Ben Jonson’s “The Alchemest”

— Gulls Behavior and Speech Exposes Contemporary Thinking in London in the Early 17th Century —

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ベン・ジョンソンの『錬金術師』
（1610年）

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Abstract

This is a play about three cozeners working in 17th century London. The first pretends to be an alchemist, the second a whore and the third a servant. They are all plotting to sell magical powers from the philosopher’s stone, which doesn’t exist. They plan to trick their foolish customers and relieve them of their wealth.

Their customers include knights, gentlemen and religious from London and the surrounding countryside. Jonson’s chief aim, via depicting the gullibility of the customers, is to show contemporary 17th century London.

Keywords: cozeners, the philosopher’s stone, astrology, meteoroscopy, mercurial spirit, Great Solomon Ophir, Chiaus, elixir, alchemy, antibaptist, anabaptist, the Saints, the Holy Brethren of Amsterdam, Christ-tide, Pagan
Introduction

The origins of this paper date back to the summer of 1993 when I attended "Ben Jonson’s" class Summer English Literature Seminar offered by Cambridge University.

This seminar discussed variety of aspects of English Literature and was paramount in my return to making modern translations of early Modern English texts. These modern translations allow the reader to get a closer and deeper appreciation of the text and socio-cultural phenomena apparent in 17th century England. In this particular paper, I have chosen to discuss how Ben Jonson discloses English culture and society in his 17th century England.

In "The Alchemist", Ben Jonson suavely creates wise cozeners and (foolish) gulls, all of whom seem to reveal his contemporary London. Although the characters are in all probability fictitious, their actions, thoughts and overall humanity are not that different today, four hundred years later. While the emotions and feelings and desires for money, power, influence, knowledge and pleasure are not unique to Elizabethan or Jacobean England, the cultural backdrop of the Church, the prominence of Spain and attitudes, norms and mores regarding sexuality certainly represent the Elizabethan and Jacobean psyche. This paper, then, strives to show this very point; that Ben Jonson has accurately, albeit comically, portrayed the cultural milieu of early 17th century Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

Text

As the city of London was being ravaged by the plague, Lovewit, the master of the house, leaves London and retreats to his home in the country so as to not come into contact with the disease. In his absence, Jeremy, Lovewit’s butler, is charged with taking care of his house while he is hiding in the country. Jeremy takes advantage of his master and involves himself with several local cozeners at a tavern. The plan they contrive is simple. The trio (Subtle, the trickster; Dol, the prostitute; and Jeremy, who will now be called Face) make plans to get money, jewelry and precious items from London’s gullible citizens; greedy knights, gentlemen and religious. Disguised as an Alchemist, Subtle will lend his “magical” powers to anyone willing to pay his fee. In so doing, the three cozeners can deceive their clients and trick them out of their wealth.

The cozening trio wastes no time when their first client appears, a clerk at a lawyer’s office named Dapper, who dislikes his job and hopes to quit after he saves enough money to buy a barony. He likes gamble; however, his card playing and betting on the races causes Subtle to hesitate in taking him as a client. Later, Subtle relents and accepts Dapper after Dapper assures him his activities are legal.

Face: Listen to me, sir, you know the law better than I do.
Dapper: I should know better than you, the danger here in. Do you recall that I should shave the statue to you?
Face: Yes, you did.
Dapper: Will I ever tell anyone? I swear by the flesh on my hand, if I devulge our secret, may I hope my handwriting skills. What do you think? Do you think I am Chiause?
Face: What’s that?
Dapper: Please, good Master.
Face: Please, noble Doctor, I beg you, assist this gentleman? He is no Chiause.

Subtle: .................................................. .................................

Dapper: His worship is calling you.

Face: I'm sorry, but I will never again engage in such business.

Dapper: No, please, sir, he calls you.

Face: Will he accept you, then?

Subtle: Before anything else, listen to me.

Face: I will listen to not another word, unless you accept him.

Subtle: I beg you, sir.

Face: Not by a word is such a thing expressed, but through legalese.

Subtle: Your disposition must be a rule of action.

[ Subtle accepts the money ] (Act I, Scene ii)

At the same time; however, Dapper also wants assurance that what Subtle is doing is legal. In order to do this, Subtle tells tales of the occult while Dol pretends to be a Fairy Queen, utilizing her sexuality to convince him. Face informs Dapper that the Fairy Queen has his lucky star (fortune) but before she will give it to him, he must fast until 1 p.m., put two drops of vinegar in his nose, two in his mouth, one in each ear, put his fingers in water and wash his eyes. Finally, he must say “hum” three times and “bun” three times before returning home.

Soon after Dapper leaves, a second client, Drugger, a tobaccocon, arrives at the house. Drugger is remodeling his business and would like to know about astrology and meteoroscopy in order to boost his business. He wants to arrange his shop in such a way as to maximize profits and harmony. Subtle explains that the star upon his forehead and his long ear are certain indicators of his impending good fortune. Gratefully, Drugger leaves a gold coin but Face is insulted because he feels as though Drugger should have given him more payment.

Subtle: What is your business?

Drugger: This, if you please your worship. I am only beginning this business and I am building a new shop; over there on the corner: it's marked. I would like to know, if your worship, with all his experience, could advise me on which direction I should put my shelves and which should be for boxes and which for pots? I want to be a success, sir. I beg you, as you are a gentleman of Captain Face, and he says you know astrology well, as well as the good and bad angels.

Subtle: Captain, by the note of meteoroscopy, which is my job. I can see a certain star upon his forehead which others do not. Your deep reddish brown, olive complexion will never deceive you and your long ear does ensure. I can tell from his freckles and his teeth and on the nail in his pinky finger.

Subtle: OK. Your door is south and your broadside west. On the east side of your shop, write Mathali, Tarmiel and Baraborat high on the wall. On the north side, write Rael, Veel and Thiel. These are the names of Mercurial Spirit and they shall keep your store free of flies.

Subtle: ..................................................

Drugger: Good Captain, what can I get?
Face: No, I will not be able to consult you, you haven’t heard what kind of wealth you need to pay more you are more likely to get.

Druggist: I would like to give him a crown angel.

Face: Only a crown!

(Act I, Scene iii)

In Act II, Scene i, the next customer, Sir Epicure Mammon, a knight, and Surly, gambler, a veritable shark, arrive at the house. Mammon is the personification of greed, hoping to obtain absolute power from the philosopher’s stone. He is the greatest character in the play in that he possesses an exceedingly luxurious imagination of one-sided, self-centeredness. Needing knowledge of science and mysticism to complete his goals, Mammon seeks the help of the Alchemist. His goals, it needs to be noted, are to obtain health, sexual potency and eternal life. His desires, then, necessitate the power of the philosopher’s stone and Subtle is all too eager to help, considering the knight has a lot of money and is willing to spend it.

Sir Epicure Mammon has a grand dream to revive a golden age of the past with the aid of the philosopher’s stone. Obtaining the key to health, sexual potency, and eternal life using the effect of the stone arises from his lustful mind. Mammon has spent the income from his whole estate in the making of the stone. His self-centered dream is ridiculed by skeptical Surly, although Mammon doesn’t care about his criticism.

Mammon: Come on, sir. You have now landed on shore in the new world; here is Peru, and inside, gold mines of Great Solomon’s Ophir. It took Solomon three years to sail here, and me, only ten months. Today is the day I can happily tell my friends, “You will be rich.” Today you will be greatly respected, from this day forth, no more being treated as gamblers with loaded dice or an unrighteous card cheat. No more being in charge of the prostitute hiring so she can fleece the susceptible heir, to have sex with him — even fully clothed. If he denies any un-salable goods, he will be beaten. No more kneeling down to the thugs and gamblers before false idols using wine and music? all night? because they are greedy and they desire the satin, velvet coat linings. There will be no more of this. You can now make youngsters viceroys as well as have your whores — and little one’s, too. To you, I say, “You will be rich.” Where’s my Subtle? There? Where to?

Face: Sir.

Mammon: That’s his dragon, his assistant, his west wind, he who blasts away his coals until he beats nature to her core. You are not serious. Tonight, I shall change everything (that is metal) in this house to gold. Early in the morning I will go to all the metal workers and potter smiths and buy their tin and lead, then go to Lothbury to purchase all the copper.

Surly: What? You will change that too?

Mammon: Yes, and I will purchase Devonshire and Cornwall and turn them into gold-mines! Aren’t you impressed?

Surly: Not at all.

Mammon: But you will be when you see the Philosopher’s Stone, only a little bid will be transformed into gold, no all the silver or copper will be expanded a thousand times into gold. Then you will believe me.

Surly: When you do, I will believe you. But if my eyes defraud me (I will give them no opportunity to do so), sure I’ll ask a whore to piss out my eyeballs into the toilet the next day. (Fuck my brains
Mammon: Ha! What! Do you think I am bullshitting you, sir? I will restore his youth and turn him to an eagle, to the 5th age — make him get his sons and daughters; you giants, as our philosophers have done. I assure you, I will get the flower of the son, the perfect ruby called elixir. As a matter of fact, I can change everything. This power can bestow upon you honor, love, respect, longevity, courage and safety, yes, of course, victory and within twenty eight days, I will change an eighty year-old man into a child.

Surly: Without doubt he's already being refreshed.

Mammon: No, I mean to say, bring back his youth, refresh him like an eagle, make him in his prime, 56 years old make him, let him bear sons and daughters. Big, young man, just like our ancient philosophers have done (like our ancient fathers of alchemy before the Great Flood), taking a knife’s tip to the stone once a week with the (fertile?) of a grain of a mustard seed on it and become strong Marsees and bear your cupids.

Surly: The diseased whores working on Pict-Hath Street would like to thank you for keeping their disease alive.

Mammon: It is a secret between creating nature which can cure disease. And cure all future disease; a month’s sickness in a day, a year’s in twelve days: and the grief of age in any case can be cured within a month. In spite of all your doctor’s remedies, I’ll move the plague out of England in three months.

(Act II, Scene i)

The following dialogue is our first experience with alchemy in the play. In this scene, Face is talking with Mammon and Surly, another trickster and card cheat, about an on-going experiment he is conducting which will make them all rich by turning everything into gold. Face moves back and forth, in and out of his laboratory, talking to Subtle about the experiment. He is using a lot of the technical terminology relating to chemistry and pseudo-chemistry, of which Mammon has no knowledge. Meanwhile, Mammon impatiently waits, asking questions and interrupting their conversation. As he does, Surly continues his suspicion and cynicism over the trick on Mammon.

Mammon: Did we do it? Has our day arrived? Did we get it?
Face: Until the evening, it will be red before you, sir; you'll be crimson red, fermented in red has done his job. Three hours from now, be prepared for transformation in alchemy.
Mammon: Pertinacious, Surly. Once again I say to you, “You will be rich.” Today you work with idiot, tomorrow you can look the lords in their eyes. Is the west wind blowing? Look at the face of the gobular flask with a long, cylindrical neck, see how it blushes?
Face: He looks like a young woman with a child, sir, that were only now found by their Master.
Mammon: Wonderful, entertaining Lungs! My only worry is whether or not I can get enough materials in this town to satisfy half of my demands.
Face: Not enough, sir? Just buy the covering roof off of the churches.
Mammon: That’s a good idea. (Act II, Scene ii)

Mammon states that he is investing a lot of money in this project by buying the best materials available. This should please Subtle because Mammon is willing to pay handsomely for the materials he is going to steal. Addi-
tionally, the excerpt reveals Mammon’s ambivalence towards the Church by discussing harlots and his lascivious dreams of the future.

Mammon: I intend to have substantial list of concubines, equal to Solomon, who had the philosopher’s balls, like me. And, with the help of the elixir, I will be as strong as Hercules and sleep with fifty women a night. Are you sure, you’ll sign it in blood?

Face: Both in blood and I spirit, sir.

Mammon: I will make my bed fluffy and not stuff them with hard materials and then, in my oval room decorated with erotic paintings, just like Tiberius stole from Elephantis: and insipid Aretine barely imitated him. Then, I will cut my mirrors into more sharp angles in order to reflect and multiply my naked body as I walk along. The demons in female form. My room will have vapoured perfume so thick that we will get lost. My bathtub will be as deep as a pit into which we can fall. After bathing we will roll around and be dried in gossamer and roses. (By the way, is it red yet?) Wherever I see a wealthy man or a rich lawyer, who has a beautiful wife, I will offer him a thousand pounds to have sex with her. (Act II, Scene ii)

Continuing with the theme of disregard for the church, Mammon continues to reveal his epicurian ideals. It is clear the Mammon’s lustful desires corrode his mind and his insatiable appetite for sexual gratification could foreshadow his downfall in the end.

Mammon: Good morning, Father.

Subtle: Gentle son, good morning, and the same to your friend there. Who is he?

Did he come with you (Is he your friend?)

Mammon: He is a non-believer. I brought him along him to change his mind about alchemy.

Subtle: Son, I fear you have become greedy. You have come today at the exact time:

You anticipate your heyday this morning. This brings forward something of uneasiness of a missed opportunity and some lustful appetite. Take care so as not to make yourself unworthy of your fortune due to your wreckless haste I feel very sorry to see my laborious experiment, so close to completion, taking a sad turn because one fails to be patient, especially after I devote my passion to them. I beg Heaven to bear witness, as I ask you, to trust that I have conducted this experiment for the public good, for Holy goodness and Divine tenderness. Now, a miracle comes into a body. In what respect, my son, will you now walk crookedly, especially to your own lust, use these gifts for a great, Catholic specific happiness: be sure that a curse will befall you and expose (Damage) your secretive ways.

Mammon: I know, sir. You needn’t worry about me. I have only come to prove this Gentleman wrong.

Surly: True, sir, anyone who refuses to believe in your stone will not be tricked.

Subtle: What do you need? You have enough, which is perfect.

Mammon: Oh! But —

Subtle: Why, this is to be cherished.

Mammon: No, I assure you, I will use all in all pious uses, that is, the founding of colleges and grammar schools, the marrying of young virgins, building hospitals, and once in a while, building a church.

Who is this? (Act II, Scene iii)

Still another example of Mammon’s sexual hunger is revealed when he first encounters Dol, who is disguised as
a nobleman's sister, and inquires who she is. Face tells him that she is a genius, a scholar, but sadly her own intelligence is making her mad and she has sought Face's help in order to be cured. Mammon praises her nobility and in the process of trying to woo her, his lustfulness causes Subtle to fail in his experiment. Sir Epicure Mammon has spent his whole estate in search of the stone and is to be comforted after all his cost, though disappointed of his final result, with the hope of getting a little something to cure his itch.

The next client seeking the help of the Alchemist (Subtle) is a young Anabaptist, a tailor with the Holy Brethren of Amsterdam, named Ananias, who ironically and rather interestingly, seeks a boost in his faith from the philosopher's stone. Ananias, introducing himself as a servant of the banished Brethren, claims to pay reasonable prices for things from widows and orphans in the name of the Saints. He goes on to say further that he was sent by his Master, Tribulation, to witness the experiments in progress. Ananias appears to be naïve and is lead around by the nose by the Elders of his faith. His naivety (or even stupidity) angers Subtle who makes him leave and forces him to return with his Master.

Ananias: Pleased to meet you, I am a servant of the banished Brethren, who buys things from widows and orphans at honest prices, for the Saints: A Deacon.
Subtle: Oh, so you were sent by your Master, your teacher?
Ananias: I was sent by Tribulation Wholesome, my Master, our enthusiastic Pastor.
Subtle: Good. I am expecting some orphan's things which are due here shortly.
Ananias: What kind of things, sir?
Subtle: Pewter, brass, and irons, kitchen utensils and metals which we use in our alchemy: in which the brethren can certainly bargain for them, if you have immediate payment.
Ananias: Were these orphans' parents true antibaptists?
Subtle: Why do you want to know?
Ananias: If they were antibaptists then we must certainly be honest in this transaction by paying the genuine value.
Subtle: Oh, Lord, you deceiver, and if their parents were not Anabaptists? What then? Now that I think about it, I do not trust you and will not until I have spoken with your Pastor. Have you brought money to buy more coals?
Ananias: The Brethren ordered me to say so to you, sir. Definitely, they witness your experiment.
Subtle: What!
Ananias: You have been paid 30 pounds for materials like brick, clay and glass; you have also been paid an additional 90 pounds for other materials, moreover the Brethren have said that they heard of a man in Heidelberg (Germany) who has made gold from an egg and an ounce of metal shavings.
Subtle: What is your name?
Ananias: My name is Ananias.
Subtle: Get out, deceiver of the Apostles! Leave, now, go mischief; the Holy Assembly has no other person to send to me other than you, wicked Ananias? Send your superior here immediately to atone for you and give me compensation, for should they not, the Alchemists fire will die out and I will not help you. I will extinguish the fire, destroy the alembics and the furnaces, and more. You wretch, now the red and black tincture will be forever lost. All hope of restoring the Bishops or the Anti-Christian heirarchy shall perish if they are not here in 60 minutes. All the work which has gone into the
separation and purification of my work will be undone. You wicked Ananias. [Exit Ananias]

(Act II, Scene iv)

Later Drurger returns with more money hoping not to offend Subtle once again. Upon arriving, we learn that he is indeed pleased with his horoscope and wants the worms in his stomach cured. So happy is Drurger with his fortune and shop design that he brings new clients for tricking trio: Kastril, who just received his inheritance, and his sister, Dame Pliant, who lost a husband but comes to find a new partner. Kastril has just recently arrived in London and eagerly desires to master arguing and “smart fighting.” He also wants to be known in high English society. His naivety does, throughout the play, make him look like an ass.

Ananias returns with Tribulation, his master, still filled with ill-will towards Face. Tribulation, the pastor of Amsterdam, has more restraint and political savvy as well as being engaged in many charitable works. What is more, he is also lobbying for support from the aristocracy to restore their lost political status as well as expanding their religious territories. Tribulation staunchly refutes any authority other than the Bible and their own religious practice, the Brethren, the Anabaptists.

Tribulation: These punishments are typical of the Saints, such reproaches, we who are better than all others (Anabaptists), must put up with? with steady shoulders we will face the all which is sent to challenge us, that which will tempt our frailties.

Ananias: In pure zeal, I dislike this man: he is (a pagan), a heathen. He can speak the language of Canaan (Hebrew? Or Aramaic?), truly.

Tribulation: Yes, I think he is disrespectful person, indeed.

Ananias: He has the Mark of the Beast-666-on his forehead. And for his Philosopher’s Stone, it is the work of evil and with his craft, he blinds the eyes of men.

Tribulation: But Good Brother, we meld all possibilities that may aid us in our Holy Cause.

Ananias: This cannot, the Holy Cause should have a Holy Course.

Tribulation: It is not always so. The Children of Hell frequently become the fools of God.

Besides, we must concede that it is in man’s nature, where he lives, can be attributed to his circumstances. If they work in the furnace and inhale the metals, their minds become inebriated and incline him to seek passion.

Look at those people, where are there atheists who are better than crooks? Or more disrespectful or choleric than your glass makers? More Anti-Christian than your Bell maker? What is it that makes the devil so devilish, I ask you, Satan is our common enemy and he can withstand the fire, brimstone and arsenic? We must concede to the motives which agitate our blood. It is so. When this work is finished, the Philosopher’s Stone is made, this fire become zeal, and could proceed to the fair punishment, and say against the triple scarlet-rugged clothes of Roman Bishops. We must await his summons and anticipate the arrival of the Holy Spirit. You have carelessly accused him with the Brethren’s Blessing of Heidelberg, emphasizing that we ought to hasten his work with the intent of reviving our dead Saints, which would be nothing more than the use of the Philosopher’s Stone. And, so a Scottish learned Elder, assured me — bribery is the only medicine for the governor in order to persuade him of our cause: and it must be done daily, in the disease.

Ananias: I have not improved myself as man, not since the light first shone on me: I am sad for having
offended you.

Tribulation: Let’s meet him.

Ananias: We are of good intentions and with God, I will knock. [Knocks]
Peace is within.

Subtle, being quite antagonistic, tries to provoke the Anabaptists by explaining to them the power and majesty of the philosopher’s stone. He states then just a few drops of the elixir can cure any ailment and by offering it to the aristocracy they can gain favor and influence. With this influence they can then purchase military forces, even become Lords themselves. Subtle even has them believe that this elixir from the philosopher’s stone will help them against the Catholic Church and its power in England / Europe.

Subtle: Oh, is that you? It’s time? Your sixty minutes are up, you see: Down there the lazy Henry and the circulating tower. Alembic, bolt’s head, retort and pelican, all have been ignited. Wicked Ananias! Have you returned? No, then, it is not settled yet.

Tribulation: Sir, please do not be upset, he is just become modest in himself. I implore your patience. His fever has carried him off the course.

Subtle: Why, this does quell my anger!

Tribulation: The Brethren had not intended to cause you trouble but we are ready to offer our help to any project the Holy Spirit or you direct.

Subtle: This does make me happy! Why, it should now be settled, now you have recognized us. Have you talked about the Philosopher’s Stone? And its benefit which meet your needs as well? The Stone will show you (besides hiring foreign forces, or attempting to recruit the Dutch, your friends, from the Indies to serve you with their navy) even modest use of the Stone will make you a force to be reckoned with. For example, a great man in a state had been suffering from gout, why not send him 3 drops of elixier in order to immediately help him? Another man was suffering from palsy or the dropsy. He drinks our oils and his youth is restored to him; there you are, you have made a new friend, and all of his friends. A lord who is a leper, a knight with syphilis and a squire with both, you can cure them by rubbing them with our medicine, you shall have even more friends.

Tribulation: Yes, this is indeed convincing.

Subtle: Then to change the lawyers bullshit to gold at Christmas —

Ananias: Christ-tide, not Christmas, I beg you.

Subtle: Ananias, what is it?

Ananias: I understand.

Subtle: Or converting his partially guided materials into gold. There is no denying that you shall have more friends. To have power to pay any army while in battle, to buy the King of France out of his Kingdom or the King of Spain out of the Indies. There is nothing you cannot do against Lords, either spiritual or temporal.

Tribulation: Very true, we can become temporal Lords, as a matter of fact.

Subtle: You can become anyone, stop and give lengthy, ponderous homily or suck up your ‘ha,’ and ‘hum’ a tune. I cannot blame those who are not as Fortunate as I, or against religion and utter voices to summon their company together, for flattery does work well with women as well as good tempered people. It is like ringing a bell? all well come.
Ananias: Bells are for Catholics.
Subtle: No more warning you? That is the end of my patience. By the sun, everything will be meaningless. I have no desire to be tortured by you.
Tribulation: I beg you sir, please be calm.
Subtle: All will be destroyed. I have told you.
Tribulation: Please forgive us, we stand corrected; his zeal has uttered a sermon somewhere. Now that we are near the Stone, his zeal is no longer necessary.
Subtle: No, why not in pious appearance, why try to persuade widows to give you their inheritance, or let allow pious wives to steal their husband’s inheritance, or persuade them for the common purpose. You do not need to take advantage of bonds, which causes only a one-day delay, and say everything should be confiscated as a penalty from God. Nor can you fill your stomach with huge meals the night before the following days fast.
During these hours the Holy Brothers and sisters need to be kind and tolerate your unyielding body. Nor throw out trivial bones of contention among your hungry hearers on an issue whether a Christian may, in fact, hunt hawks, or even hunt for that matter; nor whether respectable elderly women may be permitted to let their hair down or wear tight jackets to church or even starch their favorite clothing.
Subtle: Does he have a sufficient amount of money in his bag to buy Our goods inside? I am the guardian angel of charity in as much as for common sake, to make the most in dealings for my poor orphan, although I do hope you, too, Brethren, make good gains. There are our goods, inside. After you take a look, buy them and are finished registering them, we will be ready for our experiment; there’s not so much to do: just throw in the medicine so as to turn it into silver and then brass will be turned to gold. I will then weigh them and give them to you.
Tribulation: But how long, sir? 8, 9, 10 days? It would be liquid silver, then in 3 days it will turn yellow, and then 15 days later it will be authoritarian alchemy.
Ananias: About the second day of the third week in September, then.
Subtle: That’s right, my dear Ananias.
Tribulation: How much do you think everything will cost?
Subtle: Some hundred marks — enough to fill 3 carts, take the goods now, you can make 6 million marks from them but I need more coals to put in the furnace.
Tribulation: What!
Subtle: One more load, and then we will be finished. We must make our fire hotter.
We passed through horse dung heat, bathing heat, ash heat? all slower heats. If the holy purse is empty because of no business and not even the Saints assist us, I have a trick to meet the pewter and then you will be able to buy it immediately and with a bit of a stain, you will be as good as Dutch dollars and any of Holland’s silver coins.
Tribulation: Can you really do that?
Subtle: Yes, but wait a minute, is this legal?
Ananias: Legal? We have nothing to do with this local government, or even if we did, it is a foreign coin.
Subtle: This is not counterfeiting, just simply making molds.
Tribulation: Ha? You make an excellent distinction, molding (casting) money may be legal.
Ananias: Actually, it is legal.
Tribulation: Certainly, I accept it.
Subtle: There is no hesitation needed, sir, as Ananias believes: He has examined everything.
Tribulation: I’ll ask the Brethren for approval, do not worry.
Ananias: The Brethren will approve it, without doubt. Where will it be done?
[ Knock from outside ]

Subtle: We'll talk about that later. There is someone here who would like to talk to me. I beg you to go inside and look at the goods. That is our inventory. I'll be right in.
[ Exit Ananias and Tribulation ]

(Act III, Scene i)

These ardent Anabaptists try to justify their counterfitting by calling it molding. They are eager to obtain power with the help of those resources created by the stone. Subtle takes advantage of their wish and provokes situations that are attractive to their religious sensitivities and desires. He temps them with the lure of foreign forces, foreign countries, and making known to them powerful aristocrats with the excellent power of the stone.

Sent off by Face, Druger and Kastril return. The latter wants to master how to argue, or fight and wants to be informed a possibility of finding a new spouse for the sister is rising. Dapper, the tobaccoist who made the required rituals returns, hoping to see the Fairy Queen. Dol, who is supposed to be the Queen, is busy dealing with lusty-minded Mammon and is locked in a privy with a gag of ginger bread which she is also told is part of the rituals. During that time, Sir Epicure Mammon finds it hard to treat Dol as she pretends to be a much learned scholar and can't control her academic ramblings.

About obtaining Kastril's sister, the young widow, Face and Subtle have been quarreling when Surly, disguised as a Spanish nobleman, arrives. The disguised Surly expresses his wish to see a beautiful woman. They try to introduce Dol but she is busy; so instead they show him Dame Pliant, Kastril's sister, and tell Kastril that her hope is to be fulfilled. Surly and Pliant go together to the garden.

Mammon's surprise at Dol's abnormal behavior is found out by Subtle who tells Mammon that his sensuality will destroy the creation of the effect of the stone. Discouraged, Mammon leaves the house but later comes back to restore his loss with Surly. In the meantime, Surly reveals his true self and asks Pliant to marry him and tell her that Subtle and Face are cheaters who trying to steal everything from her.

Surly: Lady, do you understand what kind of hands you are in? You are in the nest of villains! Your honor was so close to being injected (through your gullibleness). Everything was set as a place and time; by any other conditions you would have acted like a man. Because you are a beautiful woman: I wish you were, too. I am a gentleman and I have come here in disguise to reveal the evil of this house. I could have ravished your honor, but I have not, I prefer to assert my interest in your love. They say you are a rich widow, I am a single man who has nothing. As I have protected your chastity, may I ask you to make me a rich man with your fortunes?

Pliant: I will, sir.

Surly: Then, as for these rogues, leave them to me. I will deal with them. I will make them behave.
[ Enter Subtle ]

(Act IV, Scene vi)

Seeing this, the cheaters instigate Kastril to fight with Surly who is an wicked imposter. Now is a good chance for quarrelsome Kastril who wants to fight and he picks a quarrel with Surly. No sooner has the threat of fighting
vanished when Dol tells her comrades that Lovewit, the master of the house is coming back. The ending of the play is not to expose the truth and restore lost property as is usual in comedy but to keep the game going. The master of the house, Lovewit, returns unexpectedly. Face takes the occasion to expel his partners but their escape suggests that somewhere else, in the future, a new version of the game will go on. Back in the original house, Face changed back to Jeremy, consolidates his own position by enlisting awkward Lovewit by telling lies and trying to persuade him but, in the end, everything is exposed. Lovewit not only keeps the goods the cozeners have brought to his home but, with Face’s help, wins Dame Pliant.

Kastril: Wow! You are not old-fashioned! You are great!
Lovewit: Why not smoke with your sister?

[ Exit Kastril, and Dame Pliant ]

The master who receives such happiness from his servant, to obtain a widow as well as wealth is not expressing thanks would not be free of punishment.
In spite of my small efforts, his own soul allowed me to meet my young wife. Think what will become of a young wife and a good servant: Expand his wisdom. This is your turn, Speak Rascal.

Face: I shall, sir. Gentleman, my role in the last scene restores me to a higher position, yet it was the classical principle of consistency of fittingness. Though I became clean from Subtle, Surly, Mammon, Dol, hot Ananias, Druger and All in this business, I put myself on your side, that is my truly, and this filthy lure which I got, if you quit me, take your time and rest and feast and we will invite all new guests!

(Act V, Scene v)

[ END ]

Discussion
This extensive discussion of the text clearly demonstrate life in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The selected passages have served to highlight those instances the author feels are most critical in supporting his claims in the paper. The reader is strongly encouraged to read the text in its entirety, either in the original Early Modern English or in its modern translation. In the remaining section of this paper, the author will further discuss his thesis that Ben Jonson accurately depicts early 17th century London for his posterity.

When reviewing “The Alchemist”, we can clearly see the Elizabethan and Jacobean ideals apparent in contemporary England. Jonson masterfully articulated in his characters personality characteristics endowed to all people (i.e. greed, nativity, desire for upward mobility, the quest for some higher truth, etc); however, this alone does not show contemporary 17th century England. Although the characters do manifest human qualities, one must look deeper into the social undertones woven into the play. It is only by experiencing these subtle, yet direct, references to Elizabethan and Jacobean England can we get a feel for the legitimacy of Jonson’s characterizations.

The first indication that Jonson is truly showing his England is by using Alchemy as the basis for representation. During this time, the Church was a powerful and influential force in England and, though Alchemy was widely accepted as legitimate science, it was condemned by the Church for relying on mysticism and divination, cardinal
sins against the Church. In view of this, Jonson rightly depicts Alchemy in the shadows of London, not an overt practice since it was, most likely, punishable by the Church. Additionally, the characters show deep concern for the legitimacy of Alchemy such as Dapper and Ananias asking if it was indeed legal. These metaphysical questions would certainly be asked by those who desire wealth, success and standing in a society governed by the Church.

A second indication that Jonson correctly represents his England and the socio-cultural themes therein can be found in the socio-historical references to Spain and the respect English had Spanish Armada. Throughout the play, there was a certain degree of respect for the Spaniard, especially since Spain had the most powerful Armada in the world. We can clearly see that their interaction, asides and monologues related to the Spaniard show this. The influence of the Spaniards is also felt in that Surlay goes so far as to impersonate him in order to lure money and love from Dame Pliant. Would the Spanish have not been so admired, this play may never have been considered. Admittedly, the plan does not work, but the attempt clearly indicates the English mentality.

The final point here is that the notions related to sexuality and gender roles depict the Elizabethan psyche of sexuality. Without question, overt, sensual and pleasurable sex was frowned upon by the Church, yet, people enjoy their sexuality — especially when it flies in the face of conventional, centralized restrictions. The sexual tension game between Dol and Mammon, then Doland Surlay shows this quite well. Although Dol is a prostitute, Jonson does not show her as the Church sees her, as vermon or a pestulance, rather as the common man (or any man) would see her, as a beautiful woman. Mammon’s sexual bravado is also central to the story and he earnestly wants to maximize his sexual prowess, like most men. Though this does not show Elizabethan and Jacobean England per se, matched against the backdrop of the presence of the Brethren, the Anabaptists Ananias and Tribulation sure makes a strong case.

In the end, all the character’s greediness, lustfulness, and foolishness brings them down. The people’s attitudes, desires, and passions are tested through the cozeners’ plotting. In so doing, Ben Jonson weaves a marvelous tale about early 17th century Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

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