract or repent of the hoaxes he has played on them; in his mind, their correction remains necessary. He simply sees here that the motivation and

end of that correction should have arisen from the indignation proper to comedy and intending correction, rather than the envy of tragedy which intends only destruction.

Asper seems to have a change of heart similar to that of Macilente, though we see only a glimpse of it. As the playwright standing (somewhat) outside of the play, the target of his fierce indignation has been the fools in his audience. In the original conclusion, after Macilente utters his long encomium to the Queen, “the trumpets sound a flourish” and he turns, as Asper, to Cordatus and Mitis and asks their opinion of the play. They in turn defer to the audience, to whom Asper presents a face much milder than before: “And now – that you may see I will be out of humour for company – I stand wholly to your kind approbation, and, indeed, am nothing so peremptory as I was in the beginning” (5.4.55-58). Something, then, in the progress of the play, has taken the harsh edge off of his indignation and he is willing even to associate “for company” with the audience who before he had suspected of sharing in the “ragged follies of the times.” In the revised conclusion, Macilente instead turns directly to the audience, but “with Asper’s tongue” offers them “solemn and most duteous thanks” (Appendix A.II.1.13-14). As in the Induction, he then singles out the “pure and apprehensive ears” of the discerning in the crowd and asks that their appreciation be

...the trumpet to proclaim
Defiance to rebelling ignorance
And the green spirits of some tainted few
That (spite of pity) betray themselves
To scorn and laughter.” (26-30)

His indignation clearly remains present, but he also hints at something new. For those whom he has censured he has also felt and shown some “pity,” though despite it, they remain in their “rebellious ignorance.” Again, there is only a suggestion here of a

softening in Asper's tone, but its presence confirms what he glances at in the other endings, and is in turn confirmed by them. This shift cannot quite be called a catharsis, and yet its parallel with Macilente's invites the comparison. The malice and envy characteristic of tragedy in Sordido and Macilente, and the fierce indignation of Macilente and Asper, are all tempered in the respective characters' final musings.

There is in all three characters a movement toward the reconciliation and catharsis of comedy, but this looks in Jonson very different from Shakespeare. His insistence on judging folly looks at first glance like a rather uncomic trait, but is nonetheless indicative of a strong belief in the possibility of realization and catharsis, and that such an effect is "the principal rationale for literary representation," as Bednarz puts it.⁷¹ Russ McDonald concurs, arguing that "Jonson's moral imagination responds indignantly, with an almost tragic intensity, to the conditions of a lapsed world, and yet the comical shape of the action promises that reason and especially art can rectify the fallen creatures in it."⁷²

It is remarkable that in a play that takes shots at every aspect of his society, Jonson also uses himself as a target. Cordatus and Mitis begin the play trying to calm the "*furor poeticus*" of a hot-headed and self-righteous dramatist. At the end of the induction, Carlo comes out to mock the playwright's notorious appetite (already in 1599) for food and drink, finally calling him a "one-headed Cerberus" – the guard-dog of Hades who could be bribed with sops of bread-soaked wine (Ind. 336). William Blissett wonders if there are more places we might find Jonson's self-mockery:

⁷¹ Bednarz, *Poets' War*, 56.

⁷² McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 85.

Was he not...as heavy as Puntarvolo..., as obstinate in his ventures? as violent against his tormenters? Did he still have bricklayer's hands as Sogliardo had ploughman's? Very probably he already drank too much, like Carlo Buffone, and talked too vehemently, and was tempted to prefer his jest to his friend.⁷³

All of this seems truly remarkable from the young, idealistic, and hot-headed dramatist. These well-placed self-portraits seem meant to soften our expectations of this "comical satire," to stress the modifier as much as the noun.

5.2 "We mock ourselves"

The pleasure that Macilente took in exposing the errors of *Every Man Out's* fools was consonant with the degree of indignation that their various follies evoked – something also true, I think, of the play's audience. That no one inspires real indignation in any one else in *Epiccoene* nor realizes his or her errors, though, might appear to preclude any discussion of catharsis. And if catharsis or any more general Jonsonian moral is missing from the play, it would seem all the more consonant with the nature of farce: Jonson has no larger design than to have us laugh derisively at the inescapable ridiculousness of life. As with indignation, though, there are regular enough glances within the play at the possibility of catharsis for its characters to acknowledge it as something we might legitimately expect. At the outset of the play, Truewit suggests (however ironically) that if Clerimont were "struck with the plague this minute or condemned to any capital punishment tomorrow, you would begin then to think and value every article o' your time, esteem it at the true rate, and give all for 't" (1.1.26-30). The prospect of imminent suffering and death, he says, produces clarification about the

⁷³ Blissett, "Oddness," 179.

fleeting nature of life (22). This principle is put to the test in Truewit's central hoax on Daw and La Foole, where the wits convince each knight that the other is seeking his life. Daw quickly declares to Truewit, "I'll give him any satisfaction, sir – but fighting," and begs him, "I pray you, Master Truewit, be you a mediator" (4.5.72-76). La Foole is equally desperate to give Daw "any satisfaction[,]...any terms," rather than face eternity (214-15). At the end of the hoax, Truewit is confident that "we shall have 'em tamer i' their language hereafter," expecting the knights' close brush with death to have revealed to them the folly of their previous bravado (336-37). The hoax has no such effect, though, as the pair are soon afterward making outrageous claims about the sexual favours they've enjoyed from Epicoene. Clerimont acknowledges both their enduring folly and his expectation that they ought to have realized something about themselves when he afterwards calls them, ironically, "knights *reformados*," still "wound up as high and insolent as ever they were" (5.2.66-67).

Similarly, Dauphine sees how the hoax on Daw and La Foole might also clarify the blindness of the Collegiates' opinion of the knights. When Clerimont suggests part way through it that they bring in the ladies to witness the catastrophe, Dauphine objects: "By no mortal means. Let them continue in the state of ignorance, and err still; think 'em wits and fine fellows as they have done. 'Twere sin to reform them" (4.5.230-32).

Dauphine is overruled and the Collegiates do grudgingly admit to having been deceived about Daw and La Foole's intelligence. But Haughty blames this embarrassment not on her gullibility but on the knights' cunning ("How our judgments were imposed on by these adulterate knights!") and on Centaure and Mavis, whose "commendation uttered 'em in the college" in the first place (4.6.1-4). All the ladies then quickly go from enjoying

the company of the knights to making bald-faced assignations with their new favourite, Dauphine, who has wondrously progressed in their opinions from Morose's lowly "keeper" to "a very worthy gentleman" (4.4.152, 4.6.22). The potential for catharsis is met in each case by something like Tom Otter's obstinate resolution to continue unchecked in his ways – "There's *bona spes* left" (4.2.139).

The dissolution of Morose's malice and repentance toward Dauphine forms a partial exception to the regular rejection of catharsis that I have just highlighted. He does realize his folly in marrying to spite his nephew, yet this is only because he finds marriage to grate so harshly against his real folly, his obsessive desire for silence. So what we have in Morose is really an ironic or mock catharsis, raising the possibility of clarification only to deny it. His and the other fools' responses to the hoaxes played on them are, as we have seen, to intensify, rather than realize and temper their folly. And the result of Morose's quasi-clarification is that he ends up rashly trusting those whom he ought to have seen through, made at their hands publicly to declare himself impotent and to sign over his estate to Dauphine – a far greater disgrace than being merely the eccentric he was at the outset of the play.

Ultimately, Dauphine's hoax has the effect of at least silencing everyone in the play (except Truewit), much as Macilente's final flourish did in *Every Man Out*. All are put "out of their humours" at the end of that play, but in a way that leaves them no room to respond or reform. Unlike Macilente, though, who finds himself wondrously "empty of all envy" and even ready to pity his victims after the stage is cleared, Dauphine's envy is strengthened into malice. This invites comparison of him with the play's fools, whose humours also intensify when we might expect them to be realized and corrected.

Dauphine's self-interest thus comes to look remarkably like the self-absorption that governs the fools and prevents their self-realization, with the result that he appears more petty and foolish, and the fools, more seriously vitiated.

By consistently suggesting the possibility of catharsis within the play and its characters, Jonson recommends to his audience that they too be prepared to look for it. It should arise from the hoaxes of the jokers, but as we have seen, these largely lack the necessary motivation. In the same way as Truewit and Clerimont are easily taken to be simply good-natured gallants without designs on their victims, Jonson too might simply have descended his high horse to indulge in some fun with his audience without at the same time chastising it. There is, to be sure, a light-hearted brightness to *Epicoene* that is unique among Jonson's other plays. Edward Partridge links this quality especially with Truewit, whose genial nonchalance makes the play "aerial" in its "apparently unpremeditated gaiety," and he cites with approval Maurice Castelain's suggestion that *Epicoene* is "Jonson's most joyous comedy."⁷⁴ I agree with both, especially as against critics who would problematize and neuroticize Jonson's essentially comic characters, but also don't think that lightness of tone necessitates frivolity in intent. Surprisingly, this has often been the judgment of critics who in other plays laud Jonson's strong moral sense. Dutton recounts L. C. Knights's reason for omitting *Epicoene* from his *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*: the play belongs, he said, to "the category of mere stage entertainments: in them the fun is divorced from any rich significance."⁷⁵ Likewise, Alan Dessen suggests that there is a strong "difference between the searching moral comedy of *Volpone* and the lighthearted exposés of *Epicoene*," and that like Cynthia in *Cynthia's*

⁷⁴ Partridge, Introduction, 5.

⁷⁵ Dutton, Introduction, 64.

Revels, “*Epicoene*’s wits occupy “a vantage point apparently not to be questioned or endangered.”⁷⁶ It seems unlikely, though, that Jonson, who is at the top of his form in this play, would have completely dropped or given up on the urge to teach his audience something that so marks most of his earlier work.

It must be granted that the audience is far less of an explicit target in this play than it was in *Every Man Out*, where we were to be given “pills to purge” and other violent treatments. Right from the outset of *Epicoene*, Jonson is indeed remarkably conciliatory towards us. *Epicoene*’s first prologue is notable for omitting the second half of Jonson’s customary *delectare et docere* maxim: “Truth says, of old the art of making plays / Was to *content* the people,” it declares, using a verb much closer to “delight” than to “teach” (1-2, italics mine). “Our wishes, like to those make public feasts, / Are not to please the cooks’ tastes but the guests” (8-9), he continues, employing the banquet metaphor with which he had closed the revised quarto of *Every Man Out*. There, though, it had been used with quite the opposite sentiment:

We know (and we are pleased to know so much)
The cates that you have tasted were not seasoned
For every vulgar palate but prepared
To banquet pure and apprehensive ears. (21-24)

In that play, Jonson’s clear moral designs on his audience logically resulted in this sort of elitism, since he knew that only a few would pass beyond merely being entertained to perceive and benefit from his cathartic intentions. What we are to find in *Epicoene*, by contrast, is a play purposely made for the “vulgar palates” he had earlier scorned, something closer to popular entertainment, without the righteous indignation, and not

⁷⁶ Dessen, *Jonson’s Moral Comedy*, 107.

back-loaded with any ulterior motives that only the morally superior in the audience may perceive.

But the first prologue concludes with an idea that is picked up in the second. The well-prepared banquet that he is setting forth is not simply for one-time indulgence, but will yield plenty of leftovers: “Nor is it only while you keep your seat / Here that his feast will last,” concludes the first prologue, “but you shall eat / A week at ord’naires on his broken meat” (25-27). Since the pleasure of mere entertainment doesn’t much outlast the performance, Jonson must mean, even in this first prologue, to provide us with food for later thought. The second then tells us explicitly what we should expect this to be. It immediately reincorporates the second half of Horace’s maxim, declaring that a playwright’s aims “Are, or should be, to *profit* and delight” (2, italics mine). This “profit,” Jonson then suggests, lies in the traditional aim of the satirist “to tax...crimes,” so long as “persons were not touched” (14). Jonson is quoting Martial’s defense of himself against charges of slander, and the Latin of the latter⁷⁷ clarifies the English of the former. “Tax” is Jonson’s rendering of Martial’s verb *dicere*, which means not only “to denounce” or “condemn,” but, and more fundamentally, “to show, specify, or indicate by words.” The word thus indicates both the judgment made by the poet as well as his work of specifying or clarifying the exact nature of what is being judged and his reason for doing so.

When Jonson goes on to claim that “poet never credit gained / By writing truths, but things (like truths) well feigned” (9-10), we should hear an echo of the definition of comedy that Cordatus gave us in *Every Man Out*, in which he stresses comedy’s imitative

⁷⁷ “*Parvere personis, dicere de vitiis.*” See Martial, *Epigrams* 10.33.

and reflective properties. At least one early commentator on the play understood the effect of *Epicoene*'s "imitations," and hence the substance of its "profit," to be cathartic. Francis Beaumont's commendatory sonnet, "Upon the Silent Woman," included in the 1616 folio, begins by describing how truly envious and slanderous writers inevitably miss their mark by trying to mock a particular person "– not his vice – on the stage," and are thus ignored.⁷⁸ In contrast, Jonson in *Epicoene* is one who, "although he mean / To scourge but vices" and not particular individuals, nevertheless portrays vice so well "that each private breast / That finds these errors in itself shall say: / He meant me, not my vices in the play" (14-16). The immediate effect for Beaumont of seeing the follies of Jonson's various characters, then, is cathartic self-realization. And just as importantly, he distinguishes between good and bad comic dramatists by measuring the degree to which they bring their audience to see itself. There is also a parallel to be drawn between the pointed, direct attacks of Beaumont's slanderous "bad writers" and the explicit vitriol with which Jonson bombards his audience in *Every Man Out*. The effect of the latter in that play might well be so blunt as to preclude, just like the former, any real possibility of sharp clarification. Because *Epicoene* is far less explicit in its designs on its audience, the residual food for thought it provides might then have a more potent effect, better accomplishing through its "pleasant"ness the "correction of manners" that Cordatus describes as comedy's function (3.2.527-29).

If moral catharsis remains a part of Jonson's program in *Epicoene*, what exactly is the play supposed to clarify about *nemesian* and the errors that produce it for its characters and audience? On the level of the play's *phanlooi* characters, this is fairly straightforward.

⁷⁸ I quote line 5; Dutton includes Beaumont's sonnet in an appendix on p.274. All subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically by line number.

Daw and La Foole's stupidity is made patent throughout the play. The Collegiates' error is their initial flattery and acceptance of these knights, whose idiocy they are intelligent enough to recognize. Indulging the knights' obsequiousness results, after Truewit's grand hoax in Act 4, in the Ladies' embarrassing need to retract their earlier affections. In turn, the haste with which these are transferred to a man they previously scorned amplifies their own folly. These characters' failed opportunities for catharsis reveal the similarities between the most stupid people in the play and their marginal betters.

In a more subtle way, Jonson repeats this pattern with Clerimont and especially Truewit. Both are connoisseurs of artifice. Clerimont may claim to recoil at Mistress Haughty's "pieced beauty," all "painted" and "oiled," and write songs that wistfully praise women unadorned with "all th'adulteries of art" (1.1.83-86, 99), but as Helen Ostovich points out, he enters the play "*making himself ready*' in fashionable dress."⁷⁹ To Clerimont's song, Truewit quickly responds, "I am clearly o' the other side" (101). He would rather a woman carefully "practise any art to mend breath, cleanse teeth, repair eyebrows"; "paint," he says, "and profess it" (107-8). He continues this theme later in Act 4 when instructing Truewit and Dauphine on how a man also ought to employ artifice in wooing a woman:

You must approach them i' their own height.... If she love wit, give verses, though you borrow 'em of a friend, or buy 'em.... If valour, talk of your sword, and be frequent in the mention of quarrels, though you be staunch in fighting. ...Let your powder, your glass, and your comb be your dearest acquaintance. (4.1.94-106)

His talk consistently crosses the line dividing a discrete use of artifice to enhance virtues already possessed from a dishonest one that fabricates the appearance of qualities really

⁷⁹ Ostovich, *Jonson: Four Comedies*, 21.

absent. Truewit puts this affectation forward, though, as the price of admission to the pleasurable world of gallantry: pretending to be deceived and deceiving are the negligible cost of pleasure, and they indeed heighten it. It is thus particularly ironic that Truewit and Clerimont are so thoroughly duped by Epicoene’s “painting,” which covers over a whole lot more than a facial blemish or bad breath. Barry Adams draws attention to a helpful distinction that Heinsius makes in his analysis of dramatic ignorance, of which Truewit’s sort of deception is a subtype. People who act wrongly *per ignorantiam* (“through ignorance”) “do not call forth...blame” for their crimes and “may, in fact, engender pity.”⁸⁰ Heinsius’ example is Oedipus, who, “although he knew parricide to be the worst of crimes, yet the poor man killed Laius through lack of knowledge [*per ignorantiam*] – hence the pity.”⁸¹ On the other hand, one acts *ignorantem* (“ignorantly”⁸²) when in a state of ignorance caused by one’s prior choice.⁸³ When a drunken man, for example, commits a crime, he “may still be said to act freely and voluntarily” because his ignorance is caused by his choice to drink too much, and he is “for that reason subject to...blame.”⁸⁴ Truewit and Clerimont fall into this latter category: they’re not drunk, of course, nor do they commit any crime, but their self-conscious dallying with deception quietly weakens their ability to gauge reality when they are not expecting to be deceived. They therefore bear responsibility for being deceived.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Adams, “Complex Plot,” 181. He refers to Sellin and McManmon’s translation of Heinsius, *On Plot in Tragedy*, 51.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The present participle of *ignorare* here functions as an adverb.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Adams (*ibid.*, 212) acknowledges that Truewit’s earlier realization about Epicoene (that ‘she’ is Dauphine’s partner in winning him an inheritance, rather than an obstacle) does expose something of his “officious behaviour.” By concluding that this is only “an incidental outcome or by-product of another’s satiric design,” though, and by ignoring his much more significant exposure here, Adams misses Jonson’s purpose for

Jonson verifies this judgment by making the knowing acceptance of others' facades to be the primary symptom of the knights' and Collegiates' folly: they are all "most ignorant of what they're most assured" (to look ahead to *Measure for Measure*). Because they have felt no indignation towards it in the first place, Truewit and Clerimont take no moral satisfaction from the exposure of others' self-deception. Thus they find only the pleasure of feeling superior, not a warning that they too might err in their own self-confidence, as Dauphine's hoax so strikingly reveals. The irony of Truewit's earlier aphoristic comment to Haughty, "That falls out often, madam, that he that thinks himself the master-wit is the master-fool," becomes especially piquant at this point (3.6.48-49). Dutton is right to suggest of the wits that "their high self-regard...is arguably their most visible flaw,"⁸⁶ but Jonson's particular interest here is in how this sort of vanity blinds them to the moral significance of others' folly, thus prohibiting a justly indignant response.

That Jonson has meant to clarify this about Truewit and Clerimont is made clear by the way Truewit tries at play's end to deny that anything about him has been revealed. All the characters, foolish and witty, have been duped by Dauphine – surely an uncomfortable position for the pair who thought themselves completely in league with their friend. Truewit appears to concede this when he admits to Dauphine, "you have lunched your friends of the better half of the garland, by concealing this part of the plot," and says to Clerimont that "for thy unexpected bringing in of these two [Daw and La Foole] to confession, wear my part of it [the prize garland] freely" (5.4.220-24). Yet his

employing these deceptions. In general, Adams' concern is largely to identify and classify Aristotelian elements in Jonson's drama, rather than to explore their interpretive potential.

⁸⁶ Dutton, Introduction, 66.

words simultaneously wrest back what he claims to surrender by upstaging a conclusion that is rightly Dauphine's: from here until the end of the play, we hear the voice of no one else but him. The wits certainly do not, as Robert Watson asserts, "agree to share the authorial 'garland.'"⁸⁷ Even more subtly, Truewit effaces his similarity in this moment to his intellectual inferiors. Offering the prize to Dauphine puts all of the tricksters' various hoaxes into the same league: they were engaged in a mere contest of wits, and Dauphine, the tricky lad, came out on top. As we have seen, though, Dauphine's hoax occurs on an entirely different level from those of his friends. Stretching from the beginning of the play to its end, it deceives quite literally everyone, and is undertaken for motives more significant than mere sport.

By glossing over especially this latter fact, Truewit ignores the remarkably virulent envy which motivated Dauphine's hoax, refusing to take it seriously. Finding the prospect of a serious moral dilemma uncomfortable, Truewit reduces it to the level of a jest. So when he subsequently returns to the moralizing mode in which he opened the play, declaring Daw and La Foole to be the "common moths of these and all ladies' honours," and with mock sympathy reassuring the Collegiates that whatever "mysteries" they have disclosed to Epicoene will remain secret, we have to doubt his newfound indignation (235-36, 243). As just a summary of their errors as he gives, we can hardly believe that, if given another ten lines to speak, he wouldn't shrug off the import of what he says just as he did in his opening comments in Act 1. And once again, as a judgment that Truewit can hardly take seriously, it might well be one that we ought to. The lack of genuine indignation here, Jonson shows us, has been the problem with Truewit all along.

⁸⁷ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 98.

The audience for which Jonson wrote and that, like Truewit and Clerimont, he also tricks, consisted of young gallants very similar to the play's wits. *Epicoene* was first staged by the Children of the Whitefriars at the Whitefriars theatre, located in the west of London very near to the increasingly fashionable Strand. The audience to which it catered inhabited "the beginnings of what would later be known as 'the town' or the West End, a place of prestige and fashion."⁸⁸ Its members were primarily young men on the make, "witty, single..., sexually and socially gregarious, awaiting inheritance, a felicitous marriage, or (if both of these fail), patronage." Quoting Zachary Lesser, Dutton summarizes them as a "select group of wits...that sees itself above and removed from the "vulgar braine" of ordinary English theatre goers,...part of the movement...away from a definition of gentility based on military function, land ownership, or blood, and towards a gentility of "breeding," a gentility of *style* rather than of *status*."⁸⁹ Two things about *Epicoene* become clear in the light of this description. First, Jonson may well have the wits Lesser describes in mind when he declares in the first prologue that he is not writing for the "cunning palates" of those "That only for particular likings care / And will taste nothing that is popular." Though he mingled in their company,⁹⁰ this prologue implies a distrust of their elitism.⁹¹ Secondly, he certainly appears to have modeled the three wits in *Epicoene* on the sort who likely made up his audience. We might reasonably assume that he was expecting them to recognize their own flattering portraits in the wits

⁸⁸ Dutton, Introduction, 12. See pp. 2-13 for an overview of the company, the theatre, and its locale.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, 13-16 for an account of this.

⁹¹ This sort of person is also Asper's object when he rants against a "gallant... / Who (to be thought one of the judicious) / Sits" on the edge of the stage and pronounces his opinions of the play (*Ind.* 158-60).

Truewit, Clerimont, and Dauphine, and to take satisfaction from the “ironic,” “playful detachment” with which these young men best their social betters.⁹²

At the same time, these are also the sort of people that Jonson means to trick by revealing Epicoene to be a boy. For the majority of the play, they – and we, on first reading – assume themselves to be in league with both the wits and the playwright. The audience is the regular beneficiary of the wits’ habit of giving a preliminary character sketch of a fool before he or she actually appears on stage. As Dryden noted,⁹³ we delight to recognize these traits as one by one the fools are introduced, thus sharing in the scorn heaped upon them by the later hoaxes. This sense of alliance would have been enhanced in *Epicoene* by the small size of the Whitefriars Theatre. J. A. Jackson suggests that while the resulting “intimacy gives the audience a clear view of what they are watching, paradoxically, this closeness also advances the very illusion that close proximity equals additional insight or privileged knowledge.”⁹⁴ The revelation of Epicoene’s sex rather rudely breaks this assumed alliance. In the same way that Truewit and Clerimont are suddenly distanced from Dauphine at this moment and left (at least momentarily) speechless, the audience finds itself suddenly out of league with the dramatist, becoming his victim rather than his confidant. We are left to choose for a response, then, either the amazed silence of Clerimont, or the attempt of Truewit to bury the fact that he has been had and to recover equality and alliance with the comic mastermind. In only a very limited sense can we conclude with David Kay that three gallants “provide a striking via

⁹² Shapiro, “Audience vs. Dramatist,” 415-16.

⁹³ Dryden’s “examen” from his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) is reprinted in full by Dutton (Introduction, 80-82).

⁹⁴ Jackson, “Self-Deception,” par. 12.

media between the polarities of courtly folly and alienated virtue we encounter in the ‘comicall satyres.’”⁹⁵

The reasons why Jonson tricks Truewit and his audience are one and the same, and he has spoken of it before. We have already identified one of the central differences between the wits as their motives for tricking others: while Truewit and Clerimont amicably but aimlessly drift from one hoax to the next, both as dramatists and in life generally, Dauphine consistently works towards an end, carefully assimilating the random plots of the other two into his overarching plan. Parallel to this, Truewit and Clerimont’s aimless life of leisure is precisely the thing sought by the young men of Whitefriars. This is the diletantism that Jonson saw fit to chide in his Epigram 85, “To Sir Henry Goodyere”:

Goodyere, I am glad, and grateful to report,
Myself a witness of thy few days’ sport:
Where I both learned, why wise men hawking follow,
And why that bird was sacred to Apollo.
She doth instruct men by her gallant flight,
That they to knowledge so should tower upright,
And never stoop, but to strike ignorance:
Which if they miss, they yet should readvance
To former height, and there in circle tarry,
Till they be sure to make the fool their quarry.
Now, in whose pleasures I have this discerned,
What would his serious actions me have learned?⁹⁶

From the trained hawk’s method of striking its prey from a great height, Jonson draws the lesson that virtuous men ought “never stoop, but to strike ignorance,” always being “sure to make the fool their quarry.” His concluding couplet, though, applies the principle to the cavalier Goodyere: “Now, in whose pleasures I have this discerned, /

⁹⁵ Kay, “Jonson’s Urbane Gallants,” 255.

⁹⁶ Jonson, *Complete Poems*, 61.

What would his serious actions me have learned?” The rebuke, then, is double: Goodyere is first of all frittering his life away in “pleasures” and avoiding the “serious actions” required of the virtuous man. Moreover, were he attentive to it, even from his leisure he could have learned his duty, to correctly feel and act on righteous indignation. In *Epicoene*, Dauphine is the man who does use his leisure, his dallying with Truewit and Clerimont, not merely for their brand of diversion, but towards an end (even though one tainted by envy). Jonson again (but only partially) invites the parallel with himself as a comic dramatist, providing entertainment but never without an end in mind. And like Truewit and Clerimont, who because of their aimlessness are unwittingly enlisted to serve the purposes of another, Jonson implies that his audience is foolish to assume their superior independence from a societal milieu they look down upon if their mockery and judgment of it has no aim beyond mere “sport.”

The other parallel between the dramatic and metadramatic trickery of the play lies in the nonchalance with which Truewit accepts the cosmetic deceptions of others and his own self-contradictions, and the dramatic conventions Jonson’s audience had to accept upon entering the theatre. Simply put, one had to suspend disbelief in the world the play purports to portray, in the characters that easily recognized actors play, and most to the point for *Epicoene*’s audience, in the sex of the actors playing female characters. The trick that Jonson plays on the audience exploits their expectations of theatrical conventions: after all, asks Jackson, “what else could there be on stage” than boys?⁹⁷ But Jonson rebukes his audience for agreeing to be deceived – *Epicoene* is actually just what you refused to let yourself believe him to be, he seems to say, and you should have trusted

⁹⁷ Jackson, “Self-deception,” par. 13.

what your eyes reported as reality. By overturning this particular “deception” of the theatre, Jonson takes a shot at the purported theatrical sophistication of the gallants for whom he writes, mocking them for just the sort of haughtiness he attacks in the first prologue. Jackson likewise concludes that Jonson “utilizes a truth of Jacobean theatre, that things literally are not as they seem, to demonstrate that sometimes things are exactly as they seem.”⁹⁸

I think Jonson also means for his audience to make similar inferences about the larger play world that he has set up. The close resemblance that it bears to the fashionable London of his time does not merely provide his audience with the pleasure of recognition, but enables the play more strikingly to effect comic catharsis. When Mitis expressed discomfort with how “near and familiarly allied to the time” *Every Man Out* was, Cordatus responded by citing Cicero’s definition of comedy, which requires that a play mirror reality if it is to be “accommodated to the correction of manners” (3.1.520-29). The “manners” that Jonson taxes in the play, then, are just the ones he means to tax in his audience. Perhaps most particularly, given the Whitefriars’ audience, the similarity of Truewit and Clerimont to the fools after Dauphine’s hoax is revealed as a rebuke not only to their audience’s sense of elitism regarding the theatre, but their presumptions of social status as well – a fault for which Jonson’s scorn is well-documented. These presumptions are illusions that Jonson accuses his audience of believing, even as they

⁹⁸ Ibid., par. 12. While I concur with Jackson about what Jonson aims at with the revelation of Epicoene, his conclusion on the matter is vague. He asserts that in their silent amazement, each character “is shown explicitly the role he or she has always been tempted to appropriate all along: filling in every gap of meaning with his or her self. The muted language on stage at the end of the play creates a potential moment of non-appropriation for the audience. The silence thrusts the audience member back onto him- or herself. The muted language makes explicit once and for all the always-present gap of meaning and reveals to the audience this space ‘outside’ of themselves that they have always occupied” (par. 28). Rather than something so nebulous as “meaning,” I would suggest that Jonson intends to teach a subtle but moral lesson about pride and self-deception – an intention that Aristotle’s terms help us identify with precision.

themselves fabricate them. It is illusory for them to believe that intelligence and wit, when frittered away on the pursuit of fashion and status, make them superior to those whom they would scorn. Rather, both will end up gulled by those not so cavalier with their time and talents. Jonson does not simply leave this to be inferred by what happens to Truewit and Clerimont, but actually puts his audience through the same experience they have.

Concurrent with this is a charge to his audience to believe what their eyes tell them about Truewit and Clerimont. Despite their apparently sophisticated and self-conscious acceptance of the many contradictions their thought and action evince, they really are wasting their wit, “sleeping all the term and think[ing] to effect [all their] business on the last day” (1.1.49-50). Clerimont’s concurrent scorn for and pursuit of Haughty, Truewit’s easy enjoyment of painting (provided he isn’t told it is such) and their joint dismissals of Truewit’s initial moral injunctions are revealed to be what they most plainly appear: a denial of the claims of logical, moral reasoning. F. H. Mares’s suggestion (citing Herbert Read) that differences in Jonson’s characters’ moral “value are due to differences in intelligence” may be true of *Every Man Out*, but not of *Epicoene*.⁹⁹ Just as importantly, agreeing to be duped in one aspect of life may well result in unknowingly and shamefully being had in another and more serious one.

Jonson thus achieves in *Epicoene* the same effect that Cordatus had described in *Every Man Out*, of an “exalted tree...felled in a moment” rather than “by degrees.” There Cordatus claimed that Asper violently brought characters out of their humours all at once because to do so is not only more pleasant, but “approacheth nearest the life”

⁹⁹ Mares, “Comic Procedures,” 111.

(4.5.168-72). Maintaining the same goal of verisimilitude, Jonson in *Epicœne* accomplishes a similar shock, but without the awkward mechanism of the chorus and frame narrative. Not only that, but the double trick of Dauphine drives home much more effectively Jonson's corrective intent, leaving his audience speechless for at least a moment, and perhaps more. Yet even in the midst of this direct appeal to his audience to see themselves, the play maintains its lightness of tone and inoffensiveness. Rather than being badgered into a conclusion about the play, as we often are by Jonson, we are left to take the trickery however we like: in contemplative silence, like Clerimont, or, like Truewit, by happily offering Jonson the garland as the more clever man and missing the deeper point.

5.3 "This strange course"

In keeping with the two-fold nature of the indignation aroused by comedy, Claudio's sincere but shallow repentance in *Much Ado About Nothing* satisfies, at least partly, the indignation that his denunciation of Hero arouses in the audience. The qualification is necessary because he never genuinely perceives his own culpability in falling for Don John's hoax. His emotions remain unexamined, his strong feeling, unclarified, and it is just this absence of catharsis that leaves the audience with unsettled feelings toward him. The catharsis we want but do not see in Claudio, though, is one that Shakespeare gives instead to Beatrice and Benedick. I want to argue that rightly understood, their ultimate response to each other moves far beyond the programmatic satisfaction of our indignation towards their initial humorousness, and becomes a discovery and comprehension of the complex emotions that are brought out of them,

particularly in Act 4. As in Claudio's case, Beatrice's and Benedick's feelings are at first aroused by the hoaxes played on them. Where Don John's and Don Pedro's hoaxes depend largely on manipulation of an unconscious victim, though, the Friar's explicitly aims to bring about in its victim an understanding of his emotions and motivations, and to correct the errors these indicate by introducing other, more fitting, emotions. His aim, in other words, is catharsis, and it finds its fulfillment not in Claudio, but unexpectedly in Beatrice and Benedick.

Like the hoaxes of Jonson's tricksters, Don John's on Claudio work by inflating his pre-existing, conventional habits of thought. He identifies Claudio's humour and twice puts him into false scenarios that depend on his eager acceptance of conventional attitudes toward love and marriage. Don Pedro's hoax on Beatrice and Benedick is most frequently seen as running parallel to Don John's second hoax on Claudio: the two tricksters are brothers and both seek to manipulate, in opposite ways, couples whom the play sets up as pairs. But though they begin in close proximity to each other, Don John's hoax has run its full course by the middle of Act 4, just as Don Pedro's reaches its climax. The remainder of the play for Claudio involves the *undoing* of Don John's hoax while under the influence of the Friar's. Along with the Friar's hoax, Don Pedro's continues its forward trajectory up until the play's concluding marriages, suggesting that these two might have similarities worth examining.

First, though, the most significant difference between the brothers' hoaxes is that Don Pedro's aims not to inflate his victims' previous dispositions, but radically to alter them. He wants to "bring Signor Benedick and Lady Beatrice," who are ever at war with each other, "into a mountain of affection th' one with th' other" (2.1.361-62). While I

disagree with Jean Howard's assertion that no attraction exists between Beatrice and Benedick prior to Don Pedro's trick, she astutely notes that Don Pedro "never indicates that he sees a repressed attraction between Beatrice and Benedick, nor does he present his fictions as simply revealing the truth" about their pre-existing attraction.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, neither he nor any of the other agents in the hoax try to convince Benedick that he really loves Beatrice, or vice versa, and that they need simply to admit the truth. As we have seen, the methodology of Don Pedro and his accomplices is only to exert social pressure on the pair to acquiesce in the idea of a match: they *ought* to love each other, and if they don't, it is because they are too proud to consider marriage. After providing Benedick and Beatrice, respectively, with accounts of the other's secret love, each group of hoaxers discusses the propriety and duty that the one prospective lover should feel toward the other: Benedick "hath a contemptible spirit," says Don Pedro in his hearing, "and I wish he would modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady" (2.3.182, 206-7). Ursula and Hero urge Beatrice's obligation to Benedick ever more strongly, asking rhetorically, "Doth not [Benedick] / Deserve as full as fortunate a bed / As ever Beatrice shall couch upon?" (3.1.44-46), and concurring that Beatrice's "carping" and being "so odd and from all fashions" towards him "cannot be commendable" (71-73). The method they all employ thus suggests that felt social obligation, much moreso than the awakening of genuine emotion, will be most effective in changing Beatrice's and Benedick's opinions about each other.

Like Don Pedro's, the Friar's hoax is meant to work a significant change in its victim, rather than enlarge an existing humour. That it doesn't work on Claudio in the

¹⁰⁰ Howard, "Renaissance Antitheatricality," 178.

way that he hopes for is, for the moment, unimportant, because what the Friar describes is a process remarkably similar to what I have called dramatic catharsis. His goal is not simply to “change slander to remorse” in Claudio, as we might expect (4.1.211). This would, of course, be “some good,” he admits, “But not for that dream I on this strange course / But on this travail look for greater birth” (211-13). He then goes on to prophesy a process of clarification of emotion in Claudio brought about specifically by feeling emotion. He bases his idea on the observation that Claudio has made crucial inferences about Hero that are false, and counters these inferential “proofs” of Hero’s unfaithfulness. Rather than an indication of guilt, the Friar reads Hero’s “thousand blushing apparitions,” the “thousand innocent shames” that “beat away those blushes,” and the “fire” in her eye as obvious proof of her innocence (159-62).¹⁰¹ Claudio, he implies, has connected these particulars of Hero’s reaction to the wrong universal, to guilt instead of innocence. Rather than trusting what for the Friar, Beatrice, and Benedick is the obvious meaning of Hero’s reaction, Claudio not only overrides his earlier feelings for Hero with conjecture, but decides that the ideology of female perfidy will filter any subsequent emotions he might be tempted to feel: “I’ll lock up all the gates of love, / And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang / To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm” (104-6).

The Friar concocts his hoax in direct response to this decision, as Carol Cook notes.¹⁰² He doesn’t attempt to alter Claudio’s error by means of rational argumentation,

¹⁰¹ Nova Myhill (“Spectatorship,” 306) discusses the parallels of the Friar’s act of “reading” Hero with those of Claudio and Leonato moments before, noting the importance of the Friar’s “willingness to let Hero speak in her own defense.”

¹⁰² Cook, “Sign and Semblance,” 196.

but by way of a hoax that aims to arouse pity, the emotion opposite to his hot indignation:

She dying – as it must be maintained –
Upon the instant that she was accused,
Shall be lamented, pitied, and excused
Of every hearer. (214-17)

Claudio's indignation, the Friar implies, is indicative of a failure to properly "prize" Hero's "worth," and the pity that the loss of her will engender in him will cause him to "find / The virtue that possession would not show" (218-21). But the Friar further sharpens his prophecy of what will occur in Claudio under the influence of pity:

When he shall hear she died upon his words,
Th'idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
And every lovely organ of her life
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul
Than when she lived indeed. Then shall he mourn,
If ever love had interest in his liver,
And wish he had not so accusèd her –
No, though he thought his accusation true. (223-33)

The emotional state brought about by the news of Hero's death will enable him, in "his study of imagination," to link Hero not with the stereotype of female lasciviousness that he did "when she lived indeed," but with a higher ideal, the "more precious habit" of virtue and innocence¹⁰³ thus replacing his lens of "conjecture" with a more accurate "idea."¹⁰⁴ The clarified vision enabled by his initial pity will only increase his sense of loss and shame over his misjudgement – "Then shall he mourn" – even to the point that the

¹⁰³ This description of the female ideal raises its own problems, as Cook ("Sign and Semblance," 197) notes: "Hero is cleansed of carnality, of the blood that has been read as the sign of sexuality and guilt." Nevertheless, the Friar's vision is accurate to what we see of Hero in the play, and for my purposes, this accuracy is what is important.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Kirsch (*Experience of Love*, 53-55) sees the Friar's vision here answering the essential problem of fashion that Borachio discusses with Conrad after he and Margaret trick Claudio.

accuracy of his accusation will become irrelevant to him. This sort of complete and unconditional love, interestingly, is just what the courtly love conventions which he earlier employed point towards. The Friar would restore the link with them and Hero that he had earlier made, but this time fortified with a genuine depth of feeling.

The Friar thus hopes to correct Claudio's wild indignation with an equal and opposite pity, and by evoking this feeling – the right emotion at the right time towards the right object – to make him better able to comprehend Hero's worthiness. His concluding metaphor likens his task to the curing of an illness: "For to strange sores, strangely they strain the cure" (252). His plan proposes an experience very similar to the catharsis of emotion described variously by Golden, Nussbaum, Janko, and Halliwell: it depends upon an emotional response to a dramatic situation correctly perceived and related to a larger universal, and it leaves its subject with a "due proportion" and new understanding of emotion and its complexity. Of the few critics who have given attention to just how the Friar hopes his hoax will work, Barbara Lewalski perhaps comes closest to this. She suggests that "the Friar's expectation as regards Claudio is stated in rather specific Platonic terms, to the effect that his brooding upon Hero's reported death will aid his advance along the scale of love."¹⁰⁵ Yet this advance is enabled not by Platonic dispassion, but by an Aristotelian acceptance and use of emotion as a guide. Moreover, what is especially interesting here is Shakespeare's inclusion of pity, the emotion of tragedy, as the means by which a comic resolution might be brought about. Feeling pain in response to "death" is set up as an avenue to the festive conclusion of comedy.

¹⁰⁵ Lewalski, "Love, Appearance and Reality," 249.

As I have demonstrated, though, nothing of the sort happens to Claudio. He mocks Leonato's later grief, declares his own invective a mere "mistake," and is at best only a mildly chastened version of his old self at play's end. The central reason for this failure, I think, is that he does not come to feel and comprehend the emotion that the Friar hangs his hoax on, or even to recognize the excess of his previous feelings. This response is already suggested by his reaction to Don John's first hoax: certainly it causes him to change from his initial "soft and delicate desires" to a sullen pout, but he feels these sentiments entirely on cue and without real consciousness (1.1.292). He repeats this same shift under the influence of Don John's second hoax. In both cases, his emotion brings about not the self-realization that the pain of pity would have, by only a pseudo-realization ("beauty is a witch"; "For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love" [2.1.180, 4.1.104]) that is little more than a pat agreement with the conventions Don John employs.

Claudio does, of course, eventually realize and admit his misjudgement when he hears Borachio's confession. "Sweet Hero," he then declares, "now thy image doth appear / In the rare semblance that I loved at first" (5.1.235-6). But what he sees is not the previously unrealized vision of Hero that the Friar hoped for, but the same one he knew before it was vitiated by "unchastity." This is confirmed by his later response to discovering the "resurrected" Hero at the second wedding, where he once again invokes the Friar's hopes only to deny them: "Another Hero!" he declares. Don Pedro clarifies the meaning of Claudio's "another" as being "no different" from the one he knew before, rather than "new, a second one" more deeply understood, when he says, "The former Hero, Hero that is dead!" (5.4.62, 65).

His response to Borachio's admission, though, is very much in keeping with the method by which Don Pedro had hoped to change Beatrice and Benedick: he repents because of social obligation. The knowledge of his "mistaking" brings about Claudio's abrupt shift from mocking Leonato's grief in jocular prose to begging him in formal verse, "Choose your revenge yourself; / Impose me to what penance your invention / Can lay upon my sin" (266-68). Realizing that he has wronged a "good old man," he seeks to right the wrong by means of a formal penance (270). Leonato's elaborate instruction that he publicize Hero's innocence, pay his respects at her tomb, and still give Leonato the honour of a well-born heir by marrying his niece, fit Claudio's desire perfectly. At the same time as these actions will vindicate the honour of Leonato's family, they also demonstrate to Claudio that Leonato does not hold him primarily responsible; Claudio's honour is also vindicated by remaining Leonato's heir. And so, after stiffly performing obsequies at Hero's tomb, Claudio feels himself once again worthy of his social place and of whatever bride Leonato will provide, confident that, with Hero put in the past, "Hymen now with luckier issue speeds / Than this for whom we rendered up this woe" (5.3.32-33).

After this scene, all note of sorrow is gone from Claudio, who once again jokes amicably with Don Pedro and Benedick about cuckoldry just before he is to marry his replacement bride. He is genuinely amazed to find out that it is Hero, but he takes her just as much because she is a virgin as because he has come to unconditionally love and admire her. The goal of the Friar's hoax is thus achieved, but by means much closer to those employed by Don Pedro on Beatrice and Benedick: the felt need to fulfill and conform to social obligation and convention. This is not to say that Claudio's repentance

is consciously disingenuous. Indeed, the unconsciousness with which he reduces the personal pain of culpability to the violation of social decorum is just my point. The self-recognition of catharsis never occurs in Claudio because from first to last, his feelings are confined to socially and theoretically prescribed channels.

Like the Friar's, Don Pedro's hoax achieves its aim, bringing Beatrice and Benedick to the "holy bond" of wedlock by play's end (3.1.114). As I've already noted, critics in the last three decades have frequently argued that this occurs thoroughly in keeping with Don Pedro's method of imposing social obligation. That the Friar's aim and Don Pedro's comic method converge on Claudio, though, suggests the possibility of a parallel between Don Pedro's aim (Beatrice and Benedick's marriage) and the Friar's method. Indeed, if John Creaser is right to assert that "the Friar's authoritative prophecy...is later neither borne out nor commented on," it would seem pointless for Shakespeare to have given it such space in the play.¹⁰⁶ By the aborted wedding scene, Shakespeare has already given us several demonstrations of Beatrice and Benedick's awareness of the "fashion" that rules others in the play, and of their own ambivalent responses to it. From the point at which Claudio's intent to shame Hero becomes apparent in Act 4, Shakespeare aligns Benedick's response with that of Beatrice and against that of his companions Don Pedro and Claudio.

Moreover, Beatrice and Benedick's response is soon affirmed by the Friar's. All three feel pity, pain at another's misfortune, in direct opposition to the indignation of Hero's accusers. This openness to another's suffering keeps Benedick on stage after the others have stormed off and enables him to calm Leonato's shrill reaction. Ultimately, it

¹⁰⁶ Creaser, "Forms of Confusion," 94-95.

brings him to approach a person to whom he has never spoken a serious word, and to ask her sincerely, “Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?” (4.1.255). Beatrice is not quite ready to meet Benedick’s earnestness and returns a slightly sarcastic line – though one devoid of her usual acerbity towards him: “Yea, and I will weep a while longer.” Benedick continues, though, by gently trying to demonstrate that he takes her and Hero’s side in the whole dispute: “Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged” (259-60). His genuine feeling finally moves her to suggest the possibility of her own feeling for him when she muses, “Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!” (261-62). She carefully ties the possibility, though, to his commitment to justice, to something larger than only herself.

Her hint complicates what was initially only pity in Benedick with the nascent love first suggested to him by Don Pedro’s hoax. Again testing him, she states that the task of vindication cannot be his because of his necessary allegiance to Claudio and the Prince. His subsequent declaration is a response to this challenge: “I do love nothing in the world so well as you,” he blurts out, and it surprises him – “Is not that strange?” – as much as her (267-68). David Richman notes that by pausing between these two sentences, the actor playing Benedick can convey that he is “alive to the situation’s irony and humor” even as he is “contemplat[ing] the miracle that he should be in love with Beatrice.”¹⁰⁷ The question thus deftly melds humour with wonder just as Beatrice’s earlier response paired sarcasm with openness. Her response reciprocates Benedick’s amazement: “As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you. But believe me not, and yet I lie not. I confess nothing nor

¹⁰⁷ Richman, *Laughter, Pain, and Wonder*, 134-35.

I deny nothing; I am sorry for my cousin” (269-273). She likens his feeling to something mysterious – “the thing I know not” – and cautiously admits that she shares it, but without forgetting that concern for Hero has just brought them together. Barbara Everett deftly notes that Beatrice is “not merely changing the subject when she says firmly: ‘I am sorry for my cousin.’ It’s as if she were drawing up the rule-book for the rest of their lives.”¹⁰⁸ Benedick wants a firmer declaration from her, though:

BENEDICK: By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

BEATRICE: Do not swear and eat it.

BENEDICK: I will swear by it that you love me, and I will make him eat it that says I love not you.

BEATRICE: Will you not eat your word?

BENEDICK: With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

BEATRICE: Why then, God forgive me.

BENEDICK: What offence, sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE: You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to protest I loved you.

BENEDICK: And do it with all thy heart. (274-285)

With an exquisite blend of earnestness and humour, he finally brings her to admit, “I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest” (286-87). Her confession likewise combines earnest emotion and a dash of deeply self-conscious humour. In striking parallel to the Friar’s hope for Claudio, the pain of pity opens Benedick up to realize with amazement his love for Beatrice, and his eager yet compassionate urging slowly brings about the same recognition in her. Critics who hold that Beatrice and Benedick’s love is a script handed them by Don Pedro either ignore this part of Act 4 completely (Howard and Stephen Greenblatt¹⁰⁹) or go into contortions to explain what

¹⁰⁸ Everett, “The Unsociable Comedy,” 83.

¹⁰⁹ I discuss Greenblatt’s position below, 209.

little of it they do treat (Ryan).¹¹⁰ All fail to notice that the real obligation Beatrice and Benedick feel here is to a friend and to justice, and that the Friar's vision much better describes their experience in this moment than Don Pedro's. Certainly the latter's hoax planted in their minds a seed, but it only grows up from their common ground of compassion and concern for justice – soil cleared and tilled for them by the Friar's hoax.

While it is Benedick's pity that softens Beatrice, she very quickly moves to instruct him in emotion as well. To his rapturous declaration, "Come, bid me do anything for thee," she bluntly responds "Kill Claudio" (4.1.288-89). This reply, on the one hand, entails the shock of reversal and might seem to shatter the fragile intimacy they have just established. Similar to Hunter in his condemnation of Beatrice's "hatred" for Claudio,¹¹¹ Cook charges that she "hastily retreats from her emotional surrender, . . . covering her exposed tenderness with a display of ferocity" that simply "imitates what we might call the dogged, brutal, irrational masculinity just displayed by Claudio and Leonato."¹¹² A consideration of Aristotle's parallel between pity and indignation, though, suggests that Beatrice's sentiment might be much more subtle and just than either "hatred" or what Cook laments as a "masculine revenge ethic."¹¹³ Rather, Beatrice feels the righteous indignation which, rather than being irreconcilable with pity, arises "from the same moral character [as does pity], and both emotions are characteristic of a good character" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.1386b). Her demand that Benedick "kill

¹¹⁰ By taking lines 267-73 out of the emotional context of Act Four, Ryan (*Shakespeare's Comedies*, 194) knots up Benedick's "I do love nothing in the world so well as you" into a "veiled rebuff, which equates loving Beatrice with loving nothing in the world." Their amazement at the "strange"ness of things they "know not" is only a hopeless response to the fact that beyond the contingent social constructs of Messina, "there is literally nothing to be known." Ryan's contortions resemble Claudio's grim attempt to make Hero's "exterior shows" prove her guilt.

¹¹¹ Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, 97.

¹¹² Cook, "Sign and Semblance," 195-96.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 196.

Claudio,” then, is not only rooted in virtue, but is a fitting counterpart to her previous declaration of love. When he balks at it, her response reveals the inseparability of love and justice, out of which principled indignation arises: “You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy” (298-99). Benedick’s pity may have moved Beatrice to express her love, but given what Hero has just suffered, unalloyed pity is an incomplete response: she wants Benedick’s pity for her and Hero to be paired with a just indignation towards Claudio.

She gives him powerful reason for such indignation in her denunciation of Claudio, which focuses on how his unconscious adherence to the outward form of social convention actually violates the genuine ideals of courage and valour these forms ought to represent: “Princes and counties!...Manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones, too. He is now as valiant as Hercules who only tells a lie and swears it” (311-17). Like Hunter, Stephen Greenblatt explains Beatrice’s violently dichotomous sentiments by writing off the possibility of love’s presence in her: because her “declaration of love [is] based upon a set of illusions and motivated by the fear of shame,” “where we might expect tender words, we get the opposite.”¹¹⁴ Instead, Beatrice’s vehemence finally convinces Benedick of the justice of her indignation and the need, if he is indeed going to “be friends with” her, for him to share it by means of action. Benedick realizes that she is questioning not simply Claudio’s virtue but his own love for her, and so he earnestly reasserts it: “Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee” (324-25). Rather than dissolving intimacy, her demand convinces him of the genuine depth and complexity of her love, and the

¹¹⁴ Greenblatt, Introduction, 562.

legitimacy of her inference from Claudio's particular action to the universal category of injustice. He finally asks with high seriousness, "Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?" (328-29), requiring that her answer pair both clear reason ("think you") and depth of feeling ("in your soul"). She responds in kind, "Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul," which to Benedick is "Enough. I am engaged" (330-31). Just as his pity brought about her declaration of love, her indignation motivates him to act on that love. Moreover, their emotions temper and bring to a just proportion their previously humours-based tendencies: acerbic Beatrice is softened by pity and jocular Benedick is sobered by righteous indignation. As the Friar had envisioned for Claudio, the experience of strong emotion brings about in them the self-conscious understanding of that emotion and its proper proportion in relationship to others.

Martha Nussbaum suggests that the catharsis a play's audience undergoes is mirrored for them by that of the characters. *Much Ado About Nothing* begins and ends with genial portrayals of conventional emotion in Claudio, but takes us through a somewhat painful exploration of the sinister potential of these in Act 4. As has often been noted, the result of its close brush with pain is to complicate our response to Claudio in Act 5; our indignation is not quite satisfied. Cook suggests that "the play's attempt to move toward a comic conclusion and to evade what its plot has exposed places a strain on the fifth act."¹¹⁵ Rather than evading the problems that it has raised, though, the play might instead give us, in Beatrice and Benedick's catharsis of emotion, a pattern for our understanding of our ambivalence towards Claudio. Each feels and perceives the link between pity and indignation, and as long as the situation warrants it,

¹¹⁵ Cook, "Sign and Semblance", 198.

each is prepared to act on the more painful emotion. Claudio's repentance is superficial, but it is also all that anyone will get from him because he is self-ignorant. By welcoming him back into Messinian society at play's end, Beatrice and Benedick seem to acknowledge this simple reality, and Shakespeare gives us no reason why we, clearly seeing Claudio's enduring self-ignorance, should not do the same. Just as in Benedick, pity needed to give place to indignation for a time, so for us, indignation must finally be checked by pity for a man who acts cruelly because he is blind, not because he is wicked. Shakespeare is most often kind to his stock characters, and Claudio arouses emotions that the dramatist then balances with others, an experience that leads to a more subtle understanding of how we respond to the inevitable emotional mix of social life. Beatrice and Benedick realize profound things about the nature and obligation of love, yet do not hold Claudio responsible for a similar understanding, and neither should we. Shakespeare will do this later on in *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, but it requires a different sort of play, with error of a tragic sort. Jonson glances at this sort of emotional balance at the end of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and certainly complicates indignation in *Epicoene*. There, he seems to be moving towards divesting his drama of the clear obligation that indignation entails, somewhat after the manner of Shakespeare here. Pity plays a stronger role in this for Shakespeare, though.

5.4 "As if my brother lived"

The trick that Friar Francis plays on Claudio attempts to use emotional pain to bring about in him a cathartic self-realization about the nature of his wildly fluctuating feelings for Hero. The central hoax played by the Duke in *Measure for Measure* on his

deputy Angelo is initially different. The Duke has no definite aim in mind other than to “see / If power changes purpose” – an end which need not require pain (1.3.53-54). When Angelo gets himself into a self-tortured state, however, the Duke does nothing to alleviate or remedy his moral anguish, but instead provides him with a series of opportunities to choose between continuing in his duplicity or, by way of self-realization, taking pity on those whom he had attempted to harm. Even more explicitly, the hoaxes the Duke plays on Isabella return to Friar Francis’s aim of bringing about catharsis by way of painful experience. What sort of clarification he wants to bring about in her, though, is less clear. Critics have most typically suggested that the Duke aims at her “anger and desire for revenge”¹¹⁶ or “her chastity-based spiritual pride,”¹¹⁷ and that he succeeds in leading her to “humility,”¹¹⁸ “charity and forgiveness,”¹¹⁹ but have rarely given the question more than passing mention.¹²⁰ I generally agree with these assessments, but Aristotle’s interest in the precise nature of comic error encourages a more prolonged look at what the Duke intends to correct in Isabella. What emerges from considering together the tricks played on Angelo and Isabella, I will argue, is another example of the “comedy of affliction.”

As I have already described, Angelo thinks his spirit “finely touched,” able to make political and legal judgments with subtlety and sensitivity. In reality, however, his avoidance of practical experience has left him, as the Duke suggests, coldly rationalistic in his understanding of the law. What the Duke thus aims to do, in Aristotelian terms, is

¹¹⁶ Lanier, “Tragicomic Structure,” 31.

¹¹⁷ Lake, “Production of ‘Order,’” 179.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Schleiner, “Providential Improvisation,” 234. See also Frye, *Myth of Deliverance*, 29.

¹²⁰ Lanier’s article (“Tragicomic Structure”) is a rare exception: he describes the Duke as a figure of comic temperance who moderates Isabella’s tragic volatility over the course of Acts Three through Five.

to habituate Angelo's mind and emotions by giving them practice as a deputy, while he controls any serious consequences by remaining secretly present in Vienna. His plan enacts something that Milton, interestingly enough, describes in *Areopagitica*. He argues that "the doom which *Adam* fell into" by eating of the Tree of Knowledge was not simply one of knowing good and evil, but "of knowing good *by* evil."¹²¹ As a result, "what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil?" Angelo's inexperienced rectitude is the sort of "fugitive and cloister'd vertue" that Milton says he "cannot praise" because it "never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." The Duke puts Angelo in a place where he "can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures" in order to find out if, in the midst of thus experiencing passion, he can still rationally "distinguish, and prefer that which is truly better" and thus prove himself "a true warfaring Christian."

Angelo comes face to face with passionate vice soon enough, but that eventual failure to temper his passions comes about because he initially refuses *any* sort of feeling, even pity. First Escalus and then Isabella suggest that allowing himself to feel pity will not merely temper his rational judgement, but enlighten it and enable it to be truly just – an occurrence suggestive of catharsis. Angelo refuses their requests, and almost immediately faces an emotion far more insistent than pity. Despite the Duke's arrangement and Escalus' and Isabella's pleading, Angelo responds to his situation not with cathartic realization, but just as Plato feared audiences would to drama, by being morally overwhelmed by the strong emotion it raises. "Why does my blood thus muster

¹²¹ Milton, *Areopagitica*, 213 ("*by*" is my emphasis).

to my heart,” he asks, “Making it unable for itself / And dispossessing all my other parts” – most especially his mind – “of necessary fitness?” (2.4.20-23). Reason is overrun, rather than enlivened by, the emotion aroused by Angelo’s dramatic situation, just as Stephen Gosson and other anti-theatrical tract writers who sided with Plato claimed it was in the theatre.¹²² As a result, Angelo’s thinking becomes markedly irrational in his second discussion with Isabella:

’Tis all as easy
Falsely to take away a life true-made,
As to put metal in restrained means
To make a false one. (46-49)

His coining analogy absurdly equates the begetting of illegitimate children with murdering a legitimate one. Isabella calmly and reasonably responds that this principle may well be “set down so in heaven, but not in earth”, allowing Angelo’s analogy in the spiritual, heavenly realm (all sins being equal before God), but denying its applicability to one temporal and earthly (50). Angelo’s experience is similar to what Morose undergoes in Act 4 of *Epicoene*, where the strong emotion that his ribald guests elicit from him drives him to surrender his reasonable suspicion of the three wits and instead give himself into their care. The experience of each character in these moments is a sort of mock (and in both cases, it is funny) catharsis.

Isabella is intelligent enough to see how a better trained emotional sense could benefit Angelo, and she demonstrates remarkable emotional poise in this second discussion with him. But when Claudio finds out that there is a way to save his life and

¹²² “Vice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on the stage. As long as we know ourselves to be flesh, beholding those examples in theatres that are incident to flesh, we are taught by other men’s examples how to fall And they that came honest to a play may depart infected” (Gosson, *Plays Confuted*, 109).

asks Isabella to feel pity for him, her response mirrors Angelo's. "Death is a fearful thing," Claudio declares before painting a vivid picture of what it will be like for his body "to rot" and become "A kneaded clod," or for his soul to be "blown with restless violence round about / The pendant world." "The weariest and most loathed worldly life," he pleads with her, "is a paradise / To what we fear of death" (3.1.119-29). Isabella leaps completely over the pity Claudio asks for to an indignation so intense that it becomes malice. Intense emotion overwhelms the mind of one unhabituated to feeling it and her reason fails when she explodes at Claudio:

O you beast!
O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch!
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is't not a kind of incest to take life
From thine own sister's shame? (3.1.139-43)

Her previously sharp and lucid judgment deteriorates when she is under duress in exactly the way Angelo's did: she equates Claudio's quite natural desire to live with grossly unnatural incest, an understandable sin with one repellent. Thus her experience also makes a mockery of catharsis.

This display of extreme indignation concludes the Duke's introduction to Isabella. He seems to perceive the similarity between her and Angelo, because the hoax that he goes on to play on her is closely related to the one he has already begun on him. Like everyone else, of course, she is unaware of his friar's disguise. But when she later comes to the prison to find out whether his bed trick has resulted in Claudio's pardon, the Duke decides to tell her that Claudio has indeed been executed, even though he has managed to save him. This is at the same time a trick on Angelo, to whom he has just sent the head of Ragozine the pirate in lieu of Claudio's. The decision to include Isabella

in this hoax seems to occur on the spur of the moment, but he gives a very clear reason for it:

I will keep her ignorant of her good
To make her heavenly comforts of despair
When it is least expected. (4.3.106-8)

Calling this apparently hasty decision “the weakest moment in the play” in terms of narrative structure, N. W. Bawcutt holds that the Duke “is forced by the exigencies of the plot to lie to Isabella and make a feeble excuse for doing so.”¹²³ G. M. Pinciss concurs, suggesting that the Duke’s means are intolerable as mere comic intrigue, unless they are seen in a larger theological context.¹²⁴ Yet his words directly recall those of Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing*, when he describes his plan to get Count Claudio to “mourn” over Hero’s apparent death (4.1.230). Moreover, Friar Francis’s intention to make Claudio judge more reasonably and compassionately, even despite Hero’s alleged faults, illuminates something implicit in the Friar-Duke’s words. Maurice Hunt also notes the similarity of the two hoax descriptions, but asserts that the Duke’s plan fails just as did Friar Francis’s. What love Isabella does feel for her brother “neither causes her imagination to dignify (and so excuse) the lost Claudio, nor prompts her to say that she wishes he were alive.”¹²⁵ Yet almost immediately after being told Claudio is dead, she begins to weep (her tears are mentioned by others three times in the scene), a clear indication that pity has mollified the indignation she had earlier felt towards Claudio. Outward looking sympathy, it would appear, counters her earlier self-righteousness, bringing about the more balanced (but still pained, of course) exclamation, “Unhappy

¹²³ Bawcutt, Introduction, 24.

¹²⁴ See Pinciss, ““Heavenly comforts,”” 306-7.

¹²⁵ Hunt, “Comfort,” 226

Claudio, wretched Isabel, / Injurious world” (4.3.119-20). She makes good her claim (stated in discussion with Angelo) that she had earlier denied by denouncing Claudio, that were she in the place of judge, she would more accurately and compassionately gauge “what ’twere to be a judge, / And what a prisoner” (2.2.69-70).

Despite the apparent fulfillment of his aim here, the Duke keeps up the hoax until very late in the play. The reason for this, I think, is his continuing interest in Isabella’s indignation. Though that towards Claudio is tempered by pity, her concurrent reaction to Angelo is one of amplified indignation. “I will to him and pluck out his eyes!”, she avers, and concludes her aforementioned expression of grief by cursing, “most damnèd Angelo!” (4.3.117-20). Rather than undergoing a catharsis, her indignation toward Claudio seems to have been transferred to Angelo. Certainly it is toward him a justified emotion, a genuinely righteous indignation. Nevertheless, the Duke remains interested in it and rather than trying to assuage it, promises her the opportunity for its satisfaction:

...pace your wisdom
In that good path that I would wish it go,
And you shall have your bosom on this wretch,
Grace of the Duke, revenges to your heart,
And general honour. (130-4)

Her quick agreement, “I am directed by you,” would indicate that his pledge has hit on two things that she deeply desires: vengeance for Claudio’s death and vindication of her honour (135).

The Duke’s staging of his return to Vienna in Act 5 keeps Angelo and Isabella as central characters. Before finally revealing himself, he gives both of them ample cause for increasing the indignation they feel towards each other and is vitally interested to see

how far each will carry this emotion. With Angelo, the Duke is also interested to see just how long he will keep silent about his plot on Isabella. Throughout the first part of the scene, he lauds his deputy's virtue: "we hear / Such goodness of your justice that our soul / Cannot but yield you forth to public thanks," he declares, and in the face of Isabella's accusation, reaffirms that "his integrity / Stands without blemish." (5.1.5-7; 108-9). The irony here is thick, though our recollection of Angelo's desire to repent in Act 4 complicates it. It is also a feature strongly reminiscent of Jonson's central gulling scenes. That Angelo knows this praise to be untrue recalls particularly the uncomfortable confession that Clerimont coaxes from Daw and La Foole, that they have both enjoyed Epicoene's favours. The Duke wants to see just how long it will take for this irony to overcome Angelo's passion-turned-hatred of Isabella, an end he furthers by carefully feeding Angelo's indignation with her public accusations of him. The Duke appears not to have the least suspicion of Angelo's integrity, thus convincing him that his crime remains unknown. The deputy's indignation finally boils over, and he asks the Duke, "give me the scope of justice...To find this practice out" (235-40). The Duke's response further fuels Angelo's emotion as he urges him to "punish them [Isabella and Marianna] to your height of pleasure," and to "Do with your injuries as seems you best / In any chastisement" (240; 257-58).

When Lucio pulls off his monk's cowl, the Duke finally reveals his knowledge of the crime Angelo has committed and only compounded by denying. Because we have already seen in him at least some desire to repent, I think we must take his confession to be genuine:

O my dread lord,
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness
To think that I can be undiscernible,
When I perceive your grace, like power divine,
Hath looked upon my passes.

He freely invites what he believes should be his punishment:

Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death
Is all the grace I beg. (5.1.371-75)

A continuous theme throughout the play has been the need for mercy and pity to influence rational, legal justice. In calling for his own death, Angelo seems not to have learned this: he fulfills his opening pledge to Escalus, that “When I that censure him do so offend / Let mine own judgement pattern out my death” (2.1.29-30). Like Count Claudio, he repents his crime, but without the clear catharsis of indignation intended by the Friar that tricks him. Once again, though, this judgement must be tempered with our knowledge of his earlier inclination toward repentance. His acknowledgement there, that his previous virtue was a product not simply of his own efforts but of “grace” which he subsequently “forgot,” makes his apparent spiritual despair here to be not as all-consuming as it otherwise seems (4.4.31). Indeed, Angelo finds in the Duke’s own “grace” a parallel with “power divine,” making his thorough self-abnegation before him a fitting affirmation of the sincerity of his repentance, not solely a request for harsh justice. As with those he makes to Isabella, the Duke’s regular offers of revenge to Angelo are not extended in order to seal his condemnation, but in the hope of evoking the realization that remains only potential in him. Marianna’s words best express the

unfinished nature of his catharsis when she hopes that as “best men are moulded out of faults,.../ So may my husband” be (440-42).

By urging Angelo to satisfy his indignation, the Duke simultaneously provides fodder for Isabella’s. As Friar he has set her up to seek justice against Angelo, but by denying her as Duke, he increases the injustice that is her indignation’s cause. As with Angelo, the Duke wants to see, in the most intense of circumstances, whether her thinking about judgement has changed, whether the pity she has realized for one mild sinner might also be shown towards one much worse. Rather than “barring Isabella from the realm of moral agency by literally putting her...in her proper place,” as Desmet charges,¹²⁶ the Duke’s initial shaming of her feeds her indignation in order to see whether she can maintain her moral and rational self control in the face of intense feeling – something she had earlier failed to do.

In his eventual sentencing of Angelo, the Duke finally offers to Isabella the satisfaction of the indignation he has sought to inflate. His judgement is phrased to proffer precisely the vengeance she had earlier been eager to take:

...as he adjudged your brother,
Being criminal in double violation
Of sacred chastity and of promise-breach
Thereon dependent for your brother’s life,
The very mercy of the law cries out
Most audible, even from his proper tongue,
“An Angelo for Claudio, death for death.” (404-10)

In response to this, Marianna brings the Duke’s hoax to a climax by begging Isabella to plead with her for Angelo’s life, and I wonder if she hasn’t planned this ahead of time with the Duke. He points out that Marianna’s request is “against all sense” because of

¹²⁶ Desmet, *Shakespeare’s Characters*, 145

what Isabella has suffered at the hands of Angelo, and again insists that “he dies for Claudio’s death” (434,444). The resulting tension is exquisite: Marianna asks Isabella a third time to kneel, indicating that her first two requests have gone unheeded.¹²⁷ Finally, Isabella agrees, and asks the Duke:

Most bounteous sir,
Look, if it please you, on this man condemned
As if my brother lived. I partly think
A due sincerity governed his deeds
Till he did look on me; since it is so,
Let him not die. (445-49)

Remarkably, she makes no mention of Marianna here, but bases her request on her own pity for Angelo. In the true sense of “sympathy” as “shared” or “common feeling,” she can sympathize with his initial zealousness for the law and believe that “due sincerity governed his deed” of punishing Claudio. His subsequent falling off from his high ideals when “he did look on me” she can understand as a common human weakness.

This sympathy derives, I think, precisely from the earlier catharsis of her feelings toward Claudio. She had earlier acknowledged Angelo’s assertion that not only men but “women are frail, too” (2.4.125). Her hasty agreement – “Nay, call us ten times frail, / For we are soft as our complexions are, / And credulous to false prints” – was ostensibly self-deprecating, but subtly distanced her from the sex she judged and from the charge of weakness (129-31). Claudio then asked her much more pointedly to identify with human frailty by committing his sin to save his life, and she violently refused. But her remarkable willingness in the first part of Act 5 to associate at least verbally with sin by shaming herself comes about, I would suggest, because of the catharsis of her self-

¹²⁷ Peter Brook’s 1950 Stratford-on-Avon production famously had Isabella (played by Barbara Jefford) “stand silent for a long as she thought the audience could bear before dropping on her knees to plead for Angelo” (Bawcutt, Introduction, 37).

righteous indignation towards Claudio, brought about by the Duke declaring him dead.¹²⁸ And here she goes even further, to sympathize with the most morally repugnant person in the play. Rather than indicating half-heartedness or mere acquiescence under duress, that Isabella only “partly” thinks this vividly reveals the immensity of the task of allowing herself to feel such sympathy. Maus aptly calls this “a more subtle and exacting asceticism” than that Isabella originally desired to practice in the convent: an “asceticism of the spirit” rather than only of the body.¹²⁹ No small part of her still resists identifying with a man like Angelo, yet her experience with Claudio has convinced her that she must. Frye points out that “the woman who earlier had stated her intention of praying for Claudio’s death pleads for Angelo’s life on the ground that he is less villainous than self-deluded.”¹³⁰ In words suggestive of the process of catharsis Isabella has undergone, he concludes that it was just this sort of “charity ... that Isabella had dimly in mind when she first wanted to be a nun.”¹³¹ Desmet thinks that “the act of kneeling therefore deprives Isabella... of autonomy and control”; rather, it is a supreme act of will that counters judgement with pity in a manner exemplary of the theme that runs throughout the play.¹³² This change in her might itself be the “heavenly comforts” which the Duke wanted to make for her out of “despair”: for her earthly sorrow at the loss of Claudio she gains a spiritual compassion and clarity she did not previously possess. Genuine nemeses is not wholly set aside – she offers no protest when Angelo is forced to marry Marianna – but it is tempered and purged of its earlier taint of self-righteous pride.

¹²⁸ Karl Zender (“Isabella’s Choice,” 85) suggests that in her willingness to sleep with Angelo to save Claudio’s life, Marianna models this acceptance of shame.

¹²⁹ Maus, Introduction, 847.

¹³⁰ Frye, *Myth of Deliverance*, 29.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Desmet, *Shakespeare’s Characters*, 154.

But Isabella goes on to demonstrate that by coming to feel pity and tempering her indignation, her reason has also been reinvigorated. The Duke's charge against Angelo is as curious as it is precise. Angelo is not, as we might expect, to be executed for propositioning Isabella, sleeping with Marianna, or breaking his promise to release Claudio, but for presuming to sentence Claudio while himself guilty of Claudio's crime: "as he adjudged your brother." This distinction is crucial. Because the knowledge of his own guilt inspired no mercy in Angelo for Claudio, says the Duke, Claudio's sentence will be turned upon him. But after kneeling, Isabella goes on to make a remarkably precise legal argument on Angelo's behalf:

My brother had but justice,
In that he did the thing for which he died.
For Angelo,
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
And must be buried but as an intent
That perished by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,
Intents, but merely thoughts. (449-55)

Angelo's planned blackmail did not, in a technical sense, succeed, she points out. As a result, he is not guilty of judging Claudio while himself "in double violation / Of sacred chastity and of promise-breach": his intention never became action, and thus cannot be judged. Hunt complains that Isabella "reasons syllogistically" and thus misses the Duke's lesson that "mortal frailty gives forgiveness its edge in a competition with the application of talionic law," but his claim overlooks the difference that Isabella perceives between personal Christian ethic and state law.¹³³ Marianna had previously asked the Duke to pardon Angelo and been rebuffed, and Isabella sees that similarly, her own personal forgiveness of him is hardly grounds for a state pardon. She thus picks up the charge "he

¹³³ Hunt, "Being Precise," 259.

dies for Claudio's death" and throws it out of court, so to speak. Just as her subtle spiritual pride when challenged earlier had clouded her reasoning, here her humble and generous pity sharpens and enlivens it. Rather than obfuscating justice, as many critics have charged,¹³⁴ the technical loophole that she shrewdly finds enables an exoneration which the strictures of the law could not allow. She goes beyond what the Duke expects by arguing against the very charge that seemed meant to arouse her indignation, not pity. When he grimly answered the Duke's charge against him, Angelo finally did what he had earlier promised Escalus he would if guilty of Claudio's crime – submit to death. Here, Isabella does what she promised Angelo she would do if she were judge, but forgot in her irrational malice toward Claudio.¹³⁵

In this light, the Duke's much-maligned marriage proposal might be most properly seen as Shakespeare's concluding comic trope for his surrogate dramatist. As with Isabella's earlier plea for Angelo's life, critics tend to describe the proposal as the ultimate instance of "the Duke's script determin[ing] the range of action available" to Isabella: she "leaves the stage," laments Desmet, "in silence, as a proper but ordinary woman who will be tamed by marriage – and, we presume, cease to play with reason and discourse."¹³⁶ Just as Desmet's last assumption is contradicted by a careful look at Isabella's argument for Angelo's life, so too her initial one is undone by considering the

¹³⁴ Like Hunt, Rieffer ("Instruments," 166) also criticizes Isabella's logic as "twisted" and her argument as mere "specious legalism." Barton (Introduction, 582) concurs: "That Angelo has not slept with Isabella, as he intended, is true. He has, however, slept with Mariana outside the bonds of holy matrimony, even as Claudio did with Juliet. How, then, can Isabella claim that her brother 'had but justice' when he has died (as she thinks) for exactly the same sin, fornication on a pre-contract, committed by Angelo with Marianna?" While true, both critics miss the subtlety of Isabella's argument – a subtlety necessary to legal dispute: she speaks here of Angelo's intended crime against *her*, not his wider guilt. She requests pardon of his crimes as they relate to her and her brother (though still on legal grounds), not to others like Marianna.

¹³⁵ Anna Kamaralli ("Writing about Motive," 59) also makes this point, but thinks that Isabella remains true to her promise throughout the play.

¹³⁶ Desmet, *Shakespeare's Characters*, 154.

Duke's words of proposal. Though he first tells Isabella, "Give me your hand and say you will be mine" immediately after unmasking Claudio (5.1.495), the real content of his offer emerges at the very end of the play:

Dear Isabel,
I have a motion much imports your good,
Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,
What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine. (537-40)

He explicitly makes his offer conditional upon her "willing ear," and it embodies by means of antimetabole the same ideal of mutuality and reciprocity that mark Shakespeare's other comic matches: "What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine." This offer appears "abrupt, naïve, even tasteless"¹³⁷ only if one has read the Duke and Isabella solely as psychological portraits, and it certainly disallows the possibility that his proposal "recapitulates Angelo's harassment."¹³⁸ Rather, his proposal is a fitting recognition of his and Isabella's comic complementarity: she is initially an object of his hoax, his pupil, but takes up the challenge that it poses so successfully that she is able to outdo him in the end by arguing down his charge against Angelo.¹³⁹ The Duke recognizes this in both the content of his proposal and in its couplet form, which links it to the play's other similarly-patterned affirmations of balance.

The widely divergent opinions that Isabella evokes in Act 5 indicate that the play's audience shares deeply in the sorting out of indignation that Isabella undertakes, even when it does not agree with her conclusions. But the earlier catharsis of her malice towards Claudio (when she weeps over his death) is not one that the audience shares:

¹³⁷ Hunt, "Precise," 252.

¹³⁸ Maus, Introduction, 847.

¹³⁹ Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* seems an early prototype of this sort of pupil-turned-wife when she not only submits to Petruccio's demand that she recognise old Vincentio as a 'gentlewoman,' but lavishly calls him a 'Young budding virgin, fair, and fresh, and sweet' (4.6.30, 38). Like Isabella, she not only enters into the joke but becomes an equal participant in its playing.

that moment only satisfies, rather than reveals something about, the indignation that her violent condemnation had earlier aroused in us. Moreover, our awareness of the Duke's trick with Claudio combines with the play's other reassurances about its final outcome – both denied Isabella – to prevent pity of her from significantly altering the satisfaction of our indignation here. That we are not certain how she will respond to Marianna's plea and the Duke's larger hoax in Act 5, though, brings us closer to her experience of catharsis. Certainly, watching Angelo's unwitting self-condemnation unfold is satisfying in a Jonsonian way. The Duke's initial death sentence on him, though, is very harsh, and I think it evokes an ambiguous feeling similar to that which gives Isabella such intense pause. As I suggested earlier, simply to relish the prospect of his punishment and then quarrel with the Duke's subsequent pardon would be to follow Angelo's and Isabella's initial examples as well as to disregard Marianna's plea. The audience is thus required, with Isabella, to determine whether its indignation is mixed like hers (especially in a time when "virtuous absolutists" are so repellent), where to draw the line between self-righteousness and *nemesan*, and how pity interacts with the latter sort. Bawcutt muses that while *Measure for Measure* "is full of striking themes and concepts" like justice and mercy, sexual morality and its regulation, and the line between public and private, these "are not part of a logical structure intended to eliminate inconsistencies and to work rigorously towards a definable conclusion ("Shakespeare is showing us that...")."¹⁴⁰ The play demonstrates and causes its audience to feel that even the pursuit of justice can become self-serving and self-aggrandizing. The purpose of the laughter which the play so regularly evokes, especially by way of Lucio's continual interjections in Act 5, might be to

¹⁴⁰ Bawcutt, Introduction, 45.

take the edge off our indignation just enough to let us see these subtleties. Rather than simply subversive of the more serious characters and ideas of the drama, then, the low-life characters and scenes enable us to perceive them more clearly and calmly.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The history of comparative criticism of Jonson and Shakespeare is largely one of describing their large and obvious differences, not their similarities. This would indicate that the latter task is the more challenging one, requiring a careful and thorough study of particularities, rather than generalities. It is to it, therefore, that I have devoted the most time in the preceding chapters. I would like, then, briefly to step back from detailed analysis to consider several of their larger differences that have implicitly emerged. They arise uniquely out of the uses each dramatist makes of pain in writing their “comedy of affliction.” I have already argued that though Aristotle appears to proscribe pain from comedy, his point in restricting comic error to that which is “not painful or destructive” is to contrast the genre with tragedy, rather than strictly to delineate its subject matter. But if Golden’s account of indignation is correct, moderate pain may not be merely permissible, but even necessary for comedy. While Aristotle clearly limits the range of error that the genre ought to portray, Halliwell concurs with Golden that Aristotle’s ideal comic subject matter “is simultaneously aesthetic and ethical – which is to say it defines *both* the distinctive tone of comedy (its generic ethos), *and* its inherent tendency to imply an adverse evaluation of its objects.”¹ That comic error is thus unavoidably a moral flaw inherent in character makes it necessarily the object of an emotion stronger and more

¹ Halliwell, *Translation and Commentary*, 86.

painful than mere ridicule; namely, indignation. However mild this feeling may be, it requires satisfaction or displacement in moral terms.

In a late essay, Freud discusses the psychological reaction that results in black humour, where “a criminal who was being led to the gallows on a Monday remarked: ‘Well, the week’s beginning nicely.’”² The essence of this sort of humour “is that one spares oneself the affects to which the situation would naturally give rise and dismisses the possibility of such expressions of emotion with a jest.”³ It has

something liberating about it; but it also has something of grandeur and elevation.... The grandeur in it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego’s invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure.⁴

Examples of such disengagement with the world and its undoing abound in the four comedies I have considered. Carlo Buffone stands at a distance from all the other characters in *Every Man Out of His Humour*, refusing the obligations of either friendship or moral critique. Beatrice and Benedick begin *Much Ado About Nothing* in a similarly playful but distant posture, ironically mocking the folly of their peers until forced to take its darker consequences seriously. Conversely, Angelo and Isabella use the scorn resulting from moral presumption as a way to remain isolated from the vice of Vienna: Isabella, by retreating to the confines of the convent, and Angelo, by shrugging off the intellectual investment required to differentiate real criminals from petty offenders. The attitude Freud describes is perhaps most closely related to the farce implied by *Epicoene’s*

² Freud, *Humour*, 161.

³ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴ *Ibid.*

structure: Truewit and Clerimont appear to spend the whole play in a state of narcissistic “grandeur” that finds in others’ folly only an occasion for its own pleasure. Certainly the sense of superiority in the attitude Freud describes is based on the humorous man’s awareness of his situation, an awareness that the characters just mentioned only think they possess. But even the humorous man can be seen in the end to be unaware of what might well be of the eternal consequences of death: like the *dramatis personae*, he simply refuses to believe in certain possibilities that might prove actual.

While the response of ridicule can maintain this disengagement, to feel indignation requires that the bubble of disengagement be popped, that both character and audience face the potential pain of the play’s reality. Doing just that seems to be the central aim of Jonson’s two comedies. He is intent on convincing us that comic error is not merely an aesthetic, but a moral category, and he consistently argues this point – bluntly in *Every Man Out*, and more subtly in *Epicoene*. The response of Carlo and Truewit to folly – detached and pleasurable ridicule – is for Jonson a failure or short-circuiting of emotion. This belief, I think, is behind his surprising agreement in *Discoveries* with Heinsius’ misreading of Aristotle, that the “moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that depraves some part of a man’s nature without a disease” (453). Unless it reflects a “chastening insight into the folly of self-delusion,” as Robert Watson puts it, the sort of humour that Freud describes betrays comedy’s purpose for Jonson if it remains unquestioned.⁵ He therefore consistently explodes the egotistical grandeur of his fools by abruptly bringing them to face reality, whether (as Asper) “crush[ing] out the

⁵ Watson, *Parodic Strategy*, 64.

humour of such spongy souls,” or, as with Macilente and Clerimont, shocking them to their senses by overturning the whole apparent thrust of the play (Ind. 145).

Jonson’s argument for the moral culpability of his fools runs parallel to the one he regularly makes for the moral significance of one’s use of language. “Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee” (*Discoveries* 435), he summarizes, after earlier likening language to manners and habits in its ability to gauge the virtue of the soul: “wheresoever manners, and fashions are corrupted, language is.... The excess of feasts, and apparel, are notes of a sick state; and the wantonness of language, of a sick mind” (403). But language can only index character if the hearer has the capability to judge it accurately. Indeed, Jonson’s continual concern, both with language and comedy, is that custom and fashion can deceive both their bearers and their observers. *Every Man Out* and *Epicoene* hierarchically arrange their characters so that the manners of the stupidest only ever deceive themselves; but, as the middling sort perceive the folly of the worst, they are inadvertently blind to their own and to those of their betters

If Jonson has a weakness in his approach to the errors of comedy, it is in his need to argue for their grave moral status. I don’t think Macilente or Asper ever really convince us that characters like Sogliardo and Fastidious Brisk really require the violent and catastrophic censure that the satirists insist upon. His argument for the moral culpability of *Epicoene*’s fools is much more muted, and for that reason, more effective. Indeed, there is already a degree of self-mockery in Macilente’s and Asper’s hyperbole, indicating Jonson’s good-natured awareness of the extremes of his satirists. Nevertheless, an argument is being made in these plays, and its success remains open to question.

In contrast, Shakespeare doesn't seem to argue much of anything in his plays, and this is the primary reason why critics who compare him with Jonson often fail to find a comparable moral vision in his plays. James Bednarz rightly observes that "the main deficiency of Shakespeare's poetry, according to Jonson, is its failure to establish a controlling moral perspective."⁶ Jonson thus rejects the "universe of transgressive desire"⁷ he sees in Shakespeare's comedies, along with their portrayal "of the inherent irrationality of human experience" – especially with regard to romantic love.⁸ Bednarz also goes on to claim that in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare would come to "challenge Jonson's theory of cathartic drama," finding it inevitably to fail "because its audience is intractable," unable to be taught or to change.⁹ My study shows, though, that Bednarz too quickly accepts Jonson's critique of Shakespeare's comedy by describing it in the above terms. While the two dramatists clearly differ in their motives for writing, Shakespeare remains vitally interested in moral affect. Instead of arguing for it, though, he dramatizes it. We watch Beatrice and Benedick realize that justice demands the abandonment of their superior, nonchalant attitude toward fashion when it threatens to ruin Hero. Likewise, we are spectators of Angelo as he is surprised by a more sinister vice in himself than those he so coolly condemns in others, and we witness Isabella's realization that truly moral behaviour demands engagement with the world, not self-satisfied dissociation from it.

Similarly, comic error retains a painful moral dimension in Shakespeare's comedies; he simply uses this fact differently from Jonson. Where Jonson focuses on the

⁶ Bednarz, *Poets' War*, 68.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

deceptiveness of manners, Shakespeare seems fascinated by their doubleness. Fashion makes graceful and joyful the social formalities that open and close *Much Ado About Nothing* even as it simultaneously enables injustice. Physical desire is obviously and perhaps primarily destructive in *Measure for Measure*, but its power to reconcile social divisions – so prominent in the romantic comedies – is never despaired of. Unlike Jonson's, Shakespeare's comic protagonists in *Much Ado* and *Measure for Measure* never entirely lose the independence from the world around them that they possess at the beginning of the play. They are forced to face painful realities they had tried to remain aloof from and are changed by the encounter, but often retain a degree of separation from their peers after it. Beatrice and Benedick, for example, never fully submit to the fashion and role of lovers; as Benedick says to Beatrice, "Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably" (5.2.71). Isabella does not merely return to a marginal place in the society she had tried to leave, but is poised to become its ruler's wife. Rather than crushing the "grandeur" out of his characters, as does Jonson, Shakespeare tempers and reorients it toward a more humble, socially engaged virtue.

This is the effect that I have described as comic catharsis, an experience enabled by and operating on the emotion of indignation. Sometimes the constitution and degree of indignation form the comic error of the play, and at other times, it is a response to the disproportion of other characters. In both cases, it inherently includes pain. The dishumoring of fools satisfies the indignation of both hoaxers and audience, and this is what Bednarz seems to mean when he describes Jonson's cathartic intent. But even in *Every Man Out*, Jonson presses beyond mere satisfaction to explore and clarify the nature of the emotions he utilizes and evokes. Catharsis in Jonson's hands uniquely involves

distinguishing genuine *nemesan* from the self-interest of envy. One of the most important differences between Asper and Macilente is that the former speaks out of a desire to reform; the latter, out of a desire for gain. The indignation of both is satisfied at the end of the play, but Macilente also realizes and is purified of the taint of self-interest by the symbolic virtue of the queen. In *Epicoene*, Jonson steps back from giving us an explicit ideal of indignation: Dauphine's is contaminated with envy, and he is never purged of it. But Jonson leaves it standing not out of approbation but as a warning to those who have no indignation of any sort, that their failed judgement has made them unwitting pawns in another's game. In both cases, though, Jonson consistently puts forward the need for and propriety of indignation in response to comic error.

Indignation in Shakespeare's use is something even more liable to taint. Beatrice teaches Benedick the necessity of the emotion, but hers comes very close to being excessive when she vehemently insists on Claudio's death, not just exposure. In *Much Ado*, it is also an emotion that *phauloi* characters can feel, something Jonson gives us a glimpse of this only in Morose. Perhaps most uniquely, indignation seems for Shakespeare an emotion that must be limited, or rather illuminated, by pity, its opposite. Especially in *Measure for Measure*, pitiless *nemesan* is essentially *self-righteous* indignation rooted in self-ignorance. Different from its use in Jonson, the emotion in these plays is only partially satisfied; those who arouse indignation never fully get what they deserve. Catharsis is still a realization about and habituation to indignation, but it comes about by transcending indignation to some degree, rather than through its satisfaction. In *Much Ado*, Shakespeare shows mainly the result of this process in Claudio's reconciliation with Beatrice and Benedick, and as a result it comes off as somewhat strained. *Measure for*

Measure delves into the process itself, producing a concluding resolution that, while still surprising, is more carefully earned. The claim, then, that Shakespeare lacks a moral vision seems to rest on a blunt and impoverished concept of morality.

Another important aspect of how each dramatist employs pain is where they locate the catharsis I have just discussed. To answer this question requires a consideration of how each relates character to audience. Jonson's discussion of humours in *Every Man Out* makes "character itself...an aberration and it is the duty of comedy to treat it as such,"¹⁰ as Richard Dutton perceives: "the identity to which [Jonson's fools] so stridently cling, and by which they seek to distinguish themselves from their rivals...is essentially *false*."¹¹ But paradoxically, Jonson uses the artificial singularity of his humour characters to make them examples of the "universals" (*Poetics* 1451b), "near and familiarly allied to the time" (*Every Man Out* 3.1.521), with which poetry deals. He did this, argues Dutton, by creating dramatic worlds that, "however much they might *resemble* the real world,...were actually separate from it, and...lived by different laws of being."¹² The "point of *difference*" between the two worlds, especially with regard to Jonson's characters, was what Jonson's discerning spectator "existed to observe, appreciate, and police," rather than collapse by suspending his or her belief."¹³ When a character's false identity ultimately "disintegrates on stage (or on the page), a true one is expected to crystallise in registering that fact" and pondering its meaning.¹⁴ The self-realization of catharsis is for Jonson thus primarily the result, not the subject of comedy, and dependent upon the perceptivity of the audience. His vision thus bears particularly close

¹⁰ Dutton, *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism*, 117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹² *Ibid.*, 117.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

resemblance to Leon Golden's, emphasizing the intellectual comprehension of the emotions that comedy arouses.

Certainly Shakespeare doesn't explicitly demand from his audience the mental labour that Jonson does; he isn't continually jogging our elbow as we watch or read. Critics find it a difficult task to credit Jonson's characterization in comparison with Shakespeare's. Even when strongly sympathetic to Jonson, most conclude with McDonald that "for the most part, Jonson seems to have regarded his characters as means to an end; Shakespeare rarely did so."¹⁵ But what Jonson looks for from his "judging spectators," Shakespeare finds in his judicious characters (*Alchemist* Pro. 3). My study does not so much disprove the first proposition as complicate the second. In *Much Ado* and *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare has his tricksters play hoaxes not simply on characters he would expose, but on those who, like Jonson's ideal audience, are perceptive enough to be altered by the experience. Inverting Cordatus' definition of comedy as a mirror, characters like Beatrice, Benedick, and Isabella instead mirror the audience's role as responsive observers, even as they further it by continuing to interact with other characters as the hoax played on them unfolds. This cannot help but result in close audience association with characters, and a somewhat parallel emotional and cathartic response. Ruth Nevo notes that Shakespeare's characters' errors are uniquely "cathartic":

In them we perceive the emergence of a mimesis which embraces both character and audience in its double interaction. As in all forms of dramatic irony, the informed audience witnesses what befalls unwitting characters. But here the process of looking before and after is so finely articulated that the audience, too, undergoes a restructuring of experience analogous to that of the characters, though from a higher and more

¹⁵ McDonald, *Jonson and Shakespeare*, 11.

comprehensive vantage-point. [Shakespeare's] comic device is itself thematically remedial.¹⁶

Nevo explicitly calls this remedial effect “catharsis” earlier in her discussion. Though she sees it as a process that is largely sub-conscious and non-intellectual, I think she is right (unintentionally) to align Shakespearean catharsis most closely with the emotional habituation described by Janko and Halliwell. This is not to associate Jonson strictly with audience catharsis and Shakespeare with character; the preceding chapter demonstrates that this is not the case. But when Jonson does dramatize moments of catharsis, they fall at the end of the play. This has the effect of throwing the stage moment back at the audience, once again seeking its response of realization, rather than following up on that of the character on stage. With Shakespeare, self-realization and catharsis may secondarily become the object of the drama, but only because they are primarily its subject.

It is thus ironic that Jonson's most notorious attacks on Shakespeare's drama target his verisimilitude, whether he “with three rusty swords” has characters fight “over York and Lancaster's long jars” (*Every Man In Pro.* 9-11) or “makes Nature afraid” with a “servant monster” and “such like drolleries.”¹⁷ These fantastical elements prevent Shakespeare's drama from acting as a mirror, as comedy should. Jonson therefore opts for “deeds, and language, such as men do use: /And persons, such as Comedy would choose,” because the genre must “show an image of the times” (21-23). His charge against Shakespeare, then, is not simply a matter of dramatic taste, but is fundamentally aimed at the lack of explicit didacticism in his drama. As I have suggested, Bednarz and

¹⁶ Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare*, 223.

¹⁷ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, Ind. 112-15.

many other contemporary Shakespearians thus agree with Jonson's assertion, but are pleased, rather than disappointed, by it. But they miss what Jonson missed, that the moral catharsis he so carefully prepares for his judicious spectators is one Shakespeare offers his judicious characters. Once again, a difference remains between the two playwrights, but not on the terms in which it is usually described.

This difference in where each playwright primarily locates catharsis is reflected in the way in which they use hoaxes to bring it about. Jonson's plots build almost until the end of the play, when they suddenly conclude in a rapid series of developments that leave the audience, much more so than the characters, to ponder what it all means. Cordatus explains this principle in his argument for plots that fell "a proud, exalted tree...in a moment," rather than "by degrees" (*Every Man Out* 4.5.171-72). As we have seen, Jonson later found more subtle confirmation of this in Heinsius:

Now, in every action it behoves the poet to know which is his utmost bound, how far with fitness, and a necessary proportion, he may produce, and determine it... And every bound, for the nature of the subject, is esteemed the best that is largest, till it can increase no more: so it behoves the action in tragedy, or comedy, to be let grow, till the necessity ask a conclusion. (*Discoveries* 456)

In *Every Man Out* and *Epicoene*, Jonson keeps the central hoaxes until the final act, patiently letting the action grow until the last possible moment. In *Every Man Out*, he is perhaps too patient, in that almost nothing happens until Act 5. But in *Epicoene*, he masterfully structures the whole plot around Dauphine's hoax, which, even though it begins before the play, only emerges in the final scene. In both cases, Jonson sets up a moment of complete disorientation, even shock, that is shared by characters and audience. These moments are static and symbolic, most especially the figure of the queen

passing over Asper's stage, but also Epicoene standing with peruke in hand.¹⁸ That the plays end immediately after these moments inevitably requires the final effect of the hoaxes largely to be the audience's "take home" project, not a final movement to be dramatized on stage.

In contrast, Shakespeare introduces his central hoaxes well before the conclusion of *Much Ado* and *Measure for Measure*. They frequently involve similar moments of disorientation: Beatrice and Benedick overhearing respective accounts of the other's "love," or Isabella discovering Claudio's "death," for examples. In both cases, though, the hoaxes' central location in the play means that characters, not only the audience, are required to reorient themselves and their emotions. This is how Shakespeare first locates catharsis in characters. When he does use moments of static symbolism similar to Jonson's (Hero's unveiling or the Duke's unhooding), they do not so much initiate or mark disorientation as conclude and summarize it. Hero's unveiling is more a relief to Claudio and Don Pedro than anything else, while the Duke's unhooding marks the beginning of the end of Isabella's confusion. This effect is partly achieved by letting his audience in on the moment before it happens – only in *The Winter's Tale* does Shakespeare, like Jonson, trick us. The plot structures of each, then, not only demonstrate the "processive" nature of action in Aristotle's understanding, but arrange the process in fascinatingly different ways. And for each, the arrangement of the process strongly determines the nature of its end, catharsis.

Classicist Joe Sachs finds in the *Poetics* a frequently ignored account of the sort of disorientation that Jonson's and Shakespeare's hoaxes induce. He argues that Aristotle

¹⁸ This symbolic stasis is present even in the revised ending of *Every Man Out*, where the shocked Macilente is suddenly the only person left on the previously crowded stage.

implies that wonder, not merely catharsis, is the end of tragedy, when he says late in the *Poetics* that “[the poet] should put what is amazing into his tragedies” (1460a). Aristotle’s adjective *ekplēktikos* means “having the power to knock something away from us,”¹⁹ and recalls Aristotle’s earlier claim that incidents in the best plots “happen contrary to expectation but because of one another,” because “they will be more amazing in this way than if [they happened] on their own, i.e. at random” (1452a). This late recourse to amazement or wonder, Sachs claims, provides “nothing less than the long-delayed completion of the definition of tragedy”: catharsis is more fully described here “as an *ekplēxis*, a knocking away, and the state in which we are left is wonder” – a notion not unfamiliar to both classical and Renaissance critics of literature.²⁰ *Ekplēktikos* compellingly describes the moments of disorientation and shock in these plays, and Aristotle’s apparent linkage of it with catharsis is mirrored by Shakespeare’s and especially Jonson’s dramatic practice. Truewit and Clerimont are stunned by Dauphine’s revelation, but Truewit quickly proceeds out of that moment to reorder himself and his world exactly as it had been before. In contrast, Beatrice and Benedick are also disoriented by Don Pedro’s hoax, but emerge from it gradually to reorder and refine their relationship to each other and their world. Both dramatists crucially depend on *ekplēxis*, but different from Sachs, make it preliminary, not subsequent, to catharsis. This ordering is only confirmed, I think, by my account of catharsis in Chapter 4.

Though I have deliberately avoided making this an historically-based study of influence, it still permits a few observations on Jonson and Shakespeare’s general relationship to literary tradition. Certainly the years since Baldwin’s *Shakespeare’s “Small*

¹⁹ Sachs, Introduction, 15.

²⁰ Ibid. For a description of this critical tradition, see Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder*, ch 4.

Latine and Lesse Greeke” have seen a much deepened appreciation of Shakespeare’s formal learning and indebtedness to the classical tradition. And while Jonson’s learning has always been common knowledge, recent studies like Dutton’s *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* have helped contradict images of him as a haughty pedant by demonstrating the pragmatic and political motivations for his deployment of classical authority. Yet I would assert that critics still retain something of the Romantics’ belief in the stifling effect of tradition, Jonson’s susceptibility to this, and Shakespeare’s agreement with it. Bednarz, for example, offers an astute analysis of Jonson’s dynamic relationship with the classics, but, after describing the unique alterations Jonson makes to the comic tradition, declares that “improvisation” of this sort “resides *as a contradiction* at the heart of his classicism.”²¹ Why “contradiction,” if Bednarz does not speak as an unwitting Romantic? Isn’t it more accurate to say that Jonson, after partaking widely and deeply of all that the tradition had to offer, and then digesting all of that bounty through careful imitation, came to the preparation of his own unique work with more possibilities and resources at his disposal than perhaps any other dramatist of his age? Surely this is how he himself understood the individual’s relationship to the tradition. “I know nothing can conduce more to letters, than to examine the writings of the ancients,” he declares (*Discoveries* 378). He urges aspiring writers to choose “one excellent [writer] above the rest, and so to follow him, till he grow very he, or so like him as the copy may be mistaken for the principal” (448). This is not to “imitate servilely” (448) or to “take all upon trust from them” (378), “but to draw forth out of the best, and choicest flowers, with the bee, and turn all into honey” (448), because,

²¹ Bednarz, *The Poets’ War*, 70, italics mine.

to all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience: which, if we will use, and apply, we have better means to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates, and made the way, that went before us; but as guides, not commanders. (378-79)

Moreover, Jonson relates this ideal particularly to comedy when Cordatus overrules Mitis' insistence on a playwright's obedience to the "laws" of comedy. The laws, argues Cordatus, are a product of comedy's long evolution – "every man in the dignity of his spirit and judgement supplied something. ...I see not, then," he concludes, "but we should enjoy the same *licentia* or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did, and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few (who are nothing but form) would thrust upon us" (Ind. 253-65). Improvisation doesn't contradict the literary tradition, he claims; it made it. Foregrounding the emotion of indignation and Jonson's employment of comic error, hoaxes, and catharsis brings out precisely this improvisatory quality in Jonson's classicism.

If this study makes Jonson look freer, it also makes Shakespeare look more structured and formally conscious. Obviously, his debt to the classical tradition is less explicit than Jonson's, and I have not attempted to prove that he found nascent versions of the Aristotelian comic theory here described in contemporary theoretical writings the way Jonson did. But many of the traits of his drama that usually attract post-Romantic explanations result at least equally from a formal concern with comic theory. Most especially, his abiding interest in the pain of comedy need not be a product of a "darkening vision" of society or human nature, but of formal interest in the emotions aroused by the errors of comedy.²² Indeed, his keen concern for psychological realism in his characters seems due in some part to this formal interest in emotion. And rather than

²² McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, 62.

completely rejecting a moral vision of literature and revelling in “transgressive desire,” he found a way to test and explore the complexity of moral principle’s relationship to comedy by dramatizing, rather than arguing, it.²³

Even as the scholarship of Golden, Janko, and Halliwell works so well to illuminate and complicate Jonson’s and Shakespeare’s comedy, their comedy acts as commentary on the scholarship. Jonson’s mode of humours characterization is clearly based on what Golden describes as comic error, but the playwright’s theorizing and dramatizing of error subtly explore the precise nature of the will’s interaction with emotional disposition. The device of the hoax receives some consideration in Euanthius’ and Donatus’ discussions of comic plot. But the central use that Shakespeare and Jonson make of the hoax confirms it as a structural corollary to both the *hamartia* and *pathos* of tragedy, something only implicit in Aristotle and his commentators. They also make full and complicated use of its inherently metadramatic properties and ability to comment on the nature of dramatic action. Golden’s argument for *nemeses*’ role in comedy also remains rudimentary. Shakespeare and Jonson confirm his argument and subsequent suggestion about the potential range of the emotion. But each make indignation to be not only a product of comedy, but an object of its attention by exploring its legitimate bounds and its relationship to envy and pity. Both also examine indignation’s double movement, from arousal to satisfaction, which Golden only implies by way of example. Perhaps most significantly, Shakespeare and Jonson illustrate the diverse possibilities of a renewed understanding of catharsis. Each finds different places in which it can be located – something that receives little discussion in the classicists’ work. They also

²³ Bednarz, *The Poets’ War*, 68.

demonstrate, in a way that discursive argument cannot, a range of ways in which emotion and intellect interact in the process of catharsis. At the same time, there remains enough consistency in the ends of their comedy to prevent discussion of the term from becoming once again a catch-all account of dramatic affect. Finally, the classicists' works that I have used only occasionally venture literary examples of the ideas they discuss. When they do, their examples most often evince a fairly uncomplicated reading of the literary text cited. While the study I have made here could not for obvious reasons supplement their primary work it nonetheless demonstrates that their deductions can stand up to complex, systematic literary application to the plays of two of the tradition's most important comic dramatists.

The desire to test Golden, Janko, and Halliwell's work thoroughly has resulted in my relatively small sampling of plays. A broader consideration of five or six comedies from each dramatist would certainly have provided a better picture of their career-long use of these principles, or identified whether they were consistently interested in them. Possibilities for expanding this study present themselves immediately. Are the harsh sentences that the Avocatari pronounce on Volpone and Mosca another example of indignation vitiated by envy, or do they satisfy the indignation raised by the tricksters' attacks on Celia and Bonario? Or how are we to take Lovewit's apparently opposite indulgence of *The Alchemist's* hoaxers? Does Jonson genuinely give up his punitive approach to comic error in *Bartholomew Fair*, or is there a subtext of critique like that in *Epicoene*? Justice Overdo's concluding invitation to the Fair's denizens to join him for supper asks for comparison with the catharsis Macilente undergoes. The relationship between indignation and pity that Shakespeare posits in *Much Ado* and *Measure for Measure*

seems broken in Antonio's attitude toward Shylock. Does he deliberately do this in *The Merchant of Venice*, or is it something he had yet to take an interest in? Malvolio and his strong indignation certainly seem to be borrowed from, or even a caricature of, Jonson. And Prospero appears both to orchestrate and undergo catharsis in *The Tempest*, struggling with the nature of his own indignation even as he tests it in others. Though small in number, the plays I have looked at are diverse enough to offer at least hypothetical answers to these and other questions. And once again, the distinct advantage of the more narrow and detailed survey I have made is that it proves the capability of the theory to answer these and other questions with subtlety and comprehensiveness. This wonderful responsiveness of a range of comedies to these theoretical principles cannot confirm their Aristotelian pedigree, but certainly can verify their substantiality.

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