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AN APPROACH TO THE REFERENCE OF *VOLPONE*

by James Tulip

Comedy as Equivocation

An approach to the reference of *Volpone*

What concern or what object did Jonson have in mind as he wrote *Volpone*? How much of his presence do we find in the play? To what actual life outside the play does the play refer? How does it, in general, go about its referring? Questions such as these, so basic and useful elsewhere in literary criticism, somehow have not seemed to apply to Jonson's play. *Volpone* is elusive in the extreme to handle. It seems not to need or invite criticism. It is so finished, compact and rich as to seem self-contained, self-sufficient and self-enclosing, needing neither a world to refer to nor an author to have created it. *Volpone* presents itself as "a happening" improvised as it goes along by the actors who presume to play the roles of author, actors, agents and audience. Many an audience in the theatre must have felt itself superfluous at a production of *Volpone*. For it is play itself that seems to be the object of Jonson's art, and while there are several subject matters raised within and by the play it is the constant state of play with regard to these subject matters that constitutes the actual comic subject of the play. Here lies a basic reason why *Volpone* seems to be a non-referring play. It seems to enclose its own activity, and to have the art of play as both its object and subject.

Volpone and Mosca keep pointing to the happenings as "rare" and seem impelled to realize a uniqueness which means more to them than gold, lust and status. An energy—more radical, dynamic and refined than is provided by any of these powerful drives—is the source of their play. It is a life force, a desperate will to be, a compulsion in them as characters to make something of themselves, and which knows no other logic than to keep on asserting itself in them so long as there is life left to live and wit there to use. But this instinct for play also grounds itself in a strange and equally "rare" condition. For nothing creates more comedy, or is more central, in the play than Volpone's "dying." Indeed, it is this which gives the play its characteristic tone and stamp. It places life, so to speak, *in extremis* and gives the play its peculiar pitch and excitement. Volpone's bouts of coughing are moments when the play hovers between seriousness and farce; they make for comedy that is at a bare remove from a world of darkness and horror. One false or excessive intonation and move at these points and the play would lose its comic control and make us afraid.

> *Volpone.* I feel me going, uh! uh! uh! uh!
> I am sailing to my port, uh! uh! uh! uh!
> And I am glad I am so near my haven. (I. iii. 28-30)

A unique playfulness is realized here. The moment is sheer comedy. Yet hardly pure comedy. Death and dying are not easily made the subject matter of fun and farce, and here they create a reserve of darkness just behind the verse and the comedy. But more than this, there is also a teasing allusiveness in their import. To the Globe audience of 1606, saturated as it was in Shakespearean tragedy, Vol-

pone's "dying" could well have reminded them of other stage heroes and their "dying." Would Othello's final speech not have seemed to be the object of Jonson's comedy here? Which one of "Shakespeare's actors" played the role of Volpone? And how would he have managed the transformation of the heroic idiom of tragedy into the terms of burlesque and farce. Undoubtedly, it was some such shock of recognition that made *Volpone* explode upon the London stage and take its audiences by storm, particularly the younger audiences at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge to whom Jonson was shortly to dedicate his play. Tragedy would never be the same again after this parodic master-stroke.

Jonson's unique world of play in *Volpone* is predicated upon the preceding twenty years of serious heroic drama on the Elizabethan stage, and on the older moral theatre that went before it. To say he transformed this tradition is a commonplace of literary historians, but to say *how* he transformed it is a subject that still bears study from both historical and critical points of view. The possibility of *Volpone* being Jonson's answer to and release from the heroic stage of Marlowe and Shakespeare is from a literary viewpoint the crucial argument. But it may be possible to prepare the way for this argument by locating *Volpone* more firmly in its actual historical context and showing how the play does have an object which it renders in a way that suggests a necessary manner for its unique playfulness. Nothing can illustrate Jonson's literary genius better than a recognition of the principles and powers with which he could endow parody. But nothing can illustrate Jonson's moral and practical genius better than a recognition of the way in which *Volpone* reaches into the political life of the time and by the art of his "equivocation" absorb and purge the raging hysteria of Jacobean London in late 1605 and early 1606. The two approaches are not ultimately distinguishable, but there is some point in laying the basis for a consideration of Jonson's art through a study of the "application" of *Volpone* to history.

I

Jonson, on the face of things, would not appear to agree with this approach. In dedicating *Volpone* in 1607 to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, he took the opportunity in his accompanying Epistle to defend himself and the meaning of his plays from the "application" which certain people were placing on them:

> And, howsoever I cannot escape, from some, the imputation of sharpness, but that they will say I have taken a pride, or lust, to be bitter, and not my youngest infant but hath come into the world with all his teeth; I would ask of these supercilious politics, what nation, society, or general order, or state I have provoked? what public person? whether I have not in all these preserved their dignity, as mine own person, safe? My works are read, allowed (I speak of those that are entirely mine); look into them. What broad reproofs have I used? where have I been particular? where personal? except to a mimic, cheater, bawd, or buffoon, creatures for their insolencies worthy to be

> taxed? Yet to which of these so pointingly as he might not either ingenuously have confessed or widely dissembled his disease? But it is not rumour can make men guilty, much less entitle me to other men's crimes. I know that nothing can be innocently writ or carried, but may be made obnoxious to construction; marry, whilst I bear mine innocence about me, I fear it not. Application is now grown a trade with many, and there are that profess to have a key for the deciphering of everything; but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or give leave to these invading interpreters to be overfamiliar with their fames, who cunningly, and often utter their own virulent malice under other men's simplest meanings.[1]

Now we may take this to mean what it says. Or we may feel that Jonson doth protest too much. We may even feel that he sounds here remarkably like one of his own characters (Scoto, perhaps?). Whatever the truth is Jonson certainly knew how to operate at this ambiguous level of communication. Much of his best humour is located here. Peregrine protests: "Heart! /This Sir Pol will be ignorant of nothing— / It seems, sir, you know all." Only to have Sir Politic reply: "Not all, sir, But / I have some general notions." There is room, surely, for us to have our general notions, and for feeling that our response is sanctioned by the play. Indeed, Jonson might welcome our having general notions if he only knew what some of the specific notions were that are now current in scholarly circles.

I refer, in particular, to the argument recently put forward by Professor B. N. De Luna concerning Jonson's involvement in the Gunpowder Plot of November 5, 1605.[2] The point that Mrs De Luna's long and detailed study leads up to is that Jonson may have been the informer who told Cecil of the conspirators' plans, having been a member of the Catholic circle of acquaintances and involved with them shortly before the discovery of the Plot. Now I do not wish to discuss this argument in any detail at this point. I choose to think the case is not proven as an historical argument, and possibly irrelevant as a literary argument. Mrs De Luna's study is, however, of fascinating value to my present concern with *Volpone* in that not from the purely critical and intuitive means I have used above but from a mass of detailed historical and literary evidence, relating mainly to Jonson's *Catiline*, she has shown how close in Jacobean times was the relation between literature and life, and how "Jonson and his contemporaries . . . had evolved various devices to make one story serve a double function in order to comment with impunity on 'untouchable' politico-religious questions."[3] What seems the most obvious weakness in Mrs De Luna's case is that all too seldom does she consider that *Volpone* itself might have light to shed upon the matter.

Jonson tells us in the Prologue to *Volpone* that he wrote the play quickly ("two months since no feature . . . five weeks fully penned it"). "Sir Politic Would-be's whale at Woolwich," Herford and Simpson comment, "appears to be the whale mentioned by Stow as seen

at West Ham late in the January of that year," i.e., 1606.[4] These items of evidence suggest that *Volpone* was written at the very crisis of the Gunpowder Plot, when the trial and public execution were taking place. And if this is so, then it must surely complicate the picture of what Jonson's role was, and in particular of what his attitude to Cecil was.

The Gunpowder Plot was the climax of a national neurosis going back a century before and having consequences down to our own day. Jonson was obviously closely involved on both sides, and yet in *Volpone* there is such artistic detachment from what one might expect in a man so deeply involved that any simple explanation of his role cannot be upheld. Beyond this general detachment, also, there is the figure of Sir Politic Would-be in *Volpone* to give us pause. It is my belief that Sir Politic is a parody of Cecil himself; and since Sir Politic stands as the most remarkable comic portrait of political paranoia in literature, Jonson's attitude, regardless of his actual role, must be seen as complex, and to bear studying in *Volpone* for signs of "equivocation" in terms of his relation with Cecil.

There is nothing that a "Jesuit" could have told Jonson about "equivocation." *Volpone* is, in fact, a close study of it. Mosca celebrates Voltore's gift in this regard to the man's face:

> Men of your large profession, that could speak
> To every cause, and things mere contraries,
> Till they were hoarse again, yet all be law;
>
> (I. iii. 53-55)

and Voltore has to act the role of equivocator out to exhaustion by the end of the play. Generally speaking, it is the lifeblood and substance of *Volpone*. Disingenuousness is considered the essence of life as revealed by the play, right to the point of death; indeed, this is where the play begins. Volpone's "dying" is the ultimate in equivocation. Mosca, too, is a unique example of equivocation. The kind of relish with which Jonson lets Mosca have one meaning in his mind and another on his tongue is evidence that Jonson did not share, in any simple sense, the general and popular antipathy to equivocation that arose at the time of Fr. Garnet's trial in London, and throughout the country during February and March of 1606. So topical is the substance of the comedy in *Volpone* that one can only wonder how Jonson managed to get away with it.

II

The answer must lie in his art. To take the case of Sir Politic Would-be again, the fact is that no serious contender has emerged in the history of Jonson studies as to who might have been the particular object of Jonson's satire here. One obvious reason is that no one, at the time, would dare have claimed the honour; Sir Politic is so ridiculous that to protest oneself as parodied would have invited further ridicule. So too with Lady Pol. Her craziness encloses her. We do not feel that Jonson is getting at someone or that the roles of the Politic Would-bes are merely instrumental; they are ends in

themselves. Comedy triumphs over satire. But that Jonson could have had Cecil in mind must surely have occurred to members of the Globe audiences, and not least to Cecil himself. As Secretary of State from 1598-1612, he inherited from his father, Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's Secretary, the best secret service in Europe. One of his contemporaries has said, "he could tell you throughout Spain every part, every ship, with their burthens, whither bound, what preparation, what impediments"[5]; as well "he knew the names, *aliases* and usual places of residence of the Jesuits in England and regularly received copies of their correspondence in Flanders."[6] To go from this information to Sir Politic's characterization of Stone the fool:

> He has received weekly intelligence,
> Upon my knowledge, out of the Low Countries,
> For all parts of the world, in cabbages;
> And those dispensed, again, t' ambassadors,
> In oranges, musk-melons, apricots,
> Lemons, pome-citrons, and suchlike; sometimes
> In Colchester oysters, and your Selsey cockles. . . .
> I have observed him at your public ordinary
> Take his advertisement from a traveler,
> A concealed statesman, in a trencher of meat;
> And, instantly, before the meal was done,
> Convey an answer in a toothpick.
>
> (II. i. 68-74, 76-80)

Now this need not have any specific referent for its comic effect, but the fact is that Cecil wrote in 1606 a pamphlet entitled *An Answer to Certaine Scandalous Papers, scattered abroad under colour of a Catholicke Admonition*, in which, as Mrs. De Luna notes, there are samples of "the kind of wit for which he was much admired by his contemporaries,"[7] and revealing how astutely he could conduct himself in controversies. The likelihood is that he chose to meet humour with his own brand of tolerant humour. Later he would have his revenge on Jonson when he sat him below the salt at the dinner table, and their relation is known to have soured in later years when, as Jonson claimed, Cecil no longer had any use for him. In this sense, then, it is Jonson's comic achievement *qua* comic achievement with Sir Politic that saved him from Cecil's anger, along with Cecil's magnanimity when he wrote, "All our actions are upon the open stage, & can be no more hidden than the Sunne. If we deserve ill, we shall heare ill. . . ."[8] But some sense of Jonson defending himself to Cecil and against the "application" of his play to Cecil by others is surely to be felt in the 1607 Epistle prefacing *Volpone*.

Another equivocating aspect to the reference of Sir Politic is its sheer generality. Jonson's imagination was working in heroic proportions throughout *Volpone*, even if with a parodic intent in mind; and it is remarkable how elevated and wide the pitch, reference and tone of so much of the poetry is, and how appropriate this is. Sir Politic is really conceived on a grand scale. Just as Marlowe had his Machiavel cross the Alps and descend on England, Jonson had his Machiavel go back the other way, along with his wife who is in fact

dragging him there, to demonstrate all that England had learned from the Renaissance. Jonson is summing up, from a sardonic point of view, a large cultural phenomenon in his happy and prototypal pair of tourists. For what Jonson is doing is to place Policy (and Would-be Policy at that) in relation to Avarice, and to suggest that the modish Renaissance vice is both trivial in itself in comparison with the classical and medieval understanding of Avarice and possibly no more than a modern minor variant of the old vice. Sir Politic suddenly finds himself in the big league of villainy, and experiences a "ritual" death there. Whatever particularity of reference Jonson may have had in mind with his portrait of Sir Politic, there is ample evidence in the comedy of *Volpone* that Jonson enjoyed inflating the role for the general significance he saw in it as a cultural phenomenon. His art, therefore, both protects the reference of Sir Politic from particularity and exploits its possibilities of generality.

It is true that in the play, and especially in most stage productions of the play, the sub-plot may seem a gratuitous presence with really nowhere for it to go. Lady Politic does involve herself with Volpone and in the action of the main plot, but we do not feel it a necessary or integral matter that she should do so. This does not mean, however, that Jonson is less interested in the sub-plot than in the main plot; it may even mean quite the reverse. At the level of specificity in his subject it could be argued that the Politic Would-bes constitute Jonson's dramatic subject, i.e., what he really wanted to be writing about. The rest of the play could be seen as the comic coating for his satiric pill. For the Politic Would-bes are surely creations of the first order of comic and satiric genius. Jonson's language is full of exact implication when they speak. On stage, we tend to judge them for what they are and what they do; and here —granted—their actual roles do not stand up to the weight of intelligent observation and firmness of tone that Jonson provides for them in his text. They are a writer's or essayist's creation more than a dramatist's.

The point is worth stressing since it has to do with a large issue in Jonson's overall creativity. For there is a real ambivalence between Jonson the dramatist and Jonson the "essayist." One way of putting it is to say that Jonson was not naturally a dramatist at all. He does not move easily as did Shakespeare and Marlowe at the level of dramatic actions *qua* actions; he does not really believe in stage illusion; and his language and thought, remarkable as they are, have a fixed analytical and propositional temper, a definite point of view to them. There is ample evidence from Jonson's life and writings that he resented the theatre and what it did to him. There is evidence that he wrote his three central comedies under conditions only of extraordinary stimulus. And what may be said of all three central comedies is that they are themselves as much studies of the theatre itself as studies of life. His stage actions are basically the exploitation of stage properties: doors opening, disguises, timing of entries and exits and so on.

Sir Politic Would-be, interestingly, straddles a world outside the theatre and the world inside. "O, this knight," Peregrine exclaims,

> Were he well known, would be a precious thing
> To fit our English stage. He that should write
> But such a fellow, should be thought to feign
> Extremely, if not maliciously.
> (II. i. 57-60)

How well Jonson is covering his tracks or, to put it in another way, preempting the role of critic from his audience. To take the matter further, it is this in-built equivocating criticism within *Volpone* of the world that it is rendering that essentially raises it from being merely satire to its "rare" level of comic genius. The equivocation of Jonson's stance, then, both keeps the audience at arm's length and allows the play to enact its own critique of itself as pure comedy. Here, I am referring to the definitive comic sense of such episodes in the main plot as the Act I visitation of the legacy hunters and the Act V reading of the Will. These are scenes of total comic self-enactment, moments when criticism has raised itself to clear creativity. The present essay is not the place to take up the issue of how these superb comic scenes in Jonson are themselves the resolution of Jonson's critical concerns with the contemporary stage of Shakespeare, Marlowe and others. What needs further to be done here is to point to other areas of the social embeddedness of *Volpone* in 1606, and to draw from them a more general picture of Jonson's position than is now available.

III

The areas of the play I refer to in this regard are where Jonson seems to be at the end of his critical powers and perforce experiencing the life he is creating, a life beyond the world of play. If *Volpone* comes after the Gunpowder Plot of November 1605, the intensity with which Jonson imagined certain kinds of personal and social behaviour would undoubtedly have hit home to his audience at the Globe. The melodramatic behaviour of Voltore in the Law Court and the manner of the Attorney-General, Sir Edward Coke, at the trials of the conspirators and Fr. Garnet would presumably have been compared. One striking instance that the trial of his former companions was on Jonson's mind is in the highly charged indictment of Celia by her husband Corvino:

> And, now I think on't, I will keep thee backwards;
> Thy lodging shall be backwards, thy walks backwards,
> Thy prospect—all be backwards, and no pleasure,
> That thou shalt know but backwards.
> (II. v. 58-61)

and then later as he virtually is dragging her to her disgrace:

> Be damned!
> Heart! I will drag thee hence home by the hair,
> Cry thee a strumpet through the streets, rip up
> Thy mouth unto thine ears, and slit thy nose,
> Like a raw rotchet!—Do not tempt me, come.
> Yield, I am loth—Death! I will buy some slave

> Whom I will kill, and bind thee to him, alive;
> And at my window hang you forth, devising
> Some monstrous crime, which I, in capital letters,
> Will eat into thy flesh with aquafortis,
> And burning cor'sives, on this stubborn breast.
> Now, by the blood thou hast incensed, I'll do it.
> (III. vii. 95-106)

The rage of incensed blood and grotesque rationality in Corvino is to be heard in Coke's indictment of the two Winters, Grant, Fawkes, Keyes and Bates, Rookwood and Everard Digby on January 27, 1606:

> First, after a traitor hath had his just trial, and
> is convicted and attainted, he shall have his judgment,
> to be drawn to the place of execution from his prison,
> as being not worthy any more to tread upon the face of
> the earth, whereof he was made. Also, that he hath
> been retrograde by nature, therefore he is drawn backwards
> at a horse's tail. And whereas God hath made the head
> of a man the highest and most supreme part, as being
> his chief grace and ornament, he must be drawn with his
> head declining downward, and lying so near the ground
> as may be, being thought unfit to take benefit of the
> common air. For which cause also he shall be strangled,
> being hanged up by the neck between heaven and earth,
> as deemed unworthy of both or either, as likewise that
> the eyes of men may behold and their hearts contemn
> him. Then he is to be cut down alive, and to have his
> privy parts cut off, and burnt before his face, as
> being unworthily begotten and unfit to leave any
> generation after him. His bowels and inlaid parts
> taken out and burnt . . . after to have his head cut off,
> which had imagined the mischief; and lastly, his body
> to be quartered . . . And this is a reward due to traitors.[9]

Corvino's mind could almost go on to finish the sentences of Coke:

> But I will make thee an anatomy,
> Dissect thee mine own self, and read a lecture
> Upon thee to the city, and in public.
> (II. vi. 70-72)

Glutted as the audience was with the St. Paul's Churchyard execution of the conspirators on January 31 together with all the melodramatic detail of the "backwards" dragging of the men behind the horses, so vividly depicted for us in Jacobean drawings and emblems, Jonson was releasing into his play a torrent of contemporary feeling. He himself was called to court in 1606 for "backwardness in religion." It was a loaded term, historically. All of which means that it is not some simple topical allusion Jonson is using but rather an enactment of the psychological state of men's minds that he is getting at, that state so far beyond absurdity as to be grotesque and so lacking in self-possession as to want to hurt itself in its endeavour to hurt others. The victim in triggering off this mechanism of "justice" has unleashed some

primitive chaos of fear, malice and uncertainty, a chaos of feelings that in 1606 Jonson had seen exercising itself in the King, the Attorney-General, and the other officers involved in the discovery of the Plot, capture of the conspirators, the trial and public execution.

It is possible to recognise this manic behaviour elsewhere in *Volpone* in quite different ways. If we go back to Lady Politic Would-be, we find in her—for all her absurdity—an only slightly less frightening sensibility than in Corvino. Again at Celia, she unleashes an uncontrollable fury:

> Out, thou chameleon harlot! Now thine eyes
> Vie tears with the hyena. Dar'st thou look
> Upon my wronged face?
> (IV. vi. 2-4)

Or, as earlier, when she loses her control with Peregrine and Sir Pol:

> Ay, you may carry't clear, with your state-face!
> But for your carnival concupiscence,
> Who here is fled for liberty of conscience,
> From furious persecution of the marshal,
> Her will I disc'ple.
> (IV. ii. 59-63)

Lady Pol's phrases, here, must be the ultimate in malapropisms. In one sense it is merely comic, the sense of her absurd gentility and inane acculturation; in another sense, however, it resounds in the play with an altogether different kind of humour. "Liberty of conscience" was an even more loaded phrase then than now. Catholics like Fr Garnet and Everard Digby were being hung, drawn and quartered for actions, or for the mere implication in actions, in the name of "liberty of conscience." The Puritans were fleeing to the Low Countries and from there to America for "liberty of conscience." Yet Jonson has Lady Pol use the phrase in the most opposed and crude sense possible. So irrational and insensitive a use as this must have stunned the audience out of any smug awareness that it knew what the phrase might mean. When taken in relation to the "furious persecution of the marshal," we feel Jonson's method in Lady Pol's madness. Her lack of control allows Jonson to reach back, with impunity, into what seems to be his own and the city's subconscious life, and to find there a universal impulse for "persecution." Jonson himself shares in the impulse to persecute, and yet presents it in his play with studied detachment for what it is. Life is made up of people persecuting other people in *Volpone*. Action and suffering are inextricably bound up in each other in Jonson's sense of society.

Now if Jonson was the *artist* who could create this sense of things, then he was surely not the *man* that traditionally biographers—and now with added point—have seen him as. His play must be evidence of a kind for his personality. And if we have to say just where Jonson stood on the matter of the Gunpowder Plot and its aftermath, it might be put as a resistance in him towards both extremes. He could well have been, as Herford and Simpson say, a man of "sterling loyalty to

the government, Catholic as he was"[10] and a pawn of Cecil in the affair. But *Volpone* itself must be taken as evidence of a real attempt on Jonson's part to take the hysteria out of his audiences and to purge them of their savage feelings. By taking the issue up in a symbolic form of comedy and pushing it to its furthest reaches of enactment, Jonson let his audiences see the horror and absurdity of their lives.[11] He himself had to experience the contradiction in English culture at this time as few others did. The place of religion in society was decisively established for English history in the months of the Gunpowder Plot and Trial. In this light, and as we have noted before, the incredible control, detachment and direction of emphasis in *Volpone*, and the possibilities implicit in it of a new humanism that could keep steady in religious controversy are aspects of his stance and achievement that earn for Jonson the peculiar weight in the use of the word "rare" for him. The irony which presumably would not have escaped Jonson himself was that in *Volpone* he was achieving his new stance with the very quality that was being rejected in the old order. For in his "comedy as equivocation" he was rendering to Cecil the things that were Cecil's and to the theatre the things that belonged to the theatre. It may in the very long view of history not have been the best thing to do. But it was a stroke of genius and an inevitability at the time for Jonson to do what he did. The amazing thing is that *Volpone* could reach so deeply into the issues of society and theatre of its own day and yet present itself to the world in the guise of "your fool," of whom Androgyno says:

> The only one creature that I can call blessed;
> For all other forms I have proved most distressed.
> (I. ii. 57-58)

and of whom Nano and Castrone sing:

> E'en his face begetteth laughter,
> And he speaks truth free from slaughter.
> (I. ii. 74-75)

It is Jonson's own image for himself, I feel, and undoubtedly the best.

University of Sydney James Tulip

1 Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 29-30. All line references in the present paper are to this edition.
2 B. N. De Luna, *Jonson's Romish Plot: A Study of Catiline and its Historical Context* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967).
3 De Luna, p. 360. Another recent study of "equivocation" in Jacobean life and literature, and especially as it relates to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is that of H. L. Rogers, *"Double Profit" in Macbeth* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964); see also his note on "An English Tailor and Father Garnet's Straw," *RES* XVI. 61 (1965), 44-49.
4 *Ben Jonson* (Life and Complete Works), 11 vols, eds C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925-1952). Here, the reference is to Herford and Simpson, IX, p. 196.
5 Sir Robert Naunton. Quoted by Hugh Ross Williamson, *The Gunpowder Plot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 90.
6 Williamson, p. 90.

7 De Luna, p. 145. In discussing the punishment of John Day for his *Ile of Gulls* (1606), Mrs. De Luna does not notice how close Day's images for Cecil in this book and in his *Parliament of Bees* (1607) are to points in Jonson's *Volpone*. To call Cecil "the Master Bee" seems obviously to be alluding to Jonson's Sir Politic Would-be, and to show that Day himself thought of Sir Politic as a parody of Cecil. Further evidence for the association of Cecil and Sir Politic arises out of the Pol/Parrot issue. Salisbury was especially sensitive to nicknames, particularly at the hands of James I. Writing to Lake (24th October, 1605), Cecil complains of the King: "I see nothing that I can do can procure me so much favour as to be sure one whole day what title I shall have another. For from Essendon to Cranborne, from Cranborne to Salisbury, from Salisbury to 'Beagle,' from 'Beagle' to 'Thom Derry' (i.e., Tom Thumb), from 'Thom Derry' to 'Parrot,' which I hate most, I have been . . . walked" (quoted in Williamson, pp. 91-92). Salisbury was also "the Fox" to his contemporaries, late in his life. But in 1605-1606 when *Volpone* was staged the pun or play on "fox" and "Fawkes" must have been unavoidable. Equivocation of this order for Jonson's central character, suggesting equally Cecil or Guy Fawkes, is an immense stroke of genius, and surely supports the thesis of Jonson's standing off in ironic detachment from any simple partisan support for either side.

8 Quoted by De Luna, p. 146.

9 Quoted by Williamson, pp. 213-14.

10 Herford and Simpson, I, p. 41.