“You ha’ ’fresned my rememory well”: Memory in Jonson’s Late Plays

Peter Happé

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/1928>
DOI: 10.4000/shakespeare.1928
ISSN: 2271-6424

Publisher

Société Française Shakespeare

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 April 2013
Number of pages: 127-148
ISBN: 2-9521475-9-0

Electronic reference

Peter Happé, « “You ha’ ’fresned my rememory well”: Memory in Jonson’s Late Plays », *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* [Online], 30 | 2013, Online since 03 April 2013, connection on 24 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/1928> ; DOI : 10.4000/shakespeare.1928

Shakespeare et la mémoire

actes du Congrès
organisé par la
SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE SHAKESPEARE
les 22, 23 et 24 mars 2012

textes réunis par
Christophe HAUSERMANN

sous la direction de
Dominique GOY-BLANQUET

COUVERTURE
d'après l'affiche de Claire Colombet

conception graphique et logo
Pierre Kapitaniak

mise en page et corrections
Christophe Hausermann

© 2012 Société Française Shakespeare
Institut du Monde Anglophone
Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle
5 rue de l'École de Médecine
75006 Paris
www.societefrancaishakespeare.org

Tous droits de traduction, de reproduction et d'adaptation
réservés pour tous les pays

“YOU HA’ ’FRESHED MY REMEMORY WELL”: MEMORY IN JONSON’S LATE PLAYS

Peter Happé

After 1625 there were marked changes in Jonson's comedic technique. He began to look back upon his earlier work and to invent new ways of writing comedy. He also thought about memory and noted ideas about it in Discoveries, his collection of ideas. The theory of memory which emerges is based upon classical concepts and it is clear that Jonson wished to sustain these. But his life circumstances were deteriorating and he was concerned about the failure of memory which he linked to the question of fame as a writer. This account looks at the way memory was incorporated in the late plays, bringing out the contrast between memory and oblivion. As he worked out new comic techniques, he also reflected upon the work of earlier playwrights and in doing so he illuminated the significant ancient idea that memory is an indispensable part of creative writing for the stage.

Après 1625, Jonson a changé de façon significative le style de ses comédies. Il a commencé par relire ses pièces antérieures pour inventer de nouvelles techniques d'écriture. Il s'est intéressé à la mémoire et a noté quelques idées à ce propos dans le recueil intitulé *Discoveries*. La théorie de la mémoire qui en découle est fondée sur des concepts classiques que Jonson entendait perpétuer. Mais sa santé et sa situation financière se détérioraient et il redoutait la perte de mémoire, qui selon lui était intimement liée à sa postérité en tant qu'auteur. Cet article s'intéresse à la façon dont est traitée la mémoire dans ses dernières pièces, en mettant en évidence le contraste existant entre mémoire et oubli. Alors qu'il travaillait sur de nouveaux ressorts comiques, il s'inspirait également des œuvres de dramaturges plus anciens et faisait ressurgir ainsi l'idée que la mémoire est indispensable dans le processus d'écriture dramatique.

I

The quotation in the title of words spoken by Rasi Clench, a farrier in *A Tale of a Tub*, points to two things I have noticed in the current discussion of memory: the importance of keeping memory fresh and the danger that its fallibility will obscure what it should rather reveal or preserve. Thematically, there is a conflict between the fear of oblivion and the hope for immortality. Clench's words are oddly muddled and his expression of a dichotomy in comic terms is a useful pointer to Jonson's proceedings. In addressing these functions of memory I should like to concentrate upon his four last completed plays: *The Staple of News* (1625), *The New Inn* (1631), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632) and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633). These were written in a time of growing difficulty for him. His loss of status at court with the accession of Charles I in 1625 interacted with his own physical decline, both in terms of age as well as the onset physical disability which led to his being confined to his own room in Westminster for most of the time. He also became much poorer. In these circumstances

of increasing isolation it is not surprising that we can find evidence about his use of memory in a variety of ways. He had always been a critic of his times through the exercise of satire and to an extent he continued this from his now more restricted vantage point. Looking back upon his own past, particularly his successes at court and on the public stage must have been a persistent interest. He continued also to sustain his view of the moral responsibility of the poet whom he conceived to be a rare creature with a distinctly moral function and a unique role to play as the counsellor of kings.¹ Perhaps his own misfortunes intensified his uneasiness about the times, but there is discernible a distinct thread of optimism and hope for better things. It may well be that this hope was the guiding principle at the endings of the later plays which often seek reconciliation rather than punitive judgement. In some of them he also shows an interest in the emotional lives of his characters, particularly in *The New Inn* and *The Sad Shepherd* (unfinished). Moreover his interest in writing poetry is much in evidence in these years and among the many poems he composed there are a considerable number which are elegiac, looking back and celebrating in various ways the lives of those who had died. Notable examples are "To the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir Henry Morison" (*Underwood* 70) and the "Elegy: On the Lady Jane Paulet, Marchioness of Winchester" (*Underwood* 83). In these two and in many others there is the revelation of imitable models in the person addressed. Thus memory goes back but it is also a stimulus to look forward to the future.

The traditions of the art of memory in classical and medieval culture especially as revealed by Frances Yates, Mary Carruthers and Janet Coleman have brought attention to a number of features of memory which resonate in Jonson's later plays. They have linked memory with learning and brought special emphasis upon the ways in which memory could be made to enhance the art of rhetoric.² The inheritance from Plato and Aristotle led in the first century B.C. to the anonymous *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, which became the most popular

¹ *Solus rex aut poeta non quotannis nascitur* (Only a king, or a poet is not born every year) *Discoveries* 1728-9. Jonson references are to *The Complete Works of Ben Jonson*, edited by David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, Cambridge, C.U.P., 2012.

² Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, London, Routledge, 1966; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1990; Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1992.

treatise on rhetoric in the Middle Ages. This identified memory as one of the five parts of rhetoric and separated the natural memory engrafted in our minds from the artificial memory which could be generated by training.³ Yates drew attention to Giordano Bruno who brought to England in 1583 the idea of the stimulus of the imagination by the memory.⁴ Even in ancient mythology the link between memory and the arts was signified by the story that Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, was impregnated by Zeus on Mount Helicon and gave birth to the nine Muses, Clio (history) being one.⁵ One of the assumptions that could be derived from this event is that memory is the mother of invention, an essential for the fruitful exercise of the imagination. Another was the opposition of History and Oblivion as Jonson set up, together with an allegorical engraving, on the title page of Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614):

From Death and dark Oblivion (near the same)
The mistress of man's life, grave History,
Raising the world to good or evil Fame,
Doth vindicate it to eternity.⁶

The interest in the past was enhanced as Jonson had long held the idea that the past embodied a perfection which the present age could not match and he was interested in using memory to effect a restoration.⁷ Complementary to this, Jonson also saw a need for creating a model for the future and in this connection he moved into the question of forgetting and how to deal with it, as my title quotation may suggest. Andrew Hiscock has noted, in dealing with the future, that memory can offer a means of transcendence leaving the present aside.⁸ There is also the possibility that Jonson's contemporaries, including Shakespeare, had created a matrix of historical ideas partly

³ Carruthers, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁴ Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

⁵ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, London, Verso, 1994, p. vii.

⁶ "The Mind of the Frontispiece to a Book", *Underwood* 24.1-4. See Garrett A Sullivan, Jr., *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 2005, p. 26-7.

⁷ Andrew Hiscock, *Reading Memory in Early Modern Literature*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 2011, p. 195-6. Jonson addresses the danger of losing the values of the past expressed in "To Penshurst", *Forest*, 2.91-8.

⁸ Hiscock, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Transcendence and memory are linked by Marcel Proust when he contemplates becoming a being outside time, *Le Temps retrouvé*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989, p. 178.

inspired by their frequent use of chronicles which could be alluded to as they were common knowledge.⁹ This might link up with the understanding that memory was essential to the creative process.

The main part of this essay will be centred on two aspects of Jonson's late work: some particular instances where the exercise of memory can be seen at work, and then a consideration of how memory influenced and directed Jonson's concept of writing plays in his later years. I shall hope to show that Jonson could exploit the phenomenon of memory in a number of contrasting ways and that the opposition of oblivion and immortality will be revealed.

But first I would like to locate what I have to say more fully in the period of Jonson's life as a dramatist when these plays were composed. It must be admitted that they were not well received and their unsuccessful initial reception has prevented them from being taken seriously until recent years.¹⁰ Between 1616 and 1626 Jonson spent very little time in writing plays. By the first of these dates he had acquired a great reputation as a dramatist. He also had memorialized his work up to then in the First Folio of 1616. We may see this as an act of memory in itself, an attempt to give permanence to the ephemeral traffic of the stage. In the next decade he did continue to compose masques for the court on a regular basis and enhanced his status further. But when times changed with the death of James I in 1625 Jonson returned to the stage with four more plays in about seven years and he left two more incomplete when he died in 1637. These later plays show remarkable differences from the earlier work, so that it seems that he might have re-examined his dramatic objectives in the decade of abstention. They are notably different from one another and in these plays Jonson was persistently innovative.

The essence of this change in his dramatic programme was that he began to turn away from satirical city comedy, the genre in which he had made his reputation. Instead he became more interested in developing different genres of comedy and in modifying the content of his dramatic action away from satire and more towards an exploration of character and emotions. In drawing attention to such changes,

⁹ For example see the references to Julius Caesar and also to the loss of France noted by Jean-Christophe Mayer, "Shakespeare's Memorial Drama: History, Memory and the Re-rehearsing of Ideology on the Shakespearean Stage", *Theta* 9, 2010, p. 167-80 (p. 173, 178).

¹⁰ One of the most important works in the revaluation of Jonson's late plays has undoubtedly been Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson: Dramatist*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1984.

however, I would like to make the point that this was not a complete break: it was rather a matter of exploration which developed alongside some of the earlier preoccupations. Thus he continued to include satire in his later comedies which was aimed at a variety of human foibles, and often, though not always, at some of the vices of the city. Indeed Jonson set several of his plays in this later period outside the city itself: *The New Inn* is located at Barnet, north of London; *A Tale of a Tub* takes place in a series of country villages around Paddington and St Pancras, then in the country, and for *The Sad Shepherd* he returned to Nottinghamshire which had interested him in earlier years and which he had visited more than once.¹¹

II

During these later years Jonson worked upon his commonplace book, *Discoveries*, including many literary and dramatic observations. Like the preparation and printing of the 1616 Folio, the assembling of this collection is itself a memorializing act, this time observing and assimilating the work of others. There may be some reluctance to attribute everything in it directly to him in as much as many of the items are not his own. But the truth is that he did at least engage with the ideas he collected and these may reveal his own views. In this act of memory he sought to make sure that he did not lose the thoughts of others. At the same time though the entries are often very close to their originals Jonson does make revealing alterations. Indeed it is a part of his observation of the writings from the past to make sure that they might be treated creatively and lead to new imaginative work. Thus he recognizes the authority of the past and yet seeks to learn from it, and memory is part of a creative process. In a passage which he has himself modified from Quintilian's *Institutiones* X he sets out what happens:

For the mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things, than our own; and such as accustom themselves and are familiar with the best authors, shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not; be able to utter something like theirs, which hath an authority above their own (1237-41).

¹¹ Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life*, Oxford, O.U.P., 2011, p. 427.

Implied in this adaptation of what is inherited is an understanding that memory of past writers is a help to the finding of the self, and this is one of the recurrent themes of Jonson's poetry.¹² This may be why he apparently identifies himself with a long passage he adapts from Seneca the elder which elaborates upon the vulnerability of even the most prodigious memories with the onset of old age.¹³

In discussing what is necessary for poets, the third of his requirements is "Imitation" which is the faculty of being able "to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use" (1752-3). Referring to a classical precedent he describes the process as "to draw forth out of *Horatius* the best and choicest flowers with the bee, and turn all into honey, work it into one relish, and savour, make our imitation sweet" (1758-60). In another passage the authority of the ancients is again valued, but the importance of recalling the earlier writings in order to modify them creatively is clearly uppermost in his mind:

I know nothing can conduce more to letters than to examine the writings of the ancients, and not to rest in their sole authority, or take all upon trust from them. [...] For to all the observations of the ancients, we have our own experience, which, if we will use and apply, we have better means to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates, and made the way, that went before us; but as guides, not commanders: *non domini nostri, sed duces fuere* [They were not our masters, but they have been our guides.] (92-100).¹⁴

¹² See for example *Underwood* 23 and 47.

¹³ "Memory, of all the powers of the mind, is the most delicate and frail; it is the first of our faculties that age invades. Seneca the father, the rhetorician, confesseth of himself he had a miraculous one, not only to receive, but to hold. I myself could in my youth have repeated all that ever I had made, and so continued till I was past forty; since, it is much decayed in me. Yet I can repeat whole books that I have read, and poems of some selected friends which I have liked to charge my memory with. It was wont to be faithful to me, but shaken with age now, and sloth (which weakens the strongest abilities), it may perform somewhat, but cannot promise much. By exercise it is to be made better and serviceable. Whatsoever I pawned with it while I was young and a boy, it offers me readily and without stops; but what I trust to it now, or have done of later years, it lays up more negligently, and oftentimes loses; so that I receive mine own (though frequently called for) as if it were new and borrowed. Nor do I always find presently from it, what I do seek; but while I am doing another thing, that I laboured for will come; and what I sought with trouble will offer itself when I am quiet." (*Discoveries* 346-60).

¹⁴ In her edition for *CWBJ* Lorna Hutson notes that the Latin quotation comes ultimately from Seneca, but Jonson changed *sunt* [are] to *fuere* [have been], implying a humanistic changing view of the ancients rather than a fixed one.

One of the purposes of changes was exemplarity "to show the right way to those that come after" (1248-9). Because of the high status he attributed to the role of the poet, Jonson was also interested in the pursuit of immortality and fame providing that it was ethically pure: "If divers men seek fame or honour by divers ways, so both be honest, neither is to be blamed; but they that seek immortality, are not only worthy of leave, but of praise" (124-6). Thus there may be a way of countering oblivion.

III

Turning to examples of memory in action we find that Jonson's retrospection in *A Tale of a Tub* involves the presentation and comic exploitation of a complex web of historical detail. This play is generically and, by his own affirmation in the Prologue (I.iv), a farce. It is partly a recall of earlier and apparently more innocent times, and it contains glimpses of Queen Mary and Elizabeth I. Notably there is a series of appearances of Neighbours who are present for at least eleven scenes and could be considered as functioning rather like a chorus in a Greek tragedy, since they comment, helpfully, from time to time when the action gets troublesome, though here the mood is comic. They consist of four tradesmen – In-and-In Medlay, a cooper (who is also a satirical portrait of Inigo Jones), Rasi Clench, a farrier, To-pan, a tinker, and Diogenes Scriben a writer. The Greek element in two of these names¹⁵ adds to the possibility that this is indeed an adaptation of the ancient Chorus. They are joined from time to time by Hannibal Puppy, the Constable's man. At one point they spend a good deal of time discussing their names and explaining the origins, but these explanations are conspicuous for the muddles they expose and they are shot through with whimsical connections. For example, Hannibal is shortened to Ball, and Ball was a common name for a dog, and this character's other name is Puppy. Such linking is obviously dependent upon memory and also its loss, and the phenomenon fits with the concept that the art of memory was partly about forgetting.

¹⁵ The Greek philosopher Diogenes lived in a Tub, and "To Pan" is Greek for "The everything". Rasi Clench's first name imitates an Arab or Jewish physician (iv.scene interloping.20-1).

Perhaps the Neighbours' most striking comic contribution, however, comes in the first scene when they reveal hopeless confusion over Saint Valentine. This saint has some significance for the narrative of the play which takes place upon his name day and involves the proposed marriage of Audrey, the daughter of Constable Turf and his wife Sybil. They want the marriage to take place on this day because they wish to recollect that they themselves had been married on it thirty years before. The Neighbours' discussion of the Saint becomes hopelessly confused. Indeed it seems that the mistakes they make are so confused that they cannot be unravelled. I am afraid that I shall murder the comedy by subjecting it to laborious scrutiny, but I do need to mention that starting as Saint Valentine, the Saint becomes Zin Valentine and then Sin Valentine, and then again one of the Deadly Sins in a few lines of extravagant misapprehension. As this heady speculation is passed from one speaker to another he also becomes the "Zin o'the shire" in the words of Clench, who, as he recalls this, triumphantly observes that he, the farrier, as we remember, may be an old rivet, but he still bears a brain (1.ii.27).

At this point we may note that in 1628 Jonson had been appointed Chronologer to the City of London, and that in 1631 his salary had been cut off because he had failed to produce "any fruits of his labours". He protested to his patron and eventually through the influence of Edward Sackville, Earl of Dorset, his pension and its arrears were restored by the Court of Aldermen in September 1634.¹⁶ In the meantime *Tub* was written and it was performed on 7 May 1633 by Queen Henrietta's Men at the Cockpit, and revised for the Court on 14 January 1634. The memorial confusions of the Neighbours, particularly those of Diogenes Scriben, "the great writer", are no doubt pertinent, but if one should characterize the comedy here it would have to be mild rather than bitter. There also seems to be a link between Diogenes Scriben "the great writer" (as described in *The Persons that Act*) who could use Latin and Jonson himself, also a great writer who lived in lonely isolation, like Diogenes in his tub.

Later these Neighbours in Middlesex present yet another network of muddles, this time led by Constable Turf himself. On this occasion it relates more directly to the City of London. The common phrase "Middlesex Clown" emerges and they become engrossed in its

¹⁶ Ian Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 404-5.

etymology. Scriben derives the word "clown" from the Latin *coloni* and asserts that the first of these, as farmers, were established in Roman times in Middlesex. To-Pan counters that the first *coloni* were actually in Kent because Julius Caesar had founded Dover Castle and his own ancestors had beaten the drum for him, and that this very instrument is now to be seen made of "monumental copper" hanging in Hammersmith (I.iii.50-6). Jonson may indeed not be bitter, for he is apparently enjoying himself indulging in these distortions of memory, even though they also function as a reminder of impermanence.¹⁷

A similar device reappears later in the play with another outburst of Latin learning by Scriben. This time Jonson starts with memories of city pageants as the Constable imagines himself riding in triumph "above King Arthur" (III.vi.5) and the Neighbours quickly add other worthies whom they regard as "Constables", including Saint George, Bevis of Hampton and Sir Guy. Scriben's learned memory then supplies another in the form of Appius, a *decemvir* in Rome who had designs upon Virginia the daughter of yet another petty constable there. And so this reflection upon constables modulates to dictators who were, he asserts, the same thing, until they end up with one of the city waits who Medlay affirms was called "Dick Tator" (III.vi.22). Scriben's role is to be a storehouse of confused, not to say scrambled information which feeds and maybe "refreshes" the inventive memories of his companions. It may well be, as Donaldson has suggested, that this character is another of Jonson's self-portraits. As City Chronologer Jonson could have made and consulted official records.¹⁸

These distortions of known factual and rather familiar information by the confusions of memory contribute much to the comedy of this play. A notable example arises because in these later years Jonson maintained a close interest in many aspects of public affairs. The role of the Constables was a particular concern at this time because of royal policy, under the personal rule of Charles I since 1629, increasing their involvement in local affairs. In a later scene which concerns the explanation of names Jonson uses the Neighbours to

¹⁷ Perhaps Jonson is here exploiting the frequency of memorial references to Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's plays noted by Jean-Christophe Mayer, "Shakespeare's Memorial Drama", *op. cit.*, p. 173-4.

¹⁸ Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

explicate the etymology of “constable”. The learning of Scriben again provides an answer:

Two words,
Cyning and *staple*, make a constable;
 As we’d say, a hold or stay for the king.
 (v.scene interloping.54-6)

This time the learning has some pretensions to authority as Jonson may have found it in Sir Thomas Smith’s, *De republica Anglorum*.¹⁹ But the effect of this pedantry of recollection is nevertheless an integral part of the comedy of the play. The muddled and implausible cogitations of the Neighbours are a way of making Jonson’s criticism of the policy towards Constables more noticeable, even though Jonson wished and needed to be circumspect.²⁰ It should be added that Jonson’s attitude to the Neighbours seems to be more beneficent than critical, but there is little doubt that memory and the possibility of oblivion function satirically here as a critique of royal policy.

The New Inn was written several years earlier than *A Tale of a Tub* and it may reflect more sharply the onset of the personal and physical difficulties which began to surround Jonson in the first years of the reign of Charles I. In the apologetic first Epilogue Jonson certainly refers to his personal predicament, describing himself as “sick and sad” and reflecting hopefully upon the future status of his work: “Whene’er the carcass dies, this art will live” (Epilogue 20). That particular thought may also be indicative of another aspect of this play, as it is a sentiment found in the sonnets of Shakespeare who, as I shall suggest, was much in Jonson’s mind. Consideration of it bridges to my second topic about Jonson and memory – the concern with theatrical form which was both retrospective and innovative in his later years. This constitutes another way by which memory is used creatively.

The sense of past times is perhaps most pronounced in the two set pieces of the play which form the sittings of the Parliament of

¹⁹ London, 1583, 2.22.

²⁰ In the event Jonson may not have been successful in making his criticism acceptable because the Master of the Revels records that when the play was performed at court it was “not likte”, N. W. Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1996, p. 179.

Love.²¹ These are significant because they are the occasions upon which changes are brought about in the feelings and expectations of the two leading characters, Lovel and Lady Frances Frampul. Firstly these scenes are part of a game of love which is only possible because of the inverted atmosphere of *Misrule* which is set up and made more striking by the elevation of Prudence, Lady Frances's chambermaid to preside. In the character notes he appended to the published text Jonson actually refers to her as "sovereign of the sports in the inn" making the link with the tradition of *Misrule* more telling. Though the melancholic Lovel is enamoured of Lady Frances, he is unable to speak directly of his feelings because of an obligation to another suitor, but under the dispensation of *Misrule* he finds a voice. Her initial intention is just sport, but it becomes apparent in the first scene that her role in the Parliament is changing to something more serious as Jonson addresses deeper feelings.

But secondly we must add that the tradition of the Parliament of Love goes back to the middle ages and earlier, and it was no doubt part of Jonson's humanist inheritance. However, the tone of the proceedings under *Misrule* does not betray the irreverence of the Feast of the Ass so much as suggest a classical symposium: indeed Plato is a significant inspiration for Lovel's main speech about love, the main topic of the first sitting. One feature of such a discourse is the citation of *sententiae* often derived from classical authors such as Seneca and Cicero.²² Such aphorisms are intertwined with proverbs. Moreover the conduct of the Parliament is decorous and stylised allowing the two lovers to hide behind their protective shells. This outward effect is contrasted with their increasing urgency, and particularly with Frances, as she warms to Lovel's speeches. Her change of heart is signalled by Jonson's having Prudence praise her for dissembling effectively within the terms of the sport. In fact Frances cannot avoid acknowledging her real feelings: "By what alchemy / Of love or language am I thus translated?" (III.ii.169-70). For Lovel, however, there is a further decline into melancholy (IV.iv.255-8). Thus the retrospective form of the Parliament becomes an agent in the change in the audience's perception of what is going on. In fact the eloquence of

²¹ Act III scene iii and Act IV scene iv.

²² See IV.iv.104-6 (*De Constantia*) and 115-50 (*De Officiis*).

Lovel has the effect of making Frances take him seriously in the first sitting.

But by the time we reach the second meeting of the Parliament there has occurred an episode offstage in Lovel's rescue of Pinnacia Stuff, which demonstrates his valour, and, at the request of Frances, now further smitten with love, true valour is made the new subject. This change intensifies the retrospect and it turns upon Jonson's interest in honour and martial virtues. As a young man he had fought in the Low Countries and had also narrowly escaped the gallows for killing another actor in a duel in 1598. For him the Elizabethan age became valuable as more admirably heroic as Anne Barton has suggested.²³ In the later years this feeling is also reflected in his poems about his patron William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, whom Jonson admired for similar virtues.²⁴ However, Jonson expresses an understanding of true valour in *The New Inn* which is more discriminating. Lovel avoids impulsive actions and presents valour as something rational and not rash; it is, he says,

a true science of distinguishing
What's good or evil. It springs out of reason
And tends to perfect honesty; the scope
Is always honour and the public good.

(IV.iv.42-5)

Thus although the recollection of an Elizabethan golden age might have been important to Jonson, he maintains a steady attitude towards valour which is morally acute and proceeds on rational principles.

IV

The last aspect I should like to consider in these late plays concerns Jonson's memory of the art of theatre which he used creatively, in accordance with the intention mentioned above. We may approach this through the poem he wrote for Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623. The heading gives an important clue: *To the Memory of My Belovèd, The Author Master William Shakespeare And What He Hath Left Us* for it returns to the theme of the permanence of art and this emerges again in the poem: "Thou art a monument without a tomb, / And art alive

²³ Barton, *op. cit.*, p. 300-20.

²⁴ *Underwood*, 53 and 59.

still, while thy book doth live" (*Miscellaneous Poems* 45.1-2). But beyond this the poem shows how Jonson thought of Shakespeare in the context of classical dramatists as well as contemporaries. He stresses Shakespeare's reflection of Nature, but he couples this with an assertion about the importance of Art, and it is Art that takes a long time to learn. Thus in the poem Jonson is relying on the creation of memory, but this creation is widened by the recollection of other types of drama.

The New Inn is in part a recollection of the humours comedies he wrote more than twenty years before. A few years later, a comment by the Boy in *The Magnetic Lady* makes the continuity of *The New Inn* from his earlier comic mode quite clear in this respect.²⁵ But there are aspects of this comedy which separate it from much of Jonson's earlier work and these may centre on its being a romance. Though a case has been made that it is a parody of that mode chiefly because of the amazing events of the last act, I would like to suggest that these are really an integral part of the comic style Jonson was seeking to develop and that in doing so he was much influenced by Shakespeare's late comedies, especially *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*. Quite possibly the memory of the plays may have been stimulated by his attention to the First Folio of Shakespeare as it is likely that he was associated with the production of the volume even if only as an advisor.

But Shakespeare's endings in his late comedies, his catastrophes as Jonson might have called them, are strange, unexpected and often excitingly close to the incredible. When we consider in *The Winter's Tale*, the concealing of Hermione for sixteen years and the recognition of her as a statue, as well as the rediscovery of Perdita, who was so tragically lost, we are in a world apart from normality and one which excites wonder. In *Cymbeline* the events of the play's ending defy credulity as Shakespeare links up the valour of Cymbeline's long lost sons with the guilt of Posthumus over his mistrust of his wife Innogen, her adventures in disguise including the encounter with the headless corpse of Cloten wearing Posthumus' clothes, and the guilt of Iachimo. Yet these collocations enable Shakespeare to work out the relationships he invents and to bring them to a happy conclusion.

In the inn called "The Light Heart" Jonson has created a separate place, as we have noted, and one which is insulated

²⁵ *Magnetic Lady*, Induction 91-8.

geographically, and particularly from London, the site of the city comedies. The Host's metatheatrical description of the inn as a theatre of the world increases our sense that for a time at least it is a special place.²⁶ This ancient concept had become proverbial and Jonson's recall of it is significant here as it raised the connection between the world of the play and the real world. Here in this separated world the extraordinary events of this story are assembled. We are asked to credit that the Host is really the Lord Frampul, who had lost contact with his family, that Lady Frances, the loving heroine, is his daughter; that his wife is present in the inn, unknown to him, and disguised as an Irish nurse, complete with an eye patch and Irish speech; and that there is another daughter present known only to her mother who has disguised her as a boy. All these details are revealed in the last act at great speed with the result that there are four happy couples ready to marry or resume their marriage by the end of the play. I cannot dismiss the idea that Jonson was having a bit of fun over these challenges to our credulity with this exploitation of disguise, mistaken identity and the ultimate discoveries. Yet the relations between Lovel and Lady Frampul, and the extraordinary good sense of Pru, who is rewarded by a very favourable match into the aristocracy, incline us to take the happy outcome sympathetically. Maybe this is an example of the ways in which a play can communicate a number of different and contrasting attitudes, and as such it is a recollection of similar complexities in Shakespeare's plays. We can add to this that Jonson obviously realised that the complexities of the plot were very great, and we may recall the advice about the right thread which was set out in *The Magnetic Lady*. Probably this concern led him to lay out the plot in the form of an Argument for the printed edition of *The New Inn*.

Jonson's work for the public stage is remarkable for the amount of metatheatrical self-examination it embodies. This feature is not confined to the later plays as it was something he practised throughout his writing life, earlier examples being the commentary by the Grex²⁷ in *Everyman out of his Humour*, and the contract he established between the author and the audience in *Bartholomew Fair*. Among the late plays the attraction of dividing the audience's attention by

²⁶ For *theatrum mundi* see 1.iii.132–6, and the echo by Lady Frances that “all are players” at 2.1.39.

²⁷ A chorus of two interlocutors who interrupt the play with metatheatrical commentary.

introducing onstage commentary and observation finds expression in the presence of the Gossips sitting on the stage throughout *The Staple of News* and in Master Probee and Master Damplay, who have come from the people to examine *The Magnetic Lady*. They are a means by which the audience is able to contemplate the development of the action and also by which Jonson might sharpen attention to matters of theatrical design and practice which might further his perennial objective of stimulating audience awareness.

These two examples share a significant feature which relates to our purpose here. They both embody some retrospective of Jonson's earlier work and in doing so they illustrate the importance as well as the function of memory in Jonson's design for his plays. In both plays these commentators are made to carry much of Jonson's theoretical approach to theatre. In doing so they recall in differing ways Jonson's retrospective reflections upon the theatre of the past. But at the same time these witnesses are there to be in the wrong, or at least partially so, and in these errors Jonson finds a way of expressing his own view of the theatre in retrospect towards the theatre of his own time and that of the classical past. Their conspicuous physical location, especially for the Gossips, puts them on stools on the stage and this is notably a place where Jonson, and other writers too, expected to find foolish members of his audience.

In *The Staple of News* the Gossips themselves have abstract names – Mirth (daughter of Christmas and Shrovetide), Tattle, Expectation and Censure – and thus Jonson recalls the morality plays. The subject of wealth and its perversions, a leading topic here, was a frequent centre of interest in the earlier plays, from *Avarice*, the chief evil character in *The Castle of Perseverance* onwards.²⁸ As they react in the Intermeans which follow each of the first four acts, the Gossips' wish to apply their memory of what was now an outmoded dramatic mode becomes more and more apparent, though this is always accompanied by scepticism which must arise in the audience. The recall of morality plays is a device which Jonson had already worked effectively in *The Devil is an Ass*.²⁹

²⁸ See my "Wealth in the Interludes", *Cahiers élisabéthains* 77, 2010, p. 1-8 for the popularity of this subject in the early years of the reign of Elizabeth I.

²⁹ See Satan's dismissal of Iniquity, the Vice, in *The Devil is an Ass*, l.i.80-130.

Here it is important to note that the morality play is not the only type of drama which Jonson recalls. For example, *Expectation's* immediate response at the end of Act I is that this is really a prodigal son play, a theatrical mode of great interest to humanist dramatists in the sixteenth century. But the chief recollection at this point is that there is no fool in the play, and Tattle emphasizes this by reflecting that her late husband claimed that there could not be a play without a fool and a devil in it (1.Intermean.31-2). There is a reference here to two earlier plays, *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, and Jonson's own *Devil is an Ass*. In the former a devil made a disastrous marriage when sent to earth, and in the latter the foolish and ingenuous devil called Pug goes to earth to do mischief and is completely out-devilled by the wicked people he encounters. In fact it is likely that *Grim* gave Jonson some ideas for his own play.

The texture of the Gossips' comment is enriched by the mention of the conventional link between the devil and the Vice in the interludes and this is to be developed later. For the moment in the First Intermean Jonson has the Gossips touch also the appearance of the boys from Westminster School in public plays, thus recalling an earlier practice which had been of interest to Shakespeare in *Hamlet*,³⁰ as well as to the younger Jonson, possibly when he was himself a pupil at Westminster, where there was a strong tradition of the boys acting plays in the College Hall. These performances sometimes attracted Elizabeth I as a spectator.³¹ Another possible autobiographical touch comes in with the reference to the author of *The Devil is an Ass*, who Tattle says is a learned man and one who "can write, they say, and I am foully deceived but he can read too" (41-2). This may take us back to 1598 when Jonson escaped hanging for killing a fellow actor in a duel by pleading benefit of clergy for which he qualified by demonstrating he could read and write.

That the observations of the Gossips are not without a positive significance for the understanding of the play by the audience is made clearer in the Second Intermean. As Act II ends, Censure picks up again on the absence of a devil and a fool which suggests that if there is a retrospect here Jonson is deliberately departing from it. Yet, Mirth

³⁰ *Hamlet*, II.ii.354-60.

³¹ Ian Donaldson, *op. cit.*, p. 79-82. Donaldson notes that memory was a distinct part of the educational system at Westminster School, p. 76.

asks about whether Censure likes the Vice of the current play, bringing the conversation back to this important theatrical convention. The Vice had been a dominating feature of the interludes of the 1560s and 1570s and when Jonson, like Shakespeare, became active on the stage in the 1590s, they both must have encountered people who, as actors or audiences, would have had direct recollections of the Vice's eminence as theatrical entertainment. But here Mirth identifies "three or four", Covetousness being one – a notion of plurality quite against the convention as it happens. Tattle is still not convinced because there is no devil to carry the Vice off to hell as convention expected. In a new direction Mirth now claims that such a practice is outdated:

That was the old way, gossip, when Iniquity came in like Hocus Pocus
in a juggler's jerkin, with false skirts, like a Knave of Clubs.

And she adds tellingly, bringing the recollection up to date:

But now they are attired like men and women o'the time, the Vices
male and female!

(II.Intermean.14-17)

These remarks reveal that Jonson's adaptation of the Vice was conscious and deliberate and it echoes his previous careful description and dismissal of the role in *The Devil is an Ass*.³² He wanted to refer to it, presumably because some of his listeners would remember it, and yet he saw some advantage in changes and made sure they were noticed. By alluding to it he reminds his audience that his play is indeed recalling the morality plays and interludes, and this is sustained within the main plot of the play by the use of abstract characters and the allegory of money centred upon Pecunia. Yet, by changing the convention at the same time and drawing attention to the change – that there are now female Vices as well – he shifts the ground in a creative way, especially as this speaker, Mirth, is herself female. Thus his recall of the convention and the memory of it within his audience have the effect of keeping alive a response to the action to supplement an awareness of the action itself.

This recollection of earlier theatrical practice manifests itself in a number of other genres as the Gossips' commentary is elaborated. The identification of Pecunia as the heroine recalls the use of money in

³² I.i.76-88

the *Plutus* of Aristophanes.³³ The presence of classical drama is also marked by the allusion to Terence in the Third Intermean where Jonson returns to schools. This particular preoccupation with classical precedence also reappears in *The Magnetic Lady* where Jonson again refers to studying Terence at Westminster School and backs this up by a discussion about the classical terminology for structure. The Boy and Damplay had already divided a quotation from Terence's *Andria* between them (Induction 32-3). The Boy's comment about there being no Prologue to the play echoes Terence's complaint in the same play about attacks on his Prologues (Induction 92).

The function of memory within the play explicitly concerned with retrospection links with Jonson's contemplation of his own situation as he nears the end of his life. This time the presentation of himself is not as funny as it had been in *The Staple of News* where he is portrayed as being in the tiring house where "he hath torn the book in a poetical fury and put himself to silence in dead sack" (1.Intermean.72-73). Through the words of the Boy, who entertains the inspectors in *The Magnetic Lady*, Jonson draws attention to his own earlier work and pointedly links and contrasts the methods of this new play with what he had achieved there. When Damplay queries the subtitle "Humours Reconciled" in the Induction, the Boy specifically connects the play with *Everyman in his Humour* and *Everyman out of his Humour* and with *The New Inn* as a matter of continuity of the comic thread dealing with humours characters (Induction 76-78). But his purpose is to indicate that the playwright has fancied using the power of attraction exerted by the magnetic lady. By drawing people of diverse humours together she can reconcile their differences. Thus the play is conceived as a means of ending the diversity Jonson recollects from his past work. Through the Boy he adds a further image in that he presents what is going on here as the shutting up of a circle.³⁴ This metaphor is sustained in the play itself by the two characters who speak for him: Compass who is given the capacity to steer the others where he wants them to go; and his brother Ironside who eventually

³³ Anne Barton notices a possible overall influence from Aristophanes, but finds it rather limited, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

³⁴ Jonson's *impresa* "was a compass with one foot in the centre, the other broken", *Informations*, 457.

marries the magnetic lady, capping the loadstone with an Ironside, as the parson puts it (v.x.145-6).

There are three more interventions by Damplay and Probee between the acts up until the end of Act IV³⁵ and significantly they are marked as Choruses recalling classical precedents as well as Jonson's own earlier practice. They are undoubtedly a means by which Jonson conjures classical precedents, and the contents of these discussions are frequently directed towards details from classical comedy. Terence is referred to more than once and Plautus and Martial are also invoked.³⁶ The Boy's familiarity with classical comedy is used to cite the terminology which Jonson probably derived from Scaliger concerning the *protasis*, *epitasis*, the *catastasis* and the *catastrophe*. As with the reference to the unity of time (III.Chorus.10), Jonson is really pursuing the idea that he is writing with guidance from the best models from the past. Damplay, as his name implies, is a critic whom it is difficult to control and he is seen to be determined to pursue his own preferences which involve a departure from the principles Jonson inherited. It is he who is made to raise questions of interpretation and expectation and these are part of the theatrical retrospect. This obviously echoes the functions of the Gossips in *The Staple of News* as well as Jonson's technique of allowing unfavourable criticism to arise so that he can deal with it. Thus Damplay enquires about whether some of the characters might represent persons in real life. Some recent scholarship has implied that at times Jonson really did mean his characters to represent real people.³⁷ But he was too circumspect to admit this and so the Boy dismisses Damplay's enquiry and he is joined in this by Probee, who calls it the "vice of interpretation".³⁸

Another echo from the managing of the Gossips comes in Damplay's ability to get things wrong. In the Induction Jonson introduces the idea of the importance of understanding the play in the

³⁵ As the exchanges between the Boy and the inspectors have no conclusion it is possible that there may have been a final one after Act v, especially as the printed copy reads: CHORUS / Changed into an EPILOGUE: / To the KING.

³⁶ As in II.Chorus.11-14.

³⁷ Julie Maxwell, "Ben Jonson among the vicars: ecclesiastical politics and the invention of 'parish comedy'", *Ben Jonson Journal*, 9, 2002, p. 37-68, identifies some London clergy in the 1630s.

³⁸ II.Chorus.26. Interestingly Probee links this with Iniquity, a traditional name for the interlude Vice used by both Shakespeare (*Richard III*, III.i.82-3) and Jonson (*Devil is an Ass*, I.i.43).

right way, using the metaphor of getting hold of the right thread in a skein of silk. Failure to do this leads to knots or elf-locks (Induction 134). It turns out that Damplay does not do this and so he is made to begin IV.Chorus with the following statement of confusion picking up on the last words of the previous scene about longing to hear the right:

Troth, I am one of those that labour with the same longing, for it is almost puckered and pulled into that knot, by your poet, which I cannot easily, with all the strength of my imagination, untie.

(IV.Chorus.1-4)

However, with a similar circumspection to that we noted for the Gossips, Jonson has Damplay proclaim his right to be wrong:

no overgrown or superannuated poet [...] shall give me the law; I will censure, and be witty, and take my tobacco, and enjoy my Magna Carta of reprehension, as my predecessors have done before me

(III.Chorus.22-5)

Damplay is plainly in the wrong and yet he represents something which Jonson wanted to overcome. Later Damplay is so out of touch with the dramatist's intention that he would prefer a solution to the play's events which bypassed Act v altogether.

It is evident that this degree of dissention by Damplay is given a strong voice even though his misguided protests have no effect. Indeed the last word in this controversy seems to be Probee's comment that they should "await the process and events of things, as the poet presents them, not as we would corruptly fashion them" (IV.Chorus.12-13).³⁹ But Damplay's confusion may be shared by some in the audience. The plot does become very complicated towards the end and the grasping of the right thread is imperative. Indeed the Boy adds at one point that in fact the dramatist has given some clues as to what is going to happen, especially in the symptoms of Mistress Placentia's "illness" which turns out to be a pregnancy (III.Chorus.4-9).

By his deliberate recall of past times in *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Sad Shepherd* and *The New Inn*, and his broader exploration of earlier theatrical genres Jonson makes it plain that he was interested in exploiting memory and some of the established ideas about it in

³⁹ Damplay is rebuked by the Boy for not knowing about the classical principles of construction whereas Probee uses one of the terms correctly: cf. I.Chorus.5-9 with II.Chorus.65.

dramatic form. The opposition of oblivion against the possibility of immortality are both embodied in the concept of memory as it is exploited in the later plays, expressed in comic form. But my last observation on what I have discussed here is that Jonson was quite capable of doing more than one thing at the same time. He may have laughed at the extensive memorial ramblings of the Neighbours in *A Tale of a Tub* but he was also enjoying himself exploring the storehouse of memory. He was using memory as part of a creative process and his innovations in the last plays were part of a process by which his art might live.

Peter Happé
University of Southampton