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James E. Savage  
*University of Mississippi*

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## BEN JONSON AND SHAKESPEARE: 1623-1626

by James E. Savage

Momentous events occurred in England in 1623, among them the trip to Spain, incognito, of Prince Charles and George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, for the purpose of wooing the Infanta. Of hardly less import was the publication by Heminge and Condell of the First Folio of Shakespeare. A third event of a different kind and of less momentous consequence was the burning of Ben Jonson's library. We need not linger with the journey to Spain except to note that there was almost universal rejoicing when Charles returned safe—unwed—escaped as it were from the snares of Philip and the Pope.

As a part of these rejoicings, Ben Jonson prepared a masque, *Neptunes Triumph*. It was never performed because of an insoluble question of protocol involving Spanish and French ambassadors. Portions of it were salvaged and used on Twelfth Night, 1625, in another masque, *The Fortunate Isles*, again celebrating the escape of Prince Charles, and glancing at the forthcoming union of Charles with Henrietta Maria of France.

Other portions were used in *The Staple of Newes*, acted by "His Maiesties Servants" early in 1626. It is largely these portions that I wish to juxtapose with the burning of Jonson's library and the publication of the First Folio. My starting point should perhaps be the association of Jonson with that volume. It is Jonson's initials that, without much enthusiasm, assure the reader that the Droeshout portrait was "for gentle Shakespeare cut."<sup>1</sup> And, probably the best known of all Jonson's writings is his tribute in the front matter of that volume, "To the memory

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<sup>1</sup>The source for all quotations from the work of Shakespeare will be, for language, *The Norton Facsimile* (New York, 1968). The numbers of acts, scenes, and lines will be supplied from *Shakespeare, The Complete Works*, ed. by G. B. Harrison (New York, 1952).

of my beloved, The AVTHOR, MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.”

It seems not improbable, also, that Jonson lent touches to the two prose items in the introductory matter to the Folio. Both appear over the names of Heminge and Condell. In the dedicatory address to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, a glance at Jonson is almost certainly implied in the phrase, “he [Shakespeare] not having the fate common with some [Jonson?], to be exequitor to his owne writings.” In this same address there appears one image which may be unique with Jonson, that of the “gummes,” in association with sacrifices. He uses it thus in the dedication to Lady Mary Wroth which precedes *The Alchemist*:

In the age of sacrifices, the truth of religion was not in the greatnesse, & fat of the offerings, but in the deuotion, and zeale of the sacrificers: Else, what could a handfull of gummes haue done in the sight of a hecatombe?

(V, 289, 1-6)<sup>2</sup>

The corresponding image in the First Folio is this:

Country hands reach foorth milke, creame, fruites, or what they haue: and many Nations (we haue heard) that had not gummes & incense, obtained their requests with a leauened Cake. It was no fault to approach their Gods, by what meanes they could: And the most, though meanest, of things are made more precious, when they are dedicated to Temples.

Certainly much of the material of the address to the readers is Jonsonian—the ranking of readers from foolish to wise, the certainty that the reader will “censure,” the evolution of that censure, “your six-pen ’orth, your shillings worth.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All passages quoted from the work of Jonson will be as they appear in *Ben Jonson*, ed. by Herford and Simpson (11 vols.; Oxford, 1932-1952).

<sup>3</sup> This possibility that “To the great Variety of Readers” was partly Jonson’s was suggested by Steevens (Boswell’s *Shakespeare* of 1820, II, 663-675), who cited parallel passages from introductory matter to *Catiline*, *The New Inne*, *The Magnetic Lady*, *Bartholomew Fayre*, and *Discoveries*. Herford and Simpson (*Ben Jonson*, XI, 140-144) though tempted by the idea, on the whole reject it.

What does a man read who has just lost his books to the wrath of Vulcan? One possible reason for Vulcan's action, says Jonson in "Execration upon Vulcan," was that he found in Jonson's study some "pieces" of "base allay"—"parcels of a play." It is highly probable that those parcels belonged to *The Staple of Newes*, since we have no play from Jonson's hand after *The Divell is an Asse* (1615), and since the first to appear after the fire was *The Staple of Newes*. There is in that play, I believe, much echoing of Shakespeare, and very probably a specific tribute to him. Since Jonson did lose his library, and presumably his beloved Greek and Latin mentors, perhaps he was reduced to reading the work of his compeers, and the First Folio would easily come to hand. At any rate, one is reminded more of Shakespeare's plays in *The Staple of Newes* than in any other play by Jonson.

*The Staple of Newes* itself is a better play than scholars have conceded, though it is of course not among his greatest. But, it should certainly not be placed, with Dryden, among the "Dotages."<sup>4</sup> Its structure is like that of *The Devil is an Asse*, in which all lines of action converge on the greedy fool, Fitzdottrell. The action converges in *The Staple of Newes* on the Lady Pecunia—almost an allegorical representation of wealth. The makers of news at the Staple, Cymbal and his fellows, seek to have her sojourn with them: the usurer, the "money-bawd," Peniboy Senior, strives to employ Pecunia and her servants, Mortgage, Statute, Band, Wax, and Broker, to bring him "ten in the hundred," and Peniboy Junior, to whom she is temporarily entrusted, employs her with something of the prodigality of a Timon of Athens. Peniboy Canter, in the attitude of a chorus, comments on events as they proceed, and resolves all problems at the end, with appropriate comment and punishment or reward. In a secondary choric role is Lickfinger, the cook. He is associated in a small capacity with all lines of action, but much of what he says, or of what is said of him, is extraneous to the

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<sup>4</sup> In his *Jonson and the Comic Truth* (Madison, 1957), J. J. Enck so ranks it (p. 250). C. G. Thayer, in his *Ben Jonson* (Norman, 1963), considers that to place *The Staple of Newes* among the "dotages" is a "gross misreading" (p. 177). Herford and Simpson consider Jonson's "decadence" to have been suggested in *The Devil is an Asse*, but not in *The Staple of Newes*, though "disastrously clear" thereafter.

central theme, the wooing, and the right use, of the Lady Pecunia.

In setting forth the speculation that in *The Staple of Newes* Jonson is much preoccupied with Shakespeare, that he is in some measure indebted to him, and that he incorporates in the play a massive tribute to him, I shall work along three paths. First, I shall suggest that Jonson is sufficiently indebted to *Timon of Athens* for incident, structure, and thought, that *Timon of Athens* should properly be listed among the sources of *The Staple of Newes*. I shall then collect occasional lines or phrases that may be echoes from Shakespeare's other plays. Finally, I shall follow the ubiquitous Lickfinger through various conversations to what I believe to be the tribute to Shakespeare—the passage describing “the *Master Cooke*.”

Perhaps sometime before the year 1623 Jonson set out to write a comedy about the right use of wealth. The most logical framework on which to hang such a commentary is the career of a prodigal in association with some symbol for wealth itself. These must in turn be supported by subsidiary figures such as the Miser, Peniboy Senior, the cheater, Cymbal, with his whole operation of the staple of news, and, finally, a sort of chorus, Peniboy Canter.

When Ben Jonson chose to use sources, he employed them freely, arrogantly. The list of major sources for *The Staple of Newes* is unusually long for a comedy by Jonson: *Plutus* and *The Wasps* of Aristophanes; Lucian's *Timon*; *The Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus; *The London Prodigal*, which has been attributed to both Shakespeare and Jonson; Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*; Book five of Rabelais; and, of Jonson's own work, *The Case Is Altered*, *Cynthia's Revels*, and the masques *News from the New World*, *Neptunes Triumph* and *The Fortunate Isles*.<sup>5</sup> Before this essay is finished, it will appear that a dozen or more plays of Shakespeare's should be listed, perhaps as possible sources, perhaps as targets.

Of these many plays, however, only *Timon of Athens* appears to have had an effect on both the structure and ideas of *The*

<sup>5</sup> For this information I am indebted to Herford and Simpson and to De Winter, ed., *The Staple of Newes* (New York, 1905).

*Staple of Newes*. It is my opinion that the kinship between the two plays is closer than editors have noted.

Jonson's prodigal, Peniboy Junior, is, I believe, partially conceived in terms of Shakespeare's prodigal, Timon.<sup>6</sup> There may have been some reciprocity between the two authors—Shakespeare for *Timon of Athens* borrowing from Jonson—and Jonson in turn borrowing from *Timon of Athens*. Oscar J. Campbell has pointed out that in *Timon of Athens* Shakespeare was undertaking a satirical play in the manner of Jonson's *Sejanus*.<sup>7</sup> The list of the eight "principall Tragedians" which follows the text in the Jonson Folio of 1616 has the name of Shakespeare in the fifth position. Shakespeare's familiarity with "To the Readers" of the Quarto may perhaps be assumed, particularly his knowledge of Jonson's prescription for a tragic poem: "Truth of Argument, dignity of Persons, grauity and height of Elocution, fulnesse and frequencie of Sentence." *Timon of Athens* has much of "Elocution," and, I believe, a self-conscious effort at "frequencie of Sentence." But in a much more important aspect the two tragedies are alike: both are essentially tragedies, not of an *individual*, but of a *state*. Rome, worthy of a Sejanus, in spewing him out, places itself in subjection to a worse man, Macro. In *Timon of Athens*, the city, guilty of gross ingratitude on the level of the individual and of the state, and of usury, avoids total destruction only by servile submission to Alcibiades. In each play the author has mounted a massive satirical attack on national corruption, the principal spokesman for Jonson being Arruntius, for Shakespeare Timon himself, with help from Apemantus. It is tempting to imagine that Shakespeare may have played the part of Arruntius.

The relationships pointed out above suggest a little more likelihood that Jonson sought touches for his Prodigal in *Timon*, but even without them, kindred elements in the two plays indicate almost certain borrowing.

The openings of *Timon of Athens* and *The Staple of Newes* are remarkably similar: In *Timon of Athens* Poet, Painter,

<sup>6</sup> Jonson has, of course, his own prodigal in *Asotus of Cynthia's Revels*. Asotus is, however, a fool, as Peniboy Junior is not, and is incapable of seeing his folly, while Peniboy Junior comes to see his clearly.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar J. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Satire* (New York, 1963), pp. 168-197.

Jeweller and Merchant are assembled to prey on the Prodigal. In *The Staple of Newes* Fashioner, Linener, Haberdasher, Shoemaker and Spurrier are assembled for a similar purpose. In *Timon of Athens*, Apemantus warns against their rapacity. Peniboy Canter performs the same function in *The Staple of Newes*. Still in the first scene, Timon provides a dowry of three talents for a faithful servant, and pays a great debt to free Ventidius from prison. In what would for Shakespeare be still the first scene, Peniboy Junior buys for fifty pounds a place as clerk in the Staple for his follower, Tom the Barber.

Even more striking than the parallel opening scenes is the use of feasts as background for both commentary and action. In *Timon of Athens*, however, two feasts are required to accomplish what is done in *The Staple of Newes* in a single meeting in the Apollo room. It should be noted also that after the feasts, Peniboy Junior and Timon take different courses: Peniboy Junior to self-knowledge and restoration, Timon to utter misanthropy and self-destruction.

The first major accomplishment of each feast is the establishing of the mindless prodigality of Timon and Peniboy Junior. Timon makes much of refusing payment of Ventidius' debt, even though Ventidius is now rich through the death of his father. Ostentatiously also, he gives a jewel to the "1 Lord," a "trifle" to the "2 Lord," and a bay courser to the "3 Lord." Part of the representation of Peniboy Junior's folly is achieved allegorically—by his urging Pecunia to distribute her kisses promiscuously, even to Captain Shunfield, "Though he be a slugge," and to the "Poet-Sucker" Madrigal. The grand design of founding "Canters Colledge," with professorships for all the jeerers and for Lickfinger completes for Jonson the portrait of prodigality.

The list of guests at each feast has essentially the same composition: a prodigal host; his rapacious "friends"; and a single guest welcome only to the host, whose attitude throughout the feast is that of a bitter commentator on the folly and rapacity he is observing. The efforts of Apemantus in *Timon of Athens* are largely ineffective, but Peniboy Canter without mercy holds the guests up to ridicule, not only as canters like himself, but also as shabby pretenders to their professions.

In each feast also the loss by the Prodigal of his wealth is either predicted or achieved. In *Timon of Athens*, at the first feast, the steward Flavius seeks to inform Timon that he cannot pay for the rich gifts he is making, but is rebuffed. In *The Staple of Newes*, Peniboy Canter, moved beyond endurance by the folly of Canters' College, reveals himself as father to Peniboy Junior. He takes into his own protection Pecunia and her train and leaves his son only his "*Cloak, To Travell in to Beggers Bush.*"

The final function of the feasting in both plays is the presentation of a sort of choric judgement on the flatterers. In *Timon of Athens* this effect is achieved by a second feast, that of the covered dishes of warm water, which Timon throws in the faces of his "guests." His accompanying invective is bitter:

*Make the Meate be beloued, more then the Man that  
giues it. Let no Assembly of Twenty, be without a  
score of Villaines. If there sit twelue Women at the  
Table, let a dozen of them bee as they are. The rest of  
your Fees, O Gods, the Senators of Athens, together  
with the common legge of People, what is amisse in  
them, you Gods, make suteable for destruction. For  
these my present Freinds, as they are to mee nothing,  
so in nothing blesse them, and to nothing are they  
welcome.*

(III, vi, 85-95)

The corresponding invective in *The Staple of Newes* is given to the Canter and is individualized in terms of professions: Fitton is "a moth, a rascall, a Court-rat, / That gnawes the commonwealth"; Shunfield is a "Scarre-crow / Cannot endure to heare of hazards"; the Doctor, Almanach, is a "dog-Leach" who can "erect a scheme / For my great *Madams* monkey"; Madrigal's "wreath / Is picc'd and patch'd of dirty witherd flowers."

While the opening scene and the feasting are the most obvious points in the indebtedness of Jonson, there are other items of resemblance that are hardly less striking. One very brief passage in Act II of *Timon of Athens* may have suggested to Jonson his "Jeerers," a sort of choric group in *The Staple of Newes*, performing functions not unlike those assigned to the



anti-masques of the later masques. Caphis, Varro and Isidore, emissaries for three usurers, are proposing an assault upon Apemantus and the Foole:

*Caph.* Stay, stay, here comes the Foole with *Apemantus*,  
let's ha' some sport with 'em.

(II, ii, 47, 48)

Further on in the exchange of jeering is this passage:

*Cap.* Where's the Foole now?

*Ape.* He last ask'd the question. Poor Rogues, and Vsurers  
men, Bauds betwene Gold and want.

(II, ii, 59-61)

It should be particularly noted that this passage is probably the origin of Jonson's striking epithet, "money-baud." It appears several times in *The Staple of Newes*, and later in *The Magnetic Lady*. It should also be observed that in each play, the concept money-bawd is produced by a figure primarily choric—Apemantus in the one case, Peniboy Canter in the other. Jonson's jeerers are Cymbal, Master of the Staple, Fitton, the courtier, Almanach, the "Doctor in Physick," Shunfield, the "Sea-captaine," and Madrigal, the "Poetaster." Their "game" is a concerted attack by way of insult on a helpless victim, or, in his absence, on one another. Here is a fair sample of their work in *The Staple of Newes*:

CYM. You are a rogue. P. SE. I thinke I am Sir, truly.

CYM. A Rascall, and a *money-bawd*. P.SE. My sur names:

CYM. A wretched Rascall! P.SE. You will ouerflow—

And spill all. CYM. Caterpillar, moath,

Horse-leach, and dung-worme—

(III, iv, 81-85)

One other element of *Timon of Athens* may have been translated by Jonson into action, the material of these lines:

Cracke the Lawyers voyce,

That he may neuer more false Title pleade,

Nor sound his Quillets shrilly.

(IV, iii, 153-55)

Much of the fifth act of *The Staple of Newes* is devoted to the effort of Picklocke, the man of law, who with "Fore-head of

steale, and mouth of brasse" undertakes to deny the deed of trust by which he held the estate of Peniboy Canter while it—as Pecunia—sojourned with Peniboy Junior.

There is also close kinship in certain of the ideas in the two plays. On several occasions in *The Staple of Newes* there appears as part of Jonson's condemnation of usury, the concept embodied in the last of these lines:

CLA. No, but we heare of a *Colony* of cookes  
To be set a shore o' the coast of *America*,  
For the conuersion of the *Caniballs*,  
And making them good, eating *Christians*.  
(III, ii, 155-158)

The theme of cannibalism is frequent in *Timon of Athens*:

You must eate men (Timon to the Banditti)  
What a number of men eats Timon (Apemantus)  
Breakfast of enemies (Timon to Alcibiades).

A second pervasive theme in both plays is the nature and power of wealth, symbolized in *Timon of Athens* early in the play by Fortune and toward the end by "Yellow, glittering, precious Gold." In *The Staple of Newes*, the symbol throughout is, of course, the Lady Pecunia. Both Pecunia and Fortune of *Timon of Athens* have "ivory hands." There is a marked similarity among these passages, the first two from *Timon of Athens* and the other two from *The Staple of Newes*:

O thou sweete King-killer, and deare diuorce  
Twixt naturall Sunne and fire: thou bright defiler  
of *Himens* purest bed, thou valiant Mars,  
Thou euer, yong, fresh, loued, and delicate wooer,  
Whose blush doth thawe the consecrated Snow  
That lyes on Dians lap.  
Thou visible God,  
That souldrest close Impossibilities,  
And mak'st them kisse; that speak'st with euerie Tongue  
To euerie purpose.  
(*Timon of Athens*, IV, iii, 382-90)

Thus much of this will make  
Blacke, white; fowle, faire; wrong, right;

Base, Noble; Old, young; Coward, valient.  
 Ha you Gods! why this? what this, you Gods? why this  
 Will lugge your Priests and Seruants from your sides:  
 Plucke stout mens pillowes from below their heads.  
 This yellow Slaue,  
 Will knit and breake Religions, blesse th'accurst,  
 Make the hoare Leprosie ador'd, place Theeues,  
 And giue them Title, knee, and approbation  
 With Senators on the Bench: This is it  
 That makes the wappen'd Widdow wed againe.

(*Timon of Athens*, IV, iii, 28-38)

All this *Nether-world*  
 Is yours, you command it, and doe sway it,  
 The honour of it, and the honesty,  
 The reputation, I, and the religion,  
 (I was about to say, and not err'd)  
 Is Queene *Pecunia's*.

(*The Staple of Newes*, II, i, 38-43)

*She makes good cheare, she keepes full boards,  
 She holds a Faire of Knights, and Lords,  
 A Mercat of all Offices,  
 And Shops of honour, more or lesse.  
 According to Pecunia's Grace,  
 The Bride hath beauty, blood, and place,  
 The Bridegroom vertue, valour, wit,  
 And wisdom, as he stands for it.*

(*The Staple of Newes*, IV, ii, 109-116)

While the resemblances cited above are no certain proof of indebtedness, they do strongly imply that Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* did suggest situation, idea, phrase, to Jonson, to be imitated, expanded, perhaps transmuted into Jonsonian matter. The idea that Jonson borrowed from *Timon of Athens* is reinforced also by the fact that some more obvious borrowings, or thrusts, from perhaps a dozen of Shakespeare's plays appear almost at random throughout *The Staple of Newes*, in addition to the more concentrated Shakespearean matter in the passages involving Lickfinger, the Master Cooke.

Of the group which I have specified as "occasional lines or

phrases" echoing Shakespeare, the first that should be noted is a line not actually in Shakespeare, but attributed to him by Jonson.<sup>8</sup> It occurs in the "Induction," being spoken by Prologue to the four Gossips, Mirth, Tatle, Expectation, and Censure, who constitute a more or less formal Chorus—one which is a very thinly disguised cross-section of the very spectators viewing *The Staple of Newes*. Says Prologue, "Cry you mercy, you never did wrong, but with just cause." Since the "Induction," aside from names and speech prefixes is set up in italics, the line itself, not in italics, is represented as a quotation. The passage in which Jonson attributes the line to Shakespeare is well known, but should be in part reproduced here:

*I remember*, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to *Shakespeare*, that in his writing, (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, Would he had blotted a thousand.

.....

Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter: As when hee said in the person of *Caesar*, one speaking to him; *Caesar, thou dost me wrong*. He replied: *Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause*.

(*Discoveries*, lines 647-65)

The line was presumably once in *Julius Caesar*, and one can almost wish that it remained instead of those which probably replaced it:

Know *Caesar* doth not wrong, nor without cause  
Will he be satisfied.

(III, i, 47, 48)

The *Discoveries* must have been written after the fire of 1623, for in the "Execration upon Vulcan" Jonson says that he lost

twice-twelve-yeares stor'd up humanitie,  
With humble Gleanings in Divinitie.

One wonders, of course, whether the reference to *Julius Caesar* is recovered from the "twice-twelve-years stor'd up humanitie,"

<sup>8</sup>For extended discussions of what may have happened in connection with this line, see De Winter, pp. 125-128; and Herford and Simpson, XI, 231-233.

or is produced afresh, after 1623, as a consequence of the publication of the First Folio. It is probably nothing more than coincidence that both Caesar and Peniboy Senior are deaf in one ear, but it may be worth noting in connection with the definite reference to *Julius Caesar* made in Prologue's quotation.

Of Tom the Barber, who has, while eavesdropping, heard Picklocke first admit, and then deny, that he held Peniboy Canter's estate in trust, says Picklocke, "a rat behind the hangings." The likelihood that this is an echo of the slaying of Polonius in *Hamlet* is noted by De Winter.<sup>9</sup> Probably a glance at the play within a play, the "Mousetrap," of *Hamlet* is intended in Mirth's comment on the courtier Fitton in the "fourth Intermeane": "and lie so, in waite for a piece of wit, like a Mousetrap." In the same scene, Picklocke accuses Peniboy Junior of being "Sicke of selfe-love." Herford and Simpson are reminded of Olivia's analysis, in *Twelfth Night*, of Malvolio: "O, you are sick of self-love."<sup>10</sup>

Three common proverbs are used by Jonson in *The Staple of Newes* and by Shakespeare. It would be rash, of course, to insist that Jonson borrowed them from Shakespeare, but it is interesting to examine in juxtaposition the manner in which they are put to work by the two writers. In *III Henry VI*, York is speaking to Queen Margaret:

It needes not, nor it bootes thee not, prowde Queene,  
Vnlesse the Adage must be verifys'd,  
That Beggars mounted, runne their Horse to death.  
(I, iv, 125-27)

Shakespeare's use of the proverb is rhetorical, sententious, part of an attack on the poverty of Margaret's father, the King of Naples. Jonson takes the formality out of his use of the proverb, giving it to Gossip Tatle in the fourth Intermeane, as a part of a foolish attack by his Chorus on his beggar, Peniboy Canter:

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<sup>9</sup> De Winter, ed., *The Staple of Newes*, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson* X, 289.

*I, but set a beggar on horse-backe, hee'll neuer linne  
till hee be a gallop.*

In *II Henry VI*, Hume is speaking in soliloquy:

They say, a craftie Knaue do's need no Broker,  
Yet I am *Suffolke* and the Cardinalls Broker.

(I, ii, 100, 101)

Jonson's use of the same proverb is less obvious:

P.IV. A fine well-spoken family. What's thy name?  
BRO. *Broker*. P.IV. Me thinks my vnclē should not need  
thee,  
Who is a crafty Knaue, enough, belecue it.

(II, v, 82-4)

Jonson's acquaintance with the three parts of *Henry VI* is shown by his attack in the Prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*:

Or, with three rustie swords,  
And helpe of some few foot-and-halfe-foot words,  
Fight ouer *Yorke*, and *Lancasters* long Jarres.

(Prologue, 9-11)

Still a third proverb is used by both men, this being Shakespeare's version in *All's Well that Ends Well*:

*Clo*. My poore bodie Madam requires it, I am driuen  
only by the flesh, and hee must neede goe that the  
diuell driues.

(I, iii, 30-32)

Jonson's use of the proverb is the more sophisticated in that he expects his audience to recognize it in an exchange of repartee:

FIT. An odde bargaine of Venison, To driue. P. SE.  
Will you goe in, knaue? LIC. I must needs, You see  
who driues me, gentlemen. ALM. Not the *diuell*.

(II, iv, 37-39)

The remaining group of what I have designated as "occasional lines or phrases" appears in *Troilus and Cressida*. The passages cannot, of course, be called parallels, but they come inevitably to mind to one who is familiar with both *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Staple of Newes*. Jonson had some reason from earlier days to be familiar with Shakespeare's play, for in *Poetaster* he

had attacked, if not Shakespeare himself, at least the members of Shakespeare's company. The writer of a Cambridge play, *3 Parnassus*, suggests that Shakespeare in reply to *Poetaster* had given Jonson "a purge that made him bewray his credit."<sup>11</sup> This purge has not been certainly identified, but perhaps the likeliest candidate for it is the portrait of Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*, as spoken by Cressida's servant Alexander:

This man Lady, hath rob'd many beasts of their particular additions, he is as valiant as the Lyon, churlish as the Beare, slow as the Elephant: a man into whom nature hath so crowded humors, that his valour is crusht into folly, his folly sauced with discretion: there is no man hath a vertue, that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint, but he carries some staine of it. He is melancholy without cause, and merry against the haire, he hath the ioyns of euery thing, but euery thing so out of ioynt, that hee is gowtie *Briareus*, many hands and no vse; or purblinded *Argus*, all eyes and no sight.

(I, ii, 9-31)

Later in the play *Thersites*, the foul-mouthed commentator, says to Ajax,

thou hast no more braine then I haue in mine elbows:  
An Asinico may tutor thee.

(II, i, 47-49)

This is the first usage of *assinigo* recorded in the *New English Dictionary*. The word delights Jonson, for it provides him with a happy epithet for his collaborator and enemy, Inigo Jones: "You would be an Asinigo by your ears."<sup>12</sup> Jonson uses the word in *The Staple of Newes*, of Shunfield the cowardly captain:

FIT. To be fairely knock'd o' the head.  
SHV. With a good Ieere or two. P.SE. And from your iawbone, *Don Assinigo*?<sup>13</sup>

(V, v, 12-14)

<sup>11</sup> *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt (15 vols.; London, 1874), IX, 194.

<sup>12</sup> From "Expostulation with Inigo Jones" (Herford and Simpson, VIII, 403).

<sup>13</sup> Both De Winter and Herford and Simpson note Shakespeare's use of "Assinigo" in *Troilus and Cressida*.

There are two rather striking ideas in *Troilus and Cressida* which may possibly be echoed by Jonson in *The Staple of Newes*. Aeneas, ironically rebuking himself, says

The worthiness of praise distaines his worth:  
If that [t] he prais'd himselfe, bring the praise forth.  
(I, iii, 241, 42)

In *The Staple of Newes* Jonson has Peniboy Junior boast to Pecunia of his generosity in buying the clerk's place for Tom the barber. In a typical Jonsonian manner what was in effect a "sentence" in *Troilus and Cressida* is delivered as dialogue in *The Staple of Newes*:

P.CA. He should haue spoke of that, Sir, and not you: Two doe not doe one Office well. P.IV. 'Tis true, But I am loth to lose my curtesies.  
P.CA. So are all they, that doe them, to vaine ends, And yet you do lose, when you pay you(r) selues.  
(III, ii, 9-13)

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Hector speaks this sentence in the course of the debate over continuing the war:

'Tis made Idolatrie  
To make the seruice greater then the God.  
(II, ii, 56,57)

The same idea is used twice in *The Staple of Newes*. The first is, characteristically, a dialogue:

PEC. Why do you so, my Guardian? I not bid you,  
Cannot my *Grace* be gotten, and held too,  
Without your selfe-tormentings, and your watches,  
Your macerating of your body thus  
With cares, and scantings of your dyet, and rest?  
P.SE. O, no, your seruices, my *Princely Lady*,  
Cannot with too much zeale of *rites* be done,  
They are so sacred. PEC. But my Reputation  
May suffer, and the worship of my family,  
When by so seruile meanes they both are sought.  
(II, i, 21-30)

The second use of the idea is in the form of a sentence spoken inevitably by Peniboy Canter:



## Superstition

Doth violate the Deity it worships.

(V, vi, 23, 24)

It has been suggested earlier that Lickfinger, the Cooke, shares largely in the choric commentary, along with Peniboy Canter, and that much of the material that may be of Shakespearean origin is in those passages where he takes part in the dialogue. Yet, his function is not, as is the Canter's, primarily to show the proper use of Pecunia, but to comment on the nature of poetry and the poet. He is almost obsessed by the idea that the arts of poetry and cookery are one—and that the origin of both is in the "Kitchin." In *Neptunes Triumph* Jonson acknowledges indebtedness for this idea to the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus, but he pushes Lickfinger's ideas so persistently that the Cooke becomes almost a humorous character. In those portions of the play where Lickfinger appears, or is discussed, he functions in a sense in a dual role: as the object of commentary which is, I believe, spoken in reality of Shakespeare; and, when Lickfinger himself speaks of the "master-cooke," I believe he is speaking for Jonson about Shakespeare.

The name of this philosopher of the kitchen probably came, if not out of Jonson's own fertile invention, from *Romeo and Juliet*. This is Shakespeare's use of the proverb, "It is an ill cook that cannot lick his own fingers."

*Cap.* So many guests inuite as here are writ, Sirrah, go hire me twenty cunning Cookes.

*Ser.* You shall haue none ill sir, for Ile trie if they can licke their fingers.

*Cap.* How canst thou trie them so?

*Ser.* Marrie sir, 'tis an ill Cooke that cannot licke his owne fingers: therefore he that cannot licke his fingers goes not with me.

(IV, ii, 1-8)

Our first introduction is to the Lickfinger who is Jonson himself—of the "mountaine Belly." Peniboy Senior inquires of Broker,

Where's *Lickfinger* my Cooke? that vnctuous rascall?

Hee'll neuer keepe his houere, that vessel of kitchinstuffe.

(II, ii, 68,69)

Having arrived late by half an hour, Lickfinger excuses himself in these words:

I haue lost two stone  
Of suet i' the seruice posting hither,  
You might haue followed me like a watering pot,  
And seene the knots I made along the street.<sup>14</sup>

(II, iii, 13-16)

One is reminded on reading the passage of Prince Hal's wonderful lines about Falstaff:

*Falstaffe* sweates to death,  
and Lards the leane earth as he walkes along.

(*I Henry IV*, II, ii, 115,16)

The next appearance of our unctuous cook is at the office of the Staple, where he seeks news to enliven a feast to be prepared by him and served in the Apollo room, the occasion being the entertainment of Pecunia and her train by Peniboy Junior. But what Lickfinger says of himself is, I suggest, said of Shakespeare. The essential passage is this:

P.IV. What *Lickfinger!* wilt thou conuert the *Caniballs*,  
With spit and pan Diuinity? LIC. Sir, for that  
I will not vrge, but for the fire and zeale  
To the true cause; thus I haue vndertaken:  
With two Lay-bretheren, to my selfe, no more,  
One o' the broach, th' other o' the boyler,  
In one sixe months, and by plaine cookery,  
No magick to 't, but old *Iaphets* physicke,  
The father of the *Europoean* Arts,  
To make such sauces for the Sauages,  
And cooke their meats, with those inticing steemes,  
As it would make our *Caniball-Christians*,  
Forebeare the mutuall eating one another,  
Which they doe doe, more cunningly, then the wilde

<sup>14</sup> Jonson is perhaps also borrowing from Jonson. These are Ursula's words in *Bartholomew Fayre*:

A poore vex'd thing I am, I feele my selfe dropping already, as fast as I  
can: two stone a sewet aday is my proportion.

(II, ii, 79-81)

*Anthropophagi*; that snatch onely strangers,  
Like my old Patrons dogs, there.

(III, ii, 165-80)

The enterprise of converting the “Caniballs” is perhaps the publication of the First Folio itself. The two “Lay-bretheren” may well be Heminge and Condell, or possibly the noble Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery. The “mutuall eating” one another by “Caniball-Christians” is perhaps an echo of the passage in *The Merchant of Venice*, between Jessica and Launcelot Gobbo:

*Jes.* I shall be sau'd by my husband, he hath made me a Christian.

*Clow.* Truly the more to blame he, we were Christians enow before, e'ne as many as could wel liue, one by another: this making of Christians will raise the price of Hogs, if wee grow all to be porkeaters, wee shall not shortlie haue a rasher on the coales for money.

(III, V, 121-29)

The “Anthropophagi” appear, not only in *Othello* (I, iii, 144), but also in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (IV, v, 9). Finally, “My old Patrons dogs there,” named Block and Lollard, will in a sort of mad scene endure a very unfair trial at the hands of Peniboy Senior. One is reminded of Launce's interrogation of his dog in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* who, like Block and Lollard, “made water against a gentlewoman's farthingale.” The trial scene in *The Staple of Newes* inevitably brings to mind King Lear's mock trial of his daughters, but one must, I suppose, agree with the anguished utterance of Coleridge, “I dare not, will not think that Honest Ben had Lear in his mind in this mad scene.”<sup>15</sup>

In the same scene, though not spoken by Lickfinger, there appears to be a glance at a pair of stage directions in *The Tempest*:

<sup>15</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other Dramatists*, in *The World's Classics Series* (London, 1931), p. 266.

*Solemne and strange Musicke: and Prosper on the top (inuisible:) Enter seuerall strange shapes, bringing in a Banket; and daunce about it with gentle actions of salutations, and inuiting the King, &c. to eate, they depart.*

(III, iii, s.d. following 19)

*He vanishes in Thunder: then (to soft Musicke.) Enter the shapes againe, and daunce (with mockes and mowes) and carrying out the Table.*

(III, iii, s.d. following 82)

The lines in *The Staple of Newes* are a part of the unsuccessful wooing of Pecunia by Cymbal, the master of the Staple:

Your meat should be seru'd in with curious dances,  
And set vpon the boord, with virgin hands,  
Tun'd to their voices; not a dish remou'd,  
But to the *Musicke*, nor a drop of wine,  
Mixt, with his water, without *Harmony*.

(III, ii, 230-34)

While we are still at the office of the Staple, there is additional discussion of Lickfinger in which comments made about him appear to be references to the work of Shakespeare:

ALM. I was at an *Olla Podrida* of his making,  
Was a braue piece of *cookery!* at a funerall,  
But opening the pot-lid, he made vs laugh,  
Who'had wept all day! and sent vs such a tickling  
Into our nostrills, as the funerall feast  
Had bin a wedding-dinner. SHV. Gi' him allowance,  
And that but moderate, he will make a *Syren*  
Sing i' the Kettle, send in an *Arion*,  
In a braue broth, and of watry greene,  
Iust the Sea-colour, mounted on the backe  
Of a growne *Cunger*, but, in such a posture,  
As all the world would take him for a *Dolphin*.

(III, iii, 29-40)

It seems highly probable that Hamlet's lines, "The funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables," lie behind "The funerall feast had bin a wedding-dinner." The image of Arion on the dolphin's back occurs in *Twelfth Night*

(I, ii, 15), or possibly Jonson had in mind the image of the “mermaid on a dolphin’s back” of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (II, i, 150).

The possibility that the work of Shakespeare was in Jonson’s mind as he wrote the passages pointed out above suggests that the *Olla Podrida* (putrid pot) may also concern Shakespeare. It may, in view of the reference to the “funerall feast” be an assessment of *Hamlet*. But there are other possibilities. For the meaning of *Olla Podrida*, the *New English Dictionary* offers this interesting quotation:

1622 Mabbe, Sr. Aleman’s *Guzeman*  
 “Olla podrida, is a very great one, contayning in it divers things, as Mutton, Beefe, Hens, Capons, Sawsages, Piggs feete, Garlick, Onions, &c. It is called *Podrida*, because it is sod leisurely, til it be rotten (as we say) and ready to fall in peeces. . . . In English it may well beare the name of Hodge-podge.”

Passages in two plays other than *Hamlet* might have inspired the epithet. The first is, naturally, the cauldron of the witches in *Macbeth*:

Fillet of a Fenny Snake,  
 In the Caldron boyle and bake:  
 Eye of Newt and Toe of Frogge,  
 Wooll of Bat and Tongue of Dogge:  
 Adders Forke and Blinde-wormes Sting,  
 Lizards legge and Howlets wing.

(IV, i, 12-17)

A second possibility for the “Olla Podrida” is in *Titus Andronicus*, a play singled out for special attack, along with *The Spanish Tragedy*, in the “Induction” of Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fayre*. In the fifth act Titus has in his power the sons of Tamora, who have ravished Lavinia, cut off her hands, and cut out her tongue:

Harke Villaines, I will grin’d your bones to dust,  
 And with your blood and it, Ile make a Paste,

And of the Paste a Coffen I will reare,  
 And make two Pasties of your shamefull Heads,  
 And bid that strumpet your vnhallowed Dam,  
 Like to the earth swallow her increase.  
 This is the Feast, that I haue bid her to,  
 And this the Banquet she shall surfet on,  
 For worse then *Philomel* you vsd my Daughter,  
 And worse then *Progne*, I will be reueng'd,  
 And now prepare your throats: *Lavinia* come.  
 Receiue the blood, and when that they are dead,  
 Let me goe grin'd their Bones to powder small,  
 And with this hateful Liquor temper it,  
 And in that Paste let their vil'd Heads be bakte.

(V, ii, 187-201)

The "Coffen" of the third line is a pastry shell, and our friend Lickfinger uses "coffins" for his "red-Deere Pyes." The terrible banquet does indeed get served to Tamora, with Titus "like a cooke, placing the meat on the Table."<sup>16</sup>

In *Neptunes Triumph*, not performed "at the Court on the Twelfth Night, 1623" (1624) there occurs this dialogue:

COOKE

Were you euer a *Cooke*?

POET

A *Cooke*? no surely

COOKE

Then you can be no good *Poet*. For a good *Poet* differs nothing at all from a *Master-Cooke*.

Eithers Art is in the wisdome of the Mind.

Shortly thereafter there follows a tribute to "a *Master-Cooke*," which appears in substantially the same form in *The Staple of Newes*, though there Lickfinger speaks of "the" master cook.

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<sup>16</sup> The "Arion" on a "Dolphin," the "Olla Podrida," and the massive military image for the Cooke's efforts, of this passage appear also in *The Bloody Brother*, by B.J.F., printed in 1639, where they are there spoken by a "Master Cooke." *The Bloody Brother* is of uncertain date and authorship, but the probability is that the images are in a passage written by John Fletcher (though frequently assigned to Jonson), imitating not *The Staple of Newes*, but identical passages in *Neptunes Triumph*.

In *The Staple of Newes* the passage occurs in a dialogue between Madrigal “the Eg-chind *Laureat*,” whose “wreath / Is piec’d and patch’d of dirty witherd flowers” (George Wither?)<sup>17</sup> and the redoubtable Lickfinger. I submit that in these lines Jonson, through Lickfinger the Cooke, speaks, as he does in the front matter of the Folio, of the “beloved, The AVTHOR MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE:”

A Boyler, Range, and Dresser were the *Fountaines*,  
 Of all the knowledge in the *uniuerse*.  
 And they’re the *Kitchins*, where the *Master-Cooke*—  
 (Thou dost not know the man, nor canst thou know him,  
 Till thou hast seru’d some yeeres in that deepe schoole,  
 That’s both the *Nurse* and *Mother* of the *Arts*,  
 And hear’st him read, interpret, and demonstrate!)  
 A *Master-Cooke*! Why, he’s the *man o’ men*,  
 For a *Professor*! he designs, he drawes,  
 He paints, he carues, he builds, he fortifies,  
 Makes *Citadels* of curious fowle and fish,  
 Some he *dri-ditches*, some *notes* round with *broths*.  
 Mounts *marrowbones*, cuts *fifty-angled custards*,  
 Reares *bulwark* pies, and for his *outer workes*  
 He raiseth *Ramparts* of immortal *crust*;  
 And teacheth all the *Tacticks*, at one dinner;  
 What *Rankes*, what *Files*, to put his dishes in;  
 The whole *Art Military*. Then he knowes,  
 The influence of the *Starres* vpon his meats,  
 And all their seasons, tempers, qualities,  
 And so to fit his relishes, and sauces,  
 He has *Nature* in a pot, ‘boue all the *Chymists*,  
 Or airy bretheren of the *Rosie-crosse*.  
 He is an *Architect*, an *Inginer*,  
 A *Souldiour*, a *Physician*, a *Philosopher*,  
 A generall *Mathematician*. MAD. It is granted.  
 LIC. And that you may not doubt him, for a *Poet*—  
 ALM. This *fury* shewes, if there were nothing else!  
 And ‘tis diuine! I shall for euer, hereafter,

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<sup>17</sup>See De Winter, *The Staple of Newes*, pp. lv-lix.

Admire the wisdom of a *Cooke!*

(IV, ii, 12-41)

There is little in the passage quoted which might be identifiable as specific reference to Shakespeare's work. The "deepe schoole" of line sixteen may be the First Folio. Probably the "curious fowle and fish" are suggested by *The Tempest*. "The influence of the *Starres*" may contain a glance at the star-crossed lovers of *Romeo and Juliet*. "Nature in a pot" is reminiscent of these lines in "To the Memory":

*Nature her selfe was proud of his designes,  
And ioy'd to weare the dressing of his lines!*

In the same poem Jonson renders great tribute to Shakespeare's art, ending the passage with a pun in military terms on Shakespeare's name: "*he seems to shake a Lance, / As brandish't at the eyes of ignorance.*" In the "Master-Cooke" passage Jonson conceives the cook's art altogether in military terms.

One who is at home with Shakespeare's plays does indeed feel that an "Architect" has built most of them—or perhaps that the mind of an architect has fitted the language and action to the geography of the stages of The Theater and the Globe; that an "Inginer" helped the "Souldiour" plan the military excursions; that a true "Physician" did indeed diagnose and prescribe for the ailments of a Lear or a Lady Macbeth; that a "Philosopher" asked the great questions of *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. But he is perhaps unwilling to concede that a "Mathematician" could have produced the confusion among the "talents" of *Timon of Athens*.

If this portrait of "the *Master-Cooke*" is indeed a tribute to Shakespeare by Jonson, perhaps one of the greatest tributes of all lies in omissions. The master cook is given no competence in law or religion—two professions which could be exemplified by Jonson in such practitioners as Voltore and Tribulation Wholesome.

Of the many parallels, echoes, or perhaps friendly thrusts, suggested above, some few are almost certainly references to the work of Shakespeare; many others may be—or may not be—concerned with Shakespeare; and very probably some of the resemblances in idea or phrase are merely fortuitous.



But I believe that in the aggregate, they offer a very strong suggestion that about 1623 Jonson renewed his knowledge of the plays of Shakespeare. Possibly his reading was done in preparation for rendering assistance in assembling the front matter of the volume. Perhaps it was done as a consequence of the loss of his own library to Vulcan. Whatever the reason, the work of Shakespeare was much in the mind of Jonson as he wrote *The Staple of Newes*, to the extent, I believe, of a very noble tribute to the "*Master-Cooke*."