

rated the small genre of the "country-house poem" in England. Jonson tried his hand, usually with success, at a wide range of poetic genres, including epitaph and epigram, love and funeral elegy, verse satire and verse letter, song and ode. More often than not he looked back to classical precedents. From the Roman poets Horace and Martial he derived not only generic models but an ideal vision of the artist and society against which he measured himself and the court he served. In many poems he adopted the persona of "bluff Ben," a witty, keenly perceptive, and scrupulously honest judge of men and women. The classical values Jonson most admired are enumerated in his longest epigram, *Inviting a Friend to Supper*, which describes a dinner party characterized by moderation, civility, graciousness, and pleasure that delights without enslaving—all contrasting sharply with the excess and licentiousness that marked the banquets and entertainments of imperial Rome and Stuart England. Yet the poet who produced this image of perfect moderation was notorious in his life as a drinker and a glutton with, as he puts it in *My Picture Left in Scotland*, a "mountain belly." Jonson was a man of immense appetites, which found expression in his art as well as in his life. His best works seethe with an almost uncontrollable imaginative energy and lust for abundance. Even his profound classical learning manifests this impulse. The notes and references to learned authorities which spill across the margins of his *Works* can be seen as the literary equivalent of food and drink piled high on the poet's table. Years of hardship had taught Jonson to seek his feasts in his imagination, and he could make the most mundane object the basis for flights of high fancy. As he told Drummond, he once "consumed a whole night in lying looking to his great toe, about which he had seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians fight in his imagination." In Drummond's view, Jonson was "oppressed with fantasy." Perhaps it was so—but Jonson's capacity for fantasy also produced a wide variety of plays, masques, and poems, in styles ranging from witty comedy to delicate lyricism.

The Masque of Blackness When James I and Queen Anne ascended the English throne in 1603, they presided over the development of the court masque as a major form of praise, entertainment, and political idealization, celebrating the Stuart court as the embodiment of all perfections. *Blackness* established Jonson and Inigo Jones as the chief makers of court masques for more than two decades. Jonson provided the words and Jones the spectacle; over the years their rivalry grew ever more intense. For the first decade the queen took an active role in planning and performing court masques, which were usually performed only once—most often on Twelfth Night, as in this case, or sometimes for a wedding or other special occasion. *Blackness* also began the tradition of prodigiously expensive masques: the queen's bills for it came to around £5000 (more than five hundred times what the young Jonson would have made in a year as an apprentice bricklayer). These entertainments were customarily followed by an elaborate feast and all-night dancing (the revels). On this occasion, as on many that followed, the evening was chaotic. The banquet table was overturned by the crush of diners before the meal began; guests were beaten by the palace guards; light-fingered revelers stole jewels, chains, and purses; and sexual liaisons went on in dark corners.

Court masques differed from performances in the public theater in almost every respect. Most important, the essence of the masque is dance. They were multimedia events combining songs, speech, richly ornamented costumes and masks, shifting scene panels depicting elaborate architecture and landscapes, and intricate machines in which gods and goddesses descended from the heavens. They were presented to King James, who occupied the Chair of State, which was placed in the ideal viewing

position. While the speaking parts were taken by professionals, the dancers were members of the court, including—to the horror of English Puritans—women. In the reign of Charles I, William Prynne lost his ears for attacking masques and comparing the women who danced in them (including the queen) to whores.

On the surface, *Blackness* asserts the cultural superiority of the English over non-European peoples and celebrates the patriarchal power of James, the "Sun King" of Britain, who can turn black skin to white. But in this and other queen's masques a subversive current is evident. Jonson tells us it was "her Majesty's will" that the ladies appear as black African beauties. Their costumes designed by Inigo Jones conjoin exotic beauty and wildness, associating them with the feared and desired "others" discovered (or imagined) by contemporary explorers. The power of the supposed Sun King is further undercut by Niger's lengthy praise of black beauty and by the fact that the promised transformation of the ladies' skin is never seen (though they have become white in the sequel, *The Masque of Beauty*, performed three years later). Some viewers found the work unsettling, one deeming the ladies' apparel "too light and courtesan-like" and their black faces and hands "a very loathsome sight."

In many later Jacobean masques the glorification of the monarch seems less conflicted. Jonson developed a kind of prologue known as the antimasque, in which wicked, disruptive, or rustic characters played by professional actors invade the court, only to be banished by the aristocratic masquers whose dancing transforms the court into a golden world. They then enact the mixture of the ideal and real as they unmask, revealing themselves as court personages, and proceed to dance the revels with the other members of the court. Caroline court masques, in which Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria regularly danced, tended to be longer, more elaborate, more dialogic, more spectacular, and even more hyperbolic. But early to late, many masques contain features that subtly resist the politics of Stuart absolutism.

The Masque of Blackness

The Queen's Masques: the first Of Blackness

*Personated at the Court at Whitehall,
on the Twelfth Night, 1605.*

Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemy, and of late Leo the African,¹ remember unto us a river in Ethiopia famous by the name of Niger,² of which the people were called *Nigritae*, now Negroes, and are the blackest nation of the world. This river taketh spring out of a certain lake,³ eastward, and after a long race, falleth into the western ocean. Hence (because it was her Majesty's will to have them blackamoors at first) the invention was derived by me, and presented thus.

First, for the scene, was drawn a Landscape⁴ consisting of small woods, and here and there a void place filled with huntings; which falling, an artificial sea was seen to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, raised with waves which seemed to move, and in some places the billow to break,⁵ as imitating that orderly disorder, which is common in nature. In front of this sea were placed six tritons,⁶ in moving

1. This long introductory note is Jonson's. Leo wrote the *Description of Africa* (1526); the other three are classical authorities on geography.

2. Some, though not Pliny, identified it as the Nile. Niger means black.

3. Lake Chad.

4. Painted on the front curtain.

5. Effects created by a series of painted cloths raised and lowered by a machine.

6. Sea gods.

and sprightly actions; their upper parts human, save that their hairs were blue, as partaking of the sea-color; their desinent⁷ parts fish, mounted above their heads, and all varied in disposition. From their backs were borne out certain light pieces of taffeta, as if carried by the wind, and their music made out of wreathed shells. Behind these, a pair of sea-maids, for song, were as conspicuously seated, between which two great sea-horses, as big as the life, put forth themselves; the one mounting aloft, and writhing his head from the other, which seemed to sink forwards; so intended for variation, and that the figure behind might come off better. Upon their backs Oceanus⁸ and Niger were advanced.

Oceanus, presented in a human form, the color of his flesh blue, and shadowed with a robe of sea green; his head grey and horned, as he is described by the ancients; his beard of the like mixed color. He was garlanded with algae or sea-grass, and in his hand a trident.

Niger, in form and color of an Ethiop, his hair and rare beard curled, shadowed with a blue and bright mantle; his front, neck, and wrists adorned with pearl; and crowned with an artificial wreath of cane and paper-rush.

These induced the masquers, which were twelve nymphs, negroes, and the daughters of Niger, attended by so many of the Oceaniae,⁹ which were their light-bearers.

The masquers were placed in a great concave shell, like mother of pearl, curiously made to move on those waters, and rise with the billow; the top thereof was stuck with a chevron of lights which, indented to the proportion of the shell, struck a glorious beam upon them as they were seated one above another; so that they were all seen, but in an extravagant¹ order.

On sides of the shell did swim six huge sea-monsters, varied in their shapes and dispositions, bearing on their backs the twelve torch-bearers, who were planted there in several greces,² so as the backs of some were seen, some in purple³ (or side), others in face, and all having their lights burning out of whelks or murex shells.

The attire of the masquers was alike in all, without difference; the colors azure and silver, their hair thick, and curled upright in tresses, like pyramids, but returned on the top with a scroll and antique dressing of feathers, and jewels interlaced with ropes of pearl. And for the front, ear, neck and wrists, the ornament was of the most choice and orient pearl, best setting off from the black.

For the light-bearers, sea-green, waved about the skirts with gold and silver; their hair loose and flowing, garlanded with sea-grass, and that stuck with branches of coral.

These thus presented, the scene behind seemed a vast sea (and united with this that flowed forth)⁴ from the termination or horizon of which (being the level of the state,⁵ which was placed in the upper end of the hall) was drawn, by the lines of perspective, the whole work, shooting downwards from the eye; which decorum made it more conspicuous, and caught the eye afar off with a wandering beauty. To which was added an obscure and cloudy night piece,⁶ that made the whole set off. So much for the bodily part, which was of Master Inigo Jones his design and act.

By this, one of the tritons, with the two sea-maids, began to sing to the others' loud music, their voices being a tenor and two trebles.

7. Back.

8. The Atlantic Ocean, father of the river Niger. Both ride on the backs of hippopotamuses ("sea horses," line 31).

9. Sea nymphs, daughters of Oceanus and Tethys.

1. Moving about.

2. Steps.

3. Profile.

4. The painted backdrop and the wave machine.

5. The king's throne, placed at the ideal viewing position, the vanishing point of the perspective.

6. The upper part of the scenery, through which the moon later descends.

Sound, sound aloud
The welcome of the orient flood
Into the west;
Fair Niger, son to great Oceanus,
Now honored thus
With all his beauteous race,
Who though but black in face,
Yet are they bright,
And full of life and light,
To prove that beauty best
Which not the color, but the feature
Assures unto the creature.

OCEANUS Be silent, now the ceremony's done,

And Niger, say, how comes it, lovely son,
That thou, the Ethiop's river, so far east,
Art seen to fall into th'extremest west

Of me, the king of floods, Oceanus,
And in mine empire's heart salute me thus?
My ceaseless current now amazèd stands

To see thy labor through so many lands
Mix thy fresh billow with my brackish stream,
And in thy sweetness, stretch thy diademe^o

To these far distant and unequalled skies,
This squared circle of celestial bodies.⁷

realm, rule

NIGER Divine Oceanus, 'tis not strange at all

That, since the immortal souls of creatures mortal
Mix with their bodies, yet reserve for ever
A power of separation, I should sever

My fresh streams from thy brackish, like things fixed,
Though with thy powerful saltness thus far mixed.
'Virtue though chained to earth, will still live free;

And hell it self must yield to industry.⁸

OCEANUS But what's the end of thy Herculean labours,
Extended to these calm and blessed shores?

NIGER To do a kind and careful father's part,
In satisfying every pensive heart

Of these my daughters, my most lovèd birth;
Who, though they were the first formed dames of earth,
And in whose sparkling and refulgent^o eyes

radiant

The glorious sun did still delight to rise,
Though he (the best judge, and most formal cause⁹
Of all dames' beauties) in their firm hues draws

Signs of his fervent'st love, and thereby shows
That in their black the perfect'st beauty grows,
Since the fixed color of their curlèd hair

7. The squared circle is an image of perfection, a hyperbolic compliment to Britain.

8. Alludes to Horace, *Odes* 1.3.36.

9. Aristotle's formal cause produces the form or essence of any thing.

(which is the highest grace of dames most fair)
 No cares, no age can change, or there display
 The fearful tincture of abhorrèd grey,
 Since Death herself (herself being pale and blue)
 50 Can never alter their most faithful hue;
 All which are arguments to prove how far
 Their beauties conquer in great beauty's war;
 And more, how near divinity they be,
 That stand from passion or decay so free.
 55 Yet, since the fabulous voices of some few
 Poor brain-sick men, styled poets¹ here with you,
 Have, with such envy of their graces, sung
 The painted beauties other empires sprung,
 Letting their loose and wingèd fictions fly
 60 To infect all climates, yea, our purity;
 As of one Phaëton, that fired the world,²
 And that before his heedless flames were hurled
 About the globe, the Ethiops were as fair
 As other dames, now black with black despair,
 65 And in respect of their complexions changed,
 Are eachwhere, since, for luckless creatures ranged.
 Which when my daughters heard (as women are
 Most jealous of their beauties) fear and care
 Possessed them whole; yea, and believing them,³
 70 They wept such ceaseless tears into my stream
 That it hath thus far overflowed his shore
 To seek them patience; who have since e'ermore
 As the sun riseth, charged his burning throne
 With volleys of revilings, 'cause he shone
 75 On their scorched cheeks with such intemperate fires,
 And other dames made queens of all desires.
 To frustrate which strange error oft I sought,
 Though most in vain against a settled thought
 As women's are, till they confirmed at length
 80 By miracle what I wish so much strength
 Of argument resisted; else they feigned:
 For in the lake where their first spring they gained,
 As they sat cooling their soft limbs one night,
 Appeared a face all circumfused with light;
 85 (And sure they saw't, for Ethiops never dream)⁴
 Wherein they might decipher through the stream
 These words:
 That they a land must forthwith seek,
 Whose termination (of the Greek)
 90 Sounds *-tania*; where bright Sol, that heat

1. English Petrarchan poets, whose ideal of beauty involves fair skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes. See, e.g., the sonnets of Sidney and Spenser.
 2. Son of Apollo the sun god, whose ill-fated attempt to drive the sun's chariot scorched the

earth and, reportedly, turned the skin of the daughters of Niger black.
 3. The poets (line 132).
 4. Jonson cites Pliny for this saying.

Their bloods, doth never rise or set,
 But in his journey passeth by,
 And leaves that climate of the sky
 To comfort of a greater light,⁵
 Who forms all beauty with his sight.
 In search of this have we three pryncedoms past
 That speak out *-tania* in their accents last:
 Black Mauritania⁶ first, and secondly
 Swarth Lusitania,⁷ next we did descry
 Rich Aquitania,⁸ and yet cannot find
 The place unto these longing nymphs designed.^o *appointed*
 Instruct and aid me, great Oceanus:
 What land is this that now appears to us?
 OCEANUS This land, that lifts into the temperate air
 His snowy cliff, is Albion the fair,
 So called of Neptune's son, who ruleth here;⁹
 For whose dear guard, myself four thousand year,
 Since old Deucalion's¹ days, have walked the round
 About his empire, proud to see him crowned
 Above my waves.

At this, the moon was discovered in the upper part of the house, triumphant in a silver throne, made in figure of a pyramis.² Her garments white and silver, the dressing of her head antique, and crowned with a luminary or sphere of light, which striking on the clouds, and heightened with silver, reflected as natural clouds do by the splendor of the moon. The heaven about her was vaulted with blue silk, and set with stars of silver which had in them their several lights burning. The sudden sight of which made Niger to interrupt Oceanus with this present passion.³

110 NIGER —O see, our silver star!
 Whose pure auspicious light greets us thus far!
 Great Æthiopia, goddess of our shore,⁴
 Since with particular worship we adore
 Thy general brightness, let particular grace
 115 Shine on my zealous daughters. Show the place
 Which long their longings urged their eyes to see.
 Beautify them, which long have deified thee.
 AETHIOPIA Niger, be glad; resume thy native cheer.
 Thy daughters' labors have their period here,
 120 And so thy errors. I was that bright face
 Reflected by the lake, in which thy race
 Read mystic lines (which skill Pythagoras⁵

5. The allusion is to James, the "Sun-King" of Britain.
 6. Land of the Moors in North Africa.
 7. Portugal.
 8. Southwest France.
 9. King James, regularly so styled because of Britain's close relationship to the sea. Albion (previous line): ancient name for England (white land).

1. A Greek analogue to Noah, as the survivor of a great flood.
 2. Pyramid.
 3. Instant outburst.
 4. Jonson identifies her as the moon, worshipped by the Ethiopians.
 5. Mystical Greek philosopher, who taught men how to read writing on the moon.

125 This blessed isle doth with that *-tania* end
 Which there they saw inscribed, and shall extend
 Wished satisfaction to their best desires.
 Britannia, which the triple world admires,⁶
 This isle hath now recovered for her name;
 Where reign those beauties that with so much fame
 130 The sacred Muses' sons have honorèd,
 And from bright Hesperus to Eos spread.⁷
 With that great name, Britannia, this blest isle
 Hath won her ancient dignity and style,
 A world divided from the world,⁸ and tried
 135 The abstract of it in his general pride.
 For were the world, with all his wealth, a ring,
 Britannia (whose new name makes all tongues sing)
 Might be a diamond worthy to enchase it,
 Ruled by a sun, that to this height doth grace it.
 140 Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force
 To blanch an Ethiop and revive a cor'se.⁹
 His light sciential is and (past mere nature)
 Can salve the rude defects of every creature.
 Call forth thy honored daughters, then,
 145 And let them 'fore the Britain men
 Indent the land with those pure traces!
 They flow with in their native graces.
 Invite them boldly to the shore,
 Their beauties shall be scorched no more;
 150 This sun is temperate, and refines
 All things on which his radiance shines.

Here the tritons sounded, and they danced on shore, every couple as they advanced severally presenting their fans,² in one of which were inscribed their mixed names, in the other a mute hieroglyphic, expressing their mixed qualities. Which manner of symbol I rather chose than impresse, as well for strangeness, as relishing of antiquity, and more applying to that original doctrine of sculpture which the Egyptians are said first to have brought from the Ethiopians.

	The Names ³	The Symbols
The Queen	Euphoris	A golden tree, laden with fruit
Countess of Bedford	Aglaiia	

6. The triple realms of heaven, earth, and underworld, admiring the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales united under James. James reintroduced the name "Britain" in 1604, to refer to the united island.

7. West to east.

8. Britain as a separate world, divided from Europe by the channel.

9. Corpse. Both are proverbial impossibilities.

1. Imprint the land with their dancing feet. This is the call for the main masque dances.

2. The women advanced in pairs holding fans to the audience: on one appeared both names; on the other, an allegorical symbol of their conjoined qualities.

3. The meaning of the pairs' names and symbols, in order: abundance and splendor, fertility symbol; transparent and flexibility, a twenty-sided water symbol; swiftness and spotless, symbol of purity; moisture and coldness, symbol, the salamander who lives in fire unharmed; sweetness and delicacy, symbol of education; weight and revolving, symbol, the earth's globe. The women are members of Queen Anne's court, two of them notable in literary circles: Donne and Jonson wrote poems about Lucy, countess of Bedford (see for Jonson, p. 1397); Lady Mary Wroth wrote poems and a romance (p. 1422), and see Jonson, p. 1408.

Lady Herbert	Diaphane	The figure icosahedron of crystal
Countess of Derby	Eucampse	
Lady Rich	Ocyte	A pair of naked feet in a river
Countess of Suffolk	Kathare	
Lady Bevill	Notis	The salamander simple
Lady Effingham	Psychrote	
Lady Elizabeth Howard	Glycyte	A cloud full of rain dropping
Lady Susan Vere	Malacia	
Lady Wroth	Baryte	An urn, sphered with wine
Lady Walsingham	Periphere	

The names of the Oceaniae were

Doris	Cydippe	Beroe	Ianthe
Petrae	Glauce	Acaste	Lycoris
Ocyrhoe	Tyche	Clytia	Plexaure

Their own single dance ended, as they were about to make choice of their men, one from the sea was heard to call 'em with this charm, sung by a tenor voice.

SONG

Come away, come away,
 We grow jealous of your stay.
 If you do not stop your ear,
 We shall have more cause to fear
 Sirens of the land, than they
 To doubt the sirens of the sea.

Here they danced with their men several measures and corantos. All which ended, they were again accited⁴ to sea, with a song of two trebles, whose cadences were iterated by a double echo from several parts of the land.

SONG

	Daughters of the subtle flood, Do not let earth longer entertain you; Let earth longer entertain you Longer entertain you
160	1st ECHO 2nd ECHO
	'Tis to them enough of good That you give this little hope to gain you. Give this little hope to gain you. Little hope to gain you.
165	1st ECHO 2nd ECHO

If they love
 You shall quickly see;

4. Summoned.

170 1st ECHO
2nd ECHO

For when to flight you move,
They'll follow you, the more you flee.
Follow you, the more you flee,
The more you flee.

175 1st ECHO
2nd ECHO

If not, impute it each to other's matter;
They are but earth—
But earth,
Earth—

1st ECHO
2nd ECHO

And what you vowed was water.
And what you vowed was water
You vowed was water.

AETHIOPIA Enough, bright nymphs, the night grows old,

180

And we are grieved we cannot hold
You longer light; but comfort take.
Your father only to the lake
Shall make return; yourselves, with feasts,
Must here remain the Ocean's guests.

185

Nor shall this veil the sun hath cast
Above your blood, more summers last.
For which, you shall observe these rites:
Thirteen times thrice, on thirteen nights
(So often as I fill my sphere
With glorious light, throughout the year)
You shall, when all things else do sleep
Save your chaste thoughts, with reverence steep
Your bodies in that purer brine
And wholesome dew, called rosmarine;

195

Then with that soft and gentler foam,
Of which the ocean yet yields some,
Whereof bright Venus, beauty's queen,
Is said to have begotten been,

200

You shall your gentler limbs o'er-lave,
And for your pains, perfection have.
So that, this night, the year gone round,⁵
You do again salute this ground;
And in the beams of yond' bright sun
Your faces dry, and all is done.

At which, in a dance they returned to the sea, where they took their shell, and with this full song, went out.

SONG

205

Now Dian,^o with her burning face, *the moon*
Declines apace:

5. Jonson had probably already planned the *Masque of Beauty*, in which the women's black skins were turned white, but intervening masques prevented its production until 1608.

210

By which our waters know
To ebb, that late did flow.
Back seas, back nymphs, but with a forward grace
Keep still your reverence to the place,
And shout with joy of favor you have won,
In sight of Albion, Neptune's son.

1605

Volpone This dark satire on human greed is set in Venice, but its true target is the city of London, or the city that London is about to become. It is a place devoted to commerce and mired in corruption, populated by greedy fools and conniving rascals. Like Shakespeare, Donne, and Thomas More before them, Jonson was deeply disturbed by the rise of a money economy in which every aspect of life could be prostituted to commercial interest. In *Volpone*, Jonson protests the inhumanity not just of greedy people but of greedy laws—laws made by the greedy to protect the acquisitions of the greedy. In many ways the state of Venice is shown in this play to be a worse criminal than the criminals it prosecutes.

Volpone combines elements drawn from several sources and traditions. The classical satirist Lucian provided the theme of a rich old man playing with the money-grubbing scoundrels who hoped to inherit his wealth. The medieval legend of crafty Reynard the Fox contributes to the character of Volpone (the fox) and to the play's pervasive animal imagery. Such characters as Mosca the wily parasite, Voltore the unscrupulous lawyer, the avaricious dotard Corbaccio, and the voluble Lady Would-Be are drawn in part from Roman comedy. Some scenes, such as that in which Volpone disguised as a mountebank woos Celia at her window, are drawn from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. But *Volpone* is much more than the sum of its borrowings. It is a work of wonderful comic vitality, full of wit and mischief, in which the audience cannot help but applaud the clever con artists as they play and prey upon their loathsome victims.

Volpone was first performed by the King's Men (Shakespeare's company) in the spring of 1606, at the Globe Theater. (See the illustration, in the appendices to this volume, of a contemporary popular theater constructed on similar lines, which was the model for the recently reconstructed Globe on London's Bankside.) The Globe seated some two thousand persons—aristocrats and prosperous citizens in the tiered galleries (or sometimes on the stage itself), lower-class "groundlings" in the pit in front of the stage. The play was also performed before learned audiences in Oxford and Cambridge, who no doubt appreciated its adherence to the classical unities of action, time, and place. It was first published in quarto form in 1607 and republished with a few changes in the 1616 *Works*, the basis for the present text. Stage directions and scene divisions have been added.