BRITISH WRITERS *Classics*

VOLUME I

Edited by Jay Parini

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British Writers Classics, Volume I

Jay Parini, Editor in Chief

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Introduction

Ralph Waldo Emerson once remarked in an essay called "Thoughts on Modern Literature" that "all great men have written proudly, nor cared to explain. They knew that the intelligent reader would come at last, and would thank them." This new volume, which we call *British Writers Classics*, is the first in a continuing series of volumes devoted to individual works of British and Commonwealth literature. We describe these works as "classics" because they have been shown to possess enduring value. They are works—of fiction or poetry, drama or nonfiction—that readers want to return to again and again.

One of the justifications for the kind of close reading that readers will find in this volume is this: in the past thirty years, attention in literary studies has increasingly tended toward the theoretical. This has meant that close reading of actual texts has waned, and students and general readers will have difficulty in finding up-to-date readings of important works that are written in simple but intelligent language, meant for a wide audience and not a small circle of scholars trained in a particular theoretical branch of criticism. It is hoped that these essays do, in fact, provide such readings, but that the readings are sophisticated as well, taking into account the latest thinking while not occluding the work.

Classics may be regarded as a further strand of the ongoing series called *British Writers*, where the full careers of authors are discussed at length by critics, putting their work in its appropriate historical and biographical context. Readers of this series noticed, however, that the most important works by authors often received short attention. In surveying, for example, the career of Charles Dickens, it was necessary to dispense with *Great Expectations*, perhaps his most widely read novel, in a few paragraphs. The essay by Peter Scupham in this volume remedies that by offering a full-blown critical treatment, in sophisticated critical terms, looking at the novel from many different angles. Most crucially, it looks at the language of Dickens in considerable detail.

The subjects discussed in this volume are all major works of British literature, from *The Alchemist*, a classic play by Ben Jonson, to *Wuthering Heights*, one of the most broadly known works of British nineteenth century fiction. Along the way readers will encounter lengthy and intelligent critical readings of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the "Holy Sonnets" of John Donne, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Kipling's *Kim*, *Man and Superman* by George Bernard Shaw, Eliot's *Middlemarch*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by Joyce, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Pope's

"The Rape of the Lock," *The Return of the Native* by Hardy, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Thomas More's *Utopia*. One can hardly imagine a more diverse or significant range of texts.

The writers of these articles are each, in their own way, writers themselves. In fact some of them, such as Peter Scupham, N. S. Thompson, Claire Harman, and Caitriona O'Reilly, are themselves well known as writers in the British Isles. The other writers are well-published and highly respected scholars and critics; most of them are professors of English at some institution of higher learning in the United States, Britain, or elsewhere (Patrick Vincent teaches at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland). These writers were in each case held to a high standard, as readers of these essays will soon appreciate. Clarity and concision, concreteness and fidelity to the text were always stressed by this editor. The results have been, I think, especially pleasing.

One hopes that these astute critical readings of major texts will enhance the availability of these works to general readers, and that these readers will come to appreciate the huge efforts of imagination and intelligence that went into their creation in the first place.

—Jay Parini

Contributors

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James Berg. Assistant professor of English at Iowa State University. Berg specializes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature and has published articles on Shakespeare and Tudor-Stuart drama. He is currently at work on a book, *Pre-possession: Hospitality, Gift-Giving, and the Literary Experience in Early Modern England.* HOLY SONNETS

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Sandie Byrne. Fellow in English at Balliol College, Oxford. Her publications include works on eighteenth and nineteenth-century fiction and twentieth-century poetry. EMMA, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST, and WUTHERING HEIGHTS

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Review. Her life of the poet and novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1990 and she has also edited Warner's *Diaries* (1994) and *Collected Poems* (1982). Her biography of the eighteenth century novelist Fanny Burney appeared in 2000 and she is currently writing a life of Robert Louis Stevenson. THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

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Philip Mallett. Senior Lecturer in English at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. He has written widely on English literature, especially on the period 1830–1930, and is the editor of, among other collections of essays, *Kipling Considered, The Achievement of Thomas Hardy,* and *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts.* His most recent book is *Rudyard Kiping: A Literary Life.* He is currently writing a study of Hardy and sexuality, and completing an edition of Hardy's *The Return of the Native.* THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Caitríona O'Reilly. Catríona O'Reilly was educated in Trinity College, Dublin, where she wrote a doctoral thesis on Emily Dickinson, H. D. and Sylvia Plath. Her collection of poetry *The Nowhere Birds* was published by Bloodaxe Books in 2001 and awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Peter Scupham. Poet. Has published ten collections, mostly with Oxford University Press. *Night Watch,* his most recent collection, was published by Anvil Press in 1999. His *Collected Poems* is due from Oxford/Carcanet in October 2003. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and has received a Cholmondeley award for poetry. GREAT EXPECTATIONS and KIM

N. S. Thompson. Lecturer in English at Christ Church, Oxford. He is the author of *Chaucer, Boccaccio and the Debate of Love* (Oxford, 1996), a comparative study of the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*, as well as many articles, reviews, and translations of modern Italian poetry and prose. His work was included in *Oxford Poets 2001: An Anthology* (2001). THE CANTERBURY TALES

Patrick Vincent. Lecturer in English at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Vincent received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Davis. Author of several articles on women's sentimental poetics as well as on Mary Shelley and on William Wordsworth, he is presently completing a monograph entitled *Elegiac Muses: Europe's Romantic Poetess, 1820–1840,* editing a travel account by Helen Maria Williams, and researching a book on British Romantics and Switzerland. THE PRELUDE

List of Subjects

Ben Jonson's
The Alchemist

ALEXANDRA GILLESPIE

LONDON AT THE turn of the sixteenth century was a city of incongruities. The population had more than trebled during the Elizabethan period. By 1603, perhaps as many as 180,000 people dwelled in its environs, several times the number in any other English city. It was in London that the nation's rich and powerful assembled their households and courted the monarch; that ambitious gentry sent their sons for education at the Inns of Courts; and that 90% of trade was handled by merchants who were still organized into medieval guilds from which the London Mayor and Aldermen were elected. While old systems of government remained intact, the city itself had changed, long since spilling out of the confines of its medieval walls. The old precincts of Westminster and London had merged into a single, uneven sprawl, and much of the populace lived outside of the jurisdiction of the civic authorities. Many were to be found in London liberties, for instance—former monastic sites that retained the right of sanctuary, such as Blackfriars, where pimps, prostitutes, debtors, and heretics taking advantage of the distance from the law lived cheek-by-jowl with gentry, puritan shopkeepers, artisans, and artists. In greater London, amid the nation's richest, its poorest and most desperate lived. The immigrants who flooded to the city from smaller towns and the countryside to fill the city's streets and shops or the taverns over the bridge at Southwark only rarely found a better life. Dwellings were overcrowded, and untreated sewage ran in open drains to the Thames. Children had little chance of surviving infancy, and the plague struck with frightening regularity. London was home to thousands whose voice did not accord with that of the authorities who claimed to represent them; to the dispossessed as well as the powerful; to the ailing and the leprous; to the gamblers, pickpockets, and conmen of the city's extensive criminal underworld. Ben Jonson was born into this world in 1572. It was there, in the liberty of Blackfriars where he lived, that he set his comic masterpiece of 1610, *The Alchemist*. The play's prologue marks out the territory for satire:

> Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known
> No country's mirth is better than our own.
> No clime breeds better matter for your whore,
> Bawd, squire, imposter, many persons more,
> Whose manners, now call'd humours feed the stage,

And which have still been subject for the rage
Or spleen of comic writers.

(Prologue, 5–11)

The growing population and wealth of London had bred theatres as well as subjects for the stage. Prohibitions against public performance, seen as a threat to order, were issued by London's Common Council in the 1550s and 1570s, but there was still money to be made. From the late sixteenth century on, dozens of theatres were built outside the civic authoritiesrsquo; reach. Huge, open arenas such as the Globe were built just south of the Thames at Bankside, and accommodated up to 3,000 men and women from every walk of life. There were also smaller, "private" theatres, such as the establishment built by Richard Burbage at Blackfriars in 1596. It was covered and candlelit, seated five hundred, and charged higher admission to a socially restricted audience. The players who used these performance spaces were organised into separate private companies such as Shakespeare's, Lord Chamberlain's Men. Members were actors (and sometimes writers) and "sharers." Each held a part of the company's property, costumes, and the capital needed to hire performers and playwrights. When he wrote *The Alchemist* in 1610, Jonson was at the height of his most productive period as a part of England's first professional theatrical community. In the first years of the seventeenth century he penned his great comedies: *Volpone* in 1606, *Epicoene* in 1609, and *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614.

In this same period, Jonson's personal life was anything but settled. As a youth he was educated at Westminster School at the expense of an unknown benefactor. Tutored by the famous antiquary William Camden, he read the histories of Sallust, orations of Cicero, and poems of Horace, Virgil, and Ovid. He compiled Latin commonplace-books, was schooled in rhetoric, and even acquired a little Greek. In 1589, however, he was removed from the school and

CHRONOLOGY

1572	Jonson is born in Westminster; clergyman father dies before his birth.
1580s	Studies at Westminster School under William Camden.
1589	Leaves school to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship with stepfather.
1592	Joins English army stationed in the Netherlands.
1594	Marries Anne Lewis in London. Terminates his apprenticeship.
1595/6	Birth of first son, Ben. Begins touring as an actor with Pembroke's Men.
1597	Writes *The Case is Altered*; co-writes *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost). *The Isle* is found to be seditious; Jonson is imprisoned along with players from Pembroke's Men.
1599	Writes *Everyman Out of His Humour*. Imprisoned for killing member of Pembroke's Men in a duel. Death sentence commuted. Converts to Catholicism while in prison.
1603	Queen Elizabeth dies. Accession of James I. Eldest son, Benjamin dies. Writes *Sejanus* and entertainments for the king and queen.
1605	Gunpowder Plot. Collaborates on *Eastward Ho!* for which he is imprisoned for fourth time. Collaborates with Inigo Jones on *Masque of Blackness*.
1608	Writes *The Masque of Beauty*. Another son, Benjamin, is born.
1610	Writes *The Alchemist*, having returned to the Church of England.
1616	Awarded annual royal pension; arranges publication of *Works*; writes *The Golden Age Restored* and *The Devil is an Ass*.
1618	Writes *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* while in Scotland.
1621	Writes *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*; performs regularly before James I.
1624	Composes *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* to celebrate the return

	of Prince Charles from Spain.
1625	James I dies; Charles I accedes to throne.
1628	Questioned by authorities over seditious verses; suffers a stroke; becomes London's City Chronologer.
1634	Writes *A Tale of a Tub*. Last of his masques, *Love's Welcome to Bolsover* is performed.
1637	Dies at Westminster.

apprenticed to his stepfather's trade, bricklaying. The transition from the gentle world of humanist education to that of the city guilds was not successful. Jonson failed to complete his eight-year term and left London for soldiering in the Netherlands. He returned and married in 1594 but separated from his wife after fathering several children. In the late 1590s he sought another outlet for his restless energies, joining the players of Pembroke's Men first as an actor and then as a playwright. It was for Pembroke's Men that he and Thomas Nashe wrote a play called *The Isle of Dogs* in 1597. The play was deemed seditious by the authorities; Nashe escaped to the country but Jonson was imprisoned along with two of the company's players. A year after his release, Jonson was again in jail, judged guilty of the murder of one of Pembroke's players with whom he had been imprisoned a year earlier. He was sentenced to death and saved from the gallows at Tyburn only by his humanist education. His knowledge of Latin enabled him to claim an ancient "benefit of clergy," and his sentence was commuted. Thereafter he bore a "T" for Tyburn branded on his thumb to remind him and those who met him of his crime and narrow escape. If this mark set Jonson permanently apart—neither ordinary criminal nor honest citizen—his conversion to Catholicism prior to his release from jail distanced him from his society further still. Even before the Gunpowder Plot to kill James I, the Protestant state suspected Catholics of divided loyalties and treason on top of their theological heresies. Perhaps shocked by the level of violence planned by those involved in the 1605 plot, Jonson began to doubt his new faith, and had returned to the Church of England by the time he wrote *The Alchemist.*

From his youth, then, Jonson was a kind of exile, voluntary and involuntary—from his artisan background, his education, his early career, his marriage, the sanctioned religion of his country, and even his chosen faith. In the early seventeenth century, he set an unsteady foot in another social sphere: that of the royal and noble courts. Early modern actors' companies were nominally patronized by a member of the aristocracy. The growth period before 1610 saw them brought into a formal system of licensing operated by the Master of the Revels and under direct royal patronage. Playwrights were well placed to catch the eye of a wealthy aristocrat seeking a new way to seem important. Jonson wrote the first of his famous masques with the court architect Inigo Jones in 1610 and dedicated poems and printed editions of his plays to real and prospective benefactors. In 1616 he received a royal pension, effectively becoming a national laureate. However, the place of the former murderer and bricklayer among the high born was uneasy, as Jonson's enemies were fond of reminding him. The London playwright and court poet was never fully of one realm or the other. But he was also ideally placed to explore the tensions and gaps between the world he knew and the world he saw others invent around him. Jonson's *The Alchemist* is played out in this creative space. It is at once a vivid celebration of the fecund imagination of the Renaissance and a vigorous attack upon the hypocrisy of his age.

THE ALCHEMIST: PATRONAGE AND PRINT, AUTHORITY AND AUDIENCE

Created by a rancorous professional playwright who was also a court poet of growing reputation, recreated in the collaborative space of London's professional theatre for diverse audiences, and preserved in various printed forms, *The Alchemist* is hard to interpret. The play was

printed soon after its first performance in a quarto of 1612 and in the folio edition of his *Works* that Jonson edited himself in 1616. The front matter of these editions reveals various efforts by Jonson and others to exert control over the play.

The 1616 title page to *The Alchemist* informs us of its history as a performance: "A Comedy. Acted in the year 1610. By the King's Majesty's Servants." Since 1609, the King's Men had been performing at Richard Burbage's private theatre in Blackfriars, for which Jonson wrote his play. It may have first been performed elsewhere; the Blackfriars theatre was closed by plague from July until October or November of 1610, and there is evidence of a touring performance in Oxford in September. The content of the play mirrors this record of its enactment. The domicile in Blackfriars inhabited by Jonson's characters has also been closed by plague. Its characters are at liberty to "play" in the absence of the master of the house as His King's Majesty's Servants were in the Blackfriars liberty. The play is set in the near future, on 1 November 1610 according to the calculations of Jonson's Anabaptist character Ananias in act 3 (1.129). At the end of the folio edition, there also appears a statement of the "principal comedians" who appeared in the first performance and a statement of the "allowance" of the Master of the Revels. The text is thus bracketed, as it is on stage, as unfinished, available for collaborative appropriation by actors, its liberties curbed by the politics of the Renaissance theatre.

But the preliminaries to these early versions of the play gesture to other stages upon which the meaning of *The Alchemist* is to be played out. Unlike most of his predecessors and contemporaries, including Shakespeare, Jonson insisted on seeing his texts through the press. His name, not the names of the players, appears on the title page to the 1612 edition. The play may elide evidence of its origins in performance, but it announces Jonson's authorship in the perennial and enduring form of print. The production of the 1616 folio edition magnifies this concern with Jonson's authority. *The Alchemist* is fronted by a quote from Lucretius about the garland worn by a laureate poet. It is embedded among all of Jonson's major texts up to 1616 which are prefaced by an engraving of the writer and declared to be his "Works." Jonson was the first English writer to arrange to have his own texts printed in this format. It had previously been the preserve of great classical authors and posthumously laureated English writers such as Chaucer and Sidney. There is further evidence of Jonson's efforts to authorize his own text. Both the editions of *The Alchemist* are dedicated to Mary Wroth, cousin and mistress of one of Jonson's patrons, the Earl of Pembroke, and niece of Sir Phillip Sidney. The dedicatory epistle redirects the public, theatrical text to a private, courtly context, and translates its comedic meanings from the London stage to the classical school. Indeed, the epistle opens with a translation, a quote from Seneca which suggests that the "devotion" with which Jonson dedicates his text and its dedicatee are its only value. And yet at this moment textual worth resides as much in the rhetorical skill of the learned translator, Jonson, as in the noble lady to whom he makes his offering.

In the early editions of *The Alchemist,* then, Jonson is at work to prescribe a courtly, humanist value for his text, and to proscribe or distance himself from the multiple and unstable interpretations offered by diverse audiences to multiple performances. A second epistle, found only in the quarto edition, makes it clear that the "Reader" should be wary,

> at what hands thou receivest thy commodity; for thou wert never more fair in the way to be cozened (than in this age) in poetry, especially in plays, wherein now the concupiscence of jigs and dances so reigneth, as to run away from Nature and be afraid of her, is the only point of art that tickles the spectator.

This attack on the deceptive, theatrical "commodities" of his day, "jigs and antics" written for spectators and not readers, may be likened to

Jonson's more explicit assault on contemporary plays including Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* in the Introduction to *Bartholomew Fair.* Such plays, unlike Jonson's learned productions, did not take their proper place in an Aristotelian comedic tradition. They violated the dramatic decorum. "Decorum" refers to edicts derived from the poetics of Aristotle, Horace, Cicero, and Sidney that a play should exclude the incredible, maintain stable separation of genres and consistent characterization, and conform to the "unities,"—that is, consist in a single sequence of actions in a single place on a single day. According to Jonson, all plays which breach such theatrical decorum "run away from Nature." The humanist poet is determined to distance his text from that of the profit-seeking playwright, and a proper reading of Renaissance theatre from the judgement of spectators who have been "cozened" so that

> they commend writers as they do fencers and wrestlers, who, if they are come in robustiously and put for it with a great deal of violence, are received for the braver fellows, when many times their own rudeness is the cause of their disgrace.

ACT 1: THEATRICALITY AND ANTI-THEATRICALITY

It is with surprise then, that the reader (if not the spectator) encounters the first, robustious lines of *The Alchemist*:

> [*Enter*] *Face* [*and*] *Subtle* [*quarrelling violently*] *followed by Dol Common* [*attempting to quiet them*].
>
> FACE: [*Threatening with his sword*] Believe't, I will.
>
> SUBTLE: Thy worst! I fart at thee!
>
> DOL: Ha' you your wits? Why, gentlemen! For love—
>
> FACE: Sirrah, I'll strip you—
>
> SUBTLE: What to do? Lick figs Out at my—
>
> FACE: Rogue, rogue, out of all your sleights!
>
> (1.1.1–4)

This is the most explosive opening of Renaissance theatre. The three central characters, Subtle, Face, and Dol, appear in the midst of a furious row—the play does not so much begin as erupt upon the stage. In one sense, Jonson meets his own demands: the informed comic writer knows that his play should commence in the middle of the action, which will be brilliantly worked out over the five acts of the play. On the other hand, the opening to *The Alchemist* reminds us that Jonson is a peddler of that which he professes to abhor—the schemes, spectacles, and myriad significations of the Renaissance stage. Face's bald and immoveable imperative, "believe it, I will," is violently disrupted by Subtle, who finishes Face's statement (proving it unfinished) and then transforms it into a "fart." Further scatological references follow. The "figs" Face should lick are feces or piles, but also a literary trope. They gesture away from the likely classical sources for Jonson's plot: Plautus's *Mostellaria*, where a servant like Face is left in charge of his empty house by his master; and Lucian's *Alexander*, in which gullible visitors flock to a fake oracle, just as Subtle, Face, and Dol's "gulls" flock to their fraudulent performances of alchemy and magic. The figs gesture toward base vernacular fictions: Rabelais's fabliau *Pantagruel*, in which a story about rebels forced to remove figs from the posterior of a mule is told. The author of *The Alchemist* turns out to be entirely complicit in the jigs and blurred genres of the Renaissance stage. His complicity is figured in the creative force of his bickering characters. Their insults accord with the principles of theatrical decorum. Traditionally, comic language, while it violates everyday good manners, is nevertheless in keeping with the station of the speaker and the genus of the subject enhanced or disparaged. The rogues' degenerate and degenerating utterances are appropriate to the seamy, criminal world they inhabit. When a fart is substituted for Face's words, *both* are shown to be noise and air, signifying nothing.

From the moment they appear on stage, then, Face, Subtle, and Dol are part of the reflexive, antitheatrical impulse that gives Jonson's comedies much of their taut energy. They signify, respectively, a pimp, a conman, and a prostitute—inhabitants of the squalid London described in the Prologue. But they are textual as well as mimetic inventions. Jonson assembles characters from types found in "coney-catcher" pamphlets of the period. These printed news stories about criminals were sold in the thousands to Londoners in the early seventeenth century. And Face, Subtle, and Dol are satirists themselves, as well as inventions of Jonson's satiric wit. In act I, they too generate a script from learned and lewd sources. Dol succeeds in quelling her co-conspirators' row just in time for the arrival of the first of their victims, Dapper, a lawyer's clerk. Like all the dupes of *The Alchemist,* Dapper is willing to hand over his money and his dignity if the tricksters will promise him fulfillment of his most melodramatic desires. He comes wanting a "fly," a familiar spirit, to help him win at gambling. He is announced to Subtle by Face as no "Clim-o'the-Cloughs or Claribels," but a gentleman who courts his beloved with Ovid in hand (1.2.46). Face's literary references promote Dapper's romantic sense of self. They also prompt Subtle to write a new script drawn from precisely the kind of texts to which Face alludes: "The Ballad of Adam Bell" and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The tricksters persuade the clerk that he is "o'the only best complexion / The Queen of Fairy loves." The queen, they say, is his aunt,

> a lone woman
> And very rich, and if she take a fancy,
> She will do strange things. See her, at any hand.
> 'Slid, she may hap to leave you all she has!
>
> (1.2.105–106, 155–158)

Subtle and Face draw on multiple sources simultaneously: popular ballads and romances; reports of Jacobeans duped by con-artists posing as kings and queens of fairy; and the plays of Jonson's rivals, such as Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* or Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which young wastrels redeemed by wealthy widows and tradesmen wooed by fairy queens were favored devices.

Abel Drugger, a tobacconist and the second dupe of act 1, likewise writes himself into the conspirators' literary game:

> SUBTLE: Your business Abel?
> DRUGGER: This, an't please your worship,
> I am a young beginner, and am building
> Of a new shop, and't like your worship, just
> At corner of a street. [*Shows a ground plan*] Here's the plot on't.
> And I would know by art, sir, of your worship
> Which way I should make my door, by necromancy.
>
> (1.3.6–11)

The "plot" for Drugger's shop is also Jonson's figure for the tobacconist's "beginning" or aspirations. This resembles the plots of Thomas Deloney's *Gentle Craft* (1598) or Thomas Dekker's play, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), romanticized accounts of a historical figure who rose by mercantile enterprise to become a wealthy Lord Mayor. As Face and Subtle plot to outwit Drugger they borrow from these literary traditions, promising him his fortune; the rich widow, Dame Pliant, who lives next door; and that "this summer / He will be of the clothing of his company / And next spring called to the scarlet," the garb of London Mayors and Aldermen (1.3.35–37).

If Face, Subtle, and Dol are simultaneously satirized by and made to represent the work of the Renaissance writer, the elevated role assigned to Subtle by Drugger—the repeated "sir" and "your worship"—signals their further collusion in Jonson's self-reflexive theatrical spectacle. Face, Subtle, and Dol write the scripts for *The Alchemist*'s many fraudulent performances, but they are also characters—the consummate, shape-shifting performers of those scripts. They change guise only slightly less

often than they change their names. In Renaissance theory, indebted to classical authorities such as Theophrastus, character was understood as a kind of writing, as the word itself implies. The word "character" was used to refer to a face or outward appearance rather than a personal interior. Face's name is suggestive of the Renaissance theory of characterization. He does indeed have many faces, each one proving impenetrable to those who encounter him on stage. He is Captain Face, a servant who has usurped the control of his master's house and whose real name, Jeremy, we learn only in act 5. He is a pimp for Dol and an assistant to the coney-catching Subtle. He will serve as a priest of fairy when Dapper's meets Dol dressed as a fairy queen. He will be a pander to Sir Epicure Mammon, who also desires Dol after she appears to him disguised a learned gentlewoman, "My Lord What's' Hum's sister" (2.4.6). And when Subtle, who, Dapper is assured, is a "doctor," assumes the mantle of the alchemist, Face will be "his fire-drake / His Zephyrus, he that puffs his coals"—his "Lungs," which is Mammon's name for him throughout (1.2.9; 2.2.97; 2.1.26–27). Dol is "Royal Dol" to Subtle and "Claridiana," heroine of the popular Spanish *Mirror of Knighthood* (1.1.174–175). These epithets herald the romantic guises she will assume—as Mammon's vision of "Bradamante," the woman knight from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso,* as well as Dapper's fairy queen (2.3.225). Dol's names also suggest, however, that character itself is disguise, a trick, an allusion or illusion. Even her own name, Dol Common, fails to serve as a straightforward mark of identity. Like the names Face or Subtle, it simply initiates a series of readings. Dol Common is a grammatical type, a logically distributed subject, property held in common, a garden-variety whore. In the conspirators' quarters—"*novo orbe*," "this dark labyrinth," a "citadel," a "mere chancel," "this cave of coz'nage," "this house ... run mad" (2.1.2; 2.3.308; 4.6.9; 5.3.2; 5.5.115; 4.1.13)—names cease to be a stable index to identity and become an index to the instability inherent in the very idea of dramatic character. The characters cannot be all that they claim, or appear, to be. They are actors. They implicate the real author and actors of the play in their deceptions. Even Jeremy's baptismal name is intended for a performer in a theater at Blackfriars.

In this way, the intricate comic plots scripted and acted by the rogues of *The Alchemist* extend logically to encompass theater itself in Jonson's satire. For in the theater, the King's Men and the playwright conspire to "cozen" a willing audience into parting with its money by dramatic "sleights." The play's initial Argument has already announced this analogy. Like members of a Renaissance theater company, Subtle, Face and Dol "contract / Each for a share, and all begin to act" (7–8). Even before they are absorbed into the play's celebration of the dramatic arts, the static humanist values of the epistles are compromised by this Argument. *The Alchemist* embodies the instability it condemns—in contemporary literature and in the subterfuge of the immoral inhabitants of a house in Blackfriars. The trope of alchemy is witness to this distrust of theatricality. It is first applied by Subtle to his ungrateful partner Face:

> Thou vermin, have I not ta'en thee out of dung,
> ...
> Raised thee from brooms and dust and watering pots?
> *Sublimed* thee and *exalted* thee and *fixed* thee
> I'the *third region*, called our *state of grace*?
> Wrought thee to *spirit*, to *quintessence*, with pains
> Would twice have won me the *philosopher's work*?
>
> (1.1.64–71)

The italicized words are technical terms applied by the alchemist to the preparation of an elixir or philosopher's stone from crude materials. "Dung" and "dust" are the servant Face once was; the "*philosopher's work*" has been to elevate and fix him in his new role. Like the stone or elixir produced in this way, Face will enable Subtle to turn base matter—the gulls—into gold.