# “For I do mean/To have a list of wives and concubines”: Corporate Performances and the Drama of Itemization in Jonson’s *The Alchemist*

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*The essay examines Ben Jonson’s use of list of items in his play,* The Alchemist*. With the use of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the author examines Jonson’s focus on place in this play in relation to these lists of items, finding that the items help to substantiate characters’ sense of prestige and authority. The itemization underscores a site of struggle where characters engage in competition for control of, for access to, and for occupancy in the institution of interest. Through the course of* The Alchemist *we witness the brewing of a proto-corporate enterprise as participants in this alchemical game invest in a product that promises to deliver high gains.*

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While writing within a competitively creative theater-culture and an emerging capitalistic economy, Ben Jonson, in his *The Alchemist*, might be the first playwright in the English language to dramatize the corporate model for conducting business.[1] Like one schooled in sales pitches, Jonson’s capitalizing Face knows how to close a deal. For example, when Face introduces Abel Drugger to Subtle, he provides a list of activities and items associated with Abel, his business, his identity, and his place of business:

> This is my friend Abel, an honest fellow.
> He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
> Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
> Nor washes it in muscadel and grains,
> Nor buries it in gravel, underground,
> Wrapped up in greasy leather or pissed clouts,
> But keeps it in fine lily pots that, opened,
> Smell like conserve of roses or French beans.
> He has his maple block, his silver tongs,
> Winchester pipes, and fire of juniper. (1.3.22-31) [2]

Audience members and readers know that Face and Subtle are con artists, each playing a series of roles to advance their con game. Yet Jonson produces a complex matrix of con games and con

[1] I have in mind a series of studies that assert the emergence of capitalism in early modern English culture: L. C. Knights’ *Drama & Society in the Age of Jonson*, Robert Weimann’s *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, and Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the World*. Plenty of other scholarly texts make the argument about proto-capitalism and the theater. I am assuming this concept is part of general knowledge for this field of study. However, for recent scholarly discussions on Jonson and his corporate and capitalist activities see the following: Gabriel Heaton and James Knowles, Theodora Jankowski, and Caroline McManus.

[2] All quotations come from Jonson, Ben. 2002. *The Alchemist.* In *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. David Bevington, et al. New York: W. W. Norton, 2002, pp. 861-959.

artists, functioning on multiple levels of proto-corporate enterprise. For audience members, the confidence games these characters perform here and elsewhere operate on three levels. One, Face *sells* Abel Drugger to Subtle as a potential, worthy customer, as someone who is honest and trustworthy; hence, in a meta-dramatic-heavy play, Face plays the role of the earnest friend who is helping Abel and other characters to a desired prosperity. Two, due to the irony of this moment—due to our knowing that they perform a con—we get one of a whole series of comic scenes that build and accumulate until Lovewit's return at the end of the play. And three, Jonson objectifies the act of conning by providing a textbook example on how to con others; in other words, we experience the con as it happens, and we are complicit in the act itself in our passive participation of the scheme as we witness the habits and "live" within the habitat of the con artists.[3]

And in the Abel Drugger encounter cited above, Jonson has Face deliver the equivalence of a commercial (or infomercial) on Abel's business, emphasizing the following: Face's experiential history with Abel, a list of Abel's good business habits, and an itemized account of the contents of Abel's business. All of these qualities make Abel Drugger a good investor in their alchemical enterprise. These commercial practices demonstrate a hyper-attention to place dramatized in this play, a hyper-attention to place that can best be described in Bourdieuian terminology, using the concept of habitus: the inculcated and anticipated set of dispositions and habits that establish an institution or group.[4] For Jonson dramatizes the dynamics and mechanisms of habitus and the making of what Pierre Bourdieu calls a field of cultural production in the lists of items provided and recited by the con artists and their dupes. Therefore, these lists of items have a specific purpose, other than comedy, in this play. For example, we might consider what happens to the drama and the comedy if Jonson eliminated these lists of items. Certainly the comedy itself exists in the fantastical and hyperbolic items mentioned, like Sir Epicure Mammon's desire to view pornographic wall hangings and walk "Naked between [his] succubae" (2.2.48). However, in conjunction with Jonson's emphasis on place in *The Alchemist*, I find his use of these lists of items underscores his satire of the ways in which place, prestige and social position become sanctioned. At the meta-dramatic intersection of appearance versus reality, many of these items, as presented within the context of the play's concentrated action, emphasize the rather arbitrary nature of prestige and authority, underscoring the insubstantial, fictive dynamics of power. These items represent social capital and symbolic goods, markers of recognition and legitimization. And while the irony creates the satire, Jonson's itemization holds the practice of place up to scrutiny and objectification. Ultimately, *The Alchemist* shows us just how *fashionable* the methods of authority and class position are by demonstrating that value depends upon the fictions that justify the social market of goods and not upon the actual reality of the item and/or product (Bourdieu, 1990: 57). Jonson, then, writes his play within a cultural, historical shift in attitudes and expectations about social mobility that destabilizes the social hierarchy. Asserting a similar point about *Volpone*, Peter Stallybrass connected this shift in views of power in his study of clothing and identity, stating that "the aristocracy becomes no more than one possible kind of style: a style which one can adopt or drop

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[3] See Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson: A Life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 171-175. Riggs argues that *The Alchemist* with its confined quarters is analogous to the accommodations of the Blackfriars where it was originally performed. As with live theater performances, the proximity to the stage and the intimacy of the theater place often heighten the dramatic engagement and excitement.

[4] See Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*. Ed. Randal Johnson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, especially chapter three, "The Market of Symbolic Goods."

according to the extent of one's wardrobe" (1996: 308). Through the corporate performances of the characters in *The Alchemist*, investment in a fiction—typically in the sales pitch of the product and its promise of a boost in social rank and prestige—rules the marketplace of the drama.

Ben Jonson was obsessed with place: place as social position and prestige and as physical space. This obsession could have resulted from his life experiences. Perhaps as the stepson of a bricklayer and a bricklayer himself, he had an early, intimate connection with the brick, stone, and mortar of place, physically constructing habitats. Perhaps as he saw the potential for social advancement increase in the developing capitalism of early modern English society, he saw the doorways to new positions of authority through education, entertainment, and economic investment. And perhaps as he competed for a share of the stage for the performance of his works, he saw the need to promote and cultivate his own literary field of production and *author*/ity, hoping to secure a place within a history of drama that he traced back to the Roman playwrights of the past. Certainly, we see his hyper-attention to place in his own actions: his rivalry with the designer and creator of space, the architect Inigo Jones; his publishing his own works in 1616; his need to micro-engineer theatrical expectations by providing prologues and addresses to readers for his own plays; and his own reflections on the future of fellow playwrights like Shakespeare—"He was not of an age, but for all time."

Fundamentally, Jonson's multifaceted use of place connects well to habitus. Bourdieu's concept of habitus underscores the levels and layers of the conflict of place in Jonson's plays. Bourdieu informs us that institutions, organizations, groups, etcetera have systems of structured, structuring dispositions which embody the social history of past selves and cultural practices that act upon us in the present moment:

> [T]he *habitus* . . . is what makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them practically, and so to keep them in activity, continuously pulling them from the state of dead letters, reviving the sense deposited in them, but at the same time imposing the revisions and transformations that reactivation entails. (1990: 57)

Habitus has a structure and order and is lasting yet shapeable and dynamic. Inculcated with acts of exclusion and inclusion, it determines whether or not members or nonmembers know how to "play the game." Accordingly in this "game," the "trump cards are the habitus, that is to say, the acquirements, the embodied, assimilated properties, such as elegance, ease of manner, beauty and so forth, and capital, as such, that is, the inherited assets which define the possibilities inherent in the field" (1993: 150). Existing as structured organizations and/or conditions which incline individuals to act or react in certain ways, habitus resides in the form of beliefs, truths, ideas, and behaviors, and yet it also changes and has the ability to assimilate new dispositions and to transform its predispositions, causing what Bourdieu observes as the "intentionless invention of regulated improvisations" (1990: 57). If change occurs and the group stays intact, any unrecognized changes would seem natural and part of the usual order of things. In Jonson's plays, what amounts to his hyper-attention to place is equivalent to a dramatization of habitus. For his characters, who come from a variety of social class levels, engage in conflicts that center upon the access to or maintenance of social conditions of production. And I find a key component of Jonson's fascination with place in what I identify as his drama of itemization, the act of cataloguing that objectifies a field of production. The itemization underscores a site of struggle where characters engage in competition for control of, for access to, and for occupancy

in the institution of interest. Through the course of *The Alchemist* we witness the brewing of a proto-corporate enterprise as participants in this alchemical game invest in a product that promises to deliver high gains.

But before I focus on the drama of itemization in this play and its corporate performance, I want to address Jonson's fixation on place. For in much of Jonson's works, readers will find many references to and uses of physical places as poetic devises; and scholarship supports this notion of Jonson's use of an obsession with place. While examining Jonson's use of classical monuments and architecture as symbols and allegorical images in his poetry, Gail Paster argues that Jonson made much use of architecture in his works. And despite the debate over the superiority of poetry versus architecture, Paster finds that Jonson "glorifies his own poetry by likening it to architectural splendor" (1974: 316). A focus on physical space underscores a study by Brian Gibbons who finds that Jonson's attention to place is scripted in the works themselves so that the fictional space of Lovewit's house in Blackfriars corresponds with the actual space of the theater (1996: 35). The idea that Jonson's attention to place and the theater as a sanctioned field of cultural production underlies David Riggs' primary argument about this play: "*The Alchemist* is largely concerned with the institution of theater and its place in the fantasy life of the popular tradition" (1989: 172). And with an eye on "communal performance of theatrical ritual and worship of Mammon," Caroline McManus casts *The Alchemist* within the "playing company's proto-capitalistic drive for profit," seeing this play as dramatizing the improvisational rituals of the theatrical place (2002: 192). All four of these studies illustrate a multi-focus on place by Jonson: poetically, physically, and institutionally.

Other scholarly treatments of Jonson's focus on place have situated his works within the political changes in *locating* the nexus of power of early modern England. The England of Shakespeare and Jonson witnessed a shift in understanding the individual and in recognizing the dominant class. Richard Sennet explains how the emergence of a merchant class and of capitalistic interests corresponded to changes in understanding and conceiving human anatomy. Just as William Harvey offered new understanding of the circulation of the blood, early modern economists imagined "a free market of labor and goods operating much like freely circulating blood within the body and with similar life-giving consequences" (1996: 256). This *em/bodied* economy finds its way in the many civic pageants of Middleton, Jonson, and Munday where they use the literary trope of the body and the city to underscore the promise of prosperity, metaphorically enlivening the corporate—civic body of the people—performance of the pageant. The early modern individual is a mobile human being: physically and socially. Therefore, scholars like Nancy S. Leonard can discuss Jonson's attention to the "materiality of place" in his poem "To Penshurst," a poem she sees as the "first important landscape poem in English" (1994: 107). Reading "To Penshurst" as a chorographic poem rather than as a chronicle, Leonard argues that it "relocates authority from the court to an exemplary country seat where hierarchy, labor, and reproduction are re-negotiated by a poet whose sources of authority are potentially at odds with the kings" (1994: 107). And even though the poem's attention to detail serves "existing royal and aristocratic interests," a shift in the center of authority moves from the king as a ruler of the land to a particular, local identification of place, making the locale one's own (1994: 107). This claiming of place makes "To Penshurst" a nationalistic poem rather than a monarchal poem.

Other than expressing a nationalistic perspective in regard to place, Jonson also scripted his focus on the place of the theater in his drama. *The Alchemist's* prefatory material and opening action establish *The Alchemist* as a performance of place. Prior to the drama of this play, Jonson offers an argument that helps situate the reader/audience within the play's primary, initial

premise: the plague forces the master to leave his house in the city, and his servant takes possession of the house. This premise emphasizes that as one *authoritative* body exits another takes its place. The space of the place redistributes as a new order controls the house in the seeming absence of an old order; within the gap of the absented authority, the house becomes a site of struggle for power. And performed in 1610, Jonson's play would have reflected the social conditions of London during the 1609 outbreak of bubonic plague, an outbreak that was the worst since the plague of 1603. Indeed, the masterless house serves as an analogy for the inability to "master" the plague within the city walls of London; the play's action reveals that like the plague the con game possesses the vulnerable inhabitants. Indeed, Jonson's argument to his play comments on the creation of a new social group within the house:

> Ease him corrupted, and gave means to know
> A cheater and his punk, who, now brought low,
> Leaving their narrow practice, were become
> Coz'ners at large; and, only wanting some
> House to set up, with him they here contract,
> Each for a share, and all begin to act. (3-8)

Without the master, the place changes, and Jeremy the butler plays the part of Face. David Riggs sees the wordplay on "House," "contract," "share," and "act" as suggesting that the master's house has transformed into a "metaphorical playhouse" (1989: 171). I offer another interpretation that both parallels Riggs's idea of role playing in his theater metaphor and accounts for the manipulation and methods of control we see acted in the play by Face, Subtle, and Doll Common. For the ease in duties afforded Face's new life corrupts him in the way ordinary life activities change within a new context. The house transforms the way institutions and companies do under new management. "Ease" corrupts Jeremy in giving him the leisure and spare time of the elite class to pursue profitable ventures. When Subtle and Doll enter Lovewit's—but now Face's—house, their small practice grows beneath the auspices and symbolic power of Lovewit's house itself, as a place of upper class status and prestige: in other words, location, location, location. A place of accumulated symbolic capital *authorizes* their practice. The house that they "set up" is simultaneously the habitat and its habits, creating the practice of their con game. Like a joint stock company, they "contract" together, then, in two ways: the success of their venture depends on the tightness of their social group—Bourdieu explains that all participants must believe in and invest in the game they are playing; and they must have sanctioned agreements, like expected and accepted systems of ideas and dispositions, in order to maintain the operation of the game in which they have invested (1991: 171-202).

*The Alchemist*, then, dramatizes an emerging habitus as we see the creation of an economic institution within a site of struggle where the characters conduct business in a house invested with an inculcated social history of high prestige. The house of alchemy draws "Much company" (10) and controls them through their own investment in the (con) game they consent to play. The alchemical institution created by Face and Subtle shapes and fashions the identities of Dapper, Abel Drugger, Sir Epicure Mammon, and Tribulation. In this sense, Jonson's alchemical theme metaphorically suits the action of the play within its habitat; the house operates as an alchemical furnace transforming those who inhabit it. In addition, the closed-in space of the house has specifically significant properties of transformation if we consider that *The Alchemist* adheres to the three neoclassical unities of time, space, and action. The plotting and scheming,

action and reaction, and manipulation and control are immediate, contained, and clearly observable; we see the corporation of alchemy come into practice.

In *The Alchemist*, the "house," as operated by Face and his companions, appropriates its inhabitants. Bourdieu explains how habitus, "the incorporated products of historical practice," enables one to inhabit institutions (1990: 52). "Property," according to Bourdieu, "appropriates its owner, embodying itself in the form of a structure generating practices perfectly conforming with its logic and its demands" (1990: 57). Hence, we hear Face and Subtle deliver lectures on alchemy, explanations of the properties and workings of their alchemical profession, and of the necessary acts that the inhabitants must perform in order to gain access to the philosopher's stone, a symbol of the alchemical institution—one invested with the mystery and the power that makes entry into the "house" simultaneously appealing and inaccessible. In essence, Jonson delivers an ironic comedy on the practices of exclusion and accession into positions of prestige—the field of restricted production—depicting the often systematic, fictive, and fashionable barriers that make entry into an elite class difficult, if not impossible.

When Face and Subtle argue over who controls and leads their underhanded operation, a hyper-attention to place ushers in the play's drama as habitus informs the initial action of the play's opening scenes. Place, both social position and physical space, remains the focus of their argument. The play enters on a fight. And the stage direction has Doll Common stand behind Face and Subtle, positioning her as an engaged spectator. Her comments to the verbal combatants intend to remind them of their place—Lovewit's house and their roles. She asks them: "Ha' you your wits?" (2), "Nay, look ye. Sovereign, general, are you madmen?" (5), and "Will you have / The neighbors hear you?" (7-8). On one level, her warnings are a practical part of the opening action, given Face and Subtle's fight. Yet I believe that we must take into account that Jonson chose to begin this play with a fight. So on another level, the house is literally and figuratively a site of struggle. And the need to contain their actions is similar to the need to maintain the mystery of their practice. Doll questions their desire for control and reminds them that outsiders could overhear and learn the truth of their con game. On one level, Doll wants to keep their criminal practices secret. But on another level her attempts to keep them quiet underscores the need to maintain the mystery of their "art"—to continue in the act of exclusionary rights that stabilizes and secures the authority of their practices.

Face and Subtle pay no attention to her protests; instead, they attack each other's identity by re-accounting the place in which they found the other person. Jonson stages a combat of place. And when Face questions Subtle's purpose for causing the conflict between the two men, he challenges Subtle, needing to know why Subtle asserts his position above the others—"Dare you do this?" (12)—and he needs to know if Subtle recognizes him and his authoritative position: "Why, who / Am I, my mongrel? Who am I?" (12-13). These questions open a gap to be filled by the ensuing history about his identity. For Face wants recognition of his legitimate worth and position within the group. And the two engage in a battle of legitimization that focuses upon where they found each other. Face asserts that Subtle came from "Pie-corner" where he looked like "the father of hunger" and his alchemy could not save him (25 & 27):

> When all your alchemy, and your algebra,
> Your minerals, vegetals, and animals,
> Your conjuring, coz'ning, and your dozen of trades,
> Could not relieve your corpse with so much linen
> Would make you tinder, but to see a fire; (38-42)

Obviously, Subtle's alchemical activities have no substance without a market and investors to support them. Customers must believe in and buy into his "trade" in order to make it effective and profitable. So Face lists the fundamental items of Subtle's profession and asserts that all of it is useless without a "house to practice in" (47). In this respect, the house acts like a sponsor in a field of restricted production, giving Subtle a place by which his high, elite "art" can operate from out of a residence that provides the appearance and structure of a legitimate operation (Bourdieu, 1993: 115-120).

This emphasis on place and legitimization makes Subtle's counterargument against Face a logical one to take. For Subtle asserts two primary points: one, Face (Jeremy) had nothing before meeting Subtle, and two, the house is not Face's but his "master's worship's house here in the Friars" (17). On four occasions in this opening scene of well-engineered, combative exposition, Jonson has Subtle emphasize that the house is not Face's but his "master's house" (47). In fact, Subtle claims to have made the place legitimate since only Face "and the rats . . . kept possession" of it prior to Subtle's establishing his practice there (50). Subtle uses Face's employment history against him:

> Yes. You were once (time's not long past) the good,
> Honest, plain, livery-three-pound-thrum, that kept
> Your master's worship's house here in the Friars . . . (15-17)

Subtle reminds Face of his previous status as a servant (a position he also holds as Subtle's alchemical assistant), who was poorly dressed and paid, and dependent on his master. His insistence on connecting Face's identity to Lovewit's house emphasizes Face's connection to another, older social group and stresses Face's illegitimacy to claims of power within this new operation. According to Subtle, Face is an outsider who can only gain a legitimate voice by following the rules of his alchemical practice.

This debate on place not only underscores the early action but creates a theme and variation for the play for a whole series of characters that pursue legitimization and upward mobility. Jonson objectifies the practices that define and compose a field of production as his characters debate each other's social capital. For Face asserts that the "place has made [Subtle] valiant" (63); and Subtle asserts that Face "had no name" (80) until he "Made [Face] a second in [his] own great art" (76). Jonson creates a compelling argument here between Face and Subtle. Face argues that the house legitimizes Subtle's practices. And while Subtle does not deny the significance of the house, he asserts that Face is not the sanctioned authority of the house. The place might have made Subtle "valiant" in his art, but Face is not the place. Introduced to the structured structuring of habitus here, we see that the conflict centers on the rites of institution and a field of production's emergence into a sanctioned, authorized practice. This conflict of place establishes the groundwork for the rest of the play as each character concerns himself primarily with upward mobility or in some cases the maintenance of place. Jonson plays this conflict of place out through his drama of itemization. Repeatedly, the itemized accounts underscore the following: a character's place, a character's desire for place, and a character's understanding of place. Ultimately through his use of satire, Jonson provides for us an objective view of the performance of a field of cultural production.[5]

[5] Besides my present study, a focus on the items and catalogues in Jonson's works has produced scholarly interest. See W. David Kay. 1999. *Epicoene*, Lady Compton and the Gendering of Jonsonian Satire on Extravagance. In *The*

With a focus on social place, I argue that Jonson's use of the lists of items in his comedies underscores an anxiety about locating and re-locating one's position in an economic market of social goods. In this respect regardless of gender identification, the lists and catalogues Jonson gives his characters are part of the drama and conflict for their maintenance and negotiation of prestige and social position. Among the cheated, *The Alchemist*'s dramatis personae can be divided between ambitious characters (Sir Epicure Mammon and Tribulation) and characters who have ambition thrust upon them (Dapper and Abel Drugger). Dapper's and Abel Drugger's needs and desires are minor in comparison to Mammon's and Tribulation's until the con artists thrust other ambitions upon them. (Or we might look upon these characters as the completely duped versus the newly duped.) For when Dapper comes to the house, we encounter a law clerk in search of something relatively simple, "a familiar" (1.1.190), to help him in his gambling; by the time Dapper leaves, he has a new identity as one "Allied to the Queen of Faery" (126), a discovery that will compel him to give them all his money to see her. However, since we do not witness the encounter between Face and Dapper before this scene, Jonson does not perform the method by which Face got Dapper on the "showroom" floor. But given what we learn throughout this scene, several components comprise their conning techniques: one, Face and Subtle use the others' needs and desires to fuel their schemes; two, they establish themselves as authorities by adopting roles that give them the appearance of prestige and having something valuable that only a select few customers can obtain; and three, the means by which to obtain this item requires an elaborate, specially structured, and arduous series of tasks. Heavy in its use of irony, Jonson's play demonstrates that the practices of these con artists are no different than those of other culturally sanctioned, legitimate fields of production.

Dapper, then, enters at stage two of the conning process. As a recognized figure of authority, Face plays the role of a captain, and he uses Dapper's gambling to get him into the house. From the start, Face and Subtle conduct a performance of a field of restricted production. And Subtle, as the alchemist, performs his role as one invested in the mystery of the power that permits access to the desired product. Subtle makes it clear from the start that not just anyone will obtain the products of his trade. If Subtle is to permit Dapper into his alchemical trade, then Dapper must prove that he is worthy. Jonson uses the drama of itemization twice in this first encounter with Dapper. And in both incidences the cataloguing is part of a performance that intends to permit Dapper access to the restricted field. At first, in order to prove his genuine intentions, Dapper must assert that he is no imposter, "a chiaus" (1.2.26), who will ruin the purity of the alchemist's "art and love" (39). Face vouches for Dapper's character:

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*Ben Jonson Journal*, 1999, vol. 6, pp. 1-34. With an emphasis on the implications of gender and consumption, Kay focuses on items and catalogues in *Epicoene*. And like my concentration on satire and the London commercial world, Kay points out that *Epicoene* "is full of references to commodities used as markers of gentility, and the emphasis throughout on male display" (4). Underscoring the feminization of fashion, Kay cites Karen Newman's influential essay "City Talk: Femininity and Commodification in Jonson's *Epicoene*." And even though he admits that Newman raises important issues about the way in which "consumption was gendered in the early modern period," he takes exception to her tendency to over-generalize cultural attitudes and to her applying her "neat chronological progression" upon the complex works of someone like Ben Jonson's (3). Kay's and Newman's exploration of the cultural, economic aspects of Jonson's works parallels my own study, but I do not focus on gender. For example, I agree with Kay's final statement about Jonson's work, a work that draws upon Juvenalian and Plautine satire:

> . . . his comedies and poems condemn conspicuous consumption primarily because its practitioners—male or female—waste their resources to pursue empty status symbols without possessing the true virtue, sound judgment, real learning, or inner beauty that would justify the status those symbols signify. (25)

> I bring you
> No cheating Clim o' the Cloughs or Claribels,
> That look as big as five-and-fifty and flush
> And spit out secrets like hot custard— . . .
> Nor any melancholic underscribe,
> Shall tell the vicar; but a special gentle,
> That is the heir to forty marks a year,
> Consorts with the small poets of the time,
> Is the sole hope of his old grandmother,
> That knows the law, and writes you six fair hands,
> Is a fine clerk, and has his ciph'ring perfect; (45-55)

By providing a list of credentials that makes Dapper worthy of trust, Face also itemizes reasons for Dapper's being included into their limited/limiting practice. And the irony of this moment helps to objectify Face's performance. The drama of itemization reveals Dapper's habitus: his trustworthy disposition ("No cheating Clim o' the Cloughs"), his economic position ("a special gentle"), his level of education ("writes you six fair hands"), and his social circle ("Consorts with the small poets of the time"). Just as anyone today would need to show one's credit history in order to purchase a car or house, Face itemizes Dapper's social position and credentials here. Yet because Jonson puts his social history and place, his habitus, on ironic display, we witness an objective performance of the practice of exclusivity.

And this objectification continues in this encounter as Subtle and Face dupe Dapper into believing that he has a supernatural connection to the Queen of Faery. Of course, Face and Subtle want to fleece Dapper for all he has. But Jonson continues to provide a performance of a restricted field of production, especially when the alchemist warns Face about the power Dapper will have once he obtains this spirit for gaming: "He'll win up all the money i' the town" (77). Only a select few can have access to this potent, power-giver; not just anyone can or should obtain it. This quality of this product makes it exclusive, driving up its value. And Dapper willingly pays the price after being faced with the possibility of not having access to the product. In fact, Dapper is a believer in this investment beyond the limits of *The Alchemist* itself, exiting the play with the promise to bring additional funds the next day to secure his investment. Commenting on Dapper's final hope that the Queen of Faery will "leave him three or four hundred chests of treasure/And some twelve thousand acres of Faery land" (5.4.54-55), Caroline McManus places Dapper's social mobilizing hopes within King James's knight-granting practices:

> "Dapper's desire to parlay capital into land and thus alchemically transmute himself from the urban middle class into a member of the landed gentry might not have been that anomalous, given James's notorious proclivity to grant knighthoods to those endowed with substantial funds." (2002: 206)

But once Dapper falls for the initial scheme, Subtle and Face take the scam to another level by creating an identity for him that makes him a member of a specific, exclusive group—those with

an alliance to the Queen of Faery. Heartened by this news, Dapper delights in the prospect of winning “ten thousand pound” and sending Face “half” the winnings (136).

As indicated by Dapper’s giving them additional money and promising to give them even more money later, Face and Subtle have completely conned Dapper, and this initial scene could end here. However, Jonson completes this moment by having Subtle instruct Dapper that “a world of ceremonies” must pass before he sees the Queen of Faery (144). Such rituals signify the legitimacy of the participation within and membership to an institution; the performance of the ritual provides accession to the desired cultural group. And Subtle instructs Dapper to perform a list of ritualized acts which include fasting, taking vinegar in the nose, mouth and ear, bathing his fingers, washing his eyes, and uttering ‘“hum’” and ‘“buz’” (166-170). All of these acts must be performed in order to sharpen his five senses. But they do more than just add an extra burst of comedy as we see these cheaters flex their con artists’ muscle. Taken within the context of Dapper’s meeting the Queen of Faery, the ritual is an expected, anticipated, and necessary performance. After all, one must be clean and pure when one meets royalty; and one must prepare oneself according to the prescribed decorum. Only in Jonson’s satirical hands, we see the ritual as part of a fictive performance, putting into question other socially inscribed rituals that participate within a symbolic performance for legitimization.

Before I turn to what I believe is an obvious example of the drama of itemization as portrayed in the outrageous and exorbitant Sir Epicure Mammon, I want to address Jonson’s portrayal of Abel Drugger. For in Abel Drugger we see a splendid combination of a focus on body and place and the creation of what we could call today a corporate field of production. At the initial encounter with Abel Drugger, we find that he primarily wants advice on how to construct his building and on how to set up his place of business: where should he put the door, the shelves, and which shelves should be used for pots and for boxes. After having his credibility vouched for by Face (see lines 1.3.22-31 above), Abel learns that his “fortune looks for him another way” (1.3.41) and that he will not only be a successful merchant but a sheriff by next spring. When Face asks Subtle how he knows all of this good fortune is true, Subtle inspects Abel’s body and anatomizes his corporeal form. Through an act of cataloguing, Subtle itemizes Abel’s bodily attributes by remarking upon a hidden, “certain star” in his forehead, his “chestnut” or “olive-colored face,” his “long ear,” “certain spots” in his teeth, and “the nail of his mercurial finger” (45-49). The anatomization continues in his explanation of Abel’s hand and fingers and their divine alignment according to “chiromancy” (52), making Abel perfect, bodily and professionally, for the business of a merchant. Again, Jonson’s hyper-attention to place becomes apparent here for while Subtle shapes Abel’s place of business, he also shapes Abel’s body as a place embodying his professional ambition and vocation.

This corporeal/corporate attention to place continues when Abel consults Subtle for an appropriate device to hang above the door of his new tobacco shop. Subtle instructs Abel on the importance of the right, “thriving sign” to have over the door in order to both draw customers and to symbolize the “mystic character” of the shop owner (2.6.7 & 15). Providing possible, typical choices, Subtle explains that Abel Drugger must have something more unique than the cliché signs of the Libra (the balance) or Taurus (the bull) or Aries (the ram); for these choices are too common (11-14). Therefore, Abel Drugger must have a device that strikes “the sense of passersby” and that shall “by a virtual influence, breed affections / That may result upon the party [that] owns it” (16-17). In other words, the sign should embody the shop owner. Hence, Subtle tells Abel that his shop device should have “a bell” and by the bell someone named Dee—a reference to the famous alchemist, Dr. Dee—in a rug gown should stand, creating the word

"Drug." And next to the rug-gowned Dee, a dog should stand, "snarling 'er'" (19-24). These items complete the device that signifies Abel Drugger's place of business. And this moment of comedy underscores a consistent dramatic practice employed by Jonson in *The Alchemist*: throughout this play the idea of place, the concern for attaining a new, improved social place, propels the action and comedy of the play. Each character who pursues opportunity in the house of practice run by Face, Subtle, and Doll searches for advancement. And consistently with this hyper-attention to place, Jonson provides the act of cataloguing and itemizing, where characters provide a list of items that legitimize a position of authority and/or signify and verify a wished-for position.

The power of Jonson's comedy lies in his ability to use these practices of place and these acts of itemization for ironic, comedic effect. The impulse behind the irony comes from the audience being privy to the con game. So in the case of Abel Drugger, we know that the sign described by Subtle, which is supposed to legitimize his shop and draw in customers, is only a farce. And Face's comment on the device designed by Subtle and Abel's new place underscores the farce; for he tells Abel Drugger, "Abel, thou art made" (2.6.25). To Abel Drugger, he believes he is "made" as a legitimate business owner with a sign that substantiates his business and will draw customers to his shop. However, since we, as audience members, know that Subtle and Face are conning him, we understand that not only is he being "made" in the sense of conned but also in the sense that signs and the items of symbolic power and capital that demarcate place are essentially "made" by those who believe in them.

Jonson consistently provides for us in *The Alchemist* a satire on place, objectifying the methods of legitimization and holding up for scrutiny the ways in which we substantiate positions of authority. Therefore as the alchemist, Subtle's listing of chemicals, agents, and the activities of an alchemist engages in the use of an authoritative, authorized language that legitimizes his position to practice alchemy. (At least this listing is his attempt as a con artist to appear to be an authority.) And Sir Epicure Mammon's listing of items he will acquire once he obtains the philosophers' stone not only indicates the accoutrements of place but also signifies his legitimate claim to this nouveau riche position by virtue of his newly acquired, "learned" knowledge of the items he lists. The implications of Jonson's perspective suggest that early modern English cultural practices of place are nothing more than games performed and appropriated by those who believe in its legitimate and socially sanctioned function. So much of what Jonson dramatizes with Mammon provides the drama of itemization and place that I want to focus on the specific manner in which Jonson objectifies the act of legitimizing a field of production. For by including Surly as Mammon's combative and skeptic companion, Jonson fully depicts the fictions inscribed within the dynamics that sanction institutions and their practices.

Sir Epicure Mammon—and all his talk of golden showers, geldings, and naked walks amid succubae—epitomizes the greedy investor who wants complete freedom to act upon the circulation of a free market of goods; for his only care is that he get access to "stuff enough now to project on," turning everything from metal into gold (2.2.12). And from the very moment Sir Epicure Mammon enters the stage, he expresses his desire for place to his companion, Surly: "Come on, sir. Now set your foot on shore / In *Novo Orbe*" (2.1.1-2). With the philosophers' stone, Mammon intends to act as a colonial conqueror of a new world.[6] Amid his sexual and

[6] See Jankowski's essay, cited above, and her considerable discussion on issues of class for early modern English culture and how Heywood's and Jonson's works operate within a "movement toward a capitalist/colonialist

epicurean items of activities and procurements, Mammon envisions a world where he will secure his place as the foremost progenitor, especially among those of position. For example, Mammon tells Face, aka. Lungs, the one whose labor keeps the alchemical fires going, that Face will be the master of Mammon's harem. But Mammon will geld Face, ensuring that Lungs will not invade in his Herculean task of sleeping with fifty women a night (2.2.39). Later, after providing a list of items he will keep in his bedroom, including multi-angled mirrors, succubae, mists of perfume and roses, Mammon tells us that he will take a particular interest in fornicating with the wives of a "wealthy citizen or rich lawyer" (2.2.54). For Mammon intends to pay such men "a thousand pound" to be his cuckold (2.2.56). Now, that is power: monetarily and sexually.

Mammon's speech asserts his desire to secure a position of exorbitant wealth to underscore his social prestige and capital. Amid this speech Jonson sprinkles a list of items Mammon would acquire to signify his nouveau riche station:

> My meat shall all come in in Indian shells,
> Dishes of agate set in gold and studded
> With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.
> The tongues of carps, dormice, and camel's heels,
> Boiled i'the spirit of Sol and dissolved pearl,
> (Aspcius' diet 'gainst the epilepsy)—
> And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
> Headed with diamond and carbuncle. (2.2.72-79)

All of these items signify what Mammon imagines will secure his place of wealth and prestige, his worth in a social market of goods. Having had a hand in the writing of speeches for royal entertainments, Jonson would have witnessed such opulence. Identifying Jonson as "a kind of early modern party organizer," Heaton and Knowles discuss Jonson's participation in what they call acts of "corporate hospitality" in the entertainment of King James at the Merchant Taylor's Hall in 1607 (2003: 587). Among the decadent food items at this sumptuous feast were "224 tongues from various unfortunate animals," "no fewer than 1,300 eggs," and "a tun of beer and ale."[7] Jonson seems to have found such lavish displays absurd; for in his comedic-hands he wants the audience to recognize how insubstantial these accoutrements are—or, at least, that Mammon is a comic portrayal of this decadence. An air of the ridiculous underscores the items listed, as well as Mammon's plans for his future. Jonson creates a comedic drama where the practices of place and the way in which we sanction place are held up to scrutiny. That Mammon speaks from a position of authority, as one who knows of these fine items, verifies his move into the majestic habitus he desires to attain. Yet because we in the audience know that Mammon is the target of a con game, we recognize how hollow these extravagant accoutrements are. Amid the air of the ridiculous in the listing of these items, Jonson creates a satire on place, holding up for scrutiny the ways in which we sanction place. The items are not as important as the belief Mammon has in them as signifying the power of his wished-for position.

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economy," arguing that they reflect upon the "changing class roles in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England (144).

[7] See Heaton and Knowles 589. As is the case for the printed accounts of these entertainments and civic pageants the catalogue of items is not only astounding but comical. The breakdown of the tongues includes the following: "59 pike, 17 swans, 172 quails, 81 partridges, 417 chickens, 2 cuckoos, 10 owls, 25 herons, 17 godwits. . ." (589).

In fact, throughout *The Alchemist* we encounter moments when Jonson purposefully satirizes the act of legitimizing place by providing several characters who challenge the very game that intends to legitimize the investors. For example, Surly debates with Subtle, telling Subtle that "alchemy is a pretty kind of game," filled with "terms" that intend "to cheat a man / with charming" (2.3.180-182). Surly, then, delivers a list of items:

> Of your elixir, your *lac virginis*,
> Your stone, your med'cine, and your chryosperm
> Your sal, your sulfur, and your mercury
> Your oil of height, your tree of life, your blood
> Your marcasite, your tutty, your magnesia
> Your toad, your crow, your dragon and your panther
> Your sun, your moon, your firmament . . . (2.3.184-190)

The list continues until Surly exhausts himself from naming the items. According to Surly, alchemists use these items to cheat others by sounding like an authority. To him, the substances have no substance, containing only the fictions the alchemists have assigned to them. At this moment in the play, Jonson offers an honest attack by Surly on the con game performed by Subtle, Face, and Doll Common. Breaking with the immediate experience of the alchemical performance, Surly treats and views their practices in an objective manner by dismantling the mystery of their rhetoric and their ingredients for their discipline. In doing so, Jonson has Surly attempt to strip the alchemist of his symbolic power—the power delegated to him in relation to the amount of symbolic capital given to him. In other words, the alchemist is nothing more than what the cheated and duped make him.

This objective view of the con game continues when Subtle and Mammon explain why someone who is not an alchemist would not understand the significance and meaning of these important items: the alchemist must obscure his art so that the "simple idiot" cannot learn it and "make it vulgar" (2.3.201-202). To them, language, its use and meaning, underscores authority and ensures the sanctioned members exclusive rights to the place they hold within the legitimized group. In fact, their counterargument goes to the core for the justification of a field of restricted production; for Subtle explains the history behind keeping sacred practices away from the typical population at large:

> Was not all the knowledge
> Of the Egyptians writ in mystic symbols?
> Speak not the Scriptures oft in paradox?
> Are not the choicest fables of the poets,
> That were the fountains and first springs of wisdom,
> Wrapped in perplexed allegories? (2.3.202-207)

Only a chosen few, who can decipher and/or interpret art, literature, or scripture, has access to the true, valuable knowledge contained within it. Mammon supports Subtle's argument by citing the example of Sisyphus whom the gods condemned for making their secrets "common" (208-210). This emphasis on the necessity of maintaining the mystery of their alchemical practices, of course, increases the value and symbolic capital of the discipline and the alchemical product. And in order to maintain and preserve their field of production its practices must be uttered,

understood, and performed by the persons legitimately licensed to do so. For those who subject themselves to the legitimized voices, for an institution, a practice, and/or a group to exist, these participants must forget and disregard the reality of its structure and the laws that regulate and maintain it. In other words, they believe in the fiction and do not regard it as a fiction.

Jonson consistently dramatizes these practices of authority and legitimization in his use of satire and the drama of itemization. *The Alchemist* abounds with examples. And I could explore in depth the conflicting practices of the field of restricted production versus the field of large-scale production, especially as performed through Sir Epicure Mammon. For example, at one point Surly reminds Mammon that the possessor of the philosophers' stone must be "*homo frugi*" (2.2.97)—that is, one must be a "pious, holy and religious man" (98), a member of a limited, virginal elite. However, Mammon wipes away such a concern. For according to Mammon, the manufacturer of the stone must be pure and pious; but once he buys it, it belongs to him to do with as he pleases—even though the alchemist has "worn his knees bare and his slippers bald / With prayer and fasting for it" (100-104). Mammon can care less about the worker, the work and the effort put into the making of the product. Merely wanting access to the product, he follows or pays homage to the rules of the game that give him access to the field of restricted production so that he can obtain it and exploit its uses and properties in a field of large-scale production—in which he hopes to lavishly and lasciviously monopolize. And the lists of items and activities underscore just how large-scale Mammon will make his field of corporate production—the "*Novo Orbe*" upon which shore he colonially invites Surly to set his foot.

This hyper-attention to place and the drama of itemization continues throughout *The Alchemist*, and I offer my own final catalogue of examples to highlight the possibilities. Tribulation and Ananias are the holy, parallel examples to Mammon and Surly. For one could explore the hypocrisy of Tribulation and his justifications for obtaining the philosophers' stone as a means of giving his religious sect the upper hand. And Ananias acts as a Surly-like character, attacking and subverting the heathen activities of the alchemist. An entire essay could be devoted to the study of the corporate enterprises of the Puritans in Jonson's works. For one of the primary arguments the alchemist provides Tribulation for investing in the stone concerns the ease it will bring his profession and the "good that it shall bring [his Puritan] cause" (3.2.21). The catalogue of benefits include: obtaining medicine from distant places to cure such illnesses as "gout," "palsy," "dropsy," face decay, and "boneache" (27, 30, 34 & 38); adopting an anthem to rally "the flock together" in case of war (58); and <u>not</u> being required to perform a whole series of activities such as getting wives to rob their husbands for the Puritan cause (70-71), nor needing to "Rail against plays to please the alderman" (88-89). Jonson devotes this entire encounter between Tribulation and the alchemist to an itemization of activities that will make Tribulation's life and profession full of ease. Subtle's infomercial for his product reads like the weight loss programs of today: eat all one wants, exercise less, and still lose weight:

> Nor shall you need o'ernight to eat huge meals,
> To celebrate your next day's fast the better,
> The whilst the Brethren and the Sisters, humbled,
> Abate the stiffness of the flesh. (74-77)

The future Subtle conjures for Tribulation is one full of the promise of capitalistic leisure. And as with Mammon, Tribulation invests his interest—symbolic and financial capital—in a field of restricted production as he tries to appease the alchemist with money and ingratiate himself to

him by squelching Ananias's Puritanical zeal. Ultimately, Tribulation wants to transform this investment into a large-scale production by gaining a world of Brethern and Sisters.

Ultimately, Jonson interlaces his plot with characters in pursuit of place—like the matrimonial match that will "advance the house of Kastrils" (4.4.89)—and enmeshed in the drama of itemization—like Mammon and his "downfall" once Doll recites the "other four straight" monarchies after Mammon tells her he will create the fifth (4.5.36). And with Lovewit's return these dramatic lists of items come to a fitting conclusion. For not only is the house a place for those who love wit, but Lovewit keeps the items Face/Jeremy has appropriated for him and the house. Lovewit's final speech argues this point to the audience:

> That master
> That had received such happiness by a servant
> In such a widow, and with so much wealth,
> Were very ungrateful if he would not be
> A little indulgent to that servant's wit,
> And help his fortune, though with some small strain
> Of his own candor. (5.5.146-152)

Jonson offers reflections on place and the items and actions that brought Lovewit's house to stability and restoration. Not only has the master returned but the domestic space becomes complete with a loyal servant who has procured goods for the house and a new wife with economic and social capital. The alchemical activities and performers altered the habitus, but also restored it by the end. So we witnessed a course of events that modified the structured structuring of the house and its inhabitants, but without dismantling it—even though "some small strain" threatened Lovewit's honor, his social capital, in his neighborhood. The Lovewit corporation gains with interest: matrimonially and economically.

So where does this focus on lists and listing, items and itemizing, take us? It might be worthwhile to explore the lists in travel narratives of early modern culture. What is the purpose of such lists of items? What do the items legitimize? What do the items say about the traveler and the journey? And other types of lists and catalogues of items might prove worthy of investigation. Anatomy texts, where the body is equated with place, provide extensive lists of body parts; and anatomists of early modern culture saw themselves as explorers of a micro-world, providing narratives of a corporeal landscape. Civic pageant texts provide whole lists of items used in the pageants as well as food items purchased to feed the participants in the event. Do these items help to legitimize the pageant itself as a sanctioned event for the corporate performances of the city? We might also consider the hospitable performance of these food items and what the type of food provided says about the guild patronizing the pageant. And if we return to the act of itemization in drama, we can explore the multiple possibilities for rhetorical strategy. Certainly, the catalogues of the dead and the accounts of allegiances fill Shakespeare's history plays. Lists of items for procurement fill the city comedies of Middleton. And an understanding of the context and purpose of these items offers insight into the drama and action of these plays. For these lists of items are used in the context of legitimization and place. And when Mammon asserts that he means to "have a list of wives and concubines" we hear a marvelous intersection between both legitimized (wives)—albeit plural—and illegitimized (concubines) methods of procuring and securing place.

However, as for Jonson, the marketplace of his works emerges as a consistent concern—or obsession. And looking at the social economics of *The Alchemist* offers insight into his hyper-attention to place. For his need to *place The Alchemist* within a highly recognized and capitalizing social and economic market of goods frames his play. Anyone reading Jonson's address to the reader, offered in the 1612 quarto version but not in his 1616 folio version,[8] will find that he itemizes types of plays, of readers of plays, and of playwrights. Indeed, Jonson offers his own "buyers beware" label: "beware at what hands thou receiv'st thy commodity." Indicating that some works only entertain, Jonson asserts that his play is of a high quality of art, being "polished" and "composed." This attention to polish and composition—instead of providing a work that is "unskillful" and "scattered"—becomes the focus of Face's final statement of the play. According to Face, some viewers and readers might believe that Face's character did not remain consistent in the last scene. Yet Face assures us that his performance "'twas decorum" (5.5.160), reminding us that his actions are consistent with play and character type. Here, Jonson expresses his concern with the habitus of drama and the economic and social investment in drama.[9] And anticipation of criticism and profit underscores his motive for concluding his play in this manner. Will the audience buy it? Will the audience return and "invite new guests" (165)? Will his play have strong market value? The business-minded Jonson hopes we buy the fiction he created.

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[8] I perused the folio version of his works at the University of Kansas. Ben Jonson, *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* (London: William Stansby, 1616). I am fascinated with "The Catalogue" page where the titles of each play is printed with those whom Jonson dedicated each work. Here, he practices his concern with place, marketing his texts in relation to those who represent a type of sponsor for his works. It is no wonder, then, that he does not need to include the address to the reader in the folio version. With its concerns about the "commodity" of his play, the address to the reader is not necessary for the folio version with its catalogue of sponsors to vouch for its value and worth.

[9] Jonson might be expressing some anxieties about the theatrical marketplace, as well. He seems to be recognizing a shift in patronage and from where financial support and profit comes. Caroline McManus concludes her essay with a similar observation: "Among them are the substitution of money for faith, the ways the commercial practices of a proto-capitalistic society were encroaching on and complicating the perhaps outmoded forms of patronage operative in the Tudor period, and use of clothing to effect change in social status (or maintain prestige)" (2002: 212-13).

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