

Elizabethan and jacobean drama essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Within this extract we see Sir Epicure Mammon return to Lovewit's house to claim the riches promised him and be introduced to the mad 'lord's sister' (II. 3. 221). He is met by Face in the guise of Lungs the Alchemists servant. The two engage in a dialogue concerning Mammon's 'stuff' (IV, I, 4) in which he is led to believe that the Alchemist is readying himself to turn the possessions that mammon has given to him into gold. Face then continues to dupe Mammon into believing that the 'Lady' he has come to meet is anxiously waiting for him " She is almost in her fit to see you" (IV, I, 8).

Immediately after this exchange between the two Face retires to get the 'Lady' and returns with Dol Common in tow 'richly dressed' in her guise as a noble woman. We are then privy to an excruciating and hilarious conversation between the Lady and Mammon in which Mammon extravagantly praises Dol alluding to her beauty and nobility " There is a strange nobility I' your eye, this lip, that chin... "(IV, I, 55) He continues to court her with his words whilst Face watches on in disbelief until unable to contain his amusement any longer face leaves the room.

Mammon continues to endeavour to woo the Lady with his promises of untold riches and a life of luxury once he becomes the master of the philosopher's stone " but come forth and taste the air of fine palaces... "(135) His fanciful boasting almost reaches fever pitch and Face returns in order to quieten him down asking the couple to retire to another part of the building. This scene is significant to the play as a whole as it serves to move the dramatic action forward and further establishes the characters involved.

In arranging the clandestine meeting between Mammon and Dol Face is able to further his scam. His words and deeds within the scene convey his talent for deception " To him Dol suckle him. " (33). Reeling Mammon further into the scam sets the wheels in motion for Face to procure more money from him behind Subtle's back thus preparing us for his betrayal in act V. These points therefore suggest that we as an audience gain a further insight into Face's independence and ability to act spontaneously to further his own ends. Mammon's lines within this scene also to serve reinforce our views of his character.

In Act II sc II lines 40-80 we are introduced to his hopes and desires for unlimited wealth as he imagines all the riches he will have once the Alchemist has done his work. This serves not only to give us direct insight into the greed, desire for material satisfaction and debauchery central to his character but also illustrates how he is given to flights of fancy and self-delusion. This is further elaborated upon within this scene. Mammon proposes to woo the Lady with his talk of all the splendour and riches he will soon be in possession of " Now, Epicure, heighten thyself, talk to her all in gold... (24)

It is also evident how Mammon's dreams for material satisfaction make him an easy target, for he is easily duped into handing over more money to Face. He fails to see past his own lustful desires in that he sees only what he chooses to see. He has been told Dol is a noble woman and because this is what he desires he fails to notice that she is no such thing and perceives her to be a ' Lady'. " Were there nought else t' enlarge your virtues to me, these

answers speak your breeding and nobility" (42). This scene also serves to reinforce our perception of Dol Common.

In Act I i it is evident that she is willing to tolerate Face and Subtle's arguments as a means to an end. She defuses the situation between the two and puts the scam back on track " Will you be your own destructions, gentlemen" (I, I, 106) From her language and actions in previous scenes it is evident that she is cooperative and we can see how she fits into the scam and is used by Face and Subtle as a tool. Here to in Act IV i she is willing to tolerate Mammon's pomposity and delusional fantasies and displays great self control, common sense and intelligence in order to keep the scam ticking along and thus be successful.

The language used throughout the play as a whole is of great significance in that throughout the play the characters of Face and Subtle never physically create anything they merely employ language as a way in which to ensnare their victims and persuade them that they can deliver what they promise. " Subtle and Face never actually do anything they transform or transmute nothing" Bailey C, York Notes The Alchemist Ben Jonson, 2000, Pearson Education LTD.

Like wise within this scene Mammon's language is used to create pictures of the grandeur and opulence that he dreams he will acquire " Tincture of pearl, and coral and amber... (137) this serves to show us Mammon's greed and lust are what drive him, he has seen none of the riches thus far and yet is content to use words to impress and create a fantasy world. Jonson uses blank verse throughout the play and in this particular scene this use of

heightened, metered language lends itself perfectly to further creating mammon's character. Mammon's lines are peppered with hyperbole, this exaggerated speech impacts upon the comedic aspects of the scene as we the audience are in on the scam and therefore can see the irony created through the language he uses to describe all of the fantastic pleasures he hopes to acquire.

His delusions of Dol's nobility also illustrate this and the language used therefore makes the situation and his character all the more farcical. Jonson has also made good use of the aside here as we see Face passing comment on Mammon's ridiculous wooing of Dol "Very like! Her father was a costermonger"(58) again involving the audience in the scam. Dol's responses to Mammon's praises and fantasies are cautious and prudent for every splendid picture Mammon conjures with his speech she has a rebuke thus making his words laughable.

The language, action and plot lines evident within this scene allude to the major themes found throughout the whole play. Mammon exemplifies the debauchery, lust and greed present within London society a trait Jonson was keen to expose through his writing. Also evident is the theme of deception, play-acting and putting on a face, Mammon is being deceived by both Face and Dol. Obviously the theme of alchemy can be seen to be a major theme in both the play as a whole and here in this extract "In the broad sense, alchemy involves the notion of change, and this is seen at all points throughout the play..."

The victims hope to change themselves... Such a notion of change is, of course illusory: just as lead cannot be changed into gold so, Jonson is saying, man's corruption resists improvement" Bailey C, York Notes The Alchemist Ben Jonson, 2000, Pearson Education LTD. Jonson was keen to expose what he saw as the corruption evident within Elizabethan society. In conclusion it is evident that this Act Iv sc I embroils all the themes alluded to throughout the play. Which in turn serve as an embodiment of Contemporary London society with all its flaws as Jonson saw them.

His characters are caricatures; the imagery used a convention to unearth the immoral and debauched bleakness of Elizabethan society. In employing these conventions Jonson was commenting on the state of society and aiming that through satire the audience would relate the play to the times in which they were living. It can be argued that in exposing the foolishness of the characters gulled within the play, driven by greed and of getting something out of nothing he was exposing the greed inherent in the population of London as a whole.