

**THE ILLUSION OF POWER:
NEPTUNE'S TRIUMPH
AND THE POET'S DILEMMA**

Yoshiko ONO

For all the consistent praise of divinity by the court poet, Ben Jonson, King James, in fact, had no privilege against mortality. As a modern historian writes, the king was “burned out nervously and weakened physically” and “was not the man to cope with crises which lay ahead”¹. The last six years of his reign were a step toward break-down of the Jacobean myth which the king and his poet had proliferated throughout his reign.

Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion was supposed to be the last tribute of Jonson to the ageing Monarch. It was prepared as the Twelfth Night masque for the Court Christmas. Jonson wrote the masque in answer to the request from Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham who had returned from their long-stay in Spain². On 18th of February, 1623, Charles and Buckingham, together with the prince's private secretary, Sir Francis Cottington, made a secret journey to Spain to negotiate the prince's marriage with the Spanish Infanta Maria and to bring her home to England³. The Spanish match had been a favorite project of King James. It represented a major European alliance and seemed to promise an eventual reconciliation with the Catholic faith and the powers that adhered to it. But it also involved large conces-

sions to the Catholic cause in England. So when, in 1617, King James decided to enter into negotiations with Spain over the possible marriage of Prince Charles and the Infanta⁴, Protestants in England were appalled by the prospect of having another Catholic Queen after the Tudor Dark Age under the reign of "bloody Mary". The outcry of anger and opposition to James's line of policy became wide-spread. In consequence, James introduced new legal restrictions on "lavish and licentious" speech concerning matters of state. The first drastic proclamation was issued on 24 December, 1620, and reissued on 26 July, 1621. On 25 September, 1623, another proclamation was published against the printing and selling of books contrary to the laws of the land and the regulations of the Company of Stationers⁵.

Prince Charles's safe return from Spain, and the fact that he returned without the Infanta, in October 1623, was, therefore, welcomed with great relief by the English people. Charles's return was automatically associated that the negotiations with Spain were broken off and that England had turned away from commonly resented alliance. A number of printed poems, sermons, and tracts, described the welcoming celebrations⁶. When Prince Charles landed at Portsmouth on Sunday, October 5th, 1623, the prince was showered with rejoicings by the people:

There were feasting in the streets. Hogsheads of wine were rolled out and opened, and there were bonfires, bonfires everywhere. On Blackheath fourteen loads of wood went into the making of a single fire... At Cambridge the bells rang all Monday and Tuesday. Patriotic speeches were delivered in the colleges, and bonfires lit in the quadrangles. On Wednesday the whole university assembled for a public oration and that night there were 'bonfires, drums, guns, fire-

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

works, till past midnight, all the town about'.⁷

Jonson's masque to be staged at court on the 6th of January dealt with the safe return of Prince Charles from the dangerous paths of his mission to Spain; and yet no direct reference was made to the Spanish match in the masque. The subject-matter was to pay homage to Neptune's political wisdom and the consequent triumph for the return of his son. Neptune and his court was, of course, identified with James I and his court and the argument of the masque was presented as an ideal version of recent political events connected with the prince's journey to Spain.

The masque begins with the scene of the Banqueting House itself where the courtly entertainment is being held at the moment with an attendance of courtiers and foreign ambassadors. When King James takes his seat and the loud music stops, a 'Poet' appears on the stage, followed by a 'Master-Cooke' of the Banqueting House. From the conversation of the two characters on the stage we learn that a representation of a masque is going to take place in the present moment and that the task of the 'Poet' on this occasion is to read the argument of the masque for the benefit of the audience. The argument of the masque takes us to the mythological kingdom of Neptune, where the safe return of his son, Albion, is going to be celebrated as the triumph of Neptune's wise government:

The mightie Neptune, mightie in his styles,
And large command of waters, and of isles,
Not, as the Lord and Soueraigne of the Seas,
But, Chiefe in the art of riding, late did please

To send his Albion forth, the most his owne,
Vpon discouery, to themselues best knowne,
Through Celtiberia; and, to assist his course,
Gauē him his powerfull MANAGER of Horse,
With diuine Proteus, Father of disguise,
To waite Vpon them with his counsels wise,
In all extremes. His great commands being done,
And he desirous to review his Sonne,
He doth dispatch a floting Ile, from hence,
Vnto the Hesperian shores, to waft him thence.

.....

But what the triumphs are, the feast, the sport,
And proud solemnities of Neptunes Court,
Now he is safe, and Fame's not heard in vaine,
But we behold our happie pledge againe.

*(Neptune's Triumph, 130-53)*⁸

In this invention, Neptune had sent his son, Albion, to Celtiberia to discover the real facet of “their hearts, and loue” (Ibid., 359). When Albion had completed his mission assigned to him by Neptune, the father desired to have him back at court and “dispatch [ed] a floting Ile.../ Vnto the Hesperian shores” (Ibid., 142-43) which enabled his son's safe and easy journey home.

The main masque after the conversation of the ‘Poet’ and the ‘Master-Cooke’ presents the floting island with masquers seated beneath the “Tree of Harmonie” (Ibid., 196). While the island moves forward, Apollo, Mercury, Muses, and the goddess of Harmony, appear from the heaven. Apollo sings to celebrate that Albion “is home returned well” (Ibid., 347)

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

and the Chorus admires that Albion's safe return is the triumph of Neptune and his political wisdom. Proteus, landed from the island, sings his song directly to King James seated in his throne and confirms that Neptune's "great designes/ Are read, reflected, in his sonnes returne" (Ibid., 369-70), and that, consequently, "the Pompe of Neptunes triumph shines" (Ibid., 368).

By rewriting the whole story, Ben Jonson seemed to make an attempt to free the king from all the complaints and the blame connected with Prince Charles's mission to Spain. Moreover, the main masque represented a political myth in the way that James viewed his government throughout his reign. The identification of James with Neptune as "Chiefe in the art of riding" (Ibid., 133) was a compliment to the King whose favourite sport was riding. But Jonson's allusion went deeper to the myth in which Neptune was the creator and the ruler of the embodiment of the ocean's energy, the horse. Since the age of Plato, the image of man directing a great horse had been a common metaphor for the victory of reason over the wildness of Nature, or the violence of passions. To be able to control destructive energies of Nature, both within and without, was the essential attribute of the Renaissance man. The myth of Neptune in Jonson's masque created a political myth that King James, through the vigour of his virtues, should bring order and peace to the British Isles surrounded by the sea.

The prospect of the sea shown after the main dance is a reflection of Neptune's wise government. The realm is cultivated; yet it retains the old virtues of the Golden Age:

Nowe turne and view the wonders of the deepe,
Where Proteus heards, and Neptunes Orkes doe keep,

Where all is plough'd, yet still the pasture's greene,
The wayes are found, and yet no path is seene. (Ibid., 466-69)

The fleet, discovered after the first revel of the masque, displays “a part of Neptunes strength” (Ibid., 509) that brings back “the riches of the Ocean” (Ibid., 511) to the realm for further prosperity whether in peace or war.

See, yond', his fleete, ready to goe, or come,
Or fetch the riches of the Ocean home,
So to secure him both in peace, and warres,
Till not one ship alone, but all be starres. (Ibid., 510-13)

The last songs of Proteus, Portunus, the God of port, and Saron, the God of navigation, are dedicated to King James on the throne: they address 'Neptune' directly and ask permission to sail for India (“aged Indus”) to collect “pearls” and incense for the glory of 'Neptune':

PROTEVS.

Although we wish the Triumph still might last
For such a Prince, and his discouery past,
Yet now, great Lord of waters, and of Isles,
Giue Proteus leaue to turne vnto his wiles:

PORTVNVS.

And, whilst young Albion doth thy labours ease,
Dispatch Portunus to thy ports,

SARON.

And Saron to thy Seas:

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

To meete old Nereus, with his fiftie girles,
From aged Indus laden home with pearls,
And orient gummes, to burne vnto thy name. (Ibid., 536-48)

As a political allusion, the lines of the quoted passage indicated a suggestion that England should promote trade with India and the Far East, in which King James had recently shown much interest as a national project. The East India Company established in 1600 had, in fact, been trading with "aged Indus" and importing goods such as silk, amber-grease, precious stones, and pearls, all of which were mentioned in the masque as luxurious 'gift' from the ocean. The last speech of Chorus to conclude the masque further promises prosperity and "the golden gifts of peace":

And may thy Subiects hearts be all on<e> flame:
Whilst thou dost keepe the earth in firme estate,
And, 'mongst the winds, dost suffer no debate.
But both at sea, and land, our powers increase,
With health, and all the golden gifts of peace. (Ibid., 550-54)

Jonson's masque celebrated the return of Neptune's son, Albion, from the court of Oceanus in Celtiberia as Neptune's great victory and a proof of his wisdom. However, the real history told the contrary. Prince Charle's mission to Spain brought nothing fruitful to England; far from it, King James was pushed into a new and hard course in foreign policy. The court was divided between James and Prince Charles concerning England's Continental policies⁹. James and his supporters were still determined to achieve a peaceful political settlement with Spain; Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham, on the other hand, tried to

promote their idea that the Continental turmoil could be ended, not by dynastic ties between England and Spain by marriage, but by military action against the Catholic league on the Continent. In order to win popular support a propaganda campaign was initiated by the faction of Prince Charles. The aim of the campaign was to undermine James's foreign policies and to give sufficient reasons for England to enter the war. All-powerful Neptune, who "dost keepe the earth in firme estate.../with health, and all the golden gifts of peace" (Ibid., 551/554), was a mere fiction. Neptune of the Jacobean court could exert his little influence on political realities.

And above all, the record of the actual performance of the masque itself was a total fiction. The Quarto of the masque in 1623, prepared for the actors and the patron, stated that "NEPTVNES TRIVMPH for the returne of ALBION, *celebrated in a Masque at the Court on the Twelfth night 1623*" (my underline), as if it had performed on the occasion. But the fact was, the masque was never presented at the court because of diplomatic concerns about the French and the Spanish ambassadors, who could not be invited to attend together¹⁰. Preparations for the performance were being made with diligence even behind the hard diplomatic negotiations with both ambassadors. A Venetian ambassador in London reported thus:

Here is much preparation against the masque at Twelfth Night, and many meetings at noblemen's houses in the afternoons; as, yesterday the Prince, with the rest of the retinue, were at the Lord of Bridgewater's, where they had a great banquet, and afterwards went home to supper, as the usual manner is.¹¹

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

But King James failed to resolve the diplomatic deadlock, and in the end was compelled to cancel the presentation of the masque.

Despite the fact of this cancellation, Jonson recorded the masque in the quarto as if it had been performed at court. In doing so, the poet preserved the masque as a 'text' to immortalise his invention¹² of a myth of England as the 'Fortunate Isles'. The triumph of the wise and peaceful reign of divine king was thus given perpetuity. Jonson was convinced that the poet had obligation to serve the State and to sustain wise government. His loyalty to the State urged him to rewrite history and to save the dignity of the Monarch.

Jonson suggested that wise government should need good counsellors. He wrote: "In Sovereignty it is a most happy thing, not to be compelled; but so it is the most miserable not to be counsell'd" (*Discoveries*, p.601)¹³. But Jonson had a doubt if the prince should "alwayes be sure to heare Truth? or be counsell'd the best things, not the sweetest?" (*loc.cit.*); and therefore he emphasised the need for a good counsellor. A good counsellor "must be furnish'd with an universall store in himselfe, to the knowledge of all Nature... But especially, [he] must be cunning in the nature of Man" (*Ibid.*, p.565). Besides, he should have "the opinion of his Honesty; and the opinion of his Wisdome" (*Ibid.*, p.566). Jonson was convinced that "the good counsellors to Princes are the best instruments of a good Age" (*Ibid.*, p.601).

Then who could be qualified as good counsellor to the prince? Jonson's answer was: the poet. Since Jonson had a conviction that the poet should have "the exact knowledge of all vertues, and their contraries" (*Ibid.*, p.595), and that his skill should have its "Originall from heaven" (*Ibid.*, p.636), the poet should be fully equipped to help sustain the good government. Jonson believed that the poet could "faine a

Common-wealth... [and] governe it with Counsels, strengthen it with Lawes, correct it with Iudgements, informe it with Religion, and Morals” (Ibid., p.595). Therefore, it was quite natural for Jonson, as the poet and good counsellor to the prince, to create masques with the intention of presenting the values which should operate in the State. His inclination to classicism was an attempt to organise the best thoughts of the past in the service of the present. The imagery and the role of the Monarch, the royal family, and the courtiers in the masque world were composed so as to remind them of their role to play in the actual court.

Jonson’s view of what the State should be was conservative. He hoped to restore values which he believed had operated in the past. His extensive borrowing from classic literature was the outcome of his belief that “they open’d the gates, and made the way, that went before us... as Guides” (Ibid., p.567). He created a world on the stage to revivify “the most prized of ancient cultures”. His ambition was “to hold Rome and London together in a single image, and to re-enact in England the role of Roman poet”¹⁴.

In *The Poetaster*, satiric comedy performed in 1601, Jonson created a character by the name of Horace, the great poet of the Golden Age of Latin literature under the reign of Augustus. The Horace of *The Poetaster* was cleverly associated with the poet Jonson, who in the coronation progress for James I in 1604 acclaimed the king the new Augustus in the hope to establish his position as the new Horace at the Court of new Augustus. The Jacobean Horace fashioned himself after the Roman Horace, “the best master, both of vertue, and wisdome; an excellent, and true judge upon cause, and reason” (Ibid., p.642), and assigned himself the job of counsellor to the prince.

The Jacobean masque was a form in which Jonson offered ways of

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

defining how the State should be governed. He explained the meaning and the function of the masque as follows:

It is a noble and iust aduantage, that the things subiected to understanding haue of those which are objected to sense, that the one sort are but momentarie, and meerely taking; the other impressing, and lasting: Else the glorie of all these solemnities had perish'd like a blaze, and gone out, in the beholders eyes. So short-liu'd are the bodies of all things, in comparison of their soules. And, though bodies oft-times haue the ill luck to be sensually preferr'd, they find afterwards, the good fortune (when soules liue) to be vtterly forgotten. This it is hath made the most royall Princes, and greatest persons (who are commonly the personaters of these actions) not onely studious or riches, and magnificence in the outward celebration, or shew; (which rightly becomes them) but curious after the most high, and heartie inuentions, to furnish the inward part... which, though their voyce be taught to sound to present occasions, their sense, or doth, or should alwayes lay hold on more remou'd mysteries.

*(Hymenaei, p.209)*¹⁵

Jonson's definition was that the masque should have two parts, the soul and the body : the one that is adressed to the understanding, and the other to the senses. The body of the masque is the "outward celebration or shew", while the soul of the masque depends on "the most high, and heartie inuentions". The outward show lasts only as long as sense experiences it and "perish'd like a blaze... in the beholders eyes"; the soul, on the other hand, remains vital to the masque and reveals the most profound truth of the State.

Jonson had high ethical motivation for masque-writing. Nevertheless, his invention was little appreciated by the court audience. What they expected in the masque was not philosophical density to give them insight into the social role they should take, but novelty of device which would appeal to their senses. The court gave applause to "Painting and Carpentry" ("An Expostulacon wth Inigo Iones", p.404)¹⁶ of "Mighty Showes" (Ibid., p.403). Their greatest delight lied in the sight of courtiers appearing as gods or heroes in gorgeous settings with songs and music, and their brilliantly choreographed dances. John Chamberlain, Jacobean famous letter-writer and was familiar with court masque, made a comment on the masque *The Golden Age Restored* presented at court in 1615 that "neither in devise nor shew was there anything extraordinarie but only excellent dauncing"¹⁷. Another courtier disappointingly referred to poor scenic device of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* in 1618: "Mr. Inigo Jones hath lost in his reputation in regard some extraordinary devise was looked for... and a poorer was never sene"¹⁸. It is apparent that the court audience missed the spectacular scenic effects they enjoyed in *Hymenaei* (1606) and *The Masque of Queens* (1609). Even King James, who declared himself as wise king, Solomon, showed his preference over "Mighty Showes". So when the king was entertained by *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, which was a finely wrought tribute to the king's recent political achievements in Scotland and Lancashire, James was not pleased by the masque's rhetoric which paid homage to his policy, but his main concern was with beautifully arranged steps and dances of the masquers. The king became impatient with the masquers lagging during the last dance and shouted loudly: Why don't they dance? What did you make me come here for? Devil take all of you, dance!¹⁹

Ben Jonson was never ignorant of the fact that the masque-writer's

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

function which the poet himself believed to be was not identical with the one that the court audience expected. Jonson's awareness of this gap was clearly stated in the comic dialogue between the 'Poet' and the 'Master-Cooke' of *The Neptune's Triumph*:

POET.

You are not his Maiesties Confectioner? Are you?

COOKE.

No, but one that has as good title to the roome, his Master-Cooke. What are you, Sir?

POET.

The most vnprofitable of his seruants, I, Sir, the Poet. A kind of a Christmas Engine; one, that is vsed, at least once a yeare, for a trifling instrument, of wit, or so.

COOKE.

Were you euer a Cooke?

POET.

A Cooke? no surely.

COOKE.

Then you can be no good Poet: for a good Poet differs nothing at all from a Master-Cooke. Eithers Art is the wisdom of the Mind.

POET.

As how, sir?

COOKE.

Expect. I am by my place, to know how to please the palates of the ghests; so, you, are to know the palate of the times: study the seuerall tastes, what euery Nation, the Spaniard, the Dutch, the French, the Walloun, the Neapolitan, the Bri[t]an, the Sicilian,

can expect from you.

POET.

That were a heauy and hard taske, to satisfie Expectation, who is so seuere an exactresse of duties; euer a tyrannous mistresse: and most times a pressing enemie.

COOKE.

She is a powerfull great lady, Sir, at all times, and must be satisfied: So must her sister, Madam Curiositie, who hath as daintie a palate as she, and these will expect.

POET.

But, what if they expect more then they vnderstand?

COOKE.

That's all one, Mr. Poet, you are bound to satisfie them. For, there is a palate of the Vnderstanding, as well as of the Senses. The Taste is taken with good relishes, the Sight with faire objects, the Hearing with delicate sounds, the Smelling with pure sents, the Feeling with soft and plump bodies, but the Vnderstanding with all these: for all which you must begin at the Kitchin. There, the Art of Poetry was learnd, and found out, or no where: and the same day, with the Art of Cookery. (*Neptune's Triumph*, p.682-84)

The 'Poet' in *Neptune's Triumph* caricatures himself as "a kind of a Christmas Engine" which is used for a momentary pleasure at court. The identification of the poet with the cook in the 'Master-Cooke's' speech exposes Jonson's own effort to satisfy the different tastes of the different audiences. The ironic equations of food and poetry reveals how the audience react to the artistic endeavour of the poet²⁰. Their greatest delight is not in the intellectual arguments written by the poet Jonson,

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

but in splendour and fancy of “the shew” that satisfy their senses. Through the debate between the ‘Poet’ and the ‘Master-Cooke’, Jonson criticised pettiness of the court’s expectation to the masque and asserted profoundness of his invention.

The main masque of *Neptune’s Triumph* celebrated the ideal reign of James I by identifying it with the myth of Neptune. And, at the same time, by the employment of the poet figure as masque-writer of the masque in progress on the stage, Jonson exposed that the masque world was an illusion, a fiction created by the poet. The ideal government of King James alluded in the main masque was thus nothing more than a political fantasy. However, Jonson’s intention was not to debase the present Monarchy into the object of satire. Far from it, he hoped to show the model to the Monarchy, the ‘original’ to be imitated. The meta-masque device introduced in *Neptune’s Triumph* was a Jonsonian way of manifestation that only the poet’s invention could achieve the ideal transformation of the Monarchy. Only the poet has the genius to compensate for the political fiasco and to reshape the State in the ideal mold. It was Jonson’s self-assertion of his power to “faine a Commonwealth”, and declaration of his belief in the power of illusion.

This, however, was not at all a blind faith. It was built upon his sharp awareness of the reality of the court. The present court was not identical with the ideal. The Monarch was not always the living example of the virtues. Yet Jonson well recognised his role as poet-counsellor to the State. He was careful of the manner in which he presented examples to the Monarch. Jonson wrote that a good counsellor should “behave himselfe modestly, and with respect”:

Yet free from Flattery, or Empire. Not with insolence, or precept;

but as the Prince were already furnished with the parts hee should hve, especially in affaires of State. (*Discoveries*, p.566)

The imagery and the roles of the Monarch, the royal family, and the courtiers in the main masque were, in fact, a fiction or myth that the poet had created in his invention; yet, they should be presented as if they were the natural parts of the nobility. For Jonson, the masque was a form in which the court audience should take their various impersonations as translations of their true identity. Each role in the masque was required to be interpreted as a personification of courtly qualities. It was crucial for the court to have the capacity to understand their social function that the masque exemplified.

Neptune's Triumph declared the power of illusion exercised by the poet. It demonstrated that the poet's genius had power to metamorphose the illusion of the virtues into the quasi-real. And moreover, Jonson reminded the court audience of the importance of the poet's task. When the 'Poet' of *Neptune's Triumph* answered to the 'Master-Cooke' that he had no wish to present an anti-masque, he was speaking for the poet Jonson and declared himself that the poet's duty was, not the creation of "trifles", but the reproduction of real values. Since the poet's task was, in Jonson's definition, to offer "to mankinde a certaine rule, and Pat-terne of living well, and happily; disposing us to all Civill offices of Society" (Ibid., p.636), the antimasque could not be his concern because it was not a "worthy part of presentation, /.../Meere By-workes, and al best Out-landish nothings" (*Neptune's Triumph*, 221-23). The 'poet's rejection of the antimasque displayed Jonson's literary manifesto that the function of the poet was to give the intellectual satisfaction to the court audience and to lead them to the knowledge of what they should

THE ILLUSION OF POWER

be. *Neptune's Triumph* demonstrated the power of illusion which could transform their roles exemplified in the masque into their true identity, and also declared the power of the poet who could make this transformation possible.

NOTES:

1. G.P.V. Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant or the Court of King James I* (London, 1962), p.271.
2. A. Finett, *Finetti Philoxenis* (London, 1656), pp.133-35; and also mentioned in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1952), vol. X, p.658.
3. S.R. Gardiner, *Prince Charles and The Spanish Marriage, 1617-1623. A Chapter in English History* (London, 1869), pp.302ff.
4. Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623/24* (Cambridge, 1986), p.2.
5. See the discussion of the political implications of these proclamations in Godfrey Davies's "English Political Sermons, 1603-1640", *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. III, No.1 (October, 1939), pp.1-2.
6. See, for example, John Taylor, *Prince Charles his welcome from Spaine; who landed at Portsmouth on Sunday the 5th of October, and came safely to London on Monday the 6th of the same, 1623. With the Triumphes of London for the same his happie arrival* (London, 1623); quoted from *Somers Collection of Tracts*, ed. W. Scott (London, 1809), vol. I, p.552; and also see C.H. Firth, *The Ballad History of the Reign of James I, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3rd series (London, 1911), vol. V, pp.50-1.
7. J. Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. N.E. McClure (Philadelphia, 1939), pp.145-46.
8. Collected in *Ben Jonson*, vol. X.
9. R.E. Ruigh, *The Parliament of 1624. Politics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971) pp.16-42; see also S.R. Gardiner, pp.438-39, and Roger Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts: A Political History of England 1603-1642* (London, 1989), pp.205-14.

10. Quoted in *Ben Jonson*, vol. X, pp.659-60.
11. J.Chamberlain, vol. II, p.538.
12. As for Jonson's interest in printing his 'works' to establish them as 'texts', see Richard C.Newton, "Ben Jonson and the Invention of the Book", in *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgurgh, 1982)
13. Collected in *Ben Jonson*, vol. VIII.
14. D.J.Gordon, *The Renaissance Imagination* (California, 1975), p.23.
15. Collected in *Ben Jonson*, vol. X.
16. Collected in *Ben Jonson*, vol. VIII.
17. Quoted in *Ben Jonson*, vol. X, p.553.
18. Quoted by G.E.Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford, 1941-56), vol. IV, p.670.
19. Mentioned in *Ben Jonson*, vol. X, p.576; for a detailed discussion of the incident and its implications, see Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp.70-71 and p.183.
20. With regard to Jonson's equations of food and word, see Don K.Hedrick, "Cooking for the Anthropopagi: Jonson and His Audience", *SEL* 17 (1977), 233-45.

**THE ILLUSION OF POWER:
NEPTUNE'S TRIUMPH
AND THE POET'S DILEMMA**

Yoshiko ONO

Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion was composed as the Twelfth Night masque for the Court Christmas. Ben Jonson wrote the masque in answer to the request from Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham who had returned from a Spanish mission. Charles and Buckingham had made a secret journey to Spain to negotiate the prince's marriage with the Spanish Infanta and to bring her home to England. The Spanish match had been a favorite and ambitious project of King James. However, after long negotiations the prince and the duke returned home resentfully, and the Jacobean court was divided between James and Prince Charles concerning England's Continental policies.

Jonson's masque dealt with the safe return of Prince Charles from his mission to Spain; and yet the subject-matter was to pay homage to King James's political wisdom and the consequent triumph for the victorious return of his son. Neptune and his court was identified with James I and his court and the argument of the masque was presented as an ideal version of the recent political events. In fact, Charles's mission to Spain brought nothing fruitful to England; and much worse, King James was pushed into a new and hard course in foreign policy. Nevertheless, Jonson's loyalty to the State as the court poet urged him to rewrite English history and to create another myth of Jacobean England as the 'For-

tunate Isles’.

Jonson was convinced that the poet had obligation to serve the State and to sustain wise government by providing the monarch with good counsel. Yet Jonson was never ignorant of the fact that the masque-writer’s function which the poet himself believed to be was not identical with the one that the court audience expected. Jonson’s awareness of this gap was demonstrated in the comic dialogue between the ‘Poet’ and the ‘Master-Cooke’ of the masque.

The main masque celebrated the ideal reign of James I by identifying it with the myth of Ocean God, Neptune. And, by the employment of the poet figure as masque-writer of the masque in progress on the stage, Jonson exposed that the masque world was an illusion, a fiction created by the poet. The meta-masque device introduced in *Neptune’s Triumph* was thus a Jonsonian way of manifestation that the poet’s invention alone could achieve the ideal transformation of the Monarchy.