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Carnival Vindicated to Himself? Reappraising "Bakhtinized" Ben Jonson

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Ben Jonson would probably have chimed in with Molière's rejoinder at accusations of plagiarism: "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve." As a matter of fact, his literary fame has been usually impaired by the panoply of classical sources harnessing his works. Nor can it be denied that the Jonsonian invention often resembles more a translating adaptation of the classics than an autonomous elaboration of native motifs. An undesired result of this reliance on the learned tradition is a reference-spotting habit which prompted even his most benign readers to underline his literary merits, instead of his primary business as a man of theatre. After dubbing him the most learned poet of his age who commonly "borrows with the air of a conqueror," Peter Whalley unwillingly admitted that this display of erudition sometimes "may appear, where we could wish it might not be seen."[1] According to this view, Jonson was so gullible as to fancy that equal honours were due to the translator as to the classics themselves. Whalley's reluctant remark paved the way for more ruthless assessments such as T. S. Eliot's recognition of an ideal, though limited, audience of "historians and antiquaries."[2]

Another recurrent assumption is that Jonson's bookish sticking to the learned tradition smacked of his idiosyncratic distaste for the popular canon. In particular, Jonson would not duly take into consideration the carnivalesque fondness for the grotesque. Bristol claims, for instance, that "Carnival is less applicable to the works of Jonson" than Shakespeare's, arguing that Jonson suffered from the not so original sin of writing for the Court.[3] This alleged separation from the popular world readily entails Jonson's detachment from a long-lived inheritance where, in Bakhtin's words, carnival represents the "second life of the people,"

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the true-to-life conveyance of a subterraneous, grotesque principle overturning the official views of life.[4] One problem with such assumptions is that from a post-Bakhtinian point of view all forms of popular culture seem reduced to intermingled filiations of the same carnivalesque principle. All that is popular is carnival, and *vice versa*. An author's rendition of carnival motifs, then, is gauged only in terms of the Bakhtinian carnival, more than often a mix of medieval sources transplanted into learned Renaissance adaptations such as Rabelais's. This enlarged conception of carnival ends up with confirming a sort of literary prejudice against writers like Jonson, abruptly identified as the spokesmen of power.[5]

Despite Bakhtin's, and especially the Bakhtinians' trivialising attidude of universalization, however, carnival can hardly be conceived as a never-changing conception throughout all the ages, as some scholars have pointed out.[6] In Jonson's age carnival is by no means the glorious celebration of grotesque motifs in an urbane setting attested by Medieval sources all over the continent. The most renowned carnivalesque customs such as the Boy Bishop or the Mock Mayor, allegedly depicting an overturning image of conventional power within church and society, had already disappeared during the sixteenth century. Also the suspension of authority personified by the Lord of Misrule was actually confined to private houses or university colleges, where obviously no popular elements were admitted.[7] As a matter of fact, the first half of the seventeenth century saw a widespread reform of popular culture in Europe—the "Triumph of Lent," as Burke quite simply termed it,[8] which weakened the popular corpus of carnival into educated versions for the Courts. This taming process was given a polemical turn by Protestant writers, who came to see continental carnivals as disturbing relics of heathenish—or, more aptly, Romish—customs. English writers did not show too much originality either, as to my knowledge their only extant description of continental carnival is a translation of a pamphlet by a disgusted Swiss Calvinist.[9] Ironically enough, they could not guess that what they regarded as sinful evidence of the inner corruption of the Catholic powers, was later to be interpreted as an undermining threat to the establishment promoting them. Thus, carnival in England was soon reduced to the conventional Shrove-tuesday riots acted by the

apprentices—again, some anti-Bakhtinian irony must be at work when we notice that the primary targets of these carnivalesque disorders were agents of disorder like brothels and theatres. Finally, when carnivalesque motifs are staged, they undergo a further reduction into stock characters. In contemporary works such as Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* and Middleton's *Inner-Temple Masque*, carnival is metonymically demoted into slap-stick comedy, whose only aim is mastering the ritual Shrove-tuesday riots. One may perhaps begin to question the validity of the dogmatic interpretation of Jonson as a slavish adapter of tamed carnival situations. Instead of refining carnival motifs for the benefit of the Court, Jonson may well have been portraying the contemporary reform of carnival as a different version of the grotesque, by no means reducible to a conservative move away from popular shows.

This essay, urged by the absence of a more literal consideration of carnival, seeks to offer a reappraisal of Jonson's use of the learned and popular sources related to carnival. I will pick up three test cases belonging to the different genres in which Jonson tried his hand. In *Sejanus* the focus is on the textual devices used to bridge the gap between the text and its intended audience, whereas *Epicoene* stages the Renaissance theme of moral eccentricity in a carnivalized censure of carnival customs, and *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* flouts the conventional Court shows by resorting to carnival motifs. What I would like to suggest is that Jonson's use of intertextuality, resorting to the carnivalesque tradition through a selection and rearrangement of literary sources, ultimately draws upon the learned tradition in order to stage the popular element, aiming at depicting the grotesque, which is removed both from the tamed version of carnival and the past glories of carnival itself.

I. *Sejanus*'s Lost Carnival

Historical irony has it that this classical illustration of disillusionment about popular favour could not be conveyed to the people. Discarded by most critics and its first spectators as a byword for failure, *Sejanus* bears in its printed text the marks of Jonson's bitter riposte to the

indictment on stage. His ironic move was to equate the hero with the play, as the 1616 Folio dedication remarks: "the tragedy suffer'd no less violence from our people here, then the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome."[10] The two audiences merge into each other, and the play testifies to both of the failed encounters with Rome's populace and the Globe's audience. Such an ironic conflation of the play and its hero is reflected in the text format as well. The 1605 Quarto is exuberantly keyed into a typographical polyphony, where the display of marginal notes nearly blurs the conventional division of the stage text, iconographically hedging the lines by means of learned enclosures.[11] Similarly, thematic enclosures were effected through a shift of focus: the people of Rome do not appear on the stage, and their actions are merely reported by witnesses. Through these textual and thematic devices, the play, itself a result of popular disfavour, pretended to elide the people from its scenario.

The extraordinary richness of the commentary within the Quarto text has also prompted worried questions about the author's actual originality. Any consideration of the play, in fact, must come to grips with Jonson's claim that these entwined texts were designed "to show my integrity in the *Story*."[12] In this section I have chosen the passage of Sejanus's dismemberment as a topical example of the exploitation of the classics touching upon the carnivalesque tradition. My aim is to prove that, beside the ironic showing off by Jonson, the conflation of sources eventually posits a sort of second, hidden text where, at last, the people are described in action.

Jonson's rationale in selecting the sources of the Sejanus plot is enhancing the theme of social and moral hierarchies. Sejanus's rise and fall is accordingly presented as a continuous struggle between slaves and masters. The obvious social meaning of slavery in Rome is connoted by reciprocal accusations of moral slavery. Sabinus, a nobleman, scoffs at himself and his fellows, who have stooped to "that proud height, to which / We did by slavery, not by service, climbe" (*Sejanus* I.10-11). Silius, another nobleman, owns up to this change of roles:

> We, that . . . were borne
> Free, equall lords of the triumphed world,
> . . . .

> We since became the slaues to one mans lusts;
> And now to many: euery ministring spie
> That will accuse, and sweare, is lord of you,
> . . . . (I.59-65)

Tiberius himself mutters away his muffled contempt for such a "race of men / Prepar'd for seruitude" (I.52-53). In all these instances Jonson adapts his sources into an overall frame of servility and reversal of social roles,[13] poignantly portrayed by the acclamations bestowed on Sejanus, "the now court-god." The favourite is belittled as a "seruing boy" (I.212-15), though the sources attest his descendance from the gentry.[14]

The slave element helps forestage the characters, each striving to seize the centre of the popular scene. Only Tiberius dares remind Sejanus of his low birth, echoing the rumours which greet his rise:

> The state thou hold'st alreadie, is in talke;
> Men murmure at thy greatnesse; and the nobles
> Sticke not, in publike, to vpbraid thy climbing
> Aboue our fathers fauours, or thy scale:
> (III.560-63)

Though still quoting from Tacitus (IV.xl.4-5), Jonson is gradually displacing the focus of the people's fawning and gazing from the Emperor to his favourite. After successfully cajoling Tiberius into retiring to Capri, Sejanus rejoices at his full monopoly of the clients' attention: "these, that hate me now, wanting accesse / To him, will make their enuie none, or lesse" (III.619-20). Jonson is probably thinking of the Latin root of the word *invidia*, coming from *in-video*, thus underlining the primary visual significance. The sources, however, refer to the absence of Tiberius rather than to the overwhelming presence of Sejanus at the centre of the stage.[15] This exalted slave craves to be looked upon by the increasing multitude of actual and self-debased slaves, almost evoking a theatrical palimpsest within the text.

The metaphorical enhancement of slavery is enriched by a ritual connotation along the development of the plot. The tragic hero "still goes on, / And mounts" (IV.428-29), playing into the hands of Tiberius who plans to make him "odious / Vnto the staggering rout," all too ready to "ore-turne all obiects in their way" (IV.469-72). Sabinus is

offered him as a cannibalistic sacrifice in the conspicuous absence of any witnesses: "The yeere is well begun, and I fall fit, / To be an offring to SEIANVS . . ." (IV.228-29). The passing reference to the year's beginning, in fact, links up with the ominous prodigies that forebode Sejanus's metaphorical fall by more bathetic, physical collapses. Dio Cassius (LVIII.v.5-6), another source quoted by Jonson, reports the events acted by the followers of Sejanus, namely, "the falling of our bed . . . burd'ned with the populous weight" (V.52-53), and the fate of some servants who, "declining / Their way, not able, for the throng, to follow, / Slip't downe the *Gemonies*, and brake their necks!" (V.59-61). At this point the popular scene peeps out from Jonson's use of the classical tradition. Sabinus is dragged on the Gemonies too. In the Quarto Jonson appends this passage with a note referring to the *Lectiones Antiquarum* by Ludovicus Celius Rhodiginus, where the Gemonies are etymologically described as a "locus gemitus et calamitatum"—a place of wretched sighs, uttered by the prisoners left on the banks of the Tiber to be abused by the people's rage. Rhodiginus underlines the inner theatricality of this custom, quoting a similar passage from Cicero's *Pro Cluentio*:

> Gradus illi Aurelii tum novi, quasi pro theatro illi iudicio aedificati videbantur, quos ubi accusator concitatis hominibus complerat, non modo dicendi ab reo, sed ne surgendi quidem potestas erat. (*Lectiones Antiquarum* X.v, 439-40)

The Gemonies are accounted for as a substitute for the theatre—"pro theatro"—where the people gathering on the steps gaze upon the subject of their rage. But this conventional upheaval of the Roman populace is also tinged with another ritual term of comparison, coming from the gladiatorial games. Rhodiginus browses through a long list of the several kinds of torments inflicted on prisoners and Christian martyrs, emphasising the sacrificial aura of the popular rage. Jonson ultimately assumes a competent, studious reader of the Quarto who will eventually restore the hidden theatrical frame from the learned reference quoted in the margin, adding the missing popular scene by way of classical allusions.

A similar sort of learned retrieval of popular attendance can be detected in the time setting. Both Sabinus's sacrifice and the fall of Sejanus's

servants are located by Dio Cassius in the calends of January. Along with the Saturnals, these Roman feasts used to be reckoned by seventeenth-century writers as the forerunners of carnivalesque licence.[16] As Meslin notes, slaves were free from their usual bonds of obligation, were given a double share of wine, and allowed to make sacrifices like their masters.[17] During these three days masters and servants freely mixed and had meals together, and the whole city was caught in a mood of revelry and debauch.[18] The events featuring Sejanus's servants take place in a proto-carnivalesque setting, when people are free to envisage the next fall of the present lord of Rome. The slave imagery conveys a sacrificial meaning. Sejanus, after parading into the Senate as a god attended by "seruile huishers" (V.450), is ushered out as a slave subjected to a ritual dethronement:

> They, that before like gnats plaid in his beames,
> And throng'd to circumscribe him, now not seene!
> Nor deigne to hold a common seate with him!
> Others, that wayted him vnto the *Senate*,
> Now, inhumanely rauish him to prison,
> Whom (but this morne) they follow'd as their lord!
> Guard through the streets, bound like a fugitiue!
> In stead of wreaths, giue fetters; strokes, for stoops:
> Blind shame, for honours; and black taunts, for titles!
> (V.721-29)

A last piece of evidence confirms Jonson's skilful selection of the sources in order to suggest a popular audience on the printed page. Also the final description of Sejanus's dismemberment conceals a theatre within the text, linking up with the previous marginal notes. Its source, Claudian's *Against Rufinus*, looks somehow misplaced considering the Sejanus-related canon Jonson has been drawing upon so far.[19] This textual oddity is twofold, as Jonson does not quote the work in the Quarto marginal notes. But the jaundiced rendition of the dismemberment of this other favourite, whose macabre, relenting details are translated by Jonson *verbatim* (*Sejanus* V.811-32; *Against Rufinus* II.410-17, 427-32, 451-53), enhances the ritual occasion. Claudian compares the victim already rounded up by the soldiers to a beast moving in the arena: "illa pavet strepitus cuneosque erecta theatri / Respicit et tanti miratur

sibila vulgi" (II.398-99). The gladiatorial setting, already pointed at by Rhodiginus, comes newly to life when Jonson depicts the multitude flocking to the Gemonies "with that speed, and heate of appetite, / With which they greedily deuoure the way / To some great sports, or a new theatre" (*Sejanus* V.763-65). The apparently unrelated passage from Rhodiginus, thus, conjures up a ritual occasion for Sejanus's dismemberment, as the learned tradition finally evokes the people and its carnivalesque expectation of the favourite's fall.

The linking up of the sources stages a theatre of martyrdom, where real and metaphorical slaves attend the ludicrous spectacle of the fall of actual slaves and, eventually, of the exalted slave who aspired to power. The ritual savagery of the gladiatorial games, the *munera gladiatoria* taking place after the Saturnals as a sacrifice for the earth, suggests the description of the dismemberment and provides the missing audience by way of learned references. Uncannily keeping this surprise in store for the patient reader, Jonson resorts to the sources in order to stage a Roman carnival, where *Sejanus* is attended by an audience well-read in the classics, as if only such readers or spectators could master the fences of the notes.

II. *Epicoene* or the Silent Revels

Theatrical disguise is easily taken as a synonym for carnival at large. Evidence for that identification is offered by most carnival shows deploying reversals of gender to question the social allocation of authority. Ingram reports that in Medieval France the New Year's Day was greeted by men disguised as beasts or, alternatively, as women, whereas during the life of Henry VIII boys were ritually dressed up as female pages attending the Boy Bishop.[20] Actual upheavals might imitate this carnivalesque pretext as well. Fitz argues that when in 1531 some disguised men rounded up Anne Boleyne, a witness reported that the fact almost went unnoticed "because it was a thing done by women."[21] But the major weakness of a trivialised conception of carnival as sheer transvestism is that it can be easily made to include all references whatsoever to dramatic disguise devices, so that theatre

itself becomes a highbrow version of carnival. In this section I will reduce transvestism to its symbolic value of moral violation of the Elizabethan hierarchy of society and family, represented by the woman disguised as a man, thus assuming male authority. By Jonson's use of the sources in *Epicoene*, breaches of silence and of gender coalesce in a debate over the right place of woman in society, as well as the usefulness and performability of carnivalesque customs.

Jonson's *Epicoene* intermingles two separate traditions, the rhetorical value of silence and the boy disguised. The ideal wife is supposed to stay always silent, not the less so because even men must conform to the highest rule of elocution: sometimes silence *is* eloquence.[22] This tradition of silence was astringently summed up by Libanius in his Sixth Declamation, an overt source for the play's main story, featuring an old, misanthropic husband who realizes he has married a most talkative woman. The reversal of expectations is focussed on the hierarchical breach: a woman acting like "a conduit pipe, that will gush out with more force, when shee opens againe" (*Epicoene* IV.iv.78-9; cf. *Declamatio* 19) encroaches on the husband's alleged monopoly of speech, eventually forcing him into an abashed silence and unnatural desire of self-consumption.

The tradition of sex disguise, on the other hand, is a Jonsonian modification of the Libanius plot. The central scene of reversal is turned into a gender-related affair, where assuming the wrong sex conveys the sense of adopting wrong social roles.[23] Jonson's most characteristic move is sexually reifying the husband's disillusionment. Among the dispersed sources which may be cited for this tradition of the disguised boy, critics have taken into consideration Plautus's *Casina*, Machiavelli's *Clizia* and Aretino's *Marescalco*[24]. None of these plays, however, seems to offer any evidence of straightforward textual borrowings, except the wedding scene of the *Marescalco* with the husband claiming impotence and the final dénouement. *Clizia*, on the other hand, is in the first place a Renaissance adaptation of *Casina*, so that one feels at least perplexed at the critical underlining of its literary novelties and subsequent dismissal of Plautus's precedence.[25] My proposal is that instead of falling into reference-spotting, we consider these works as literary analogues staging the punishment of an eccentric. The stress ought to

be laid not on direct transmission of passages or stage tricks, but rather on the meaning of the festive occasion during which this punishment is carried out.

The three analogues are all staged in a general festive setting. The Prologue to *Casina* refers to some "ludi," though the comedy, later on, makes it quite clear that the real *ludi festivi* are being played at the expense of the dotard. *Clizia* takes place during carnival, whereas the *Marescalco* seems to belong to the Renaissance genre of carnivalesque jests.[26] Jonson's adaptation plays upon this latent carnivalesque context, as carnival becomes in *Epicoene* both a general term for festive misrule and an element of contradiction for its followers and detractors alike. The first instance of this Jonsonian translation of carnival occurs in the opening description of Morose. The old man cannot stand the stock characters of London life, such as a Costard-monger, a Smith, "Or any Hammer-man" (*Epicoene* I.i.154-56), and parades along the streets "with a huge turbant of night-caps on his head, buckled ouer his eares" (I.i.144-45). Adapting a passage from Libanius (*Declamatio* 4), Jonson temporally qualifies Morose's misanthropy:

> . . . He would haue hang'd a Pewterers' prentice once vpon a shroue-tuesdaies riot, for being o' that trade, when the rest were quit. (I.i.157-59)

His hate of carnivalesque shows as the utmost manifestations of popular noise and disorder is mirrored by his seclusion from the life of the community:

> . . . hee hath chosen a street to lie in, so narrow at both ends, that it will receiue no coaches, nor carts, nor any of these common noises: . . . (I.i.167-69)

The main fault of the eccentric, also topographically identified by his voluntary isolation, is a lack of social cohesion, as misanthropy is conveyed by cacophony. Morose's failure in complying with the social demands of London life brings him out of town "euery satterday at ten a clock, or on holy-day-eues" (181-82). The carnival-hater is "recompensed" by a carnivalesque setting comparable to Jonson's sources. But in *Epicoene*, taking place on a festive day (II.iv.110; III.ii.89-90), the eccentric is never reconciled with festive occasions of any kind.[27]

Carnival cannot affect society or mend the fissures within its fabric. The whole plot of *Epicoene* bears witness to a general censure of the possible versions of carnival. One of the characters is a true carnival performer, Mr Otter, once "a great man at the beare-garden in his time," but now only "his wifes Subiect" (II.vi.54-61).[28] Mrs Otter readily rebukes her husband for the late revival of his former occupation at Court:

> You were best baite me with your bull, beare, and horse? Neuer a time, that the courtiers, or collegiates come to the house, but you make it a *shrouetuesday!* (III.i.4-7)

Carnival, an old-fashioned taming of wild beasts for the Court, is now just a worn-out device for drunken revelry. It cannot help restore the conventional order within the family.

In *Epicoene* punishment is performed by a masterly albeit deliberately unconvincing quotation of carnivalesque customs. If Mr Otter is reviled as a vain drunkard, Morose the carnival-hater is punished by a charivari-like scene of misery, oddly blending the two possible infringements of marriage rules: a young woman married to an old man, and the woman being a scold.[29] But, just as Otter's old-days carnival, this is only a vestige of the past claims of redressing social wrongs. Morose's charivari is not a spontaneous, popular performance, but rather a play-within-the-play under the direction of Truewit and Clerimont: not a true-to-life Carnival, but a meta-theatrical display of stage-directing. The disillusionment about the healing powers of carnivalesque customs is endorsed by Jonson's staging of the Fourth Act, when Morose, who "lockd himselfe vp, i' the top o' the house" (IV.i.22), is presented with another sort of charivari being played now on the carnival performer. Prompted by the Wits, Otter rails at his wife, "an vnlucky thing, a very foresaid beare-whelpe" (IV.ii.74-75). The charivari stages its exception, as the scold is reinforced in her role, and Mrs Otter, secretly conveyed there by the Wits, again beats her husband.

The result of such a conflation of carnivalesque rituals is the exposure of their alleged power as popular tools of justice. Coupling the learned hint from Libanius with the sudden revival of popular customs, *Epicoene* has several onstage directors, where the Wits guide the actions of Morose, the Otters and the Collegiates, only to know, right at the end, that the

silent Dauphine has hidden the best part of the trick. In a sense, this is a confirmation of the old elocutionary rule: silence may eloquently redress the wrongs, especially if it is joined with theatrical disguises. If the literary analogues explicitly stage the disguise in order to underline the carnivalesque punishment of one eccentric, *Epicoene* reduces all the other characters to eccentrics that are kept off Dauphine's superior craft. Silence and cunning defeat the noisy tricks of popular tradition.

Jonson's comedy is, inevitably, a sort of *post-mortem* recognition of traditional carnival customs. The stress, however, is not on their reform, but on frank failure, as the day of festive mood ends with confirming the inverted order established between the Otters, as well as the "hermaphroditicall authoritie" detained by the Collegiates. Instead of merely paraphrasing the classical reversal of gender roles, Jonson adapts Libanius's disparagement into a definite temporal setting where carnival, though still performable, needs revising and eventually leads to a painful conclusion both for his detractors and his followers. The festive frame derived from the literary analogues ironically proves that the carnivalesque tradition is ebbing into a noisy, useless progression of stereotyped scenes. It is not the character who starts or performs the carnival but the spectator who silently attends it, that can bring home the most "wealthy dowrie" (II.v.91).

III. *Neptune's Triumph* for the Return of Carnival

Jonson's masques are usually considered the acme of his growing identification with the refined ideals of the Court.[30] A supporting argument is often found in their logical progression from the chaotic exposition of misrule to the orderly display of dances and songs. The comic contents of the inductions and the antimasques, thus, would make use of a more mundane tradition only to enhance the final sense of the King's order. More generally, the exploitation of classical sources is said to stand for the author's separation from the popular tradition, just as the people, by definition, cannot join the masques' audience. The failures of some masques, however, should already undermine any belief in such straightforward identification between the poet and his choosy audience,

and somehow destroy the popular icon of Jonson as the conventional Court playwright. *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618), a shrewd attempt at blending Rabelais and mythological matters in an intriguing debate over the possible reconciliation between opposite drives, led one of his spectators to indite quite a famous bit of Jonson criticism: "Y^{e} poet is growen so dul y^{t} his devise is not worthy y^{e} relating, much lesse y^{e} copiing out. divers think he should retourne to his ould trade of bricke laying againe."[31] In this last section I will consider another masque where the learned tradition, so evidently displayed in the note-laden printed text, by overlapping with an educated version of carnivalesque motifs is transformed into a satire of Court shows.

Jonson's comic inductions show an exuberance of inspiration which cannot be reduced simply to the first element of a conventional progression from disorder to order. In particular, the antimasque of *Neptune's Triumph* stages a grotesque translation of poetry into cookery, casting a dubious light on the final triumph of the kingly rule. Written late in 1623 as a celebration of Prince Charles's homecoming from Spain, the masque was not staged because of "the competition of the French and Spanish ambassadors, which could not be accommodated in presence" (quoted in Ben Jonson, *Works* 9: 659). Also the masque evokes a similar sort of accommodation between the two characters of the first part. A tipsy Poet is assailed by a loquacious Cook, the self-appointed master of the revels in the banqueting-hall. Jonson describes the festive occasion as the only chance when the Poet can be employed as a "kind of *Christmas* Ingine; one, that is vsed, at least once a yeare, for a trifling instrument, of wit, or so" (35-36). Masque-writing acts like catering "for the palates of the ghestes" in the mock-heroic translation offered by the Cook:

> The Taste is taken with good relishes, the Sight with faire obiects, the Hearing with delicate sounds, the Smelling with pure sents, the Feeling with soft and plump bodies, but the Vnderstanding with all these: for all which you must begin at the Kitchin. There, the Art of Poetry was learnd, and found out, or no where: and the same day, with the Art of Cookery. (66-72)

This polemical conflation is actually not an autonomous invention, but rather an expansion of a few lines taken from a learned work and fitted

into low style. In this case Jonson is adapting a few passages from the *Deipnosophists* by Athenaeus, especially those dealing with a boisterous cook who, as Jonson explicitly translates, would claim that "a good *Poet* differs nothing at all from a *Master-Cooke*. Eithers Art is the wisedome of the Mind" (*Neptune's Triumph* 42-4; *Deipnosophists* I.7). Jonson stages grotesque motifs not from the popular tradition, but from other books.

The follow-up of this combination strikes a different note of mock-heroic confusion within the hierarchy of the Court revels. A further step down the grotesque tradition leads to the carnivalesque overturning of social roles. After having usurped the sacred realm of poetic invention, the Cook claims to be reverenced like a military chief, as his culinary art translates war machinery into food. The Poet-General

> Makes *Citadels* of curious foule, and fish,
> Some he dry-ditches, some motes round with broths;
> Mounts marrow-bones; cuts fifty-angled custards;
> Reares bulwarke pies; and, for his outer workes,
> He raiseth ramparts of immortall crust;
> And teacheth all the *tacticks* at one dinner:
> What rankes, what files, to put his dishes in;
> The whole Art *Militarie!* (91-98)

As Gordon argues, the Cook is an obvious foil for Inigo Jones's mania for fantastical scenery and pageantry.[32] Again, though himself pitted into a personal feud, Jonson chooses to rely on literary sources for this ironic degradation of the Court masque. The Cook's ideal of perfect man derives from a mixture of Vitruvius and Puttenham, portraying the architect and the poet respectively as the first civilizers and the highest incarnations of man.[33] Athenaeus provides a similar theme when a cook relates how Sycon, the founder of the culinary art, set up a complete curriculum for cooks covering all possible fields of human knowledge, from astrology to architecture, from natural science to strategy (IX.378). The Cook, thus, exposes the architect's fondness for stunning scenery. The return of Albion was to be performed through "a floting Ile," sent by Neptune-James I "to waft him thence" (*Neptune's Triumph* 142-43). The masque would have staged this mythological homecoming with an artistic deployment of the stage machinery designed by Inigo Jones.[34] But the Cook goes on disturbing the conventional frame of the Court

masque. If he had been free to provide the whole show, he would have had

> . . . your Ile brought floting in, now,
> In a braue broth, and of a sprightly greene,
> Iust to the colour of the Sea; and then,
> Some twentie *Syrens*, singing in the kettel,
> With an *Arion*, mounted on the backe
> Of a growne Conger, but in such a posture,
> As, all the world should take him for a Dolphin:
> O, 'twould ha' made such musick! Ha' you nothing,
> But a bare Island? (185-93)

Jonson's boisterous Cook obeys to a self-abusing irony, as Jones's islands were by no means likely to be "bare." His fictional island, however, also evokes the Italian scenery of carnival and wedding feasts, especially Neptune's chariot as described by Natale Conti[35] and Vincenzo Cartari,[36] all too present to Inigo Jones. Thus, although the Cook's alternative shows are sneered at by the Poet as mere "*Out-landish* nothings" (*Neptune's Triumph* 224), the actual show of the masque is closely related to this scenographic tradition. Apparently, the Poet is entrusted with the "serious part" (326), but his main task is composing the comic induction, whereas the second part, the masque proper, is just a didactic accompaniment to the prodigious stage machinery. Jonson's usage of the sources already censures the stylised, impressive scenery of court shows.

The comic induction, moreover, is indebted to a more popular, though strongly learned tradition of carnivalesque contrasts. Again, Jonson uses the sources to get back to the popular scene of the grotesque. The ironical conflation of *personas* in the Cook reverts the usual order of the masque. The cook-architect should be allowed only to furnish "a *metaphoricall* dish" (233), an ". . . *Olla Podrida*," but he has "persons to present the meats" (240-41):

> Graue Mr. *Ambler*, Newes-Master of *Poules*,
> Supplies your Capon; and growne Captaine *Buz*
> (His *Emissary*) vnderwrites for Turky,
> A Gentleman of the *Forrest* presents Phesant,
> And a plump Poultrers wife, in *Graces* street,
> Playes Hen with egges i'the belly, or a Coney,
> Choose which you will. (295-301)

During the masque the Cook will also serve "a dish of pickled Saylors, fine salt Sea-boyes, shall relish like *Anchoues*, or *Caueare*" (517-19), wittily conflating meat and fish. But the opening translation of military art into culinary was already redolent of a century-long tradition of mock contentions between the opposite armies of Carnival and Lent. The starting point was Lucian's description of culinary wars.[37] The Medieval and Renaissance carnivalesque tradition enlarged upon this culinary demotion of the chronological succession between the two related periods of the year. As Grinberg and Kinser argue, the contrast became a formal vessel for all the categories of human life, in a chiastic struggle which took on the grotesque features of food.[38] This tradition of opposite parties represented by meat and fish may be found at work in all European literature, from the early French Renaissance[39] to the Italian *Contrasto del Carnasciale colla Quaresima*.[40] Also John Taylor's *Iacke-a-Lent* stages such grotesque rendering of the time-bound struggle between a "fat grosse bursten-gutted groome, called *Shroue-Tuesday*" and the "numberless army" of Lent, heralded by "Sir *Lawrence Ling*" and "Colonell *Cod*":

> . . . it is a wonder to see what Munition and Artillery the Epicures, and Canibal Flesh-eaters doe prouide to oppose *Lent*, and keepe him out at the staffes end, as whole barrels of poudered beefe blow him vp, tubs of Porke to pistoll and shoote him through with his kindred hunger, famine, and desolation, Baricadoes of Bacon, as strong and impregnable Bulwarkes against inuasive battery. (*Iacke-a-Lent* 116; *Works* 1: 126)

The culinary battle was, moreover, staged in actual shows. In 1506 Giovanni Sabbadino saw a similar struggle in the Piazza Maggiore of Bologna between Shrove-tuesday, "un uomo grasso, tondo e colorito sopra cavallo grasso," and Lent, "a cavallo macro in forma de richissima vechia" (Grinberg and Kinser 65). Urban carnivals and literary texts thus resorted to the culinary theme as a synonym of temporal progression, and the question is open whether historical precedence must be given to the shows or to the texts. Despite this uncertainty, it is safe to assume that this web of references to the culinary battle are inevitably linked with the carnivalesque contrast.

The Cook's alternative show is thus a quotation of popular carnival. My suggestion is that Jonson was relying on the report of Pantagruel's

periplus in Rabelais's *Fourth Book*. In their voyage to the Oracle of the Bottle, actually quoted by Jonson (*Neptune's Triumph* 77-79), Pantagruel and his fellows set foot on the island inhabited by the oxymoronic Quaresmeprenant, a carnivalesque monster who "pleure les troys parts du jour," but "ses habillemens sont joyeulx" (*Pantagruel* XXIX). Quaresmeprenant is engaged in a war with his neighbouring "Andouilles farfeleus," a sort of Lenten sausages.[41] As Panurge argues, "c'est bataille culinaire, et voulez aux cuisiniers vous rallier" (XXXIX). An army of cooks is then enrolled by Pantagruel to bring about the defeat of the giant sausages. Apart from the common derivation from Lucian, some strong evidence for Jonson's thematic borrowing from this episode may be found in the revised sequel of the masque, *The Fortunate Isles* of 1625. The serious part has almost gone unchanged, whereas the comic induction sees a debate between Iohphiel the spirit and Mere-Foole, a "Melancholique Student" who begs to see the heroes of the past. Iohphiel retorts that they are now busy in menial chores. Pythagoras, for instance, "... has rashly run himselfe on an imployment, / Of keeping *Asses* from a feild of beanes; / And cannot be stau'd off" (*The Fortunate Isles* 256-58). Now, Pantagruel's earliest stop before the island of Quaresmeprenant was in the Island of the dead heroes, the "isle des Macraeons" (XXV) stemming from Lucian's Island of the Blessed (*True Story* II.17 ff.) which Jonson echoes in the Macaria of the second masque.[42] But, despite the conventional triumph of order in both masques, the conclusion of *The Fortunate Isles*, with its references to the very sea-deities forming Neptune's train (519-30), oddly twists this order. We are back to the characters envisaged by the Cook, thus testifying to a more widespread ambiguity within the Court masque. Although the scenery imagined by the Cook is ludicrous, it is still the Cook's job to provide the classical scenery the Court seems to relish.

Neptune's Triumph and its sequel, thus, do not offer the conventional reconciliation of the ending. The carnivalesque show of the Cook's antimasques is deprived of its learned origin and takes on a popular vein of grotesque display. Jonson draws on Rabelais's learned adaptation of carnival motifs, but apparently dismisses it as the Cook's "by-workes." At the same time he exposes the grotesque pendant of the architect,

whose Italianate alternative carnival has the last word. In conclusion, Jonson's dissatisfaction affects both popular and court carnivals which, like the islands of Quaresmeprenant and of the Macraeons, are just two stops along the voyage.

IV. Is King Carnival Dead?

The three points I have been considering are, of course, only the *début* of a longer periplus through the Jonsonian invention. If we stick to the texts, Jonson seems more generally to loathe the public, rather than the popular element. My impression is that Jonson, for one, resorts to the sources in order to create an alternative text-within-the-text, where the popular element is decoded as the latest occurrence of a moral theory set down by the classics. What I would like to suggest is that studies on Jonson—and on carnival as well—stand in need of a new reconciliation between the pleasure of popularesque, theoretical overturning and the virtue of a fresh-faced approach based on actual literary and historical contexts, somehow deposing the more revolutionary though question-begging assumptions of ferocious hyperbakhtinizing. A different working hypothesis could lie in dismissing simplified binary oppositions between the high and the low, the Court and the people, the learned and the popular, especially when there is some ground to believe that all classes could resort to the same layers of a shared civilization of the grotesque, partly codified into written sources and partly adapted or transplanted into social customs, where each could mutually foster the other. If this view could be granted some validity, we could also give a different interpretation of the sort of post-Rabelaisian carnival we find in these works, a specimen of revelry deprived of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and its array of uncrowning and *sniženie*. Though not dismissing the popular element, Jonson actually seeks the grotesque, which can be made up by popular and learned elements. A direction which ought to be exploited could thus posit a cycle marked by the fall of King Carnival and the return of dethroned Grotesque as a more general principle including the carnivalesque. Within this more benign

framework, even Jonsonian carnival may stand, instead of a second life of the people, as a second theatre to be used as another source along the quest for the author's "bien."

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NOTES

[1]*The Works of Ben Jonson* ii-v. An opposite view is held by the anonymous author of the *Reflections on Originality in Authors*: Jonson, who is just a "pilferer from the Antients," could write only "one continued series of Imitation and allusion . . . . This surely is an odd species of improvement from reading, and savours very little of Invention or Genius: It borders nearly upon, if it is not really plagiarism" (63).

[2]"Ben Jonson" 14.

[3]"Carnival and the Institutions of the Theater" 640.

[4]*Rabelais and His Work* 5-6.

[5]Compare, for example, Womack's argument about Jonson, who is "objectively on the side of 'Lent'": ". . . the carnivalesque in Jonson becomes sly and tense, fraught with danger and perversity; its costumes falsehoods, its inversion crimes, and its promise of liberation anarchic" (*Ben Jonson* 135).

[6]As S. Greenblatt argues, Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque, more than of carnival, is by and large a "*post festum* recollection," as "*Gargantua and Pantagruel* is not carnival, but the brilliant aesthetic representation of carnival motifs; not the communal laughter of a largely illiterate populace, but the highly crafted, classicizing comedy of a supremely literate individual; not festive mayhem in the streets, but words on a page" ("'Filthy Rites'" 7-8).

[7]See E. K. Chambers (*The Medieval Stage*) and especially Y.-M. Bercé (*Fête et révolte* 28 ff.) for the disappearance of these customs.

[8]See *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* 64, 207.

[9]This description of time-limited anarchy by T. Kirchmeyer is always bent to perform a devastating criticism of heathen Popism: "The tongue is set at libertie, and hath no kinde of stay, / All things are lawfull then and done, no pleasure passed by, / That in their mindes they can deuise, as if they then should die" (*The Popish Kingdome, or Reign of Antichrist* sig. 48r). A more detailed comparison between ancient Roman customs and continental carnival is made by T. Moresinus in his *Papatus*.

[10]Quoted in Ben Jonson, *Works* 4: 349.

[11]J. Jowett ("'Fall Before this Booke'" 279) notes thus an "insurmountable obstacle to the popularizing process."

[12]*Works* 4: 350. The tragedy does not include a single event or a character which may not be traced to some sources. Jonson, moreover, often resorts to several sources for the same passage. According to Dutton, the true sense of the "integrity in the story" would consist in the reader's chance to fulfil the historical parallelisms provided by the author ("The Sources, Text, and Readers of *Sejanus*" 181-83, 197-98).

[13]Respectively, Tacitus (*Annals* I.ii.1), Suetonius (*Life of Tiberius* LXI), and Tacitus (*Annals* III.lxv.3).

[14]Tacitus, *Annals* IV.i.2; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* LVII.xix.5.

[15]Tacitus remarks that Sejanus loathed "vulgi rumorem, ingruentem invidiam" (*Annals* IV.xli.1). Further on, he makes clear that the "salutantum turba" refers not to Tiberius, but to the numerous clients of Sejanus.

[16]See H. H. Scullard (*Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* 207).

[17]*La fête des kalendes* 47.

[18]See J. Caro Baroja (*Le Carnaval* 163-72).

[19]Dio Cassius merely hints at the three-day long dismemberment of Sejanus (*Roman History* LVIII.xi.3, 5).

[20]*The Reform of Popular Culture* 163-65.

[21]"What Says the Married Woman" 3.

[22]For the rhetorical tradition on silence, see R. B. Waddington ("The Iconography of Silence" 248-61).

[23]Libanius only reports the dismal bed scene, when the newly-wed husband, craving for silence, is frightened by the thundering voice of his wife (*Declamatio* 6).

[24]According to Boughner, the disguise occupies a "pivotal place" only in *Clizia*, which also offers some "epicene elements," including the fake marriage ("*Clizia* and *Epicoene*" 89-91). But all these elements are actually derived from Plautus. Campbell, on the other hand, argues that Jonson borrowed from the *Marescalco* the "cruel and persistent ridicule of one eccentric." In both comedies, the page disguised leads the eccentric to the same "extremity of ridiculous abjection, before an equally large audience" ("The Relation of *Epicoene* to Aretino's *Il Marescalco*" 756-58).

[25]"*Clizia* and *Epicoene*" 89-91. All the three plays, moreover, openly stage the disguise trick for the benefit of the audience (*Casina* 769-72; *Clizia* IV.viii; *Marescalco* V.iv.1), whereas Jonson's *coup de théâtre* equates the audience's surprise with the characters' on stage. See P. Mirabelli ("Silence, Wit, and Wisdom" 312, 333).

[26]*Casina* 25-26; *Clizia* III.i; for the *Marescalco*, see M. D'Apollonio (*Storia del teatro italiano* II.84-85). For the carnivalesque setting of *Epicoene*, cf. L. G. Salingar ("Farce and Fashion in *The Silent Woman*" 30-34).

[27]I. Donaldson recognises in the plot of *Epicoene* "the punishment of misanthropy . . . through the means of a viciously high-spirited festive ceremony" ("A Martyr's Resolution" 6).

[28]P. Cunningham quotes a payment to Henslowe "by way of his Ma[ties] reward to him and his seruaunts in bringinge and presenting before his Ma[tie] at Whitehall the game of Bearebaytinge upon Shrovetuesday" (*Extracts from the Accounts* xxxvii).

[29]See *Le Charivari*, eds. J. Le Goff and J.-C. Smith.

[30]According to I. Ianicka, for instance, in his masques Jonson "raised his court-audience to an idealized reality of their own" ("The Popular Background of Ben Jonson's Masques" 187). See also E. W. Talbert ("The Interpretation of Jonson's Courtly Spectacles"), and W. T. Furniss ("Ben Jonson's Masques").

[31]Quoted in Ben Jonson, *Works* 11: 576.

[32]"Poet and Architect" 152n1.

[33]Vitruvius argues that the ideal architect "ingeniosum esse oportet, et ad disciplinam docilem . . . et ut literatus sit, peritus graphidos, eruditus Geometria, et optices non ignarus, responsa Iurisconsultorum noverit, Astrologiam coelique rationes cognitas habeat" (*De Architectura* I.i). A similar polymath is Puttenham's Homer who, though "a poor priuate man," was able to "so exactly set foorth and describe, as if he had bene a most excellent *Captaine* or *Generall*, the order and array of battels, the conduct of whole armies, the sieges and assaults of cities and townes," as well as "the sumptousnesse and magnificence of royal bankets, feasts, weddings, and enteruewes" (*The Art of English Poesie* 1-2).

[34]Inigo Jones prepared a preliminary sketch of "A Maritime Palace, the House of Oceanus," which was then adapted for *The Fortunate Isles* (*Designs by Inigo Jones* n65, 51-52). In the second masque the Cook obviously disappeared, though some of his lines were quoted in *The Staple of News* (IV.ii.1-41), written after Jonson and Jones had finally parted.

[35]*Mythologia* II.viii.164.

[36]*Imagini degli Dei* 223; 240.

[37]*True Story* I.13-17; 36-41.

[38]"Les combats de Carnaval" 73.

[39]*Deux Jeux de Carnaval* xi.

[40]*Libro di Carnevale* I.xx-II.lxiv, 12-46.

[41]See S. Kinser (*Rabelais's Carnival* 9-11, 50-1), and B. C. Bowen ("Lenten Eels").

[42]See J. Bennett Waters (*Britain Among the Fortunate Isles* 121).

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