The Artist and the Mountebank

Rochester's Alexander Bendo and the Dynamics of Forgery and Illusion in 17th-Century Art

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In July 1676, a new mountebank arrived in London, set up shop in Tower Street and promptly published a handbill to advertise his services. In itself this was nothing new or particularly noteworthy, but Alexander Bendo's advertisement was extraordinary, in the sense that it addressed the very notion mountebanks tended to avoid mentioning: deception. In Early Modern Europe, mountebanks — doctors who travelled from town to town and would usually present their medicines and skills on a small stage — were generally thought to be guilty of a multitude of different deceptions, most notably the selling of useless cures with the aid of invented exotic persona, forged diplomas from imaginary universities, and letters of recommendations from invented persons of note. In fact, mountebanks were so commonly associated with fakery that they soon became a byword for deception.[1]

Alexander Bendo, however, claimed to be the genuine article: "if I appear to any one like a counterfeit", he wrote, it could only be because as an honest man, he is "the counterfeit's example, his original […]. Is it therefore my fault if the cheat by his wits and endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid resembling of him?" (Rochester 1676: 2-3) Despite these protestations, Alexander Bendo was a counterfeit, but not in the sense that he was a deceiving mountebank: he was in fact the creation of the Baroque poet and playwright John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester. The handbill was part of an elaborate imposture that according to Gilbert Burnet, Rochester's first biographer, had seen Rochester: "set up in the

1 | I am very grateful to the Stichting Fonds Catharine van Tussenbroek, whose grant for my Occasional Studentship at the Warburg Institute in 2011 enabled me to start the research for this study there. I also thank Professor Caroline van Eck and Dr. Joy Burrough-Boenisch for reading the text and providing me with their valuable comments.

Tower-Street for an *Italian Mountebank*, where he had a Stage, and practised Physick for some Weeks not without success" (1680: 27).

The Alexander Bendo episode has proven to be irresistible to Rochester's later biographers (it has appeared in every biography since Burnet's as a testimony to Rochester's eccentricity and outrageousness) and literary historians alike. In recent decades, the handbill has found its way into academic studies, where it has been discussed in the context of satire and Restoration politics. This paper will not argue with this particular approach — the handbill very obviously includes an exercise in political satire — but wants to propose that the text is also part of a very specific discourse in which the mountebank served as a vehicle for Baroque artists to explore the dynamics of deception in their work. The concept of deception was fundamental to Baroque aesthetics and there was no greater acclaim for the Baroque artist if his virtuosity managed to deceive the eye of his audience — a notion reflected in the very name of one of the most popular genres in Baroque painting, the *trompe l'oeil*.

All over Europe, Baroque artists — painters and playwrights in particular — would explore and discuss this trait in their work, particularly by drawing sustained comparisons between themselves and the mountebank. Although some of these comparisons have been discussed in isolation, very little attention, if any, has been paid to how they relate to one another. This article will attempt to provide a first sketch of the illusionist artist/mountebank discourse, which I will introduce with a drawing by the Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius, the mountebank scene from Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone* (1606) and Gerrit Dou's painting *The Quack* (1652). Rochester's handbill, I will argue, is a continuation of this artist/mountebank discourse, in the sense that it draws comparisons that are similar to those found in the works of Jonson and Dou but also takes them further, in an intricate game with representational boundaries and his readers' expectations.

The Artist and the Mountebank

The mountebank was a particularly popular subject in Early Modern Europe, especially in the Dutch Republic, the Southern Netherlands, Britain, Germany, France and Italy.[2] He appeared in many different genres, ranging from the stages of

2 | A small study conducted by six students (Oliver Antczak, Thomas Giacoletto, Rian van den Dool, Damiët Schneeweisz, Mariam Orjonikidze and Jack Lindsay) in my Research Clinic "Faking It: Political Deception in Early Modern Art and Culture" at Leiden University College yielded dozens of visual and textual representations of the mountebank for all of these countries in the period between 1600 and 1800. The visual representation of the mountebank appears to have been particularly popular in the Dutch Republic, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy but much less so

Molière and Thomas Asselijn to a multitude of cheap prints, as well as paintings by artists as diverse as Jan Steen, Jean Tassel and Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo.[3] Although there appear to have been some cultural differences in the approach to the subject, the emphasis in these representations was usually placed on the notion of the mountebank's deceitful nature and the audience's gullibility. The relationship between these two is, for example, expressed succinctly in the satirical English print *The Infallible Mountebank or Quack Doctor* (ca. 1688-1705, fig. 1). In the text that accompanies the image, the mountebank presents his audience with a long list of obviously false claims, which he concludes: "Read, Judge and Try. And if you Die, never believe me more."

However, this wealth of visual and textual representations of the mountebank hides a much smaller and rather more sophisticated discourse in which artists would compare their own craft with that of the mountebank and use him as a vehicle to explore the dynamics with their own audiences.[4] Hendrick Goltzius' drawing "The Children of Mercury", from his 1596 *The Children of the Planets* series, provides a particularly good introduction to this discourse.[5] The drawing, which was turned into a print by Goltzius' former student Jan Saenredam (fig. 2), depicts Mercury along with the professions associated with him. However, rather than showing Mercury as the protector of merchants, as had been common in the Children of the Planets tradition, Goltzius presents him in the context of rhetoric, the art of

in Eastern Europe and Russia. The discourse in which artists compared themselves to the mountebank seems to have been limited mainly to the Dutch Republic, Britain, France and Italy.

3 | Steen, Tassel and Tiepolo are just three of the many artists who painted quacks and their audiences in the 17th and 18th century but they have in common that they made several versions of the subject. Jan Steen painted his between 1650 and 1660 and all versions are simply known as *De Kwakzalver* — the best-known of these is part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Jean Tassel painted at least two, extremely similar, versions of his *Le Charlatan*, one of which is to be found at the Musée Massey in Tarbes. Neither version is dated but they were probably produced in the 1650s or early 1660s. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo painted several versions in the 1750s, including *Il Ciarlatano* (1751-52), which can be found in the collection of the Louvre in Paris.

4 | It must be noted that this discourse is in fact part of a wider one in which artists identified with other types of tricksters. For a particularly good example, please see Gianlorenzo Bernini's only surviving play *L'Impresario* (ca. 1643) and Donald Beecher's excellent article on it: "Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Impresario*: The Artist as the Supreme Trickster" (1984).

5 | Also see my brief discussion of this image in Hylkema 2014: 6-7.

Figure 1: Anonymous, "The Infallible Mountebank" or Quack Doctor, ca. 1688-1705, engraving, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.

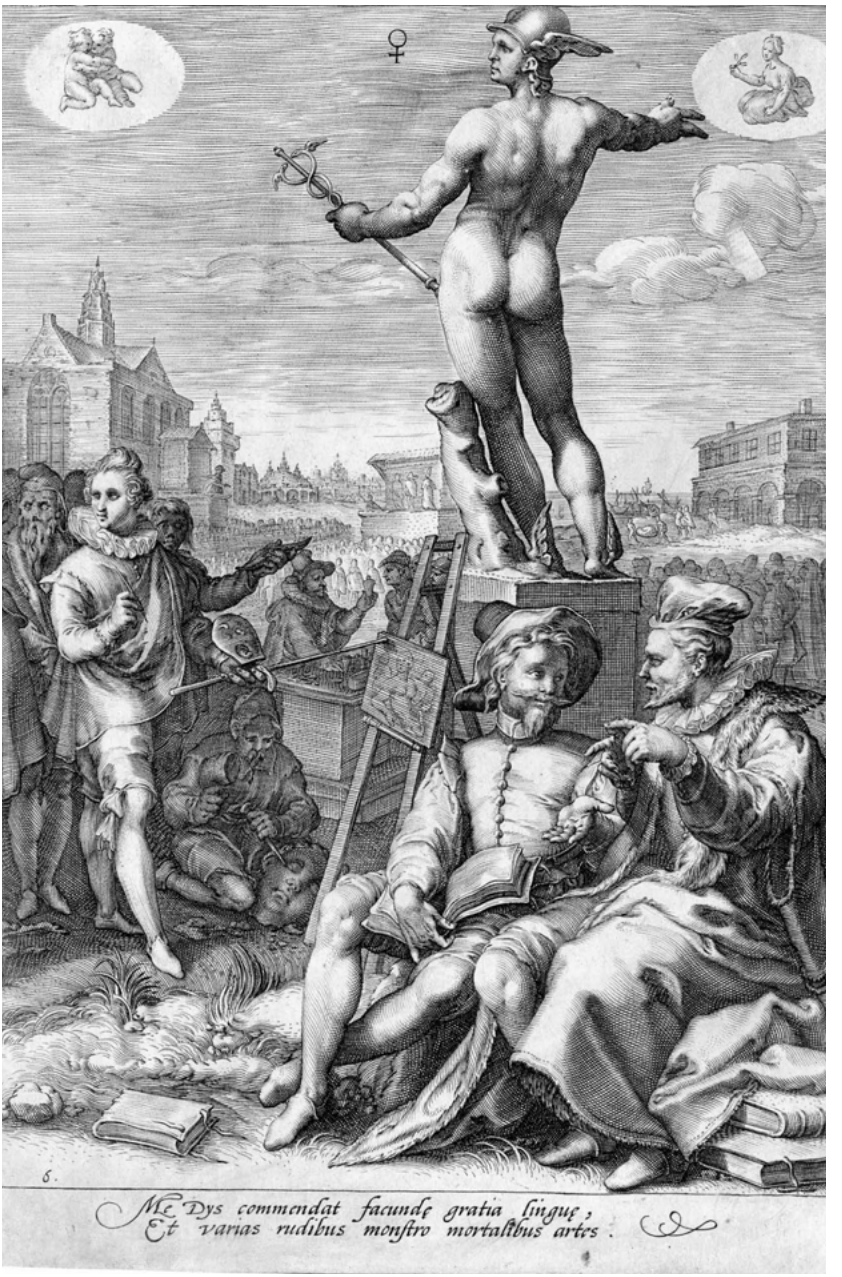


Figure 2: Jan Saenredam, "The Children of Mercury", ca. 1596, engraving after a drawing by Hendrick Goltzius, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.

persuasion, which he emphasizes by placing two rhetoricians in the foreground. To Mercury's left, we see the painter holding a palette and maulstick, and the sculptor, busily carving a human figure. In the background, an orator is addressing a crowd and to the right, a theatrical performance is in progress. In between the stage and the painter, another of Mercury's children is found: the mountebank, presenting a bottle of medicine.

These professions have in common that they all deceive their audiences, a notion that Goltzius emphasizes by placing a weaving shuttle between the quack and the painter. This shuttle is a reference to the early modern Dutch word 'webbe', which meant a woven tissue but was also used for literary texts and in the phrase 'een webbe van leughens', which literally translates as 'a tissue of lies' or 'ein Lügengewebe'. But what lies do Mercury's children tell their audiences? The mountebank tells a multitude of lies but in the end, they all serve the same purpose: to persuade his audience that the bottle he is holding up contains a potent medicine, rather than mere water — or worse. This indeed is similar to the kind of lie Mercury's artists tell their respective audiences: theirs is the lie that occurs when a work of art transcends its representational frame and the viewer experiences and treats it, however briefly, as that which it represents. We reach out to touch a hand or shoulder, only to touch cold marble and realize that we have fallen for the sculptor's lie.

Drawing on the anthropological work of Alfred Gell, Caroline van Eck has theorized the process in which the viewer forgets the "demarcations between art and life" and experiences a sculpture as alive as the "living presence response" (van Eck 2015: 11). In Baroque sculpture, the eyes played a particularly important part in achieving this effect: Claude-Henri Watelet wrote about Bernini's gift to convey "the illusion of life": "the 'living' eyes of the statue fix the viewers and bring to the soul of the viewer an idea of life, and the sensation of gratified desire" (van Eck 2015: 65-66, translation by van Eck). The trick to this effect lies in what Hannelore Hägele has described as the process of carving in the gaze. This entails adding a focused pupil to the sculpture's eye and this is exactly what Goltzius' sculptor is doing in "The Children of Mercury": sitting on the floor, he is cutting a pupil into one of the eyes of female head in front of him. Hägele writes:

> As the beholder's eye follows the path of the glance to its object, he anticipates a fuller measure of eye-tugging and darting, just as in real life. A quickening sensation is thus effected in him partly by what he sees, but more by what he senses may happen were the frozen image to be quickened into motion. (2014: 136-37)

That response is the moment when the artist succeeds in making the spectator believe that this is flesh and blood rather than cold marble, and it is the ultimate victory of Baroque mimesis, in which the work of art is experienced, however fleetingly, as alive and as that which it represents, rather than a mere representation.

It is important to note that Goltzius' drawing does not dismiss or condemn Mercury's deceptive brood. In this respect, it would set the tone for the many comparisons that would be drawn between artists and mountebanks in the century to come. Contrary to neo-Platonic and Calvinist debates about the deceptive nature of the imitative arts, these comparisons celebrated the artist's ability to create illusions and discussed this in terms of craftsmanship and virtuosity as well as the pleasure that it gave audiences. In this sense, this discourse was strongly related to the 17th century's renewed interest in the story of the contest between the Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which the latter deceived his rival by painting curtains that were so lifelike, that Zeuxis tried to open them and lost the contest as a result. In his *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst* (1678) the Dutch painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten concludes his praise of the achievement of Parrhasius with the remark that the perfect painting is "like a mirror of nature, that makes things that are not there appear as if they are, and as such is deceptive in a permissible, entertaining and praiseworthy manner" (25, my translation).

The Playwright and the Painter: Ben Jonson and Gerrit Dou

In the theatre, the mountebank was regularly used as a vehicle for the exploration of the dynamics between the performance and its audience, a notion beautifully illustrated by the mountebank scene (Act II, scene 2) in Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone*. In this scene, the villainous Volpone impersonates an Italian mountebank by the name of Scoto of Mantua and in this guise addresses a crowd on stage. The performance is witnessed by two characters — Sir Politic and Peregrine — who provide a running commentary on their reception of the mountebank. Scoto's speech confirms Sir Politic's belief that mountebanks are "great general scholars" and "excellent physicians" (Jonson 1995: 35) whereas Peregrine will not be convinced and mocks Sir Politic and the rest of the crowd for falling under Scoto's spell.

It must be noted that the mountebank scene in *Volpone* is hardly the only case of deception in Jonson's work: from *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) to *The Magnetic Lady* (first staged in 1632), almost every single one of Jonson's comic plots is driven by imposture, forgery, hoaxing, and other kinds of trickery. However, the mountebank's formal performance within the actual performance does offer Jonson the opportunity to explore the mimetic relationship between deception and truth through a series of implicit comparisons. What Jonson presents his audience with is in fact the performance of an actual deception, Volpone's impersonation of Scoto Mantua. And what a glorious deception it is too: apart from Peregrine, Scoto's audience is completely taken in by the mountebank's rhetorical virtuosity and are persuaded of the effectiveness of Scoto's potion. More importantly, everyone falls

for the actual deception: Volpone's impersonation of Scoto. Even Peregrine, who prides himself on his scepticism, does not for a moment wonder whether Scoto of Mantua is who he claims to be.

Mimesis plays an important part in this success. At the beginning of the scene, as Scoto's stage is erected, Sir Politic and Peregrine both describe their own general views of the mountebank: whereas Politic admires them, "They are the only knowing men of Europe!", Peregrine has heard "that they are most lewd imposters; made of all terms and shreds" (Jonson 1995: 35). Scoto's speech confirms both these views, in the sense that Volpone understands exactly what constitutes a mountebank in his audience's eyes, creates its likeness and then brings it to life before them. This notion echoes a remark by Francis Bacon that Jonson would later quote in *Discoveries* (1640): "deceit is the likeness of truth" (Jonson 1892: 66). Without ever pointing out the comparison explicitly, the mise en abyme structure of the mountebank scene gives Jonson the opportunity to show his audience what he does as a playwright: he understands what constitutes their truth and then imitates that on stage to make them believe his illusion.

Half a century later, the Dutch painter Gerrit Dou would present a very similar point in his painting *The Quack* (fig. 3), albeit in a rather more explicit manner.[6] At that stage Dou was celebrated throughout Europe for his gift to produce extraordinarily lifelike paintings. The Dutch poet Dirk Traudenius assured his readers that if Zeuxis were to see Dou's work, "[he] would be deceived all over again. Here it is not paint that lies on the panel / but life and spirit" (1662: 17, my translation). In fact, Dou would often include deceptively real curtains in his paintings, as in the Rijksmuseum's *Man Smoking a Pipe* (ca. 1650), to allude to his status as the modern Parrhasius. He was obviously proud of his extraordinary mimetic powers, a notion that is abundantly present in *The Quack*, in which he, as Eric Jan Sluijter writes, "presented with remarkable wit his unconcealed pride in the 'deceit' he was able to produce" (1998: 195).

In Dou's *Quack*, the mountebank takes centre-stage, literally, and is shown presenting his captivated audience with a bottle of medicine. He is accompanied by all the exotic props traditionally associated with mountebanks: a monkey, a parasol, and a medical diploma so outrageously grand that it cannot be real. However, whereas other artist / mountebank comparisons are abstract, like Goltzius', or implicit, like Jonson's, Dou makes his specific and personal by including a self-portrait in the image. In fact, Ivan Gaskell points out that "the scene is set at the Galgewater in Leiden, where Dou had his studio" (1982: 18). The painter is shown hanging out of the window of his studio directly behind the quack, holding a palette. The symmetry in how the figures of the mountebank and Dou present the attributes of their respective professions immediately establishes an explicit comparison be-

6 | A shorter discussion of this work was included in my article "The pleasure of being deceived: spectatorship in the arts and other deceptions in eighteenth-century England" (Hylkema 2014).

Figure 3: Gerrit Dou, "The Quack", 1652, oil on canvas, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, © Stichting Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

tween the two. Dou, however, is not watching the mountebank but directly confronts the viewer's gaze. This creates a relationship between spectator and painter that explicitly resembles that between the mountebank and his audience. I, Dou appears to tell his viewer, am doing exactly to you what he is to them: I am deceiving you.

The Poet: Rochester and Alexander Bendo

Although Gerrit Dou's painting has, to my best knowledge, never been connected to any of the many other works in which the artist compares himself to the mountebank, it is quite possibly the most discussed example of this discourse on artistic deception. Rochester's Alexander Bendo, however, has so far escaped such attention, even though elements of the handbill clearly deal with the concept of mimesis and deceit. What makes the Alexander Bendo case particularly intriguing is that Rochester takes the comparison one step further: whereas Dou went beyond Jonson's implicit comparison by literally inserting himself in the work, the line between Rochester and Bendo is very thin indeed.

Although accounts of the Bendo episode vary, most agree that he started the imposture in the summer of 1676 in order to escape being arrested and charged with the murder of his friend Captain Downs.[7] On 17 June that year, Rochester and several friends had become involved in a drunken brawl in Epsom that ended in Downs' death. It has never become clear what happened exactly, but Rochester, who had fled the scene, was widely held responsible. With a possible murder trial hanging over his head, Rochester decided to lie low in London, disguised as Alexander Bendo (Greene 1974: 106; Johnson 2004: 250). Several years after Rochester's death, his former servant Thomas Alcock published *The Famous Pathologist or The Noble Mountebank* (1687), which greatly elaborated on the account of the imposture in Gilbert Burnet's biography. Claiming that he had assisted Rochester in the imposture, Alcock describes how carpenters had set up a stage for Rochester at his lodgings in Tower Street, where he lived and practised as

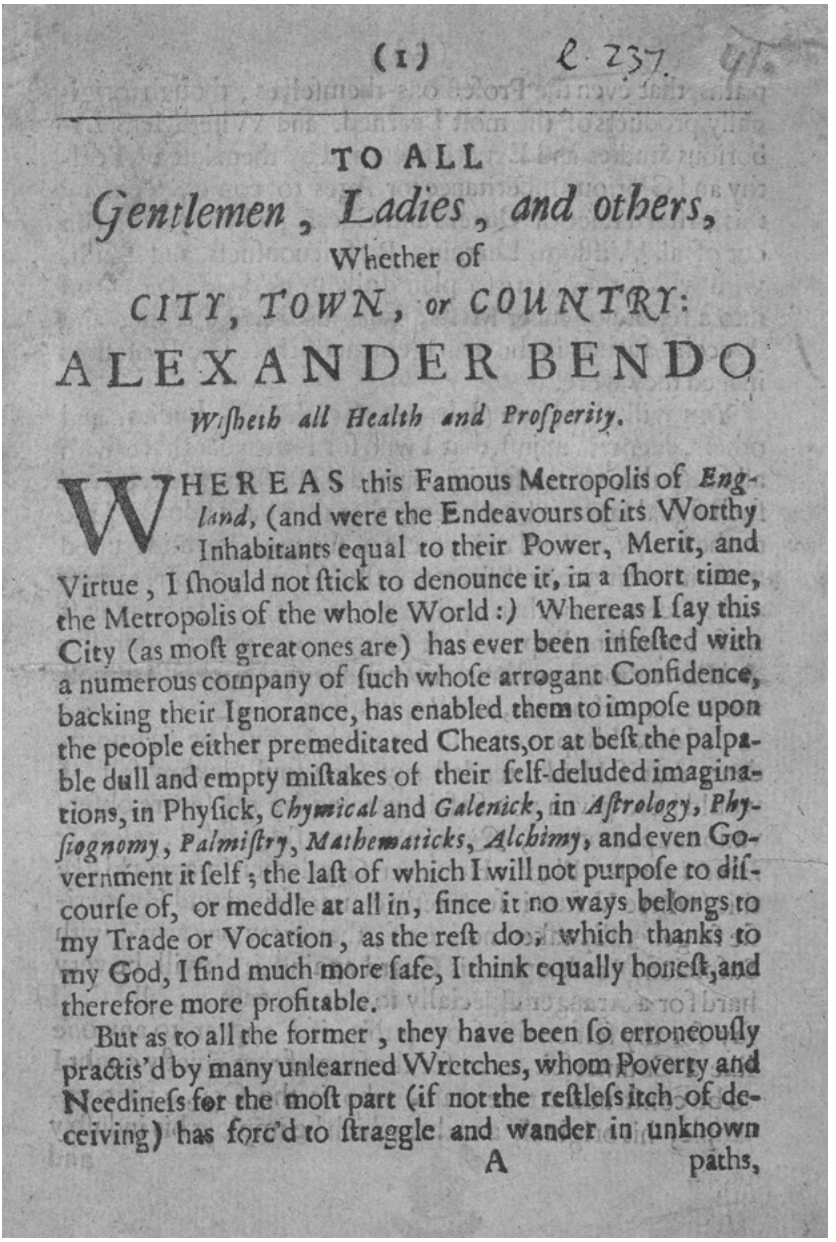
> the noble Doctor Alexandr Bendo, in an old overgrown Green Gown […] —lined through with exotick furrs of diverse colours, an antique Cap, a great Revernd Beard, and a Magnificent false Medal sett round with glittering Pearl, rubies, and Diamonds of the same cognation, hung abt his Neck. (1961: 29)

7 | One notable exception is Vivian de Sola Pinto, who does not connect the imposture to the events at Epsom but dates the Bendo imposture one year earlier, to 1675, in his introduction to Alcock's pamphlet (de Sola Pinto 1961: 13-14).

The story of the Bendo imposture has become a firm fixture in Rochester's biography: it has proven irresistible to all of Rochester's subsequent biographers and featured prominently in Laurence Dunmore's film about Rochester's life, *The Libertine* (2004). The imposture has also found its way into academia, for instance in Kirk Combe's article "Making Monkeys of Important Men: Performance Satire and Rochester's Alexander Bendo's Brochure" (2012), which approaches the weeks that Rochester lived and practised as Bendo as "a prolonged period of performance art" (56). Combe's analysis, which he mainly bases on the handbill, Alcock's account and — as he readily admits — "educated guesswork" (ibid.), is intriguing and very relevant in the context of the artist/mountebank discourse. The problem, however, is that there is not a shred of evidence that the imposture actually happened. As Germaine Greer points out in her book on Rochester's life and works, there is no mention of Alexander Bendo in the transactions of the Society of Apothecaries, which she argues must mean that "Alcock's tale can hardly be true" (2000: 66).

Kate Loveman also casts doubt on the authenticity of the imposture by pointing out that it is strange that Alcock was the only individual "to claim to have witnessed the cheat by so notorious a courtier. If the stage performance and the laboratory visits had indeed occurred, we might expect to find more people claiming to have been present, or at least telling stories about others who had fallen for the trick" (Loveman 2008: 15). Loveman concludes: "On the basis of the current evidence then, and rather regretfully, it seems necessary to concur with Greer's judgement that no prolonged impersonation occurred" (ibid.). The story of the imposture does indeed seem to be too good to be true and not particularly likely in the light of Rochester's predicament in the summer of 1676: when trying to avoid being arrested for murder, one would hardly try to attract attention in the manner described in Alcock's pamphlet. Indeed, the motto Alcock included in his title page "Si populus vult decipi decipiantur" (if people want to be deceived, let them be deceived) may well have been a warning to his readers rather than a reference to the alleged victims of Rochester's deception.

The imposture may be such stuff as Ben Jonson's comedies are made on but Rochester most certainly did produce the handbill. The British Library keeps its surviving copy (fig. 4) in a folder with genuine 17th-century mountebank advertisements, and it is so similar to the others that it is easily overlooked. The title page, in which Bendo identifies himself and greets his audience, "To all Gentlemen, Ladies, and others, whether of City, Town, or Country, ALEXANDER BENDO wishes all Health and Prosperity" is certainly typical of the genre. On closer inspection, there are some differences: at eight pages, it is longer than most genuine handbills and is perhaps more elegantly printed. However, on the whole, Alexander Bendo's handbill looks authentic, to the extent that it could be defined as a forgery in terms of its appearance. A forger, however, would have tried to make his creation indistinguishable from authentic mountebank handbills and that is definitely not the case in Rochester's handbill — on the contrary.



(1) l. 237. 41.

TO ALL
Gentlemen, Ladies, and others,
Whether of
CITY, TOWN, or COUNTRY:
ALEXANDER BENDO
Wiſheth all Health and Proſperity.

WHEREAS this Famous Metropolis of *England*, (and were the Endeavours of its Worthy Inhabitants equal to their Power, Merit, and Virtue, I ſhould not ſtick to denounce it, in a ſhort time, the Metropolis of the whole World:) Whereas I ſay this City (as moſt great ones are) has ever been infeſted with a numerous company of ſuch whoſe arrogant Confidence, backing their Ignorance, has enabled them to impoſe upon the people either premeditated Cheats, or at beſt the palpable dull and empty miſtakes of their ſelf-deluded imaginations, in Phyſick, *Chymical* and *Galenick*, in *Aſtrology*, *Phyſiognomy*, *Palmiſtry*, *Mathematicks*, *Alchimy*, and even Government it ſelf; the laſt of which I will not purpoſe to diſcourſe of, or meddle at all in, ſince it no ways belongs to my Trade or Vocation, as the reſt do; which thanks to my God, I find much more ſafe, I think equally honeſt, and therefore more profitable.

But as to all the former, they have been ſo erroneouſly practis'd by many unlearned Wretches, whom Poverty and Needineſs for the moſt part (if not the reſtleſs itch of deceiving) has forc'd to ſtraggle and wander in unknown

A paths,

Figure 4: Rochester, John Wilmot, 1676, Earl of, front page of To all gentlemen, ladies, and others, whether of city, town, or country: Alexander Bendo wisheth all health and prosperity, British Library, London, © British Library Board, General Reference Collection C.112.f.9.(41.).

The handbill opens with a discussion about fraud, continues with a shorter section on the deceitful nature of politics and then embarks on a lengthy advertisement of Alexander Bendo's medicines and treatments. The opening alone may have raised suspicion in Rochester's readers: although mountebanks did compare their skills and medicines to those of their competitors, they were generally careful to avoid mentioning the concept of deception. Bendo, however, introduces it immediately, in a sustained attack on his fellow mountebanks. As Greer notes: "A mountebank who persists in reminding people that they are being practised on by a 'Bastard race of Quacks and Cheats' will hardly do well" (2000: 65).

The unusual opening of the handbill may have given Rochester's readers reason to doubt the handbill's authenticity but the second part of the text decidedly lacks any resemblance to real advertisements. Bendo embarks on a comparison between the mountebank and the politician, in which he concludes that:

> The politician (by his example no doubt) finding how the people are taken with specious, miraculous, impossibilities, plays the same game; protests, declares, promises I know not what things, which he's sure can ne'er be brought about. […] So you see the politician is, and must be a mountebank in state affairs; and the mountebank no doubt, if he thrives, is an errant politician in physic. (Rochester 1676: 3)

Academic discussions of the handbill appear to have focused exclusively on the satirical section of the text and ignored its opening and, particularly, the third and by far longest part of the text, in which Bendo advertises his medicines and skills. I would, however, argue that these two parts firmly place the text in the artist/mountebank discourse. Like Jonson's mountebank scene and Dou's painting, Rochester's handbill reflects on the illusionist nature of its art, and like Jonson and Dou, Rochester uses the mountebank as a vehicle to demonstrate his own virtuosity in fooling his audience. There are however several crucial differences between the three works, the first of which is found in how their respective audiences encounter and experience the works.

Jonson's mountebank scene and Dou's painting are explicitly offered as works of art and Jonson and Dou are explicitly identified as their creators. Scoto's speech is so clever in imitating real mountebanks that the play's audience may have forgotten briefly that they are in the theatre, but the experience is only temporary. Before and after they have been seduced by the illusion of the performance, the audience knows that they are in the theatre, and will place and appreciate the experience in this context. The same applies to Dou's painting: even though the tapestry on the quack's stage looks deceptively real, the viewer is aware that it is offered within a painting. The moment the viewer is fooled and reaches out to touch the fabric does not last: like Zeuxis, he or she will feel oil on canvas, and then remember that it was a painting all along.

The reader's experience of Rochester's handbill is entirely different. Contrary to Dou's viewer and Jonson's audience, Rochester's reader sets out thinking that the text is authentic but the author then deliberately spoils this effect with the ambiguity of the opening. Rochester's reader realizes that he or she may have been fooled, and that the text in front of him or her may be satirical fiction rather than an authentic handbill. In other words, whereas the illusionist effect in Jonson's and Dou's respective works is achieved when their mimetic virtuosity makes their audiences and readers forget, however briefly, that what they see is representation, Rochester manages to frame his work in such a way that it deceives his reader from the very start — and then he stops the deception himself by revealing that it is fiction.

Another difference is found in how these works relate to their respective creators. Whereas Jonson's comparison between the playwright and Scoto the mountebank is abstract and implicit, Dou inserts himself in the image, making the comparison explicit and personal. Rochester, however, takes this further, particularly in places where the text seems so authentic that the boundary between the authorial voice and Bendo appears to dissolve. This holds particularly true for the part that critics usually ignore, in which the text moves from obvious political satire to an advertisement of Bendo's skills and medicines. This section takes up more than half of the handbill and, like the opening, it is marked by ambiguity. In most ways, the text is remarkably similar to authentic handbills and treatises on mountebank remedies of the period: all the illnesses that Bendo mentions, for instance, can be found in authentic handbills. These include barrenness, venereal diseases, inflammations and obstructions, bad breath, obesity and scurvy, of which he writes:

> First, I will (by the leave of God) perfectly cure that *Labes Britannica*, or grand English disease, the scurvy; and that with such ease to my patient, that he shall not be sensible of the least inconvenience whilst I steal his distemper from him; I know there are many, who treat this disease with mercury, antimony, spirits, and salts, being dangerous remedies, in which I shall meddle very little, and with great caution, but by more secure, gentle, and less fallible medicines, together with the observation of some few rules in diet, perfectly cure the patient. (Rochester 1676: 4)

Scurvy was rife in England at the time and Bendo's observations on the illness sound sensible as well as knowledgeable — mercury and antimony were indeed used as remedies against scurvy in 17th-century England (Baron 2009: 319) and Bendo is absolutely correct to point out that they were dangerous.

The fragment also closely mimics authentic handbills in other ways, for instance the structure of an authentic mountebank's text: it introduces an illness and then focuses on the effect of the treatment on the patient, often comparing it to the remedies used by competitors. In several places, Bendo's advertisement

emphasizes the safety of his remedies: he promises that if he, Bendo, is unfamiliar with an illness, a patient need not be afraid of "having experiments tried upon him; a privilege he can never hope to enjoy, either in the hands of the grand doctors of the court and town, or in those of the lesser quacks and mountebanks" (Rochester 1676: 5).

This emphasis on safety was a common feature in authentic handbills, as was the assertion of the mountebank's exotic qualifications. "Many quacks," writes Tobias B. Hug, "advertising through handbills in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries claimed to have travelled through various places in Europe and 'beyond seas', to have cured kings or to possess medicines from abroad" (Hug 2009: 54). Bendo includes these claims too, after a long list of his particular medical accomplishments: "The knowledge of these secrets I gathered in my travels abroad (where I have spent my time ever since I was fifteen years old to this my nine and twentieth year) in France and Italy" (Rochester 1676: 7).

Finally, Bendo concludes his handbill:

> They that will do me the favour to come to me, shall be sure from three of the clock in the afternoon till eight at night at my lodgings in Tower-street, next door to the sign of the Black Swan, at a goldsmith's house to find Their humble servant, ALEXANDER BENDO. (Rochester 1676: 8)

This too strongly resembles the final part of authentic bills. One genuine handbill published anonymously in London sometime between 1660 and 1685 closes with the remark that the doctor's residence is "in Holborn, within 3 doors of Brownlow-street, next door to an Apothecarys, and over against the signe of the Magpy, who is to be spoken with from 8 a clock in the morning till 12 at Noon" (Anon. 1660-85: 2).

If Rochester's handbill had consisted merely of the advertisement, it would not only have persuaded his readers that Bendo was a genuine mountebank but also that he was knowledgeable and sincere. However, this persuasive quality does render the text ambiguous again: the writing is much better, in terms of its wording and structure, than that of authentic mountebank handbills. The effect of this ambiguity is wholly deliberate and very much in line with how Jonson and especially Dou use the mountebank as a vehicle to show off their illusionist virtuosity. In the opening of the handbill Bendo claims:

> All I shall say for myself on this score is this, if I appear to any one like a counterfeit, even for the sake of that chiefly ought I to be construed a true man, who is the counterfeit's example, his original, and that which he employs his industry and pains to imitate and copy. Is it therefore my fault if the cheat by his wits and endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid resembling of him? (Rochester 1676: 2)

In the context of the opening, Bendo is of course comparing himself to cheating fellow mountebanks, but when the reader goes back to this fragment after he or she has read the satirical part, in which the text reveals its fictional nature, and the highly persuasive advertisement, it takes on a whole new meaning. Now that the reader has realized that Bendo cannot be anything but the fictional representation of a mountebank, Bendo's remark becomes a reflection on the nature of artistic mimesis as well as a showing-off of Rochester's genius as a writer. If the counterfeit is understood to be the artist, who "employs his industry and pains to imitate and copy", then the creation of Bendo is a true triumph, in the sense that Rochester, with his superior wits and endeavours, has created a character that is so convincing that Bendo not only appears to be real to the reader but also the ideal mountebank, of which real mountebanks appear to be mere copies. The effect implied here is similar to that of living presence, in which the work appears to the reader to be the living original, "a true man", rather than the fictional representation.

Bendo's handbill is commonly referred to as satire, possibly because of the traditional critical emphasis on this section of the text. This, however, is a shame because this perception neglects the text's opening and the advertisement, neither of which are satirical or place the handbill as a whole firmly in the artist/mountebank discourse. From its highly deceptive title page to its equally deceitful sign-off, Rochester's handbill bounces back and forth between forgery, highly persuasive textual illusionism, and obvious literary fiction, thus creating a game between him and his readers that is more complex than the comparisons drawn by Jonson, Dou and other playwrights and painters. Where they compare themselves, either implicitly or explicitly, to the mountebank, the boundaries between Rochester and Bendo dissolve — to materialize again when the author reveals himself to assert his illusionist virtuosity. As such, Rochester's handbill echoes the motto that Jan Saenredam added to his print of Goltzius' image: "Me dys commendat facunde gratia lingue, Et varias rudibus monstro mortalibus artes" — The grace of my eloquent tongue recommends me to the gods, and I show the crude mortals various arts. In Latin, 'artes' refers to arts as well as tricks, and the ambiguity not only serves Goltzius' image beautifully but also turns the motto into a rather apt description of Alexander Bendo's handbill and Rochester's virtuosity in deception.

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