

**Dynamic Linguistic and Artistic Patterns in
Jonson's *THE ALCHEMIST***

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to demonstrate how and why Ben Jonson's play *The Alchemist* is a valuable literary and historical document in that it charts important shifts and changes in the English language at the lexical, grammatical and semantic levels. A detailed linguistic study of the play reveals how specific words were borrowed and accommodated from various languages into English. *The Alchemist* also reveals significant aspects of social change in the idioms drawn from rural life, legal and even culinary jargon at that time. The investigation also touches upon a brief semantic analysis and examines the use of some speech acts in the play which enriches its dramatic significance.

This paper seeks to explore Ben Jonson's linguistic art in *The Alchemist*, in all its variety, complexity and subtlety. The nature of the investigation will encompass historical, socio-linguistic, stylistic and semantic, as well as metaphorical aspects. Such a multi-referential analysis instead of a uni-dimensional study is justifiable because critical appraisals of Ben Jonson's language are often one sided. Contemporary critics and writers of the nineteenth century are derogatory in their analyses which are often based on a prejudiced comparison with Shakespeare and a strong preference for the romantic. Corbyn Morris (1744) opines, "It appears that in imagination, invention, jollity and gay humour Jonson had little power,"¹ and Hazlitt (1819) says, "His genius...resembles grub more than butterfly, plods and grovels on, wants wings to... catch the golden light of poerty"². John Addlington Symonds (1898) is of a similar view..."there is no music which we hear...no aerial hues...these higher gifts of poetry...are almost...absolutely wanting in Ben Jonson"³. Modern assessments of Jonsonian language take the shape of explorations of verbal patterns and images such as studies by Edward B.Partridge⁴ and F.H. Mares⁵ but are limited in perspective, ignoring the grammatical and lexical. This study will identify some historical changes in the English language as reflected in *The Alchemist* at the grammatical level. Then it will establish vocabulary connections with historical, social, economic, cultural and political factors. It will also show how Jonson manipulates and juxtaposes a variety of languages, both old and new, with a variety of styles. In order to complete the picture a brief analysis of symbols and images would be conducted.

Three major characteristics of the period of the 16th and 17th centuries – the period of Modern English – can be identified concerning the spirit of the age in linguistic matters.⁶ First there was a conscious interest in the English language and its problems. The 15th century had witnessed attempts of writers to embellish their style. But in the following two centuries books, pamphlets and prefaces defend the language against those who compared it unfavorably to Latin or other modern tongues, patriotically recognizing its position as national speech and urging its appropriateness for learned and literary use. Numerous books

attempted to describe the proper pronunciation of English and, "Along with the regard for English as an object of pride and cultivation went the desire to improve it in various ways... to enlarge its vocabulary and regulate its spelling"⁷ For example the word 'Alchemist' can be traced to *kimiā* (late Greek), *Khemia* (blackland Egypt) and *Chyma* (the art of pouring liquid). The variety of spelling was regularized by Jonson. This is because the word appears as French 'al quemiste', Italian 'al chimista' and latin 'alchymista'. The earlier forms were 'Alchemister' and 'Alkamyer'. The word was used in 1514 by Barclay, 1578 by Lyte, and in 1607 by Shakespeare as in "you are an Alcumist" in *Timon of Athens* (V. i. 117)⁸. In 1685 Quartes retained an older version of the spelling as "lord what an alchymist art thou" (IV iv 1718). But Burke in 1790 and Carlyle in 1831 use the Jonsonian spelling of -y and -ie ending⁹. Some etymological spelling helped to prevent homophones from becoming homographs so that in *The Alchemist* we find that 'seen' and 'scene' have a different spelling, the latter having a latinate one, but the same pronunciation. This change was effected in order to avoid confusion resulting from the production of many such homophones on account of the Great Vowel Shift.

The second characteristic of the language of Jonson's age was that the nature of a modern standard of English became recognizable. The Great Vowel Shift, Caxton's printing press and efforts of spelling reformers had resulted in a form easily recognizable and readable for the modern reader. So although *The Alchemist* retains Shakespearean forms such as "nigh" and "taen", as well as "mun" (i.e. must) as colloquial countryside English, yet it is easy to read. However, contracted forms such as "tw as", "o'er", "e'er" and "ha' it" "it" are archaic.

Thirdly, Renaissance flexibility of word categories allowed great inventiveness. In *The Alchemist* we have numerous examples of this linguistic tendency. Adjectives could appear as adverbs, nouns or verbs; and nouns appear as verbs. Face says to Subtle, "prove today who will shark best" (I.i.159). Mammon speaking about the special property of combating diseases says, "Tis the secret / of nature, naturis'd against all infection (II. i.65). Even Subtle

challenges Ananias to name, “the martyrizations of metals,” (II i.594). We have other examples in “citronise” (III. ii. 129) and “concumbers” meaning ‘to lie with’, a derivative of concubine (IV. i. 30). “Ground thy quarrel” (IV. i. 194), is another example of such word category flexibility.

English grammar in the 16th and 17th centuries is marked more by the survival of certain forms and usages that have since disappeared, than by any fundamental developments. The great changes which reduced the inflections of Old English to their modern proportions had already taken place. In a few parts of speech which retain their original inflections, the reader of Shakespeare is conscious of minor changes in form and in the differences of syntax and idiom which may attract attention. Jonson’s *The Alchemist* reflects some of these elements. In the noun, the inflections marking possessive singular and plural were retained. In the nouns the-s plural become generalized, and thus in *The Alchemist* we have, “ait of palaces...toils of empiric’s...feasts and triumphs...jewels...states...” (IV. i. 134-141) instead of the old weak plural in -n. thus whereas in Shakespeare we occasionally find “kneen” (knees) and “fleen” (fleas), in *The Alchemist* there is no such example. In Jonson’s age the adjective had lost all its endings so that it no longer expressed distinctions of gender, number and case. With adjectives the use of more/most in the comparative and superlative form becomes possible and although double comparisons are frequent in Shakespeare as “this was the most unkindest out of all” “(*Julius Caesar* III. ii. 185)¹⁰, in Jonson a single form is used as in *The Alchemist*, where Subtle jokingly addresses face as, “My most honour’d lady,” (IV. ii. 17) or later on, “most brave,” (IV. II. 51).

In the pronouns three changes took place in the 16th century some of which are reflected in Jonson’s use of language in *The Alchemist*. There was a disuse of ‘thou’, ‘thy’ and ‘thee’. Then there was a substitution of ‘you’ by ‘ye’ as in a nominative case. Thus we have Dol saying, “You are hot upon it Face” (V. ii 99). Similarly Lovewit says to Mammon, “You may go in...”(V. iii 39) and Face questions Mammon with, “What mean you, sir?” (V i. 106). It is

interesting to note that in the 13th century 'thou', 'thy' and 'thee' forms were used to address familiars and 'ye', 'your' and 'you' began to be used as a mark of respect in addressing a superior. But by Jonson's time of writing *The Alchemist* it seems that 'your' and 'you' became the usual pronoun of direct address irrespective of rank or intimacy. So Subtle says to Dapper, "Your Grace's kinsman" (V. ii. 34) and "Your fly will learn you all games" (V. ii. 51). In pronouns there was also the introduction of 'its' as the possessive of it but there is no illustrative example of this change in *The Alchemist*. Interestingly Jonson retains "Tis" for 'it is'.

Jonson's play *The Alchemist* also shows the development in the grammatical category of verbs in the English language in the 16th and 17th centuries. The regular ending of the third person singular was '-eth' through the Middle English Period, of Chaucer as well. But two centuries later the '-eth' form began to be dropped. But Jonson does retain this form as when Surly affects high flown speech in, "That casteth figures, and can conjure," (IV. iv. 45). The 'e' is often dropped and a contracted form created in past tense verbs such as "employ'd", "rubb'd", "Fubb'd", "claw'd", "tawd" (IV. i. 345-7). Some archaic uses of verbs such as "fumigated" (I. i. 344) for 'perfumed' are incorporated by Jonson. The -ing infinitive form is used interestingly as, "within a noose, for laundering gold and barbing it" (I. i. 114) where 'barbing' is a barber reference to clipping off edges to make coins round at the edges. Similarly "stoop at her" (V. iii. 135) with which Love wit threatens Kastil, is an idiom with a word derived from hunting meaning 'diving on her like a hawk'. Sometimes animate verbs are used for the inanimate as in the Prologue, "whose manners, now call'd Humours feed the stage" (Pro. 9).

Jonson's construction of WH questions is peculiar in the omission of verbs for concise effect which may also have been a grammatical characteristic of the language of his age. Illustrative examples are, "What box is that?" (Face to Subtle. V. ii. 113), "What now a billing?" (Face to Subtle), and "Why you the keys?" (Dol to Subtle. III ii. 123). The omission of 'Do' as in "Think you so sir?" (Lovewit V. iii. 65) and a plural verb for singular in "The whole

nest are fled” (V. iii. 58) are also interesting. Certain Shakespearean verb usage is also retained in Jonsonian language such as, “Must I needs cheat myself” (Surly. V. iii. 85).

By the time of Jonson, “shall” started to be used with ‘I’, and ‘you’ and ‘I’ with ‘will’. But in *The Alchemist* there are deviations such as, “That you shall not, sir” (Lovewit to Mammon. V. ii. 72) and “You shall have a cast commander”, (Face to Kastril III ii. 323) Here Jonson reverts to fifteenth century usage although he often uses the model ‘will’ in its registered standard forms too, as in, “I will: and shave myself” (Subtle to Face V ii. 96) or “I will” (Love wit V. i. 46) or “She will cry strawberries”, (Face to Subtle. V. ii. 33).

It is possible to trace the period of great lexical expansion in the English language through Jonson’s *The Alchemist* too. N.F. Blake states:

Although many words were being borrowed from 1400 onwards, the period of greatest borrowing was between 1530 and 1660 with the peak in the decades either side of 1600.¹¹

The Latin loans tend to be bookish in nature because they form elements in a specialized vocabulary. Studying Latin was considered fashionable and Subtle in *The Alchemist* uses a lot of latin terminology both in its original and in its anglicized form. This he does to keep up his pretence of being scholarly because the English language was at an earlier time considered inferior because of its lack of antiquity. Thus Subtle uses latin terms in their original complexity such as “past equi clibanum” (I. i. 84), “Materia liquurda” (II. i. 356) “propria material” (II. i. 358) and even Mammon says, “ad infinitum” (II. i. 41). Words used for alchemical processes often have the – tion latin suffix and Subtle enjoys using such words as “putrefaction / solution, ablution, sublimation/cohabation, calcinations, ceration and / fixation,” (II i. 599-604). Some Latin loan words used in *The Alchemist* are

anglicized and used even today for e.g. “venture tripartite” (I. i. 135) referring to a business of three partners, and “factious” (I. i. 140) meaning quarrelsome, from the Latin root ‘factio’.

The words integrated into English are from Spanish and reflect the conflicts between the two countries not only in Europe, but also in the new world. Trade was also an important source for all countries with sea ports on the Atlantic or North Sea.¹² This facilitated not only exchange of language, but also fashion as Face angrily exclaims to Kastril:

Ask from your courtier, to your inns-
of-court-man
... Your Spanish jennet is the best
horse. Your
Spanish stoup is the best garb. Your
Spanish beard is
the best cut. Your Spanish ruffs are
the best wear.
Your Spanish pavane the best dance
Your Spanish tiltillation in a glove
The best perfume. And for your
Spanish pike
And Spanish blade, let your poor
captain speak

(IV. ii. 7-15)

Surly pretends to be a Spaniard in the play at one point and speaks to Subtle in fashionable Spanish as, “Entiendo, que ia senora est an hermosa” and “Senores porque se tarda tanto” (IV. i. 325-6). Jonson also uses anglicized Spanish words such as “Spanish verdugo ship” (II. iii. 233) where ‘verdugo’ is Spanish for ‘hangman’.

Another language which contributed to English was Greek, but often through Latin. In *The Alchemist* we also have examples of words that Subtle employs from Astrology such as:

The thumb, in chiromancy, we give
Venus.
The forefinger to Jove, the midst to
Saturn,
The ring to Sol; the least to Mercury
... His house of life being Libra...

(I. i. 425-429)

the planetary names are all contributed from Greek through Latin. There is also a use of direct allusion to Greek mythology such as references to “Janson’s helm” “Mars in his field”, “th Hesperian Garden, Cadmus story”, “Joves’ shower,” and “the boon of Midas, Argus Eyes” (II. i. 98-102). In fact Dol talks to Mammon in a mixture of Hebrew and Greek, “And so we may arrive by Talmud skill / And profane Greek to raise the building up/of Helen’s house against the Ishmaelite” (IV. Iii. 24-26). Dutch added some words to English during this period because the cross channel trade remained of great importance to both parties. However Dutch words are mostly of maritime nature in *The Alchemist* and an example is a reference to “up see Dutch” which carries connotations of the Dutch being fat, dull and heavy drinkers and eaters, and thus meaning ‘heavy’ or ‘dull’.

Even German words such as “statelich” (II. i. 553) are used in their original form and we can infer how they were anglicized to the derivative ‘stately’. A French derivative “bonnibel” (IV. i. 180) for ‘pretty country girl’ is created by combining ‘bonny’ from English and the French “belle”. The word also has Spensarian billing for kissing.¹³

Jonson’s language in *The Alchemist* not only provides valuable insight into the history of English but also records significant events, places and personalities of his age. We are informed about “Lothbury” (II. iv. 35-36) a place where braziers and copres lived and copper was mined in South West England, “the Exchange” (IV . ii) in strand, built in 1608-9 containing many fashionable shops, and Ratcliff (IV. iv. 179) a riverside area near Staphey. There is a

mention of many contemporary places of Jonson's time such as St. Katherine's Hosptial (V. i. 148) founded by Queen Matilda, "the three Pigeons" (V. ii. 189) a public house in Brentford, and "Black Friars" a quarter inhabited by haberdashers, and leather makers (mostly puritan). Jonson also mentions "The temple Church" (III. i. 503) a meeting place for lawyers, clerks and businessmen Moore fields (I. i. 504) which were outside city limits and where lepers resided. Sir Mammon in the play *The Alchemist* offers to go and help these lepers after he acquires wealth through Subtle's philosophers stone. "China houses" (IV. ii. 48) are also mentioned, and were shops selling miscellaneous articles imported from the East.

Inventions such as the water work hydraulics constructed by Bevis Bulmer which delivered water from the Thames are mentioned (II. 76) along with the water work on the new River constructed by Hugh Middleton bringing fresh water from the reservoir to Solington (III. ii. 368-70). There are references to the Great Frost of 1607-8 (III. ii. 208) and the Puritans attempt to raise money for a common cause not allowing grace to a debtor but bringing God into the transaction willing the forfeit (VII. ii. 72-3). We are also told that in Jonson's day money was lent sometimes not as cash but as commodity and the borrower had to sell goods, often at a loss, back to the money lender (I. i. 10-14). Names for men of trade such as "Pimlico" for the man who ran an inn at Hogsden famous for ale. The "gold end-man-street" merchant who bought up odd bits of silver and gold from households (II. i. 567), and "parcel brother" (IV. iv. 33) a part time dealer in second hand goods, all find their way into the language of *The Alchemist* making it a valuable historical document.

With the establishment of English Colonies in New England and Virginia, tobacco become an important trade element¹⁴. From I i. 397 onwards Face describes Able's Tobacco Shop equipped with special maple wood blocks for cutting the tobacco, silver tongs for holding the coal and the use of slow burning juniper wood. The pipes made in Winchester were famous in the 16th and 19th centuries. Jonson also uses language specific to the currency and

commerce of his age. The foreign currency in circulation ranges from Nobles (worth 6s. 8d), and Portuguese coins worth £ 4 to Marks (worth 13s 4d). The English currency identified is Edward Shillings (minted in Edward VI time), Spurroyals (coins of Edward IV reign), crowns (worth 5s and introduced by Edward VIII in 1526), and “single money” (V. ii. 114) referring to small change. In fact certain idioms take their coinage from commerce, such as when Face says to Subtle, “in searching out their veins” where “veins” refers to sources of gold or money (I. i. 481), or Subtle saying, “the good passage of our stock affairs”(V. ii. 93) meaning the successful progress of joint enterprise. Even “he’ll put ... to a cloak” (I. i. 310) meaning ‘leaving only a cloak and thus destitute’ also has an economic relevance.

Idioms used by Jonson are also drawn from the rural life in his age. “The hay is a pitching” (II. i. 281) meaning ‘the trap is being set’, “Stalk like a milk-jade” (II. ii. 167) meaning ‘walking round like a horse grinding coin’ are drawn from agriculture. Some idioms, however, are peculiar to the colloquial jargon in Jonson’s time and illustrative examples are for example when Face calls Mammon “A parlous head” (II. i. 529) indicating that he has a suspicious mind. The word “parlous” has its root in archaic and French and is identified with ‘perilous’. We are also familiarized with idioms such as “give a say” (I i. 453) meaning ‘to make a good attempt’, “To set out throat” (V i. 160) meaning ‘to shout’, and “bring your head within a coxcomb” (I. i. 115) for ‘making a fool of oneself’. Though many of these idioms are no longer in use such as “let the wild sheep loose, I’ll gum your silks with strong water” (for a threat to spoil the other’s clothes) in I. i. 89, yet *The Alchemist’s* text provides us with a rich variety of the idiomatic use of English in Jonson’s age.

Legal terms can also be identified in *The Alchemist’s* language. “Assumpsit” (I. i. 268) is a legal term for a verbal contract in return for fee, “Liberties” (IV. iv. 170) are districts outside city limits not subject to magisterial authority. “Don Provost” (I. i. 170) is a city official responsible for keeping order, but can also be used for a ‘hangman’ entitled to the possession of clothes of those whom he

executed. Dol uses the word to stop Face and Subtle arguing because she does not want their scheme revealed. She does not want to be hanged and her fashionable clothes replaced by those of the hangman.

It is interesting to note that war terminology is used by Jonson in the argumentative dialogue between Face and Subtle at the opening of the play. There is a reference to “translated suburb captain” (I i. 19) referring to a bogus soldier who had never seen service abroad, and “powder coins” (I i. 31) as grains of gunpowder used by Face to refer to Subtle’s facial blackheads. There is also a mention of “Artillery yard” (I i. 31) which was a training ground in the city for Volunteer Artillery Practice, and “harsquebuszier” (II. ii. 7) meaning a soldier armed with ‘a harquebus’ which was a type of gun.

The technical jargon of gambling is also identifiable in *The Alchemist*. Subtle says, “not a mouth shall eat for him ... that is a gaming mouth” (I. i. 298-300) meaning that all gamblers will only be able to eat on credit at the eating houses because Dapper will win their money at gambling. There is also a reference to a “groom porter” (III ii. 307) a minor court official who provided cards and dice for gambling and settled disputes at play. There are also numerous references to card games like “Mum Chance”, fashionable card games such as “Gleek” and “Primero” (V ii 44), winning hands at cards as “five and fifty, and flush” (I. i. 246). Dice games such as “tray trip” and backgammon “God make you rich” (V. ii. 44-45) are also mentioned. This jargon is mostly employed by Face and Subtle who are gambling gamesters and deceivers. But the language is also employed in dialogue exchanges with Dapper who implores Subtle to use his alchemical art to conjure spirits which will ensure his victory at gambling games.

Contemporary idiom and coinage of words for prostitutes and prostitution are also employed in Jonson’s *The Alchemist*. “Punketee” (II. i. 42) is a comic diminutive of “punk” meaning ‘whore’. The Chamber’s Dictionary¹³ acknowledges the usage of

“punk” even in modern times but usually as an adjective. Jonson uses it in various forms such as, “livery punk” (I. ii. 2) ‘a prostitute in regular service’, “punk device” (I. i. 143) which is a variation of ‘point device’ meaning ‘meticulous dress’ but connotatively associated with a whore, and “traveled punk master” (IV. i. 303) meaning ‘an experienced teacher or practiser of prostitution’. Jonson also uses a wide variety of terms for prostitute such as, “cock-a-trice” (V. i. 127), “bona roba” (II. i. 698), “guinea bird” (IV. i. 38) and “puss” (V. i. 131). Even the word, “smock-rampant” (V. ii. 126) means prostitute and is coined from an analogy with a lion rampant standing on its hind legs in mating. There are references to “quainter traffickers” (II. i. 517) meaning dealers in delicate woman’s flesh and “court town Stallions” (II. i. 152) as seducers of women in the court and city. Realistic references are made to “pict hatch” (I. ii. 62), a hostelry and brothel at Clerkenwell frequented by prostitutes, “woolsack”, “Dagger”, “Heaven and Hell” (I. i. 191) as taverns in London and even brothel keepers with nicknames such as “Madame Caeserean”, “Mistress Amo” (V. ii. 141-2) or Madame Augusta (II. i. 17), are mentioned.

The culinary language of delicacies and favourite dishes can also be traced in *The Alchemist*. There is a mention of delicacies such as “carp’s tongues, dormine and camels heels” (IV. ii. 179-81), “shads” (IV. ii. 34), a type of mackerel, “battered shrimps” (III. ii. 318) which were also considered aphrodisiacs, (III. i. 318), “myrobolane” (IV. i. 218), and “calvered salmon” (II. i. 184) which was fit cut into slices while still alive to preserve its freshness. But names of local favourites also abound such as, “frumenty” (IV. ii. 41), a type of dish made from wheat boiled in milk and flavoured with saffron and spice, “sodden ale” (II. ii. 366), a type of boiled beer and “collar of brawn” (IV. i. 273) which was meat from the pigs neck. Medicinal drinks such as “Aurum potable” and “Spirit of Sol” (III. i. 179-80) refer to drinkable gold, but also used as idiom to indicate that magistrates can be bribed. Apicus a famous epicure in the Tiberius reign and composer of a book of recipes is also mentioned (II. i. 179).

The Alchemist abounds in Biblical language such as when Ananias says to Lovewit, “Worse than the grasshoppers or the lice of Egypt” (V. ii. 15) referring to the two plagues inflicted by Moses on the Egyptians to persuade Ramses to allow him to lead the Ishmaelites out of Egypt. Ananias in comparing the cheaters Face and Subtle to the pests, finds them greater, “Synod” (IV. iv) as an assembly of church, and “Aladdon” (V. iii. 30) as the angel of the bottomless pit is also mentioned. We know that Jonson was a confessed Catholic for 10 to 11 years and could never have felt any affection for the ‘Saints of the Reformation’. His attitude to Puritanism was like his attitude to alchemy, but perhaps he treats the puritans with deeper contempt. The philosopher’s stone was perhaps a more effective way of getting that advantage which the Puritans sought through long winded speeches and exercises. Ananias introduces himself as, “faithful Brother” (II. v. 7) and Subtle affects to understand by this a devotee to alchemy – thus the two professions assume parallel proportions. “Ha hum” (III. ii. 55) is the exclamatory language of Puritan preachers and so also makes a reference to the Year of the Last Patience of the Saints, which refers to a religious conviction of the Anabaptist sect in Christ’s return to rule earth for 1000 years. Another proof of how Jonson equates Alchemy and Puritanism as deceptive is in the mention of personages belonging to both Alchemy and Puritanism, particularly to the Anabaptist fanatical sects.

The language of *The Alchemist* consists of numerous proper nouns naming Alchemists such as: Simon Read in London 1907 (I. i. 216-7) charged with invoking spirits, a “lullianist” (II. i. 586) or a follower of Raymond Lully, a Spanish missionary alchemist of the 15th century. Edward Kelly (IV. i. 89-91), and Dr. John Dee, a famous English alchemist, astronomer, geometrician, magician and necromantic who had just died at the time of Jonson writing the play. These references are only paralleled by a record of Puritan Anabaptists. These Anabaptists were a fanatical Protestant sect lead by Thomas Munzer. They were against infant baptism and believed in adult baptismal practice. They negated all moral laws, and were essentially Puritans. *The Alchemist’s* language is filled with Anabaptist’s personages such as: Henry Nicholas who founded

the Anabaptist sect of 'The family of Love', John of Leyden, whose real name was Jan Bochelsson, leader of a favourite Anabaptist group, Bernt Knipperdollink, leader of the extreme sect of Anabaptists in Munroer and Hugh Broughton a divine Hebrew scholar. Jonson actually borrows from Broughton's word 'A concert of Scripture' 1590 (IV. v. 12-23), and Dol's wild harangue on ways of achieving linguistic understanding is a parody of the Pentecostal miracle when apostles began to speak in other tongues the Spirit gave them. There are also references to Physicians such as Galen (130-210 A.D.) and Paracelsus (1490-1541).

Jonson also imitates very closely Juvenal, Terence, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, Horace and Aristotle at many points in the play. Vulgar Attic and Roman expressions like, "I fart at thee" (Subtle to Face I. i. 2) are reminiscent of the Greek and Roman comic playwrights Aristophanes and Plautus.

The language of Jonson's *The Alchemist* is also filled with literary names of fictional romantic heroes and heroines. These are: Claridiana (I. i. 175), the heroine of Chivalric romance 'The Mirror of Knight hood', Bradamante (I. ii. 435), the Virgin Knight of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, Bayard – the horse in the same work, Amadis de Gaul (IV. v. 94), hero of the Spanish prose romance, Hieronimo (IV. iv. 125) hero of the Spanish Tragedy by Kyd and even Cadmus, (II. i 80) the greek mythological hero who sewed dragon's teeth. The german hero Till Eulenspiegel of the 16th century German anecdotal collection is also mentioned. This indicates Jonson's wide reading and cross reference to romantic biblical and Greek or Roman works and characters which enrich the language of *The Alchemist*.

There could be two possible reasons for the complexity and multiplicity of language types and technicality in Jonson's *The Alchemist*. First of all since the play focuses on the process of alchemy Jonson could be using the complexity in an attempt to reduce it to an elemental compound unity. This may be substantiated by Anne Barton who identified Jonson's use of alchemy to be similar to Donne's use, "as a way of expressing

central impulses in poetry: paradox of a union of contraries and the reduction of complexity to unity, the many to one".¹⁵ Secondly, the language of alchemy is dense and complex and one reason for this may be to conceal the secret of this art (or science) from common man. But at the same time the complexity also reflects the confusion within the science which is often reduced to nonsense.

Many critics comment on Jonson's presentation of a vivid impression of Jacobean life. J.B. Bramborough states, "An image of the times is exactly what Jonson provides."¹⁶ Brian Gibbons opines that the dramatist presents: "Comic analogy of city life, so busy with ephemeral noise and activity, where speculations based on credit are liable to burst and where robes and furred gowns, solemn officials and professional men, strive to dignify the pursuit of gold".¹⁷

Even L.C. Knights acknowledges that Jonson has identified

... an individual tone and accent...defined in terms of the union of opposites. The manner is remarkably individual yet... with a strong sense of tradition... A marked classical bent combined with an Englishness that can digest erudition. A mode of expression that is grave, weighty and sententious, moves easily into high spirited buoyancy. The voice of the insistent moralist is also that of a successful popular entertainer.¹⁹

However a true appreciation of Jonson's gift of language and expertise is through the technicalities of grammar, lexicality and register explored in the paper so far as a comprehensive whole which shows an expert synthesis of the language of high fashion with that of abusive invective, and colloquial jargon. Names of fashionable items are valuable insights into city life. There are "lily pots" for lilies, "conserves of roses" to mean jam, "court fucus" (I. i. 447) a type of lady cosmetic, "taffeta sarsner" which is a type of fine silk (II. i. 193) and even "pomander bracelets" (I. i. 505). Jonson also tells us about "goose turdbands" (IV. ii. 13) which were

yellowish green callars, and “titillation” (IV. ii. 13) a Spanish way of perfuming gloves which were very fashionable.

In the same play however, we also have interesting abuses coined from animate or inanimate objects often from animal sources. Thus “trencher – rascal” (I. i. 103) is an abusive word coined from a person who bears a trencher or a dish waiting man. “Dog bolt” (I. ii. 21) means worthless person and is derived from a blunt headed arrow, “Dog leach” (I. i. 103) and “wild fowl” (VI. i. 72) are used for dupes and idiots. Even “qoudling” (II. i. 189) is a derogatory term meaning unripe apple which Face uses for Dapper. Face insults Subtle with “pinch horn’d nose” (I. i. 28-30) perhaps because Subtle is wearing a spectacles or has a nose resembling a shoe horn, or even on account of him being thin and starved. Thus G. Unwin judiciously observes that, “no one who knows the records of the time will charge Ben Jonson with wild exaggeration. He tends rather to err in the direction of pedant realism”.

A semantic analysis of Jonson’s language in *The Alchemist* increases the appreciation of his ingenuity in linguistic use. Speech is used as action. This is a mode of Speech Acts which are appropriately employed by Face and Subtle to dupe people through alchemical processes. It is through the semantic analysis that we realize that the alchemy is not only a science but an art – the art of deception. In semantics a performative utterance is one that actually describes the act that it performs simultaneously¹⁹ such as when Subtle answers Kastril by, “I warrant you” ((V ii 97). But such performatives are rare because Subtle and Face rarely do anything, they only rely on Speech to have an effect of action in the imagination of the receiver.

Illocutionary acts are carried out by speakers making an utterance in terms of a conventional system of social interaction such as thanking, complaining etc.²¹ may formalities are observed in *The Alchemist* to maintain superficialities such as Subtle’s greeting to Surly, “much good joy and health to you sir” (IV. ii. 338) or when Dapper apologizes to Face, “I am very sorry captain” (I. i. 202) or says, “I thank his worship” (I. i. 338) which are customary social

interactions. Constatative utterances are ones which make assertion but are not performative²². Such as when Mammon says, "I'll show you a book..." (III. i. 80) but does not do so to Surly.

Most interesting are the use of perlocutionary speech acts carried out by a speaker making an utterance in the act of causing a certain effect on the hearer causing change²³. Thus Subtle tries to dupe Dragger by saying, "This is a ship now, coming from Ormus / that shall yield him such a commodity/ of drugs"(I. i. 431) or Mammon saying, "Come on, Sir, now you set your foot on shore / In Nouo Orbe: here's the rich Peru" (II i. 2-3). He also intends to conduct the, "Founding of colleges and grammar schools / marrying young virgins, building hospitals / And how and than a church" (III. i. 260-4) in order to urge Subtle to complete his search for the philosopher's stone.

N.H. Blake's views regarding syntactical changes during the period between 1400 to 1660 indicate a necessity to shift to Stylistic analysis of artistic works. He says:

The Syntax in this period sees a continued movement towards an analytic language which increasingly restricts choice in placement of individual parts of a sentence. Equally the influence of Latin grammar encourages more logic in the constitution of a sentence and more explicitness in linking together its constituent elements...At the same time the growth in literature which seeks to reflect the spoken language means an increase in the number of sentences which are in completely formed. The insistence on rhetoric and sound effects in language also leads to these taking prominence over the logic of grammar. Thus the

effects of standardization and grammar are undermined by the appearance of language that is highly decorative or extremely colloquial, depending upon the stylistic effect a writer is trying to achieve.²⁴

A Stylistic investigation into *The Alchemist* must begin from an analysis of Jonson's views on language and speech voiced in *Discoveries*. He describes speech as "an instrument of society"²⁵ thus "corruptions of language as evidence of an untuning of the individuals mind, and of a wider disturbance in society as a whole"²⁶. Thus language for Jonson becomes in fact an index of moral and intellectual health. L.C. Knights record the importance of economic and social conditions during Jonson's age which contributed to style and imagery. He records a revival of antiquity, the development of industrialization, rise of capitalist enterprise and economic individualism and the development of realism in politics, thought and action. Accumulation of wealth resulted in great which spread through all layers of the social strata L.C. Knights writes:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the influx of American gold and silver into Europe in hastening the disintegration of the medieval economic order. From the early years of the sixteenth century Spain received a steady supply of gold from her American conquest: her colonial policy was one of immediate and whole-sale exploitation.²⁷

The alchemical process of turning base metal to gold is truly the central theme of *The Alchemist*. But Jonson's style of using language satirizes the acquisitive attitude and deceptive manipulation of alchemists using the science as a metaphor for corruption, greed, puritanical fanaticism and even the imagination.

A stylistic analysis reveals an apparent quarrel at every level of exchange in the exposition ranging from the economic and social to speech itself. We see that the exposition through abuse and argumentation serves to inform spectators of Subtle and Face's crimes, misdemeanors, aspirations and folly. The argumentation becomes a slanging match where the unpoetic is made rhythmic as in:

Subtle	:	Cheat
Face	:	Bawd
Subtle	:	Cowherd
Face	:	Conjurer
Subtle	:	Cutpurse
Face	:	Witch
Dol	:	O me!

(I. i. 102-109)

Bradborough states that he can trace such an exchange to the 'Quick Change Artistry' of the "Italian comic debates... or contrast it to the fly tings' of medieval poetry...[or] the exchange of Westminster school yard".²⁸ However if we look closely a parallel is also drawn in this opening speech between the various connotations of an alchemist as an astrologer, palmist, necromancer and fraud, and common roguery. Thus satirical epithets abound in Jonson's *The Alchemist* such as, "livery-three-pound-thrum" (I. i. 16) and "punk-device" (V. i. 143). The language and style helps to define these Theophrastus-like characters. In *The Alchemist* we can identify a wide range of voices, styles, accents, rival styles of speech, the patterns of rhyming mother wits in puppetry as well as the tradesman's cries. The language juxtaposes ballads, curses, low cockney dialect, Irish, Scot, and Welsh accents as well as educated witty discourse with solipsistic devices. Selected examples should suffice to illustrate Jonson's ingenuity and combination of skills in this regard. We have: "No cheating Clim o'the Cloughs (II. ii. 33) which is indicative of Irish ballad traditions, "Two o'the fools " and "These two o'the gallants" (V. i. 120-122) are Scottish constructions, curses such as "rogue" (I. i. 5), "notorious such as in

Subtle threatening Face with whelp” (I. i. 11) are drawn from a variety of sources. Solipsis your Scarab I’ll thunder you in pieces / I will teach you / thou to behave to tempt a Fury again / that carries tempest in his hand and voice” (I. i. 59-63). Harry Levin has remarked that:

His poetic style is like social intercourse, longer speeches strike syncopation between shifting colloquial rhythms and sustained stresses of blank verse²⁹

Thus Jonson shows us the comic potentialities of everyday speech such as when Ananias says, “They are profane / lewd, superstitious, idolaters / thou lookest like Anti-Christ in that lewd hat” (IV. iv. 45). Each character betrays his folly through his style of speaking. Jonson shows Faces affinity with a cheeky cockney in order to underestimate his tireless professional alertness for a chance of profit. Drugger and Mammon betray their folly through their comically inappropriate juxtapositions, jumbling up the mythical with the domestic and magical with the banal. Drugger says, “And I would know, by art sir of your worship / which way I should make my way by necromancie / And where my shelves. And which should be for boxes” (I. iii. 10-12) talking about establishing his tobacco shop. Surly’s didacticism is evident from, “Rather then I’ll be braid sir, I’ll believe / that Alchemie is a kind of petty game / somewhat like a tricks o’the cards to cheat a man” (II. ii. 179-81). Surly’s ridicule of Face and Subtle is unsparing and his threat of “a clean whip” recalls the sternness of comic satire correction.

In an important central scene in *The Alchemist* Drugger appears and is told that Surly intends to steal the widow. There is a roaring climax of noise and struggle with all characters on the stage – all tricksters, who other than their disguises and dissembling have another common characteristic, which is that they all speak in a style which gives away their deception. Thus the tricksters successfully combine three separate schemes of deception (on Drugger – I iii and II vi, on Ananias_II. v, III. i, III. ii, and on

Kastril – III. iv, IV. ii). The climax of the ridicule is directed towards them while they display extreme humours:

Surly: Why this is madness, sir,
not valour in you: I must laugh at
this.
Kastril: It is my humour: you are a
pimp,
and a trig,
And an Amadis deGaul on a Don
Quixote.
Drugger: Or a Knight o'the curious
coxcomb.
Do you see?
Ananias: Peace to the household.
Kastril: I'll keep peace for no man.
Ananias: Casting of dollars is
concluded lawful.

(IV iv.. 92-96)

Thus the righteous but wild protests of Kastril and Ananias swamp the more reasonable analysis of Surly making their claims appear ridiculous.

It is interesting how Subtle changes his style of conversation according to the man he wants to dupe adapting his language accordingly. To Face he speaks abusively as in, "Thou vermin, have I ta'es thee out of dung" (I. i. 65). To Dol he speaks romantically, "Royal Dol / Spoken like Claridiana and thyself" (I. i. 175). To Drugger who is a tobacconist, Subtle speaks with great familiarity of chemicals "I know you have arsenic, / vitriol, saltastar, argaile, alkali Cinoper..."(I. i. 449-451). To Mammon who is their prime investor Subtle takes care to affect a high landed tone, "But these two / make the rest ductile, malleable, extensive / And even gold they are; for we do find / seeds of them by our fire, and gold in them" (II. i. 376-380). When Ananias introduces himself, Subtle affects a religiously biblical styles, "out, the varlet / that cozen'd the apostles! Hence away! Flee, mischief; had your holy

consistory no name to send me of another sound / than wicked Ananias?" (II. i. 651-5). Thus it seems that the 'art' of alchemy lies in the techniques of adapting language to gull others. Even Face, the apprentice shows adeptness at this strategy and subverts the master – servant relationship in the exchange:

Subtle: What's cohobation?

Face: Tis the pouring on
your aquaregis.....

Subtle: What's the proper passion of metals?

Face: Malleation.

(II. i. 605-8)

Thus the stylistic analysis shows us that there is no transformation of metals but in fact of human beings on account of a materialistic society. Each character aspires to be someone he is not and Subtle and Face, through the linguistic exploitation of their desires, allow them perhaps to see a glimpse of their idealized situations. Dapper the clerk wants to escape his daily routine and turn gambler. Face and Subtle promise him a conversation with a fairy and robbery of a bank. Abel Drugger is a Tobacconist or druggist and wants the lifestyle of the rich and famous, so the two rascals promise him a marriage to Dame Pliant. Ananias and Tribulation work for the fanatical Anabaptists and are made to imagine themselves equipped with spiritual power. The word "casting" of money is used by Jonson not in the sense of coining but in the sense of "holy", for the two Puritans. Kastril is a country gentle man and wants to become a fashionable landowner. Face and Subtle promise him a luxurious lifestyle. Interestingly all these characters lack linguistic vigor – so in supplying it to them Face and Subtle provide them with temporary illusions. It is only Sir Epicure Mammon who manages through his own language to create the illusion of wealth as in, "No more shall thirst of satin, or of covetous hunger / of velvet entrails, for a rude spun clock... The sons of Sword and Hazard fall before / The golden calf, and on their knees, whole nights/ Commit idolatry" (II i. 15-18). Thus language is so patent that Mammon converts a whore (ie. Dol) into a princess and sees in her an

Austrian lip and a medicean forehead. He also however sees an illusion, “that sparkles as divinitie, beyond an earthly beauty.” (III. ii. 71). The rescue of Pliant by Surly is related in the manner of chivalry and the pathos of romance, “You are a widow rich,; and I am a bachelor / worth nought your fortunes may make me a man / As mine ha’ preserved you a woman” (IV. vi. 11-15), Anne Barton says:

... alchemy makes use of the most revolting ingredients – pisse, and egge shells,... / Hair o’the head, burnt clouts, chalk... bones, scaling of iron, Glasse’ (II. Iii. 194-96) – in order to produce gold, so Jonson in this play has employed the most ... meticulously realistic material... and extracted... the gold of imagination. Language has not only turned a whore temporarily into the fairy Queen, a household drudge into an officer, a beggar into a pious and frugal philosopher... it has contracted a whole world... within the walls of a stripped and deserted house.³⁰

Thus the potency of language creates mere illusions, and imagination is subverted.

Interestingly it seems that Jonson expands the intrigue in *The Alchemist* on the basis of contraries in speech. Dapper and Drugger, the simpletons and fools are allocated short speeches. Sir Epicure Mammon, Tribulation and Ananias, representing the vices express, themselves in long speeches, a mutuality being established between lust and Puritanism. The Rhythm of language is given special attention by Jonson in *The Alchemist*. In fact it appears as if rhythmic arrangements take procedure over actual sounds. Harry Levin notes that Face’s praise of the Spaniards is rendered in a string of four foot clauses so that the interacted phrase “leaps across the page and creeps back again”³¹. Similarly Paul Goodman draws attention to the reduction of character and plot to sound through language manipulation. “A simple smooth rhythm that does not

call attention to itself makes speech serious; iambic rhythm elevates colloquial speech”³². However the strategy Jonson uses is to handle the iambs in such a way as to bring the musical down to colloquial speech giving it a comic rhythm. For eg. The rhapsodic of Sir Mammon as, “I will have all my beds blown up, not stuff...” (II. ii. 145) or Tribulation’s, “The children of perdition are of times / made instruments” (III. i. 15) are compact and have a marching rhythmic effect which is reminiscent of the heroic.

Una Ellis Fermor believes that in *The Alchemist*. “The blank verse... hardly ever arrests by its mellifluousness... we take for granted the fine clear medium of speech.”³³ But this can be refuted on the basis of the sheer variety of Puritan canting, Dol’s ravings, the pseudo language of scripture and even the special vocabulary of the duello. In fact when Ananias confronts Subtle, two different special languages are spoken and neither speaker really understands the other:

Subtle: ... Who are you?

Ananias: A faithful brother if, please you

Subtle: A lullianist? A Ripley...

Ananian: I understand no heathen language truly

Subtle: Heathen! You Knipper-doling!

Ananias: Heathen Greek, I take it.

(II. i. 586-95)

The masque like conventions in language such as songs, litanies and orations for example in the interview of Dapper and the Queen of Faeries also add to the variety of rhythm. Nonsensical fragments such as “Ti ti do it, ti ti do ti da” also create rhythmic variation.

Edward Partridge observes that speech is often reduced to sex in *The Alchemist*³⁴. In fact sex actually becomes a substitute for language and vice versa. Epicure Mammon says, ‘Heighten thyselfe, talke to her all in gold / she shall feele gold taste gold, heare gold, sleep gold, / nay we will concumbere gold’ (IV. i. 25-5). In fact there are a lot of sexual puns in the play as well, for example, “in tail” (II. i. 753) which means to inherit’ but a tail also refers to the end of a woman’s skirt, or “mother tongue” (III. ii. 69-

72) used obscenely for sex whereas it also refers to one's first language. However not all puns are sexual. There is the mention of the "crewel garter" (I. i. 170) referring to a garter made of yarn but 'cruel' would imply the rope used for hanging. "His most worsted worship" (I. i. 173) has a pun on the word 'worsted' which alternately could mean honoured or defeated.

Naming is another device which Jonson uses in *The Alchemist*. The name Subtle has connotations of a mixed response between the positive and negative. It is also a reference to the serpent in Genesis. Kastril is a small angry falcon. It is usually a technical name for a hawk who is not trained like large ones for aristocratic sport as it damages the hunt like vermin. It may also imply 'coistrel' a term used for a trouble maker of the law, and derived from Kestrel, a wind hover bird which cannot fly too high. Dol is a name used for a whore also in Jonson *Epicoene* as "Dol Tearsheet" (II. V. 129-30)³⁵. Dol is addressed by numerous names throughout *The Alchemist* which indicates her adeptness at playing enticing roles and impersonation. She is called "Dol Common", "Dol Singular", "mistress Dorothy", "dainty dolkin", "madam Suppository", "Sweet Honorable lady", "bird o'the night and Queen". Abel Drugger's name is also well chosen because "Abel" has biblical connotations of innocence and vulnerability in being Cain's brother who was murdered. "Drugger" indicates that he is a druggist and tobacconist by profession thus he is the professional whom Subtle like Cain seeks to destroy in *The Alchemist*. Ananias is the name of one of Christ's Apostles, and Tribulation Wholesome also has Puritanical association. These two characters are thus aptly named as they are Puritan Anabaptists. Surly's name indicates that he is an honest man but sadly out of place amongst all the rogues and hypocrites.

Jonson's language in *The Alchemist* also shows his preoccupation with maintaining a reference to Time. Dapper who is Subtle's first visitor is late and ordered to return "at one o'clock" (II. i. 64). Mammon's visit is associated with the "Sunnes rising" (II. iii. 5-6). Face makes an appointment with Surly at, "Some half houre..." and invites Mammon to return "within two houres" (II. i. 292) to

interview with Dol. Lovewit returns home, “deep i the afternoon” (V. ii. 30) and Subtle intended to get away with Dol and the stolen goods “soore at night” (V. iv. 74). There are also many oxymorons used by Jonson in his play indicating the working of contradictory forces, the two faced nature of interactions and characters, as well as the discrepancy between superficial communication and real meaning. Examples are “Against the menstruous cloth and rag of Rome” (III. i. 33) or “A lord is a leper” (III. i. 38), “stark pimp” which Face titles himself (III. ii. 290) or “kind wretch” (V. i. 33).

Speech and language style in the play also define characters very aptly. Herford and Simpson state:

Subtle’s philosophy, his phrases and his arguments are not, in any intimate sense his own; they are not like Volpone tinged with the humours of the individual mind and temper. They are merely the common property of his bogus order, stock weapons, and he handles according to the rules of a conventional sword craft, trade practices of the alchemical quack.³⁶

A comprehensive discussion of Jonson’s language and the various uses to which he puts it, would be incomplete without an analysis of some of the recurrent images and symbols in *The Alchemist*. There are verbal images of insubstantiality as in the “hollow bouncing balls” (IV. v. 98-9) to which Face and Subtle compare themselves. “Puckfist” are also puffballs to which Face compares Subtle (I. ii. 63). In addition to these there are images of dispersal as in Mammons idea to have mirrors cut into angles, “to disperse / And multiply figures”, and of having perfume dispersed “vapor’d bout the roome / To loose overselves in (II. ii. 46-47). Dispersal images are complemented by images of wind, “plume”, “puff”, “mist”, vapor”, “smoke” and “fume” which supplement the images of insubstantiality and establish connections.

Language as a weapon is explored through terms of dueling such as, "Come will you quarrel. I will feize you sirrah / why you not Puckle to your boles" (V. i. 31-2). Mammon warns Surly that he will "pound him to dust".

There are also images of language as a destructive force as when Lovewit knocks and asks to be let into his own house, Face observes ironically to Subtle, "Harke you thunder", (V. 137).

Sensuous images of taste, touch and smell also enrich the text of *The Alchemist*. Mammon says:

... we will eat our mullets,
Sous'd in high-country wines, sup peasant's
eggs.
And have our cockles boil'd in silver shells,
Our shrimps to swim again, ...
In a rare butter made of dolphin's milk.
Whose cream does look like opals.

(IV. i. 155-160)

Subtle talks of, "he hath vinegared his senses" (III. ii. 399) and Mammon speaks of "And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber" (II. i. 182), "oiled mushrooms... for sauce" (II. i. 188-90)

Mammon also uses imagery of touch and smell. He says, "My shirts / ... soft and light / As cobwebs... My gloves of fishes and bird's skins, perfum'd / with gums of paradise..." (II. i. 192-7). Face mentions, "A felt rug and a thin thready cloak" (I. i. 34). Subtle calls Dol, "My soft and buxom widow" (IV. i. 211).

Sexual images are also evoked frequently as when Face, talking to Subtle about the widow, says, "It is but one man more?... and beside, there is no maid enneed to be fear'd or lost" (IV. i. 312), or Face and Subtle talking:

Subtle: you shall be emptied son; pumped and drawn
/ Dry as they say.

Face: Milked, in troth, sweet Don.

(IV. i. 290-3)

and Subtle says to Surly:

You shall be soak'd, and strok'd, and tubb'd and
rubb'd

And scrubb'd, and fubb'd, dear Don before you go.

... Be curried, clan'd and flaw'd and tawl'd indeed.

(IV. ii. 345-348)

Images of gold are frequent too, "As all the gold he hop'd for were in his blood" (Face IV. iii. 106), "will you so much gold in a bolt's head" (IV iv. 42), to make gold there for th'state," (Subtle IV. iv. 137), "golden flagons and greek wedges" (Surly, V. i. 100), "Tincture of pearl and coral, gold and amber", (Mammon IV. i. 136), "Feel gold, taste gold, hear gold, sleep gold" (Mammon IV. i. 26), Subtle says, "... so much gold as brass" (IV. ii. 124) earlier. However although we have promises of gold as wealth, as sexual gratification and as satiation, yet nowhere in the play do we see or hear of real gold being made.

Elaborate images of the biological, metallurgical and chemical are also combined linguistically by Jonson in *The Alchemist*. We are told about:

Your stone, your medicine, and your chryososperm
Your sal, your sulphur and your mercury
Your oil of height, your tree of life, your blood
Your merchesite, your tutie, your magnesia
Your toad, your crow, your dragon and your
panthers
Your sun, your moon, your firmament, your adrop

(II. i. 394-9)

This passage is an illustration of languages and the technical terms of astrology, biology, chemistry, metallurgy, mineralogy and even astronomy all combined into an impossibility – alchemy. This combination also hints at the obscure origins of the alchemical science. It was an invention attributed to the Egyptian God Thoth or Hermes (hermetical art) and there may be a connection with metallurgy of ancient Egypt, an idea similarly associated with the ancient Chinese. Greek manuscripts of the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. later taken up by the Arabs then passed onto natural philosophers or scientists of western Europe such as Albert Magnus and Robert Bacon³⁷. Although the word “alchemy” is of Arabic coinage, in the Renaissance interest in the subject was renewed and alchemical thought was given a new direction by a German philosopher Paracelsus (whom Jonson also mentions in his play) who made a strong connection of it with medicine. However Jonson's age also saw many people, gulled by fake alchemists and pseudo scientists and the age of rising capitalism was right to create greed in the common man. This is what Jonson satirizes through the complexity and subtlety of his language in *The Alchemist*.

Thus many images used become symbols during the course of the play. “Gold” represents illusion, greed or even lust. References to the plague in, “Plague, piles and pox”, (IV. iv. 48) and “pox on't” (V. ii. 59) become symbols of corruption both moral and social in the English society. The description of rich interiors, or crowded streets in Flemish painter tradition with sharp portraiture and lavish ornamentation become symbols of superficiality. Even images of creatures such as “unclean birds” (V. i. 140) “dog to dance” (V. i. 26), ‘baboons’ (V. i. 15 and IV. ii. 345), “monsters” (IV. i. 296), “the greek lion of all” (IV. i. 292), abound. They become symbols of a beastly society governed by principles of ‘survival of the fittest’ as in capitalist trade. These creatures also indicate a strata of social hierarchy as the hunted and the hunter with the gamblers being the scavengers.

The philosopher's stone, which according to alchemy has the power to transmute, becomes a symbol of sterility, and even absurdity. At the heart of greed Mammon expects to transform his world with the

dead, dull shape into a fairy land of infinite riches which is absurd. The laboratory of Subtle and Face at the centre of the play becomes a kind of dream factory and a centre for creating illusion instead of gold.

Alchemy in its various dimensions as science, the art of deception and illusion, is in fact also reduced to a business by Jonson. Face, at the end of the play warns Dol and Subtle to make a run for it and announces the end of their partnership on Lovewits return in terms of a legal metaphor:

“Wherefore, good partners,
Both he and she be satisfied: for here
Determines the indenture tripartite
Twixt Subtle, Dol and Face.

(V. ii. 129-131)

alludes to, “this seat of falsehood” and Face decides that, “with whom I traded” (V iii 162) have left and therefore he too will have to switch trades, now as he has switched masters from Subtle to Lovewit. Thus the process of Alchemy also becomes a transmutation of relationships in an opportunist and materialist Jacobean London Society.

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