Religion and the Law in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*

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Summary: *In Bartholomew Fair, Jonson, speaking for the Establishment, debunks the presumptuous "singularity" of extreme Puritans, demonstrating the folly of "authority" which is rooted not in traditional structures of church and state but in excentricity and private fancies. Jonson's satirical method combines parodic allusion with the reductive method of caricature. As would-be moralists, Busy and Overdo are cowed into submission by the plea for a larger humanity which places hypocritical meddlesomeness within the wider context of a social structure embracing both civil order and the stage.*

In *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson takes a satirical look at the "petulant ways" (The Prologue to the King's Majesty) of those who would use religion and the law to reform society according to their own narrow and, ultimately, anarchical moral code. More precisely, his attack is aimed at the presumption of those who usurp the moral authority of religion and the law to serve their own ends. In short, his satire is directed at the underlying hypocrisy of the Puritan ethos.

In his address to King James, presumably written for the first performance of the play before the court at Whitehall on 26 December 1614, Jonson confidently claims the concurrence of the King. James's irritation at the presbyterian demands of the Puritan faction was well known. He was profoundly suspicious of the equalitarian tendencies inherent in the Puritan ethos as is evident in his description of Puritans to his first Parliament in 1604 as "a sect rather than a religion—ever discontented with the present government and impatient to suffer any superiority, which maketh their sect unable to be suffered in any well-governed commonwealth."¹

In the 1603 preface to his *Basilikon Doron* James was more careful to restrict his definition of a Puritan:

the name of Puritan doth properly belong only to that vile sect amongst the Anabaptists, called the Family of Love; because they think themselves only pure. . . Of this special sect I principally mean when I speak of Puritans. . . and partly, indeed, I give this style to such brainsick and heady preachers their disciples and followers, as refusing to be called of that sect, yet participate too much with their humours.²

Margot Heinemann claims that this reference by King James, who was touchy about public criticism of himself and his own policies, could have indicated to dramatists “that to mock at holiness in the shape of these particular groups was unlikely to get anyone into trouble with the censorship.”³ However, Jonson had enough reasons of his own for disliking Puritans in general and the sects in particular, and making them the butt of his satire. In *Discoveries* Jonson states categorically:

Puritanus Hypocrita est Haereticus, quem opinio propriae perspicaciae, quâ sibi videtur, cum paucis in Ecclesiâ dogmatibus, errores quosdam animadvertisse, de statu mentis deturbavit: unde sacro furore percitus, phreneticè pugnat contra Magistratus, sic ratus, obedientiam praestare Deo.⁴

Critics are generally in agreement as to Jonson’s conservatism. He endorses traditional structures. In his poetry, for example, he consistently argues from a tradition. As Bruce King points out:

. . . the poems celebrate a hierarchy in which the responsibilities of the aristocracy towards the land, the community and the state are implicitly contrasted to the destructive energies of the city, individualism, ambition and glory.⁵

This emphasis on man in his communal aspect is reminiscent of Hooker. Societal structures, according to Hooker, evolve from the natural law and the law of reason working in tandem for the good of the whole. He implies that authority in religion and the law derives from a communal will or tradition, not from individual eccentricities. The distinction forms the basis for his attack on the sectaries.⁶ The extreme Puritan reliance on the inner light of the Spirit could so easily become a “pretext” to satisfy personal desires and ambitions. In *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson demonstrates with devastating satirical effect the folly of the kind of ‘authority’ in which judgement is based on eccentricity or private fancies—what Hooker termed “singularity.”⁷

Of course, Jonson was not alone in satirizing the arrogant eccentricity or

hypocrisy perceived in the tendency to appeal to spiritual illumination whenever convenient. In the popular *The Plaine Man's Pathway to Heaven* (1601), to cite but one example, there is a vignette which could almost have provided the prototype for Jonson's *Busy*. The speaker who launches the counter-attack is the reprobate "caviller," Antilegon, addressing Philagathus, "an honest man":

Phila. . . . assuredly I cannot hold my peace at your vile cauilling, and most blasphemous speeches.

Antile. I cry you mercie, Sir: you seeme to be one of these scripture men: you are all of the spirit: you are so full of it, that it runneth out at your nostrils. . . You thinke there is none good, but such as your selfe, & such as can please your humor. You will forsoothe be all pure. But by God there be a company of knaues of you.⁸

At the beginning of Jonson's play, John Littlewit describes *Busy*: "Some time the spirit is so strong with him, it gets quite out of him, and then my mother, or *Win*, are faine to fetch it againe with Malmesey, or *Aqua coelestis*" (I.ii.68-70).⁹ In *Bartholomew Fair*, however, the emphasis is on debunking the claim to authority in the name of religion and the law which becomes laughable because it is shown up as being informed not by reason, which is the operative principle behind genuine authority, but by self-inflated meddlesomeness. *Busy*'s "inspired" denunciations of the Fair represent one kind of "singularity," while Justice Overdo's pompously magisterial, but no less irrational attempts at rooting out "enormities," represent another.

What characterized the sects such as the Anabaptists and the Family of Love was their "anti-clerical and layman's creed."¹⁰ Both Peter Lake and Richard Greaves emphasize the lively debate that centred on the subject of the training and ordination of ministers. On biblical grounds Separatists and other sectaries claimed the right to preach on the basis of inner revelation of the Spirit rather than formal education. Greaves quotes the Separatist Barrow's fervent declaration: "I with my whole heart wish, that all the Lord's people were prophets."¹¹ The established church, on the other hand, insisted that only those qualified to the ministry and who derived their ministry from a bishop's ordination were permitted to expound the gospel. Collinson, for example, refers to the specific injunction by the High Commission in 1589 "to every parish in the diocese of London, forbidding entertainment of irregular preachers."¹²

On the matter of adequate theological training the established church was

fully supported by Puritan divines, such as Cartwright and other university intellectuals who rejected “the separatists’ populist revolt against any sort of ministerial elite.”¹³ Thus the main attacks on the sectaries come to focus on their challenge to a traditionally educated ministry. Greaves concludes:

The ultimate danger, then, was that proponents of an unlettered clergy allegedly moved by the Spirit could overturn the established order in favor of a spiritual democracy or an oligarchy of saints. The ferocity of the counterattack against these forces is understood only in the light of the revolutionary implications of the sectarian position. Ironically, the sectaries, who gave primacy to preaching in the worship service, developed principles kindred to those of the Anglicans and Puritans with respect to the role of the Spirit in understanding the gospel. By destroying the tension between natural and revealed knowledge, they bypassed traditional education as the proper pathway to the preaching vocation and challenged the control that defenders of the existing order maintained through education and ordination. In effect, the sectaries threatened the educational system, the church and its legal agencies, and the social order itself.¹⁴

Jonson was clearly aware of this debate and, as a religious and social conservative, he was suspicious of the disruptive influence of unorthodox and unlettered men on the people. Moreover, as Margot Heinemann pointed out to me, Jonson would regard lay preachers as opposed to the state-controlled ministry both as a source of disorder and as presumptuous in claiming as uneducated men to discharge functions properly reserved to educated or learned men (a category in which he not unreasonably included himself).

The practice of lay preaching was particularly associated with the Anabaptists.¹⁵ We know that the organization of their church, consisting of small, independent congregations, was thoroughly democratic. For one thing, they practised the “liberty of prophesying,” that is, anyone was free to say during services whatever they believed themselves inspired by God to say. For another, officers were elected by the votes of the entire congregation. Louise Fargo Brown reports:

Any member might be chosen as deacon, but only those who were thought to possess special gifts were elected to eldership, as it was the elders who exercised pastoral duties. The belief that no special education was necessary as a preparation for the work of the ministry led to actual denunciation of higher education by some preachers, and gave rise to the opinion that the Baptists were opposed to learning and to the universities. Moreover, the fact that the men who preached on Sundays frequently worked the rest of the

week as saddlers, glovers, felt-makers, and the like, brought upon them the scorn of the Church of England clergy and the Presbyterians.¹⁶

Thus an attack on the Baptists published in 1645 has the following:

Q. "Who are your preachers and what are they?" A. "There are divers: viz., Mr Patience, an honest glover, Mr Griffin, a reverend Taylor, Mr Knowles, a learned Scholler, Mr Spilsby, a renowned cobbler, Mr Barber, a Button maker, and divers others."¹⁷

The brethren refer to their leaders as ministers, or servants, shepherds, elders, teachers. Is this where the 'title' of Rabbi comes from? In *Bartholomew Fair* Dame Purecraft calls her mentor "brother" but other characters refer to him as "Rabbi Busy." From the various contexts in some other references to "Rabbis" which I have been able to trace it would appear that the appellation was used contemptuously. Margot Heinemann alludes to Middleton's masque *The World Tost at Tennis* (1620) "in which soldier and scholar, commiserate with one another on their poverty, and the scholar attributes his unemployment to the rise of 'mechanic Rabbis' or lay preachers":

There's Rabbi Job a vereable silk-weaver,
Jehu a throwster dwelling in the Spitalfields,
There's Rabbi Abimelech a learned cobbler,
Rabbi Lazarus a superstitious tailor;
These shall hold up their shuttles, needles, awls
Against the gravest Levite of the land,
And give no ground neither (p.156).¹⁸

In *The Overburian Characters* "A Puritane" is described as

a diseas'd peece of Apocripha, bind him to the Bible and he corrupts the whole text; Ignorance, and fat feede, are his founders, his Nurses, Raylings, Rabbies, and round breeches; . . . his fierie zeale keepes him continuall Costive, which withers him into his own translation, and till hee eate a Schoolman hee is hide-bound;¹⁹

A later attack (1653) on John Rogers, one of the leaders and ministers of Fifth Monarchism, by Zachary Crofton, a Presbyterian minister, is titled "Bethshemesh Clouded: or some Animadversions on the Rabbinical Talmud of Rabbi John Rogers of Thomas Apostle's London: called his Tabernacle for the Sun, his Irenicum Evangelicum, or his Idea of Church Discipline. In which you have his spirit in Some Measure Refuted by Zachary Crofton, Minister of the Word."²⁰

The "title" of Rabbi was clearly associated with unorthodox lay preachers

with a jibe at their ignorance and hatred of learning. More specifically, it probably derived from the accusation of “Judaizing” levelled at those Puritans and religious radicals who insisted on basing religion exclusively on the scriptures, particularly the Old Testament. Their lay preachers were then labelled “Rabbis” by their detractors and enemies.

I have found one piece of evidence which might suggest that the term was actually used by the Family of Love, often identified with the Anabaptists, possibly because of a shared emphasis on the inspirational power of the Spirit. Alastair Hamilton quotes from the confession of two men made to the Surrey justice of the peace, William More, concerning “a sect whose Elders summoned the members of their congregation to ‘one of their disciples houses, which they call also a Rab [Rab = abbreviation of Rabbi?].’”²¹ However, it seems that the leaders of the sect who actually conducted the “service” were called “Bishops, Elders, and Deacons.” So this evidence is very flimsy and uncertain.

Be that as it may, Jonson’s Rabbi Busy is clearly sensitive to the charge of “Judaizing.” As an added reason for accompanying his little flock to the Fair in order to satisfy Win’s longing to “eat of a pig,” he declares:

In the way of comfort to the weake, I will goe, and eat. I will eate exceedingly, and prophesie; there may be a good vse made of it, too, now I thinke on’t: by the publike eating of Swines flesh, to professe our hate, and loathing of *Iudaisme*, whereof the brethren stand taxed. I will therefore eate, yea, I will eate exceedingly

(I.vi.92-97).

Busy’s reference to the charge of “Judaism” helps to “place” him, and what he represents, as the target of Jonson’s satire. Littlewit also points out to Winwife: *Rabbi Busy*, Sir, he is more then an *Elder*, he is a *Prophet*, Sir (I.iii.116-117).

Christopher Hill deals with the whole question of “Judaizing” in relation to Sabbatarianism, i.e. the dogmatic assertion that the fourth Commandment is morally and perpetually binding, while Collinson too delineates the “growing success of the Sabbatarian doctrine which seems to have carried all before it in puritan circles in the reign of James I.”²² Government opposition to Sabbatarianism is not hard to explain. It was related to the underlying fear of the implications of Judaism. Hill’s conclusions are of particular interest:

Many Puritans regarded themselves as the chosen people, and their reliance upon Old Testament texts is notorious. “Judaizing” meant, among other things, looking back to the customs and traditions of a tribal society, still

relatively egalitarian and democratic; its standards and myths could be used for destructive criticism of the institutions that had been built up in medieval society.²³

The subversive danger of "Judaizing" is encapsulated in one of the early Separatists, Barrow's, most extreme and "far-reaching proposals for reform." I quote from R.L. Greaves:

Barrow asserted that the laws of England should be made conformable to the Mosaic Law, in the absence of which existing laws were often ungodly and unjust. . . it was mandatory for every prince to govern in total accord with "the judgements due and set downe by God for the transgression of the moral law."²⁴

From all this evidence it is abundantly clear that what the Establishment rightly feared from the tendency to Judaism was the undermining of traditional hierarchical structures of church and state. The challenge to traditional authority by the Old Testament Bibliolatry of unlettered fanatics was a tendency which not only King James, but most conservative and educated Jacobean regarded with suspicion. Jonson's method of attack is satire. By means of caricature he emphasizes the ignorance and eccentricity of those who hold such views and makes them laughable.

In the light of the above, Jonson's careful contextualization of Busy's lowly status in contrast with the exaggerated deference of the Littlewits and Dame Purecraft to his "authority" may also be seen as a deliberate strategy. Amongst other things, the opening scene serves to establish Busy's arrogant and tiresome usurpation of authority in the Littlewit household. The portrait of Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, ex-baker of Banbury, is precisely drawn before he appears on stage. The audience is introduced to Busy by John Littlewit, a proctor,²⁵ that is, an official of the ecclesiastical court, whose functions included the collection of tithes. The sectaries, in particular, were opposed to tithes which they regarded as relics of popery. According to Greaves, they also "resented compulsory exactions to support an ecclesiastical establishment they repudiated."²⁶ Bitter attacks were likewise launched by Puritans both within and without the official church on the ecclesiastical courts themselves. The jurisdiction of these courts extended over both religious and secular matters as the distinctions between civil and ecclesiastical laws were very blurred. Typical invectives against the church courts sound very like Busy: Field referred scathingly to the Court of Faculties as "the filthy quagmire and poisoned plash of all the abominations that do infect the whole realm" while

Dering argued that it was the “mother and nurse of all abominations.”²⁷

Busy in even more graphic vein echoes the accusations of popery and the favourite Puritan term from the Old Testament, “abomination.”²⁸ Win and John Littlewit report on Busy’s preoccupations:

Ioh. He cannot abide my Vocation, he sayes.

Win. No, he told my mother, a *Proctor* was a claw of the *Beast*, and that she had little lesse then committed *abomination* in marrying me so as she ha’s done.

Ioh. Euery line (he sayes) that a *Proctor* writes, when it comes to be read in the Bishops Court, is a long blacke hayre, kemb’d out of the tayle of *Anti-Christ*.

(I.ii.74-80)

Jonson scales down the situation because the holder of the “popish” office is silly John Littlewit. But the audience could not have failed to recognize the barb directed at the Puritan attack on the “vocation” of proctor which was part of the whole system of ecclesiastical courts.

At the same time, however, Jonson makes fun of the social pretenses of the Littlewits. John is delighted and impressed with his wife’s finery: “And her fine high shoes like the Spanish lady!,” while Win has her eyes on the social status of Mistress Overdo, the wife of a Justice of the Peace. Interestingly, a common Puritan complaint against attorneys was their aspiration to become gentlemen. Greaves reports that the Puritans likewise found reason to complain about the principal method they used to achieve this, namely, “sophistry, the ability ‘to coyne quirkes and quiddities.’”²⁹ John Littlewit, with his ridiculous pursuit of “a pretty conceit” (a jibe at the current literary fashion) and “a quirk or a quiblin” seems almost a parody of this tendency.

In filling out the portrait of Busy, as in the case of Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias in *The Alchemist*, Jonson draws readily on the whole arsenal of anti-Puritan satire. In the *dramatis personae* as well as insistently in the text Busy is referred to as “a Banbury man.” The association of the town of Banbury with Puritanism has been dealt with by critics of Jonson (for example, Herford and Simpson and Johansson) and by historians. Collinson notes pithily:

[Banbury] became a byword for smalltown godliness, the Jacobean enjoying their Banbury jests no less than the English their Irish jokes. It was a Banbury cat which was hanged on Monday for killing a mouse on Sunday and a Banbury man who in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* gave up his trade of baking because his Banbury cakes were enjoyed at ‘brideales, maypoles, morrises

and such profane feasts and meeting.'³⁰

These "details" concerning Busy are furnished by Quarlous who claims to have known him and "divers of those Banburians" when he was in Oxford. Puritan opposition to elaborate wedding feasts and, in particular, their condemnation of lords of misrule, morris dances and May-day celebrations round the May-pole as pertaining to old superstitious Holy days, was well known.³¹ It was linked to the whole sabbatarian question as is evidenced by the following quotation from James's 1618 *Declaration of lawful Sports* proclaiming that it was the King's "pleasure. . . that after the end of Divine Service our good people be not disturbed, letted, or discouraged from any lawful recreation; such as dancing, either men or women, archery for men, leaping, vaulting, or any such harmless recreation, nor from having May-games, Whitsun-ales, and morris-dances, and the setting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used."³² Later in the play when Busy is locked in the stocks for disturbing the Fair we hear him noisily proclaiming what he represents:

WAS. What are you, Sir?

BVS. One that reioyceth in his affliction, and sitteth here to prophesie the destruction of *Fayres* and *May-games*, *Wakes*, and *Whitson-ales*, and doth sigh and groan for the reformation, of these abuses.

(IV.vi.88-92)

But to return to the initial sequences in which the portrait of Busy is drawn. The opening exchange between Quarlous and Littlewit, as well as the information volunteered by Littlewit, serves primarily to outline the ostentatious nature of Busy's extreme brand of Puritanism. All the stock attributes already picked out in *The Alchemist*, especially in Subtle's "catalogue," are there: there is the Old Testament bias (praying "that the sweet singers may be restor'd"—a reference to the psalms), the much-satirized habit of saying interminable graces, the "godly" names adopted by the sectaries³³, the aversion to learning. When finding himself in the stocks with Justice Overdo, Busy cannot bear listening to the Justice's stream of Latin quotations, "the very rags of Rome, and patches of popery." Latin, of course, was especially detested as the language of the Church of Rome.

Most significantly though, Busy's "singularity" is linked, as in Hooker, to hypocrisy:

A notable hypocriticall vermine it
is; I know him. One that stands vpon his face, more than his faith, at all times;

Euer in seditious motion, ànd reprocuing for vaine-glory: of a most *lunatique* conscience, and splene, and affects the violence of *Singularity* in all he do's.
(I.iii.135-139)

His female counterpart is Dame Purecraft. The Littlewits give a thumbnail sketch of her too, before she appears:

IOH. Our mother is a most elect *Hypocrite*, and has maintain'd us all this seuen yeere with it, like Gentlefolkes.

WIN. I, let her alone, *Iohn*, she is not a wise wilfull widdow for nothing, nor a santified sister for a song.

(I.V.163-167)

Knowing what to expect, the audience then sits back to enjoy the "performance" of the two hypocritical Puritans. Jonson repeats the satire on Puritan cant which he used so effectively in *The Alchemist* to demonstrate the power of language to defraud. Dame Purecraft glibly invokes "the blaze of the beauteous discipline" to "fright away this euill from our house" (I, vi.1-2), that is, the inner light of the Spirit which determines Puritan conduct will be the guiding principle in avoiding pollution from any "evil" source. Once more, there is the ridicule of the Puritan obsession with the Devil. Afterwards, when Busy has gluttoned himself at the Pig woman's booth, he looks round the Fair and also finds the Devil everywhere: "the whole *Fayre* is the shop of *Satan*!" (III.ii.42). Dame Purecraft and Busy react to each other on cue. She puts Win's sudden longing to eat Bartholomew pig in the Fair to him as a "case of conscience," adding significantly, "Good Brother *Zeale-of-the-land*, thinke to make it as lawfull as you can." Busy, of course, obliges promptly in the most outrageous parody of Puritan casuistry as expounded, in particular, by popular preachers such as William Perkins.³⁴ The casuist "construction" used by Busy contains a further jibe at Puritan hypocrisy and individualism. Anything can be justified as long as it is done with "*sobriety* and humbleness." It is the same kind of argument as that used by Ananias in *The Alchemist* to persuade himself that "coynning of money is most lawfull."

The sheer exaggeration of Busy's use of Puritan cant, formulas, and rhythms makes him more of a caricature than Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome. But paradoxically, the very excess of his utterance, the vividness and consistency of the "linguistic caricature"³⁵ makes him more memorable as a type. As Margot Heinemann has it, "Busy fixes the type forever."³⁶ His sermonizing captures to perfection the cadences of the Puritan pulpit that have endured to this day. I vividly remember listening to the following verbiage:

Now, brothers and sisters, the fire seen by Moses was not above the bush, nor was the fire, the very flame seen by Moses, to the right of the bush, nor to the left. The fire, brothers and sisters, was in the bush.

Here is Busy:

I wil remoue *Dagon* there, I say, that *Idoll*, that heathenish *Idoll*, that remaines (as I may say) a beame, a very beame, not a beame of the Sunne, nor a beame of the *Moone*, nor a beame of a ballance, neither a house-beame, nor a Weauers beame, but a beame in the eye, in the eye of the brethren.

(V.v.4-9)

The affinity is obvious.

Like the two Anabaptists in *The Alchemist*, Busy proves ultimately to be a financial swindler. Dame Purecraft, herself a consummate "deuourer, in stead of a distributer of the alms," who extort money from the "elect" under the threat of "reprobation and damnation," tells us:

Our elder, *Zeale-of-the-land*, would haue had me, but I know him to be the capitall Knaue of the land, making himselfe rich, by being made *Feoffee* in trust to deceased *Brethren*, and coozning their *heyres*, by swearing the absolute gift of their inheritance.

(V.ii.66-70)

But in emphasizing his "singularity," Jonson's satire is broader, less severe, more romping. Busy's ranting against the "wordly" Fair in whose gastronomic delights he nevertheless indulges so liberally is pure caricature. He guides his charges through the Fair with strict injunctions: "So, walke on in the middle way, fore-right, turne neyther to the right hand, not to the left: let not your eyes be drawn aside with vanity, nor your eare with noyses" (III.ii.30-32). Apart from the familiar sentence construction, so similar to my recollected sample, Jonson is mocking the besetting Puritan fear of what Dame Purecraft, echoing Busy, refers to as "the vanity of the eye." This anticipates the confrontation between Busy and the puppet Dionysius—presently to be dealt with. Busy's absurd directive to obliterate the senses of sight and hearing in passing through the Fair is a wicked satire on the extreme Puritan emphasis on the Spirit or inner light and the consequent negation of the "outward" eye and ear, and by extension, all visual and auditory symbols that might evoke traditional, i.e. popish associations—hence Busy's warning against "the beels of the beast." Since there was no prohibition on the sense of smell Busy hilariously sniffs his way to the Pig woman's booth to "satisfy" his "suffering-self"—his hypocritical euphemism for nothing less than grossly self-indulgent gluttony, a fact

which does not go unnoticed by Ursula's crony Knockem: "right hypocrites, good gluttons. . . thou shalt try 'hem by the teeth.'" One remembers Littlewit finding Busy "fast by the teeth, i' the cold Turkey-pye, i' the cupboard, with a great white loafe on his left hand, and a glasse of *Malmesey* on his right" (I.vi.34-36).

Having had his fill, Busy is ready for further denunciations of the Fair, epitomized by Ursula who has "the marks vpon her, of the three enemies of Man, the World, as being in the *Faire*; the Deuill, as being in the fire; and the Flesh, as being her selfe (III.vi. 35-37). Knockem comments once more: "An excellent right Hypocrite! now his belly is full, he falls a railing and kicking, the Iade."

Predictably, Busy sees Idolatry and Popery everywhere. Moved by the "spirit," he unleashes a self-intoxicating flood of abuse at the "merchandize of *Babylon*" and "the peeping of *Popery* vpon the stalls." Leatherhead's toys are Roman symbols: his hobby-horse is an idol, a drum "the broken belly of the beast," a doll "the purple strumpet" (the Church of Rome was commonly referred to as "the strumpet of Rome"), while the "profane pipes" and "tinkeling timbrels" are associated with the abhorred ritual of the Mass. Even poor Joan Trash's basket of stale gingerbread cakes, which were "moulded into figures of St. Bartholomew"³⁷ is cumulatively inveighed against as "thy basket of popery," "thy nest of images," "this idolatrous grove of images."

In a near-blasphemous parody of Christ's overturning the tables in the Temple Busy, in a frenzy of zeal, overthrows the gingerbread. But the very excess of Busy's gesture and language within the context of the situation depicted is designed not to shock but to evoke mirth at his lack of moderation. This is the very stuff of dramatic caricature.

Moreover, the anti-Puritan satire in *Bartholomew Fair* is more good-humoured than in *The Alchemist*. Busy is less calculating than his hypocritical counterparts, Ananias and Tribulation. His hypocrisy is more transparent. He is, ultimately, shown up as a blustering fool. For his pains in disrupting the Fair with his "sanctified noise" he ends up in the stocks. So does Justice Overdo who, like Busy, but in his own blustering way, sets out to "reprehend" and reform the world of the Fair. The spectacle of the two fake moralists who pose as figures of authority,³⁸ which is precisely what Jonson is pilloring in this play, is highlighted with exquisite irony by Dame Purecraft: ". . . they haue set the faithfull, here to be wonder'd at; and prouided holes, for the holy of the land" (IV.vi.125-126). However, they are allowed to escape from the stocks, as they are allowed to go scot free in the end. Jonson is content to have shown them

up and to have made his point.

Busy's favourite cant word, "abomination," finds its counterpart in Justice Overdo's "enormity." Justice of the Peace, Adam Overdo, clearly models himself on the Puritan notion of the "godly magistrate." His expressed intentions, reiterated like a refrain, are laudable. His concern in discovering and chastising "the yearly enormities of this Fair," he says, is to promote the public good "in Iustice name, and the Kings; and for the common-wealth!" But his real motives are far less exalted. His overweening self-importance is evident from the start. When two of the peddlers mention his name, he is delighted: "I am glad, to heare, my name is their terror, yet, this is doing of Iustice" (II.ii.27-28). Later, his even less subtle wife amusingly echoes his own attitude when she thanks the Watch "in the behalfe o' the Crowne, and the peace, and in Master *Ouerdoo's* name, for suppressing enormities" (IV.iv.180-182) while the Watch themselves are only too aware of their J.P.'s blinkered self-opinionatedness and overheated impetuosity:

BRI. He will sit as vpriight o' the bench, an' you marke him, as a candle
i' the socket, and give light to the whole Court in euey businesse.

HAG. But he will burne blew, and swell like a bile (God blesse vs) an' he
be angry.

BRI. I, and hee will be angry too, when him list, that's more: and when
hee is angry, be it right or wrong; hee has the Law on's side, euer.
I market that too.

(IV.i.74-81)

What is most evident about Justice Overdo's kind of justice is, however, his officiousness. The specific allusion to George Whetstone's *A Mirour for Magestrates of Cyties* (1584), as discussed by Herford and Simpson, indicates that Jonson may well have got the idea for the figure of Justice Overdo from Whetstone's argument "that a careful magistrate must disguise himself and frequent places of entertainment in order to discover their real character."³⁹ Herford and Simpson add that "Whetstone's association with the extreme Puritan reformers and the proposals in his pamphlets for putting down places of entertainment would give point to Jonson's satire."⁴⁰ Adam Overdo's soliloquy (II.i), in which he introduces himself to the audience, explains that he is all set to implement Whetstone's recommendations. He cites the "commendable" example of a "worthy, worshipful man, sometime a capital member of this city" whose ludicrous officiousness is clearly meant to raise a laugh from the audience. Is Jonson, himself a famed frequenter of taverns, lampoon-

ing the actions of the Lord Mayor of London? Herford and Simpson report:

Dr C.S. Alden identifies the ‘capitall member of this City’ with Sir Thomas Hayes, Lord Mayor of London, quoting from the *Analytical Index to Remembrancia*, pp.358-9, his letter of 8 July 1614 to the Lord Chamberlain detailing the steps he had taken to reform abuses in the City: ‘He had informed himself, by means of spies, of many lewd houses, and had gone himself disguised to divers of them, and. . . had punished them. . . some by carting and whipping, and many by banishment: . . . he had taken an exact survey of all victualling houses and ale-houses, which were above a thousand, and above 300 barrels of strong beer in some houses, the whole quantity of beer in victualling houses amounting to above 40,000 barrels’ .

. . .⁴¹

At any rate, what this evidence does suggest is that some magistrates actually acted in accordance with Whetstone’s recommendations. Justice Overdo refers to himself as an example of Whetstone’s magistrate on two further occasions so that the audience cannot miss the allusion: he reveals himself to Troubleall (as he thinks) as the “carefull *Magistrate*” disguising himself “for the good of the *Republique*, in the *Fayre*, and the weeding out of enormity” (V.ii.92-94) and in his final self-congratulatory oration he calls upon London and Smithfield to look upon him:

The *example of Iustice*,
and *Mirror of Magistrates*: the true top of formality and scourge of enormity.
(V.vi.34-36)

Overdo’s self-inflated assumption of divinity tempts one to think Jonson may also be alluding in an oblique way to the original *Mirror for Magistrates*, the famous collections of tragedies, published between 1555-1578. Justice Overdo looks forward to

the houre of my seuerity. . .
wherein cloud-like, I will breake out in raine, and haile lightning, and
thunder, vpon the head of enormity.
(V.ii.4-6)

In dedicating the *Mirror* “To the nobilitye and all other in office,” Baldwin wrote:

For as Iustice is the chief vertue, so is the ministracion therof, the chiefest office: & therefore hath God established it with the chiefest name, honoring & calling Kinges, & all officers vnder them by his owne name, Gods. Ye be all Gods, as many as have in your charge any ministracion of Iustice.⁴²

Lily Campbell points out that in accordance with the orthodox Tudor doctrine "the whole theory of the divine right of kings is implicit in this definition"⁴³ James, for political reasons, perpetuated this theory. However, in Jonson's play, Justice Overdo, as a mere J.P., arrogantly usurps divinely sanctioned authority which is the prerogative of the King alone. Once more, Jonson is directing his barbs at Puritan presumption. His parody functions on two levels. Justice Overdo's hubristic misuse of his office makes his fall, albeit a comic one, inevitable. Secondly, what underpins the *Mirror* is the orthodox doctrine of "place." Justice Overdo is an upstart or one of the "new men." Waspe tells Mistress Overdo:

why Mistresse, I knew *Adam*, the
Clerke, your husband, when he was *Adam* Scriuener, and writ for two pence
a sheet, as high as he beares his head now, or you your hood, Dame.
(IV.iv.162-165)

The office of Justice of the Peace was traditionally associated with the gentry. According to G.C.F. Forster:

The magistracy was often simply a concomitant of gentle birth, but many of the J.Ps by this time had attended a university or an inn of court, lawyers were strongly entrenched in the commissions and the number of clerical J.Ps grew, perhaps in the hope that they would stand outside local jealousies and factions.⁴⁴

Justice Overdo is therefore, very likely, conceived as one of Christopher Hill's "industrious sort of people,"⁴⁵ rising in station through Puritanical diligence. Certainly his beaver-like activity in setting out personally to "discover" the enormities of the Fair has the familiar ring of anti-Puritan satire.

King James himself was annoyed with the apathetic ostentation, on the one hand, and the officiousness, on the other hand, of J.Ps when he spoke of "good justices" and "bad," "idle slow-bellies" and "busy bodies."⁴⁶ Justice Overdo is certainly a prime example of the "busy body."

Jonson's *Busy* and *Overdo*, as their names indicate, are then individual variations of Puritan meddlesomeness. The joke is, of course, that *Busy*'s interference with others' pleasure is pure hypocrisy. His own gluttony makes nonsense of his anti "cakes and ale" stance. Justice Overdo is no hypocrite in this sense of the term. But self-deception is also a form of hypocrisy. Adam Overdo greatly fancies himself as the stern moralist. What is more, in his case the joke is that his "wisdom," Latin tags and all, turns out to be the purest folly. All his judgements are misjudgements. Thus the "proper" and "civil" young

man whom he wants to save from the enormities of the Fair is actually a cutpurse. The lunatic Troubleall with his fixation on Justice Overdo's "warrant" is seen as a "sober and discreet person." Overdo's efforts to make amends to him misfire when the unscrupulous Quarlous, disguised as Troubleall, obtains the Justice's "hand and seal" for purposes of his own. Moreover, he gets away with it in the end.

Jonson's satire of Puritanism reaches a climax in the puppet-play scene. The passing reference in *The Alchemist* to the Puritan attacks on the stage is here developed in a complex way. Not only is a humorous answer provided to the "old stale argument against the Players," but the scene as a whole evolves into a dramatic apologia for Jonson's own art and vision. As the vigorous polemicist and consummate dramatist that he is, Jonson hits on the semiotic principle of "ostension" to silence his opponents—those Puritans who object to his own plays, the stage and poetry in general.

The extreme crudity of the puppet play is deliberate. The idealized romance of Hero and Leander is reduced to the sordid London setting of whores and pimps. The puppet play is thus a micro-microcosm of Jonson's theatre representing the Fair which represents in microcosm the life of the city outside. The point of this 'miniaturization' is to demonstrate the reductive method of caricature—which is how Jonson's satire works.

Zeal-of-the-Land Busy is Jonson's caricature of the extreme "seditious Sectists" whose "presumptuous humours"⁴⁷ or "singularity" required the correction of satire. When the puppet play is in progress, Busy storms into the booth, representing the theatre. He marshalls the arguments of Stubbes, Gosson, Munday, Rainolds, as well as those of the Puritan pulpit. First, in a manner reminiscent of Gosson, but using typical Old Testament idols such as "Dagon" and "Baal," he lashes out at the idolatrous nature of the theatre. Gosson reiterates that "stage playes are the doctrine and invention of the Devill." His fear of idolatry derives from the visual and auditory nature of the theatre and the concern that plays were once consecrated to Bacchus:

We knowe that whatsoever goeth into the mouth defileth not put passeth away by cause of nature; but that which entreth into us by the eyes and eares, muste be digested by the spirite, which is chiefly reserved to honor God. . . . Wherefore I beseech God so to touch the heartes of our Magistrates with a perfite hatred of sinne, and feare of Judgement; so to stirre upp some noble Scipio [who had once persuaded the Roman senate against erecting theatres] in the Courte, that these dancing Chaplines of Bacchus, and all such as set up these wicked artes, may be driven out of Englande, may bee shutt from

the companie of the Godly, and as open professors of Idolatrie, separated from us by sea and Lande.⁴⁸

The puppet Dionysius, as spokesman for the dramatist/theatre, undertakes to "dispute" with Busy. The sectarian obsession with the inspirationism (the promptings of the Spirit) and the cant terms "lawful calling/vocation" are mocked. One of the great Puritan objections against the theatre was that it promoted idleness. It was equated with mere entertainment, an idle sport or pastime and was thus not considered a "lawful" calling. What is more, in its extravagant visual appeal, the stage also promoted "Pride" and "Vanity." The fear of the "vanity of the eye," or "the besetting Puritan urge to close up what has been called the 'idolatrous eye'"⁴⁹, is evident once more.

As in *The Alchemist* (I.i.128-129) there is a jibe at the industrious Puritan artisans, in particular the Blackfriar's feather-makers who have no qualms about trading in fashionable frivolities while condemning modishness in dress—or, the Puppet adds, the bugle-makers who produce the instruments for making "profane" music.

Busy's trump card is the frequently used argument:⁵⁰

you are an *abomination*: for the Male, among you, putteth on the apparell of the *Female*, and the *Female* of the *Male*.

(V. v.99-100)

derived from the injunction in Deuteronomy.⁵¹ The Puppet responds by lifting up his garment to show his sexlessness—a telling assertion against the literal-mindedness of the Puritan detractors of the stage. The Puppet, like the actor, is a creature of pure make-believe.

Many critics seem to have a problem with Busy's conversion, his sudden decision to become a "beholder,"⁵² trying either to explain it or seeing it as unconvincing. But that is not the point. Dionysius, that is, the dramatist as spokesman for the stage, is simply claiming his triumph in silencing irrelevant and narrow-minded as well as literal-minded opponents. Busy (and the point of view he represents) is triumphantly cowed into submission and the right of the "play" to continue is asserted.

The Puritan lawgiver still has to be routed. Justice Overdo rises to the occasion, preparing "to take Enormity by the fore-head, and brand it" (V.v.125-126). First, silly Cokes with his childish delight in the puppet play is branded a "disciple of enormity." Thus Overdo's "enormity" neatly matches Busy's condemnation of the players as an "abomination." Then, turning to Leatherhead with the absurdly alliterative invective, "thou prophane professor of *Puppetry*,

little better than *Poetry*,” Justice Overdo aligns himself with the extreme literal-mindedness of some Puritans who condemned poetry itself as being “counterfeit” and, consequently, pertaining to untruth. The “fables” used by poets were seen as inspired by the Devil “the father of all lyes.”⁵³

Earlier on in the play the eccentric Overdo identifies poetry as a “terrible taint” and an “idle disease” with which he fears Edgeworth (whom he sees as a “proper young man”) has become infected through his association with the songster, Nightingale (III.v.1-9).

Once more, Jonson uses startlingly crude “ostension” to silence his would-be moralist. The reality of the flesh, which Justice Overdo has been at such pains to “reprehend,” intrudes in the shape of his own wife. At the sight of his own flesh and blood, as it were, turning out to be indeed “the chiefest enormity” of the Fair, Justice Overdo is stunned into silence.

In the end, Jonson has neatly turned the tables on the Puritan denial of the flesh. He has demonstrated that for all the Puritan denunciation of the flesh, man’s carnal nature cannot be prevented from asserting itself. John Enck is right in claiming that “the wholesale acceptance of the physical” in this play may in part “have been dictated by the main target of attack: the Puritans. . . Smithfield represents all the world the stage contains, and it surpasses the Puritans narrow preaching.”⁵⁴

Finally, the plea for a larger humanity which appeals unashamedly to the “eare and view” is appropriately subjected to the judgement of the King. By doing so, Jonson places the presumptuous singularity, the “envy of a few” within the wider context of a social structure which embraces both civil order and the stage.

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Notes

1. Quoted in Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 22.
2. *Basilikon Doron*, ed. J. Craigie (Edinburgh, 1944), p. 15.
3. Heinemann, p. 78.
4. Ben Jonson, *Discoveries 1641*, ed. G. B. Harrison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. 7.
5. Bruce King, *Seventeenth Century Literature* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p. 53.

6. Cf. Richard Hooker, Chapter 8 of the Preface to *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: Dent, 1958), I, p. 135:

When they and their Bibles were alone together, what strange fantastical opinion soever at any time entered into their heads, their use was to think the Spirit taught it them.

also Book V, Chapter 10. *Ibid* II, 37:

Now where the word of God leaveth the Church to make choice of her own ordinances, if against those things which have been received with great reason, or against that which the ancient practice of the Church hath continued time out of mind, or against such ordinances as the power and authority of that Church under which we live hath itself devised for the public good, or against the discretion of the Church in mitigating sometimes with favourable equity that rigour which otherwise the literal generality of ecclesiastical laws hath judged to be more convenient and meet; if against all this it should be free for men to reprove, to disgrace, to reject at their own liberty what they see done and practised according to order set down; if in so great variety of ways as the wit of man is easily able to find out towards any purpose, and so in great likings as all men especially have unto those inventions whereby some one shall seem to have been more enlightened from above than many thousands, the Church did give every man license to follow what himself imagineth that "God's Spirit doth reveal" unto him, or what he supposeth that God is likely to have revealed to some special person whose virtues deserve to be highly esteemed: what other effect could hereupon ensue, but the utter confusion of his Church under pretence of being taught, led, and guided by his Spirit? The gifts and graces whereof do so naturally all tend unto common peace, that where such singularity is, they whose hearts it possesseth ought to suspect if the more, inasmuch as if it did come of God, and should for that cause prevail with others, the same God which revealeth it to them, would also give them power of confirming it unto others, either with miraculous operation, or with strong and invincible remonstrance of sound Reason, such as whereby it might appear that God would indeed have all men's judgments give place unto it; whereas now the error and insufficiency of their arguments do make it on the contrary side against them a strong presumption, that God hath not moved their hearts to think such things as he hath not enabled them to prove.

7. Elsewhere, I have shown that Shakespeare's portrayal of Malvolio's "singularity" (See also *T.N.*, II, iv, 166) likewise accords with the way in which Hooker uses the term. See Jeanette Ferreira-Ross, 'The Puritan Hypocrite in Shakespeare and Jonson', *UNISA English Studies* XXX, 1 (April 1992).
8. Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Mans Path-way to Heaven* [1601] (Amsterdam and Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1974), p. 302.
9. All quotations from *Bartholomew Fair* are from *Ben Jonson*, eds. Herford and Simpson (Oxford, 1925-1952), 11 vols. Here: VI, 11-141.
10. Heinemann, p. 77.
11. Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University

of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 86.

12. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 404.
13. Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 89.
14. Greaves, pp. 092-93
15. William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, Rep. of 1963 edition), p. 215.
16. Louise Fargo Brown, *The Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England during the Interregnum* (New York: Burt Franklin, n.d., first published London, 1911), p. 5.
17. Thomason, *The Anabaptists Catechisme* in Louis Fargo Brown, n.5.
18. Heinemann, p. 85.
19. *The Overburian Characters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), p. 26.
20. C.E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism 1660-1688* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 236.
21. Alastair Hamilton, *The Family of Love* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1981), p. 117.
22. Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 440.
23. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), p. 204.
24. Greaves, p. 672.
25. Cf. *David Copperfield* where Steerforth describes a proctor as "a sort of monkish attorney" (O.E.D.).
26. Greaves, p. 105.
27. Quoted in Greaves, p. 677.
28. See M. van Beek, *An Enquiry into Puritan Vocabulary* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1969), p. 55.
29. Greaves, p. 660.
30. Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 139.
31. Cf. Greaves, p. 427.
32. Tanner, *Tudor Constitutional Documents*, 56 in Bertil Johansson, *Religion and Superstition in the Plays of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton* (New York: Haskell House, 1966), p. 149.
33. Cf. *The Alchemist*, III.ii.92-101; also Johansson, 144-145.

34. Cf. William Perkins 1558-1602 *English Puritanist: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience"*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1966).
35. Jonas Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 197-204.
36. Heinemann, p. 85.
37. *Ben Jonson*, eds. Herford and Simpson, X, p. 201.
38. Of course, as a magistrate Justice Overdo has a real, if small, claim to authority. But the point is that his inflated sense of moral superiority is based on "singularity" in Hooker's sense of the word, not on the solid foundation of tradition informed by reason. That is why his judgements go awry and why he is a "pretender to authority," as Alexander Leggatt has acknowledged. See Alexander Leggatt, *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 184. Rosalind Miles, too, concurs with this view: "[Jonson's] target rests in *Bartholomew Fair* is false or usurped authority, authority that rests upon no true moral base." See Rosalind Miles, *Ben Jonson: His Craft and Art* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 193.
39. Herford and Simpson, X, p. 177.
40. *Idem*.
41. Herford and Simpson, X, p. 185.
42. *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. 65.
43. *Ibid*, Intro., p. 52.
44. G.C.F. Forster, "The English Local Community and Local Government 1603-1625," in *The Reign of James VI and I*, ed. Alan G.R. Smith (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), p. 209.
45. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, Ch. 4: "The Industrious Sort of People," 124-144.
46. *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I, 1603-1625*, ed. J.R. Tanner (Cambridge, 1961), quoted in Forster, p. 212.
47. Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* [1612] (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1972).
48. Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* [1582] (New York and London: Garland, 1972).
49. The charge of transvestism against the players, based on the prohibition in Deuteronomy, is made, amongst others, by Perkins, Gossen and Rainolds.
51. Deuteronomy XXII.5:

The woman shall not weare that which pertaineth vnto the man, nether shal a man put on woman's raiment: for all that do so, are abominacion vnto the Lord they God.
The Geneva Bible, A Facsimile of the 1560 edition (Madison: University of

Wisconsin Press, 1969).

52. The word "beholder" is used repeatedly by Gosson in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* for someone who attends a stage performance. Cf. also D. Rainoldes, *Th'overthrow of Stage-Playes* [1599] (New York: Garland, 1974), title page: "Wherein is manifestly proved, that it is not onely vnlawfull to bee an Actor, but a beholder of those vanities."
53. Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions*. Cf. also the following extract from the Second Action:

...in Playes...those things are fained, that never were, as Cupid and Psyche plaid at Paules; and a greate many Comedies more at the Blacke friers and in euery Playe house in London. . . Playes are no Images to trueth, because sometime they handle such thinges as neuer were, sometime they runne upon truethes, but make them seeme longer, or shorter, or greater, or lesse then they were, according as the Poet blowes them up with his quill, for aspiring heades; or minceth them smaller, for weaker stomakes.
54. John Enck, *Jonson and the Comic Truth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966) pp. 201-202.