Jonson’s Masque Markets and Problems of Literary Ownership

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Books can be owned simultaneously by the author, the merchant, and the purchaser, making it possible, as Lucius Annaeus Seneca observes, “for Titus Livius to receive his own books as a present, or to buy them from Dorus,” a bookseller.1 Ownership of a literary text is thus complicated rather than resolved by its presentation or sale: proprietary interest is multiplied as the text is reproduced, yet the author retains a kind of nonpossessive ownership. This appears to have provided little consolation for Ben Jonson, who complained frequently of losing ownership of his work, explaining that when he “suffer’d . . . [a text] to goe abroad, [he] departed with . . . [his] right” over that text.2 In moving from the realm of scribal publication into print, from gift economy into the marketplace, Jonson, whose society did not yet conceive of authorial rights, apparently surrendered ownership and control of his text to an agent who would oversee its publication.3 Nevertheless, because texts have multiple lives—as works of art and as material objects—Jonson was able to market his work, particularly his masques, in gift and sale economies simultaneously.4 A professional poet at Court, Jonson existed at the center of patronage circles but simultaneously forged ahead with the publication of his works in a new competitive market. His masques provide particularly interesting examples of this approach and highlight complexities of ownership, valuation, and circulation that arose during this time of social and economic flux and that anticipated

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modern connections between the availability, the demand, and the price of a product.

Jonson’s masques are products of Jonson’s labor, printed and sold in the marketplace, and products enabled by, produced within, and reflective of the authority of the king, Court, and systems of aristocratic patronage. More than any other genre of text produced by Jonson, the masques rely upon being owned in some way by numerous people and upon being valued and exchanged in both existing patronage and developing market economies. The premises of valuation in each of these economies were often opposed: rich and personalized presentation copies of texts were the currency of the patronage economy, whereas printed reproductions (stigmatized within coterie circles) circulated in the developing market. Within the patronage economy, the text often gained value from the standing of its patrons, while the text on the market, though no longer owned by the writer, paradoxically relied more upon the reputation of the author. In printing and selling his masques, Jonson increases their accessibility and asserts his authority as a writer, yet he also risks devaluing his texts as he promotes them, not least because he surrenders his authorial rights at the point of publication. Characteristically, Jonson works hard to inscribe the value of his labor upon his work so as to protect it (and Jonson himself) from devaluation in a marketplace of print. A particular feature of this strategy, evident in numerous masques and many of the poems, is an emphasis upon diversified interest in the text so that shared ownership, contrary to the principles of the patronage economy, becomes a means of protecting and even increasing the value of the product. More specifically, as this article will demonstrate, Jonson combines the value systems of two often-conflicting economies to market his work as a type of luxury product—that is, as a marker of social and intellectual distinction to be owned only by an exclusive group of consumers.

Jonson, as T. S. Eliot famously observes, is “damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book.” Interestingly, Eliot considers Jonson’s “deadly” reputation as a writer to be the result of a “conspiracy” among intellectual readers. Jonson, struggling against his base associations with the public stage, deliberately fashions his printed texts as difficult and weighty works. In this vein, his folio of WORKES is often considered elitist, yet this notion clearly clashes with the market-orientated professionalism of the poet, with what Elizabeth Hanson refers to as the folio’s “herald[ing]” of “possessive individualism, modern
subjectivity, and bourgeois culture." In short, the classicism of
the folio not only contradicts earlier, comparatively vulgar ventures
into print but also makes the folio an anomaly in itself—at once
an exclusive artifact and Jonson’s book for sale. In exploiting the
classical connections of the folio style in order to market his work
to potential buyers, Jonson, as Don E. Wayne astutely observes,
straddles a gap between a moral “anti-acquisitive culture” and
an emerging commercial society. Indeed, Jonson’s works sug-
gest the classical ideal of anti-acquisitiveness at the same time
as the folio is presented as a distinguished object to be acquired
at cost. The sign system of the 1616 folio is thus far from mono-
lithic and the publication constitutes, as Joseph Loewenstein
notes, “a groping forward toward later authorial property rights”
nonetheless “modeled on . . . the economics of patronage.”
Blurring the boundary between those apparently antagonistic modes
of exchange, Jonson relies upon patronage systems defined by
honorable gifts and bonds of obligation, while circulating his texts
in an emerging literary marketplace ostensibly based on entirely
different values and bonds.

In both arenas, however, the poet seeks to elevate his work
above that of others by distinguishing the fruits of his labor as
markers of the superior understanding and good taste of their
consumers. Arjun Appadurai illuminates the implications of such
a distinction for the role(s) of a given product. Defining luxury as a
special register of consumption, Appadurai demonstrates that the
signs of such consumption include: “(1) restriction . . . by price or
by law to elites; (2) complexity of acquisition . . . ; (3) . . . capacity
[for the luxury product] to signal complex social messages; (4)
specialized knowledge as a prerequisite for . . . consumption.”
Jonson’s masques variously display these signs and, while there
is nothing new in recognizing that masques were “items of social
prestige,” we have yet to understand the complex motivations and
strategies involved in Jonson’s marketing of his literary product
in this way.

While it may seem incongruous to speak of Jonson’s masques
as luxury products when in their time their restriction to the aris-
tocratic consumer was increasingly under threat, the masques’ de-
pendence upon performing exclusivity is implicit and intricate. In
the opening lines of the description of *The Masque of Blacknesse*,
for example, Jonson presents the printed text as valuable pre-
cisely because it made accessible what was previously restricted
or inaccessible: “The honor, and splendor of these *spectacles* was
such in the performance, as could those houres haue lasted, this
of mine, now, had been a most unprofitable worke.”15 The profit of preparing the printed text is derived from the temporal nature of the masque’s performance. Therefore, market profitability is aligned with the exclusivity of the original performance, despite the fact that the reproduction of the text would normally signal a loss of exclusivity and value. In print, masques could be consumed by whoever could afford to buy them, but Jonson rejects the idea that this should reduce the intrinsic value of his work. While Michael Drayton complains of a “lunatique Age” in which “nothing [was] esteem’d . . . but what is kept in Cabinets,” Jonson insists that his printed masque descriptions, as unique recollections of past courtly spectacles, are valuable and coveted goods.16 Even as quarto texts for sale, Jonson’s masques maintain their royal connections and carry complex social messages regarding the status of their participants, sponsors, and spectators—their owners. The privilege of the masques’ original performances interestingly is not displaced by the comparatively lowly associations of the printing press but rather metamorphoses into a distinction of literary taste.

“[T]he unskilfull are naturally deceiv’d, and . . . thinke rude things greater then polish’d,” Jonson observes in his Discoveries, defending his own writing style and admonishing the “unskilfull” readers who prefer the ruder style of his rivals (Works, 8:583). Fashioning himself as a writer of the select rather than of the rancorous multitude is paradoxically Jonson’s means of mass self-promotion: his composed work reflects the nobility, restraint, and understanding of a superior consumer, even as it is printed for sale. Nevertheless, as Eliot’s infamous remarks suggest, the marketing of texts as exclusive or difficult to acquire carried certain risks. Not least among these, perhaps, was the fact that luxury was associated with excess, waste, and debauched behavior as much as it was connected with superior understanding, taste, and status. In “To My Mvse,” Jonson thus blames “luxurie” for inducing him to flatter a “worthlesse lord” (Folio, p. 786). Concerned with the relationship between the value of the lord and the value of Jonson’s product, the epigram figures luxury as a temptation of the emerging marketplace, threatening in this case because the patron is not praiseworthy, and Jonson is reduced to committing fierce idolatrie. In aligning the lord with the marketplace and distancing himself from it, Jonson asserts the value of his poetry; the luxury of the poet’s flattery is rendered harmless by an economy in which the false praise quickly evaporates into a “tax.” Ingeniously, Jonson asserts the superior value of his poetry without removing it from the stigmatized marketplace.
An equivocal concept in early modern thought, luxury evoked notions of lechery and immoderation yet, at the same time, was associated with social status and distinction. Jonson frequently battles with the masques’ ambiguous symbolism in this regard, defending masquing against charges of excess in the 1612 masque *Love Restored*. This masque, a pointedly inexpensive offering, draws explicit distinctions between the masques’ elite consumers and the masques’ vulgar critics; it engages in paradoxes of luxury and plays out some of the conflicts between existing and developing economies. The invited courtly audience is lauded for rejecting venal exchange and for embracing higher values, while the world of the uninvited, outside the Court, is characterized by disorder, interest in money, and commercial corruption. The satire of the corrupt bourgeoisie, who try unsuccessfully to buy entrance into the masque, forms an unusually long antimasque, while the defense of the masquing form comes, as Jeffrey Fischer observes, with the Court’s unmasking of that “hypocritical, misguided world” that criticizes Court extravagance. Opening with an apology addressed to the king, the first lines of *Love Restored* are conventional in their redirection of the reader’s attention back to the original performance. A masquer explains that because “the rogue play-boy that acts Cupid, is got so hoarse, your Maiestie cannot heare him” (*Folio*, p. 990); in short, the masque cannot be performed. The speech is, of course, a performance in itself, and Jonson misses no opportunity to inscribe himself as author within it as he inscribes the position of majesty within the masque as testimony to its privileged status. The masquer elaborates, “Some two houres since, we were in that forwardnesse, our dances learn’d, our masquing attire on and attyred. A prettie fine speech was taken vp o’ the Poet too, which if hee neuer bee paide for, now, its no matter; His wit costs him nothing” (*Folio*, p. 990).

Stressing his own labor, Jonson reminds the king and the audience of their debts to him while outwardly denying that he expects any reward, an inversion that mirrors the performance of the masque’s nonperformance. As the masquerado bewails the situation, “Cupid” storms onto the stage, explaining to the astonished masquer that he is “neither player, nor Masquer; but the god himselfe” (*Folio*, p. 990). The printed text enlightens the reader that this figure is an impostor—the god Plutus. Cupid, a common figure of the masque, is thus replaced by a vociferous critic who boldly declares that he “will haue no more masquing”—masques being “deare,” “false, and fleeting delight[sl]” (*Folio*, p. 990). His remarks are clearly incompatible with his guise, yet it remains
possible that part of the audience might have remained oblivious to his true identity at this point. Even if the disguise was obvious to the audience, because Jonson establishes a distinction between those who can see the truth and those who cannot, the implication of an underclass that believes in the false god serves as a means of reaffirming the privileged status of the select audience (and offers readers a chance to distinguish themselves as well). As the audience revels in the costly delights of the masque, then, Jonson sanctions that luxury consumption by aligning its detractor with venality and miscomprehension.

The character Robin Good-fellow, a vital go-between in *Love Restored*, connects the world of the uninvited (believers in Plutus) and the world of the Court where the invited assembly recognizes the god of money to be a false god. Importantly, Good-fellow describes at great length his protracted attempts to sneak uninvited into the masque performance. Upon learning that it is threatened with cancellation, predictably he is indignant because it has been such an effort for him to gain admittance. “So many thornie difficulties as I haue past,” he asserts, “deseru’d the best Masque: the whole shop of the Reuels” (*Folio*, p. 991), making an explicit connection between difficulty of access and the perceived value of the product. While Good-fellow’s description of his comic exploits has the feel of a preface, it actually overwhelms the brief masque proper to which he is eventually admitted after “confidently, giving out [that he] was a part o’the deuice: At which . . . they thought it fit, way should be made for [him]” (*Folio*, p. 992). The drama of trying to gain admittance to a masque threatened with cancellation thus takes up over two hundred of the mere three hundred lines in the printed text of *Love Restored*, in effect becoming the masque. Moreover, after various attempts to gain entry, including pretending to be an “ingineer,” posing as a musician (*Folio*, p. 991), and “[f]ortie other deuices” (*Folio*, p. 992), the outsider Good-fellow is only admitted to the masque because he proves central to its device.

Of course, Good-fellow is pivotal in the device of the masque on two counts. First, the story of his inability to gain entry into the exclusive performance confirms the privileged status of the audience and the nature of the masque as an exclusive occasion/product. Second, once admitted to tell the tale of his nonadmittance, Good-fellow unmasks Plutus and thus unmasks the critics of the Court and the masque as venal money worshippers and “vaine” Puritans (*Folio*, p. 991). Prevailing over the god of money who threatens to “make all places and dignities arbitrarie” (*Folio*, p.
993) and threatens, therefore, the performance of social hierarchy that is the masque, Good-fellow restores order and enables the masque proper. “[W]e spirits” he pronounces, measuring himself against anyone who might not yet have understood that Cupid was really Plutus, “are subtler yet, and somewhat better discoverers” (Folio, p. 992). Here, Jonson signals the subtlety of his invention and his proprietary interest in the masque: like Good-fellow, if Jonson were not central to the device he would be excluded from the occasion, and if he were excluded, there would be no masque. Good-fellow/Jonson reinstates Cupid/King James’s authority by unveiling the detractor of the masque to be the venal god of money, whose reign is based upon false bonds rather than upon the bonds of love such as those forged between James and his people. Majesty is dutifully celebrated and masquing is expertly defended against charges of prodigality. “[I]n despight of this insolent and barbarous Mammon,” Good-fellow enthusiastically informs the audience, “your sports may proceed” (Folio, p. 993). Paradoxically, however, Love Restored affirms that the masque is enabled by exclusivity, and though this restriction is not based upon money, the masque clearly performs power through displaying privilege at great expense. Fleeting and dearly bought as Plutus suggests, Love Restored distinguishes between the select, who appreciate its value and hence the value of Jonson’s work, and the undiscerning to whom the priceless masque necessarily appears irrelevant and unduly lavish.

As new historicists have observed, the audience, the makeup of which was determined by and reflective of the exclusivity of the occasion and the king’s authority over it, were integral to the masques’ devices.18 Dudley Carleton’s letter to Sir Ralph Winwood, describing ambassadorial contention over invitations to The Masque of Blackness, is illuminating in this regard because it highlights the way in which public men attached political value to being visible at masque performances. The French ambassador, as Carleton explains, was perturbed because his invitation to the Masque of Blackness was as a “private” man. He was further annoyed because the Spanish ambassador, who accepted the invitation that he himself declined, succeeded in casting off his private persona to sit “by the King in State” (Works, 10:448). Central to the Court masque was the performance of status, power, and wealth and numerous commentators of the period stressed, both admonishingly and admiringly, the extravagancy of the Stuart masque.19 Though “the King require[d] a great loan of money from the City” in December 1620, John Chamberlain
notes, “there [was still] money given out and preparation made for a masque at Court” that Christmas.\textsuperscript{20} The performance of luxury in what Chamberlain refers to as the “monstrous waste” of aristocratic banquets and entertainments functioned as a cultural marker of status, power, and privilege.\textsuperscript{21} To destroy or to waste exclusive goods—as Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Riches” suggests—somewhat contrarily was to assert their transcendence of market exchange.\textsuperscript{22}

Masques were at once associated with excess and trifles and with majesty and stateliness. They “are but toys” Bacon observes, “yet, since princes will have such things, it is better they should be graced with elegance, than daubed with cost.”\textsuperscript{23} Drawing a distinction between vulgar excess (associated with market exchange—“cost”) and refined taste that recalls the argument of \textit{Love Restored}, Bacon’s notion that those things which “are of no great cost” are more glorious is unconvincing in view of his staging of a masque for the Somerset Wedding in 1613 at a cost of some £2000.\textsuperscript{24} Even as masques were derided as superfluous frivolities, they continued to attract sponsors and spectators eager to display their social standing. Yet if the effect of a masque relies upon its exclusive status as (superficially) distinct from the false and venal exchanges of Plutus, what then is to be made of the printed masque? As Sara van den Berg notes, though Jonson “did not share the aristocratic fear of print . . . because [he] sought a coterie audience, he recognized a danger in . . . the proliferation of his book as a commodity.”\textsuperscript{25} Yet Jonson also recognizes the scope for marketing his printed work as a different type of luxury product. While the printed description of \textit{Love Restored} makes clear that the masque was a luxury not so much restricted to an elite by price but restricted to an elite who recognized it as priceless, printed masques obviously had their price as material commodities. Making his printed work as inaccessible as possible to common readers, however, Jonson insists that his masques are still exclusive products, consumed (despite their reputation as “toyes”) only by an elite.

The inclusion of the masques in the 1616 folio demonstrates that Jonson did not consider his masques mere “toys.” Moreover, given that this apparent assertion of authorship and ownership did not coincide with financial autonomy for Jonson, who remained heavily dependent upon systems of patronage, it seems unlikely that he would have published the folio if it had not in some way been designed to further his status as a writer for the Court. Indeed, post 1616 Jonson compounded his move away from
the public stage by drawing ever closer to the Court, effectively monopolizing masque production for the rest of James’s reign. The poem entitled “The humble Petition of poore Ben. To th’best of Monarchs, Masters, Men, King CHARLES,” makes Jonson’s ongoing reliance upon royal favor transparent. Pointedly reminding the new king of the “free Poëtique Pension” bestowed by James “in gratuitie / For done service,” Jonson petitions for the continuance of his position as the king’s poet (Works, 8:259).  

While putting a price on the masques risks aligning them with the very values Jonson sought to distinguish them from in Love Restored, publishing the retrospective descriptions of the performances also affirms and celebrates royal power once again. Extensive footnotes and cross-references ensure that the masques appear distinguished in a new and most Jonsonian way. Moreover, while we might remember that Jonson negotiates the path between the economy of privileged patronage and the economy of the marketplace undoubtedly out of self-interest, his deft combinations of the discourses of gift and market exchange in his WORKES suggest important parallels between the two.

Douglas A. Brooks speaks of the 1616 Folio as a transposition of Jonson’s internal conflict, the plays representing his strife for individual autonomy at one end of the spectrum, the masques functioning as a reminder of the external authority of the Court at the other.  

To my mind, however, the masques negotiate that conflict in their own right. First, in performance the masques are variously owned by the king, collaborators, performers, and spectators and yet often draw attention to themselves as products of Jonson’s own labor. Second, quarto title pages recall the time and place and often the name of the principal performer of a masque, seemingly paying homage to its sponsors, authorizers, and owners while simultaneously immortalizing Jonson’s own inventive authorship. Divested of the prefatory material typical of the quarto editions, the folio thus signals for some commentators Jonson’s assertion of himself as author and owner of the texts, while for others it is simply a silent acknowledgment that they belong to James. The masques never entirely escape the authority of the Court, yet an important feature of Jonson’s printed masque is the careful distinction that the poet makes between his own labor and the invention or sponsorship of others. Printed masques preserve Jonson’s voice, recalling exclusive performances now largely irretrievable from any other perspective. Paradoxically, he asserts authority over the masque (a collaborative enterprise in performance) at the very moment that he ostensibly relinquishes
control over the circulation and reception of the text. In suffering his masques to “goe abroad,” then, Jonson actually asserts his singular authorship, often reducing the contributions of others to passing references and sometimes jettisoning them altogether.\(^{30}\)

In fact, Jonson repeatedly aligns his own labor with the permanent text and the contributions of others with the ephemeral occasion of the masques’ performances.\(^{31}\) The preface to the masque *Hymenæi, or The Solemnities of Masque and Barriers at a Marriage* (1606), for example, distinguishes between the masque performance as a temporal body and the printed masque as an immortal soul. In presenting a textual description of the masque for the “understanding” of readers, Jonson claims that he saves “the glorie of all these solemnities” which would otherwise have “perish’d like a blaze, and gone out, in the beholders eyes” (*Folio*, p. 911). In printing *Hymenæi* Jonson effectively remakes the masque, re-presents it in a form of writing he claims largely as his own invention, and presents himself as the protector of the glory and authority of the original occasion. In print, the masque challenges “royall Princes, and greatest persons” to show that they are “not onely studious of riches, and magnificence in the outward celebration, or shew . . . but curious after the most high, and heartie inventions, to furnish the inward parts” (*Folio*, p. 911), that is, desirous to read Jonson’s text.\(^{32}\) Answering the critics that “squemishly crie out, that all endeuour of learning, and sharpnesse in these transitorie deuices . . . is superfluous” (*Folio*, p. 911), Jonson implies that the greatest persons will value the learned text more highly than the masque performance, thereby legitimizing his role and raising the value of his product. In addition, by affording it their studious attention, those great persons turned wise readers prove that Jonson’s masque is far from superfluous, indeed, that it is something to be considered seriously and valued highly.\(^{33}\)

Poking fun at the insubstantial offerings of his old rival Samuel Daniel, whose masques he considered to be fit only for the most “ayrie tastes.” Jonson distinguishes his own masques from the triviality of others to present *Hymenæi* as a nourishing meal of “sound meates of the world” (*Folio*, p. 911). Interestingly, he aligns his work with wholesome consumption, his rival’s with the kind of luxurious consumption criticized by Plutus in *Love Restored*. Paradoxically, however, Jonson characterizes his masque as “Nectar” to be consumed only by a “better subiect,” making it in Appadurai’s thinking, at least, a luxury itself (*Folio*, pp. 911–2). Presumably, the “better” subjects Jonson has in mind belong to
the learned classes and will privilege the printed text over the performance, even if they themselves already had witnessed that performance. Those readers might then provide a model readership, whose “palates” dictate those of a general readership to follow (Folio, p. 911). The masques thus operate as examples of good taste precisely because they are inaccessible for and even are shunned by the common reader or spectator. They also reassert the defense of masquing framed in Love Restored—masques are appreciated only by the nonvenalminded—without deflating the claim that the fleeting and expensive nature of their performance provides a primary key to their value. The defense recalls Seneca’s rhetorical distinction between vulgar and noble wealth: “Any close observer should be aware that we are different from the mob. Anyone entering our homes should admire us rather than our furnishings . . . Finding wealth an intolerable burden is the mark of an unstable mind.”

When wealth is approached correctly, Seneca suggests, it distinguishes the select from the “mob” and functions as a marker of status and taste in the same way that Jonson insists his masque texts do. In this sense, Jonson did not so much work toward what Loewenstein has called the “devaluation of the impermanent event” but rather redefines the masque as a new kind of luxury product; one, this time, restricted to an intellectual rather than a strictly social elite. In re-presenting masques in printed form, however, Jonson does not simply swap from appealing to the Court to appealing to the world outside but rather uses one market to appeal to the other. The original and socially superior consumer would have protected his work from censure and raised its social and symbolic value among the bourgeoisie, who sought as consumers above all else to emulate the aristocracy. In Hymenæi, then, Jonson markets the “remou’d mysteries” (Folio, p. 911) of the printed masque to his previous spectator at the same time as he re-presents the masque as an opportunity for new consumers to align themselves with the royal prestige of the original occasion and audience. In this way, he draws together multiple lives of the masque, connecting patronage and market economies and promoting the product in the latter on the basis of its privileged position in the former.

The boldness of Jonson’s move toward printing his texts—first in quarto editions, then in the confident and self-promotional folio—is undeniable; nevertheless, the early modern literary marketplace remained an ambiguous place even for professional poets. In “To my Detractor,” Jonson suggests that the literary market is
fundamentally at odds with the classical standards he applauds and emulates, accusing a critic of basely and falsely rating his poetry in terms of its market price. “Thaue found thy Vice,” he warns the detractor (John Eliot), which “Is to make cheape the Lord, the lines, the price” (Works, 8:408). According to Jonson, the detractor reveals his vice in denying the value of the poet’s verses on the basis that they had procured “Th’enuy’d returne, of forty pound in gold.” Here, Jonson apparently answers the charge that in selling his texts, or, in receiving returns on their dedication, he too makes “cheape the Lord, the lines, the price.” Once again, the defense echoes Seneca’s response to critics of his wealth, in which he argues that stoics could be rich without compromising their stoicism, providing wealth was not the source of their happiness. Jonson asserts that it is his attitude to the “returne” that counts, the fact that he does not consider the patronage offered by the Lord in base monetary terms. In effect, Jonson translates a market return back into a patronage reward, engaging with contemporary problems regarding the relationship between giving literary texts to patrons (coterie exchange) and selling texts to printers (market exchange).

John Frow, among other recent commentators, observes that “gift and commodity are not mutually exclusive modes of transaction, since they tend to have in common certain forms of calculation, strategy, and motivation.” In selling rather than giving his masques, Jonson did not alter the way in which he marketed them as radically as we might expect. He did not and indeed could not afford to debase the social valuation of the work through which he secured patronage and prestige. Whether it is by necessity, by pride, or by invention, Jonson consistently markets his work as a venerable commodity across both patronage and market systems. In both cases he relies upon the masques’ capacity to function as social markers or as indicators of distinction in order to claim superior value for his text and for himself as author. Interestingly, selling his work brought him less material reward than giving it; literary gifts were more vulnerable to accusations of venality than were books sold.

Masques, however, were perhaps the most suspect of all so-called literary gifts because, as Strato observes in the opening scene of The Maid’s Tragedy, masques are unavoidably “tied to rules of flattery.” Here, the lack of authorial control manifest in the “rules” of masque writing threatens to devalue the product of the writer’s labor, while at the same time it is apparent that if those rules are not followed, if the consumer’s desires are not
met, then the masque will not be valued at all. Conflating the premises of valuation in gift and sale economies, the argument recalls that of the epigram “To my Mvse,” for the superficiality of the masques’ praise does not annul the potency of their performance of power through luxury, as the flattery of the worthless lord does not debase the value of Jonson’s poem. There is a sense of flexibility here and a notion that the literary product can perform more than one role at once, something that Strato’s account of the masque appears to take for granted. Paradoxically, multiple ownership is both the reason why masques are valued and the impetus behind Strato’s criticism—they must, he elaborates, praise the king, the bridal couple, and members of the audience. The interdependent nature of the perceived value of masque and sponsor/subject/spectator is obvious, and Jonson cleverly exploits that interdependence in order to advance his own fortunes. *The Masque of Queens*, for example, makes the most of multiple proprietary interests, juggling praise for Queen Anne and her ladies with praise for James’s kingly authority and the Court more generally. Recent commentary on *Queens* fluctuates between reading it as a celebration of female power, designed to appeal primarily to Anne, and reading it as a celebration of “the sovereign and masculine word.” If, as *The Maid’s Tragedy* insists and Jonson’s own treatment of his masque text implies, the masque gains value from appealing to many people at once, then those contrary readings easily are reconciled.

A collaborative enterprise, *Queens* was authorized, exchanged, and consumed by different people, all of whom had some degree of interest in the masque itself. *Queens* celebrates the fame of Bel-anna and her princely dames, but it also depicts that fame as originating with and reflecting the heroic virtue of James’s Court and reign. Jonson assures James that each queen is a “great example / Contracted in [him] selfe,” effectively thus recontracting the image of Anne as “soueraigne of all” (*Folio*, p. 962), clearly designed as a compliment to the queen to raise the value of his masque for James (*Folio*, pp. 958, 962). When he prints the masque text, Jonson exploits Anne’s interest in it once more, this time to raise its value for its dedicatee, Prince Henry. The poet explains his choice of patron carefully in an autograph dedication contained in a presentation copy given to Anne. Despite being occasioned by the selling of *Queens* to a printer, the dedication to Henry indulges in the discourse of patronage, dutifully praising the patron’s “excellent vnderstanding” and suing for protection against “the stiffnesse of others originall Ignorance, allready armd
to censure.” Signing off as “the most trew admirer of” Henry’s “Vertues, And most hearty Celebrater of them,” Jonson plays the part of the devoted client, yet the masque had not celebrated Henry in its performance, nor does it advance virtues favored by the young prince. As Jonson regives Queens to Henry then, he reaffirms his praise of James and re-presents his gift to Anne. He treats the masque as a commodity within his own control, using its sponsors as markers of quality and prestige to endorse his text and to announce his own laureate status. Moreover, because, unlike coterie poetry, masques did not circulate in manuscript before publication, the dedication to the quarto text presumably was fashioned for print. The title page and dedication signal to the purchaser the high value placed upon the masque by those belonging to the highest echelons of society. In this sense “the reward” for writing Queens is indeed “double to one act,” as Jonson puts it, for Queens is an exclusive gift that courts at least three patrons at once even after it is printed and sold in the marketplace.

Carrying royal fame beyond the “sight but of a few” to “the applause due to it from all” provides the justification for printing The Masque of Queens and a defense against its devaluation in a marketplace of print (Works, 7:279). Henry’s patronage of the printed masque becomes a device whereby Anne’s “owne actions” and, indeed, Jonson’s skills can be celebrated without either appearing immodest so that the masque gains rather than loses value as proprietary interest in it is enlarged. Jonson performs a similar maneuver in “An Epigram to my MVSE, the Lady Digby, on her Husband, Sir KENELME DIGBY” (Works, 8:262–3). Here, the poem is imagined as the text of Sir Digby’s virtues and, therefore, worthy of the praise of a wider readership to whom Digby will, no doubt in the spirit of self-promotion, circulate the poem. “What reputation to my lines, and me” the poet anticipates, “When hee shall read them at the Treasurers bord”? The lines and the poet will increase in value when they are associated with Digby and, significantly, when Digby claims ownership of them and then publicizes them. As Harold Love suggests, Digby effectively publishes the poem; the discerning readership, in their reading of Jonson’s work, will function as an endorsement which will increase the demand for transcripts of the poem: “Being sent to one . . . [the lines] will be read of all.” Love is interested in scribal publication, yet the epigram also suggests a shift in the conception of print. Importantly, the reproduction of the text and its consumption by a group of readers only indirectly connected with Jonson, who func-
tion not as sponsors or patrons but more as markers of the text’s quality and value, manifests a literary market one step removed from traditional systems of clientage. Jonson’s lines inscribe and use Digby’s fame in order to increase the perceived value of the text at the very moment when accessibility threatens to devalue it. As Jonson exploits royal connections to remarket *The Masque of Queens* at the same time as he regives the masque to its original patrons, “Lady Digby” imagines Sir Digby not divested of the poetic gift offered to him by his client but rather newly endowed with the status of literary connoisseur in his role as publisher of Jonson’s text. On the one hand, Jonson asserts that his poetry being “read of all” will be more valuable because of it; on the other, he affirms that he has “sent” or given it to a single patron or owner and, in this sense, embraces market economics while sustaining the façade of gift exchange.

If Jonson exhibits signs of embracing early concepts of market exchange, however, his dramatic work reveals a complex revulsion of the commonality that came with it. While consistently concerned with the fame of his work, which as he recognized was increased by its circulation, Jonson remains opposed to and concerned about the indiscriminate consumption of his texts. Presumably, the desire to have his text “read of all” is really a desire to have his text read by all those who matter, by those discerning readers whose understanding and approval would signify the true value of Jonson’s work and thus embody his fame. Perhaps it is for this reason that following the 1616 folio Jonson does not appear to have marketed his masque texts to the public in the way that he had done previously, despite the fact that many of them were printed in quartos prior to the 1640 folio. Joseph Loewenstein argues that the masques written between 1616 and 1629 were unregistered because Jonson published them only for use as presentation copies. This reinforces the idea that the poet, while keen to claim ownership of his work via the printing press, either saw this as an effective way of seeking aristocratic patronage or else recognized that there was no real market for printed texts outside the Court. However, even if printed masques were unpopular with the general consumer, the fiction of their desirability needed to be sustained. To this end, Jonson stresses their relation to a performance accessible only to elite and invited guests—stressed, in effect, their separation from a general consumer and, therefore, their status as luxury goods.

“Pray thee, take care, that tak’st my booke in hand, / To reade it well: that is, to understand,” Jonson instructs his readers (*Folio*,
Characteristically, by implying the inaccessibility of his text to the undiscerning reader, Jonson suggests the worthiness of his book; he suggests too that proprietary interest in it would reflect a reader’s learnedness and good taste. Exploiting a similar blend of compliment and instruction in *Queens*, Jonson engages his reader in what Jonathan Goldberg calls an “encouragement to decipherment”; Jonson states that “a writer should alwayes trust somewhat to the capacitie of the spectator, especially, at these spectacles” (*Folio*, p. 948). The masque audience, Jonson hints, would be capable of this higher understanding, bringing with them “inquiring eyes [and] quicke eares . . . not those sluggishe ones of porters, and mechanicks” (*Folio*, p. 948). At once, Jonson quiets possible detractors, compliments defenders for their understanding, and restates the exclusivity of the masque even as it is reproduced in print. Van den Berg sees the strategy as self-defensive and the means by which Jonson protects against his text’s indiscriminate consumption: by “insist[ing] on its erasure,” he is able to argue that the text “has no value as a commodity, a condition that enables the poet to reclaim it for himself.” Certainly, Jonson was fond of implying that without the proper collaboration of the reader/subject, a text’s value could evaporate, as evidenced by the epigram “To My Mvse.” He also denies or rather attempts to deny the proprietary claims of incapable readers such as the “clarke-like seruing-man” in “To My Booke-seller” (*Folio*, p. 770) and the “worthlesse lord” in “To My Mvse” (*Folio*, p. 786). However, even Jonson could not and, I think, did not wish to entirely “erase” the commodity value of his text. Instead, he forges a very specific relationship between his texts and their prestigious subjects and readership so that each affirms the value and social distinction of the other, rendering them separate from and safeguarded against undiscriminating readers and tastes. *Queens*, he implies, or indeed any masque he describes in print, is a type of luxury product because it can be acquired but only by a privileged and learned few; as such, it functions as a marker for the superior social status of its proprietors—creator and consumers alike. If the printing of his texts signals the emergence of new literary markets, then, it is significant that Jonson insists that he does not wish to see his texts valued according to the number of copies sold but valued according to the virtues and learning of those who acquire them. It is a characteristically self-reflexive claim because, once again, it strategically persuades the potential patron or purchaser of the advantages of owning Jonson’s text.
NOTES

An earlier and shorter version of this article was presented at the “Texts, Ma(r)kers, Markets” conference at the University of York, England, July 2003.


3 This would either have been a printer, a bookseller, or a combination of the two as Alan B. Farmer and Lesser outline in “Vile Arts: The Marketing of English Printed Drama, 1512–1660,” RORD 39 (2000): 77–165, 78.


6 Arthur F. Marotti notes that during this period patrons “were reduced to a minor feature of the publishing format . . . [while] the subservient author began to enjoy prestige as a member of a new literary and aesthetic elite.” When patrons’ names were included it was, Marotti argues, increasingly “for the purpose of promoting sales of books to a general readership” (“Patronage, Poetry, and Print,” YES 21 [1991]: 1–26, 25–6).

7 T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 104. As Martin Butler remarks, the legacy of the Herford and Simpson “edition has been to reinforce some of the prejudices against which Eliot was arguing, by helping to sustain the idea that Jonson is an acquired taste” (“Introduction: From Workes to Texts,” in Re-presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance, ed. Martin Butler, Early Modern Literature in History 11 [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999], pp. 1–19, 2).

8 Elizabeth Hanson, Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 120.
9 Gerald Eades Bentley, for instance, notes that “before 1616 nearly all plays which got printed had appeared on the bookstalls as unbound cheap quartos,” whereas Jonson’s folio made “a mute claim to dignity” because “the large folio format was generally reserved for . . . literature thought to be of permanent significance” (The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare’s Time, 1590–1642 [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971], p. 56).


13 See Bentley, p. 56.

14 Patricia Fumerton has observed in this regard that the bourgeoisie “increasingly made their presence felt in the audiences of James’s masques” (Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991], p. 166). On the one hand, this trend signals the decreasing exclusivity of the masque; on the other, however, it suggests just how powerful masques were as social indicators. Shohet notes “an example of a reader using the masque to extend access to an elite event” (p. 163).


18 Stephen Orgel, for example, argues that the masque’s audience “became a living emblem of the structure of the court” in which one’s placement in relation to the king became “an index to one’s status” (The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance [Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1975], pp. 10–6).

19 The Venetian ambassador Zorzi Giustiniani, for example, offers a colorful description of the Masque of Beauty, drawing attention to the “abundance and beauty of the lights immense,” the “sumptuous” music, and the “wealth of pearls and jewels that adorned the Queen and her ladies, so abundant and splendid that in everyone’s opinion no other Court could have displayed such pomp and riches” (Calendar of Venetian State Papers 11 [1607–10], p. 86; qtd. in Works, 10:457).

he claims the total cost was “above £3000” (p. 278). In addition to this manner of extravagance, there was also the ritualistic tearing down of the masque. The *Masque of Blacknesse*, as Dudley Carleton elaborates, “concluded with a Banquet in the great Chamber, which was so furiously assaulted, that down went Table and Tresses before one bit was touched” (*Works*, 10:448).

21 *Chamberlain Letters*, p. 179.

22 “Of great riches there is no real use, except it be in the distribution; the rest is but conceit. So saith Salomon: *Where much is, there are many to consume it; and what hath the owner but the sight of it with his eyes*?” (Francis Bacon, “Of Riches,” in *Essays*, intro. Michael J. Hawkins, Everyman’s Library [London and Melbourne: Dent, 1972], pp. 107–9, 107).


26 Apart from relying financially upon patrons, patronage relations were also, as Richard Helgerson observes, vital to Jonson’s self-presentation and laureate ambitions; they were indeed an esteemed “sign of his poetic elevation” in Jonson’s mind (*Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* [Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1983], pp. 166–7). Robert C. Evans’s book *Ben Jonson and the Poetics of Patronage* provides a pivotal study of Jonson’s patronage relations (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press; London and Toronto: Associated Univ. Presses, 1989).


28 Jonson’s disputes with Inigo Jones over the ownership of masques on which they collaborated are well documented. Bruce Thomas Boehrer argues convincingly that one result of the dispute was Jonson’s attempt “systematically to muscle his colleagues out of the sphere of authorship” in order to establish his own “authorship/ownership of the masques” (“The Poet of Labor: Authorship and Property in the Work of Ben Jonson,” *PG* 72, 3 [Summer 1993]: 289–312, 297). Timothy Murray likens the “historical phenomenon” of the folio to John Locke’s essay “Of Property,” seeing in both the “promotion of literature, philosophy, and art as intellectual commodities bearing the marks of their progenitors” (*Theatrical Legitimation: Allegories of Genius in Seventeenth-Century England and France* [New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987], p. 96).

29 Loewenstein is among those critics who see the less commemorative nature of the folio as an indication of Jonson’s attempt to establish his “own . . . permanent artifact” (“Printing and ‘The Multitudinous Presse’: The Contentious Texts of Jonson’s Masques,” in *Ben Jonson’s 1616 Folio*, pp. 168–91, 186). Herendeen, in his article in the same volume, by contrast sees the removal of prefatory material in the folio as confirmation that “there could be only one dedicatee—the king” (“A New Way to Pay Old Debts: Pretexts to the 1616 Folio,” in *Ben Jonson’s 1616 Folio*, pp. 38–63, 57). Timothy Murray, meanwhile, concludes that the folio “signifies . . . the transference of textual
property rights and intellectual authority from the communal structures of the court and theatre to the private domain of the author and subsequent possessor of his folio” (pp. 95–6). While Timothy Murray speaks of the folio thus anticipating a time when “the economic success of a dramatist’s book” would be “equated philosophically with the quality of the author’s mind,” he takes no account of the fact that the folio was not an economic success for Jonson even while it in other ways asserted his ownership and authorship over it as a literary product (p. 96).

30 Even in early masques such as The Masque of Blackness, Boehrer notes Jonson’s assertion “that the work’s ‘inuention was deriued by me’ (7:169); moreover, his growing tendency to slight his collaborators culminates with the notorious second-billing of Jones in the 1631 quarto of Love’s Triumph through Callipolis” (p. 297).


32 I am indebted here to Jerzy Limon’s concept of the masque as three separate texts—script, performance, and retrospective description or literary text (The Masque of Stuart Culture [Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated Univ. Presses, 1990], pp. 19–28). Limon argues “that the masque-in-performance and the printed literary masque not only belong to different systems, but . . . their authorship is not the same” (p. 28) and, in this, he challenges Orgel’s assertion that the performed and printed masque were “two aspects of the same thing” (The Jonsonian Masque [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965], p. 62).

33 Shohet notes that the readers of both Thomas Dekker’s Magnificent Entertainment and Jonson’s Hymenæi had “access to an experience that the performance audience was not privileged to enjoy” (p. 166).

34 Seneca, Letters from a Stoic, trans. Robin Campbell (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 38. I would like to thank Professor A. D. Cousins for suggesting to me possible connections between Seneca’s defense of his luxurious lifestyle and Jonson’s marketing of his masques as luxury products.

35 Loewenstein, “Multitudinous Presse,” p. 186.


37 John Frow, Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 124. In his work on theories of exchange Appadurai has observed that though “the tendency to see [the] two modalities of [gift and sale] exchange as fundamentally opposed remains a marked feature of anthropological discourse” the exchange of gifts is in fact “a particular form of the circulation of commodities” (pp. 11–2).

38 Loewenstein notes that “[a]s a masque-maker, Jonson had been compensated directly by his audience, and at a rate approximately three to four times that paid by an acting company for one of his plays” (Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002], pp. 166–7).


40 Orgel, “Marginal Jonson,” in The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque, ed. David Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 144–75, 174. This contrasts with Barbara Kiefer Lewalski’s well-known argument that “the Queens appropriate rather than destroy the power
of the witches” (Writing Women in Jacobean England [Cambridge MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993], p. 37) and with Leeds Barroll’s assertion that Anne was “a woman who thoroughly understood the political power of ceremonial display, and who self-consciously exploited it for her own ends as long as it proved useful” (“Inventing the Stuart Masque,” in The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque, pp. 121–43, 136). See also Margaret Maurer’s “Reading Ben Jonson’s Queens,” in Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 233–63.

41 The production was overseen by Queen Anne who also danced the part of “Bel-anna.” yet it was hosted by the king and celebrated king and Court as well as Anne and her ladies. In fact, James authorized payments totaling in excess of £3000 “for provision of such thinges” and to “such persons as are to be vsed in his mattles intended Maske.” As the uninvited Venetian Ambassador peevishly observed, “as the King paid the bill, he desired to be the host” (Works, 10.492–3; 10.499).

42 Contrary to Jonson’s depiction of him as a studious and gentle young man, Henry preferred military and athletic pursuits ideologically opposed to his father’s learned and diplomatic kingship—see Roy Strong, Henry, Prince of Wales and England’s Lost Renaissance (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).


44 Dedication to Prince Henry. The masque of queenes celebrated from the house of fame (London, 1609), STC (2d edn.) 14778, British Library copy.

45 Autograph dedication to Anne, Works, 7:279.

46 Love, p. 41.

47 Loewenstein argues that Lovers Made Men, The Masque of Augurs, Time Vindicated, Neptune’s Triumph, and The Fortunate Isles “were printed for use as presentation copies [and] . . . that they were not to be offered for public sale,” pointing to the fact that none of them was entered as stationer’s copies and none carried the name of a stationer on the title page (Possessive Authorship, p. 204).

48 Neptune’s Triumph, of course, is the most extreme example of this strategy because, in this case, Jonson invented fictional details of a cancelled performance.

49 As numerous critics have pointed out, Jonson often took care to present within his work a type of manifesto for reading. Richard C. Newton, for example, remarks that “[w]e find in Jonson a sense of the printed text as an authorized and established object of criticism—implying, and imposing from within, its own rules for reading” (“Jonson and the [Re-]Invention of the Book,” in Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1982], pp. 31–55, 34).


51 Van den Berg, p. 119.

52 This is, as is commonly pointed out, a claim most specifically advanced in Jonson’s epigram “To My Booke-seller.”
disguise, offers a fittingly oblique commentary on the ambiguous religious performances undertaken by early modern Catholic converts.

Scott, Alison V., 1974-

- *Jonson's Masque Markets and Problems of Literary Ownership*
  [Access article in HTML] [Access article in PDF]

  **Subject Headings:**
  - Jonson, Ben, 1573?-1637 -- Criticism and interpretation.
  - English drama -- Economic aspects.

  **Abstract:**
  In printing the texts of his courtly masques—in quarto volumes and then in his 1616 Folio—Jonson risked devaluing them within the patronage networks they were originally produced for. Nevertheless, Jonson used the stigmatized medium of print to increase the accessibility of his work, and to assert its value. This article explores that seeming paradox, arguing that Jonson defended the value of his printed masques by reasserting the very qualities that had previously enabled them as patronage "gifts." Even in the stigmatized marketplace of print, Jonson claimed his masques to be luxuries to be possessed only by discriminating consumers.

Williamson, Elizabeth.

- *The Domestication of Religious Objects in The White Devil*
  [Access article in HTML] [Access article in PDF]

  **Subject Headings:**
  - Webster, John, 1580?-1625? White devil.
  - Crosses in literature.

  **Abstract:**
  Protestant reformers viewed the crucifix as the ultimate symbol of Catholic idolatry because it included a visual representation of the body of Christ. Yet both crosses and crucifixes were preserved in homes and private chapels throughout the early modern period. Crucifixes also proliferated on the stage in a variety of fictional contexts. In *The White Devil*, John Webster presents a small, jeweled crucifix in a positive light by introducing it as an heirloom. Alluding to the role that such objects continued to play in recusant families, Webster uses his crucifix to evoke sympathy for Cornelia, the play's embattled matriarch, while simultaneously questioning the stability of the token she values so highly.

Boehrer, Bruce Thomas.

- *Recent Studies in Tudor and Stuart Drama*
  [Access article in HTML] [Access article in PDF]

  **Subject Headings:**
  - Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 -- Bibliography.
  - English drama -- Early modern and Elizabethan, 1500-1600-- History and