

**HERALDS AND HERALDRY  
IN BEN JONSON'S PLAYS,  
MASQUES AND  
ENTERTAINMENTS**

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Heralds and Heraldry in Ben Jonson's Plays, Masques and Entertainments by Arthur  
Huntington Nason

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**ARTHUR HUNTINGTON NASON**

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HERALDS AND HERALDRY IN  
JONSON'S PLAYS.



ILLUSTRATION FROM LEGH'S ACCEDENS OF ARMORY, 1576.

ACHIEVEMENT OF THOMAS LORD HAWARDE,  
DUKE OF NORFOLKE.  
*Folio, 47 a*

# HERALDS AND HERALDRY

In Ben Jonson's Plays, Masques  
and Entertainments

BY

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1907

PART I.

THE HERALDS AND HERALDRY OF  
JONSON'S DAY.

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1. *Madman.* I have skill in harroldry.

2. *Madman.* Hast?

1. *Madman.* You do give for your creast a  
woodcockes head, with the braines pickt out  
on't; you are a very ancient gentleman.

—Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*, IV, 2.





PART I. THE HERALDS AND HERALDRY  
OF JONSON'S DAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOURCES FOR OUR STUDY.

**I**N VIEW of the vast and varied technical knowledge displayed by Jonson in his dramatic works, it is not surprising to find that he possessed a detailed familiarity with the science of Heraldry. The wonder is rather that, although the casual heraldic allusions in the plays of Shakspeare have been made the subject of a monograph,<sup>1</sup> no one has written, heretofore, on the far more numerous and technical heraldic passages in the plays of Jonson. The heraldry of Shakspeare has far less need of annotation. "They may give," says Slender, "the dozen white *lucers* in their *coat*;" to which the Welshman replies, "The dozen white *louses* do become an old *coat* well."<sup>2</sup> But Jonson's heraldic jests are buried beneath a mass of technical terminology. For example: "Gyrony of eight pieces, azure and gules; between three plates, a chevron engrailed checquy, or, vert, and ermins; on a chief argent, between two ann'lets sable, a boar's head proper."<sup>3</sup>

That much excellent satire exists even in such passages as the foregoing, I hope presently to show. Such is at least one of my purposes in the notes that constitute "Part II." But before I annotate particular passages, it is desirable that I present, as "Part I," a clear state-

<sup>1</sup> *Heraldik in Diensten der Shakespeares Forschung. Selbststudien von Alfred von Maunz. Berlin. Mayer & Müller. 1903.* <sup>2</sup> *Merry Wives of Windsor, I, I.* <sup>3</sup> *Every Man Out of His Humour, III, I; Works, I, 100.*

ment of so much of the science of Heraldry as actually appears in the dramatic works of Jonson. This statement, moreover, should be based not on the theory of heraldry as taught by modern manuals, nor on the theory of heraldry as it was practiced in its prime, but on heraldry as it was popularly known and practiced in Jonson's day, a period of heraldic decadence.

Our most obvious sources for such a study are the official records of the Heralds' Office, many of which are now accessible in print. For our present purpose, however, these records are not our only sources, nor our best. What we wish to study is not chiefly the heraldry of the time as it was understood by the officers of the Heralds' College, but rather, the heraldry of the time as it was understood by Jonson and his audience. Whatever went into the popular manuals of heraldry in Jonson's day, *that* with most likelihood, we may suppose familiar to the play-going public. These popular manuals, therefore, whether written by heralds or by laymen, must constitute our most important source.

Who were the popular authorities on heraldry in Jonson's day? Jonson himself has given us one answer: "Sir," says his young pursuivant, Master Piedmantle, "I have read the *Elements* and *Accidence*, and all the leading books."<sup>4</sup> The former is a work by Jonson's friend Edmond Bolton; the latter, an earlier manual by Gerard Legh. Camden, in his *Remains concerning Britain*, repeats these names and adds two more; he cordially refers his readers "to Edmond Bolton, who learnedly and judiciously hath discovered the first Elements of Armory, to Gerrard Leigh, John Ferne, John Guillim."<sup>5</sup> Guillim, whose *Display of Heraldry*, 1610, is the ablest treatise of them all, gives as his sources, "Ger. Leigh, Bofwell,

<sup>4</sup> *Staple of News*, II, I; *Works*, II, 292. <sup>5</sup> Camden: *Remains concerning Britain*, 1674; Reprint of 1870, p. 248.