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The voice of reason in Ben Jonson's nondramatic poetry

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The voice of reason in Ben Jonson's nondramatic poetry

by

Janet Ann Spear

A Thesis Submitted to the
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INTRODUCTION

Ben Jonson's literary reputation rests solidly upon his famous comedies although a few of his nondramatic poems have long been recognized as some of the finest short poems written in early seventeenth-century England. Jonson himself had a high regard for his poetry for he saw through the publication of the folio including *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*, which he called "the ripest of my studies." The poems are mostly occasional and appear very polished and finished, but the canon is small. The most unusual poems to the modern reader are the satiric epigrams which are scathing exposures of representative types of vicious people who had aroused Jonson's contempt. Many of the other poems praise good people, mostly patrons of Jonson, in terms which claim these people are nearly divine. Both of these kinds of poems are foreign to modern sensibilities, and thus the Jonson poems which are often anthologized are those which are personal and self-revelatory, such as Jonson's famous epitaphs on his daughter and son.

That Jonson took the moral function of poetry very seriously has long been recognized; however, there has been some critical controversy concerning the basis of this morality, that is, whether Jonson derived his beliefs about how man should behave from observing men and manners without much reference to truth supernatural in origin, or whether he referred all secular morality to Christian truth. Jonson's position as the first real classicist in English literature is essentially

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1 *Ben Jonson, The Works*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percv and Evelyn Simpson (London, 1925-1952), VIII, 25. All references to Jonson's work and the Herford and Simpson commentary will be to this edition and hereafter will be cited in the text. Poems will be cited by collection and number, commentary by volume and page number.
undisputed: he read and assimilated nearly everything the ancients made available to his age, and the ethical views which Jonson based his poetry upon were obviously influenced by this study. Although it is commonly recognized that the humanism of the English Renaissance was largely an attempt to redefine the classics in Christian terms, and although Jonson would without a doubt be considered part of this larger movement, scarcely any of his critics have mentioned the relationship between his poems and traditional Christianity. We know that he wrote a theological tract of some kind because in "An Exegecation Upon Vulcan" (Und. 45) Jonson tells us that he lost in the fire

...twice-twelve-yeares stor'd up humanitie,
With humble Gleanings in Divinitie,
After the Fathers, and those wiser Guides
Whom Faction had not drawne to studie sides,
(11. 101-104)

The only older critic who gave much consideration to Jonson's theological bias was George Burke Johnston who in discussing Jonson's explicitly religious poems said of "A Hymne to God the Father" (Und. 2), "Jonson did not ever recapture ancient Rome with more complete consistency than he captured medieval religion in this poem." Johnston also mentioned that some of the secular poems have a relationship to medieval theology, but did not develop his discussion of them along these lines. Johnston says

In his religious poetry proper Ben devoted his talents to penitence, faith, love, and beatitude.

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The more brutal side of medieval dramatic or epic
poetry, punishment of the damned, did not enter his
religious poems. However, in many of his secular
satires he treated the same kind of individuals
that Dante's *Inferno* and innumerable early sermons
contained. And although the gap seems wide between
the saintly women of some of the elegies and the
Court Pucelle and her sisters, both types played an
important part in the religion of the Middle Ages
and the Renaissance.3

No one has gone so far as to claim that Jonson was not a Christian;
but beyond that point, such remarks as C. H. Herford's, "underneath
there lay in Jonson's mind ethical ideas of immense potency and grip,
though never by him brought into philosophic shape, ideas most nearly
akin to Stoicism" (II, 370), fail to mention that the ethical ideas of
Christianity certainly were in philosophic shape at this time. Because
Herford and other early critics seemed principally concerned with
tracing the classical influence upon Jonson, they underestimated the
Christian, and this has contributed to misplaced emphasis on the
part of some more recent critics, especially G. A. E. Parfitt, who
in his article on Jonson's ethics states that "To Penshurst" lacks
a theological basis; "We should also notice how secular the poem is,
for although Christianity specifically enters toward its end, and al-
though the spirit of Christian ethics is relevant throughout, the
achievement which Jonson saw at Penshurst is essentially human and no
attempt is made to suggest that it is only possible with God's grace
and help--it is accessible to Man as Man and it is self-rewarding."4

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3Johnston, pp. 68-69.
4"Ethical Thought in Ben Jonson's Poetry," *SEL*, IX (Winter, 1969),
125.
Such a view of Jonson will be seen as overlooking what Jonson himself felt poetry to be.

Besides the overemphasis on the classical influence on Jonson's thought, one aspect of Jonson's poetry itself may have led some critics to see it as essentially secular. Jonson seldom writes in explicitly religious terms in his poetry: there are no holy sonnets and no transcendental religious journeys. T. S. Eliot described Jonson's verse as "of the surface" and felt that it lacked "a network of tentacular roots reaching down to man's deepest terrors and desires." This quality results from the fact that Jonson's Christian world view was stable and he never arrived at the great questions of faith and doubt which modern readers find more familiar. Although Jonson paid more attention to observations of men and manners than most of his contemporaries, he explains in "An Epistle to Master John Selden" (Und. XIV) that knowledge should be gained by moving outward from a solid center.

Stand forth my Object, then you that have been Ever at home; yet, have all Countries seene; And like a Compasse keeping one foot still Upon your center, doe your Circle fill Of general Knowledge; watch'd men, manners too Heard what times past have said, seene what ours doe. (ll. 29-34)

This center which must be maintained as the observations are made has been described by Thomas M. Greene as an image of fixed moral stability.

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which gives coherence to all of Jonson's work.  

Whatever relation this centered self has to Roman stoicism, it could also be legitimately interpreted as a stable, unquestioned Christian world view to which all observations of man and manners are referred. Two of Jonson's most recent critics, Gayle Edward Wilson and W. David Kay, remark that Jonson was more theologically inclined than many of his critics acknowledge. The purpose of this study is to expand upon their suggestion and illustrate the theological basis of a selected group of Jonson's nondramatic poetry. It will be seen that one reason Jonson's verse lacks "tentacular roots reaching down to man's deepest terrors and desires" is that taken together, the complimentary verse and the satiric epigrams are figurative poems whose didactic purpose is analogous to that of the medieval allegory. Jonson uses this allegorical mode because the poet is the voice of reason who sees beyond appearances to the abstract truths which they represent; and thus the observations of men and manners were referred to reason, which in the Christian sense is the voice of God speaking in man. The qualities of the verse which make it more than pure allegory are those qualities which could be called "Jonsonian," the self-revelatory, personal tone, and the insistence upon verifying Christian truths in experiential terms. If Jonson's verse is first measured in terms of its medieval element, then the Renaissance and classical elements of that verse are much easier to identify. First, however, Jonson's poetic theory must be seen in its relation to Christian theology.

6 "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," SEL, X (Spring, 1970), 325.

THE THEORY

The critical commonplaces which Jonson declared allegiance to in *Timber, or Discoveries* illustrate the basis in traditional theology which poetry had in the English Renaissance. The poet, Jonson writes, is one who in imitating nature "Fayneth and formeth a fable and writes things like the Truth" (VIII, 635). This fable "offers to mankinde a certaine rule, and Patterne of living well, and happily; disposing us to all Civil offices of Society" (VIII, 636). The seventeenth century understood these "things like the Truth" to be the truth of nature; that is, since the order of nature is God's order, all truth and all created good come from God. Man can learn from scripture, history, and the order of nature how he should behave. As Jonson says, "Man is read in his face; God in his creatures" (VIII, 579). However, since the Fall, man's perceptions have been dimmed and he does not always see God's truth clearly. Created things which the senses perceive are particulars of God's creation through which man arrives at general truths which are hidden from the senses. That poetry concerns these hidden truths Jonson explains in comparing poetry and painting, "the Pen is more noble, then the Pencill. For that can speake to the Understanding; the other, but to the Sense" (VIII, 610).

The difference between sense and reason and their relation to the appetite and will are explained in Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a representative Renaissance theology, which Jonson told Drummond
to "digest" for church matters (I, 126). According to Hooker, "To choose is to will one thing before another. And to will is to bend our souls to the having or doing of that which they see to be good. Goodness is seen with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye is Reason" (p. 219). Reason must see beyond what is merely available to the senses: "By reason man attaineth unto the knowledge of things that are and are not sensible" (p. 219). The appetite does not see beyond the senses: "The object of appetite is whatsoever sensible good may be wished for; the object of Will is that good which Reason doth lead us to seek" (p. 221). Because man's perceptions were limited by the Fall, "Goodness doth not move by being, but by being apparent; and therefore many things are neglected which are most precious, only because the value of them lieth hid" (p. 223).

Since the poet is not tied to the mere recording of sense experience, he can reveal to man truths which are supernatural in origin in order that man may be moved toward the good which he may not have recognized before. Since reason, the ability to abstract from sensible particulars to general truths, is that which separates man from beasts in the Great Chain of Being, it is the power which makes man most like God. And because the poet excels in this power, his function is nearly divine. Since reason, in the Christian sense, is the voice of God speaking in man, Jonson considered poetry to be this God-like activity. "Then it [the poet's

---

power] riseth higher, as by a divine instinct, when it contemnes common, and knowne conceptions. It utters somewhat above a mortal mouth" (VIII, 617).

The poet is thus both the voice of reason and a priest who can give man a vision of supernatural truth. The function of poetry is completely moral; as Jonson writes, "We doe not require in him mere elocution; or an excellent faculty in verse; but the exact knowledge of all vertues, and their contraries; with ability to render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattling them" (VIII, 595). To make goodness apparent, the poet can show virtue in its perfection, that is, he can figure the virtues of people as divine, so that man knows what virtue is and has an example to follow. He can also show vice in its deformity so that man can recognize it and turn away from it. He can show man how he should live according to God's plan and what happens when man distorts this plan.

To this end the wisdom of the poetry is most important and embellishments of language are only to be used when necessary. Jonson took these principles very seriously in his poetry and was most critical of "those that labour onely to ostentation, more busy about colours and surface than about matter and foundation" (VIII, 585). Because things of the senses exist in order to lead men to general truths, images and figures should be used only to lead men to the truths they stand for. If figures exist for their own sake, they are forms without content, without any spiritual principle informing them, as evil in this traditional Christian scheme is form without content, nonentity, worshipped
only for its own sake. Jonson was remarkable among his contemporaries for his plain and unadorned language, and he writes in Discoveries that "of the two...I would rather have a plaine downright wisdome, then a foolish and affected eloquence" (VIII, 621). Figures were to be used when necessary to help man understand things which are hidden, or to make virtue delightful and vice ludicrous in order that the reader should direct his will toward the good.

Jonson's use of these principles in his poetry will be readily apparent when seen through one of his most explicitly theological poems, the "Epode" (For. XI). In the introduction to the "Epode", Jonson catalogues and rejects several mythical muses who might be the inspiration for his song, and decides that he will depend upon his "owne true fire" (1. 29) instead. Jonson relies on his own knowledge of the process by which truth is found rather than depending on a classical source. The "Epode" begins with the observation that if you are naturally free from sin, it is virtuous to live ignorant of vice, but others need to know all they can about vice in order that they may avoid it.

Not to know vice at all, and keep true state,  
Is vertue, and not Fate:  
Next to that vertue, is to know vice well,  
And her blacke spight expell. (11. 1-4)

This is followed by an explanation of how reason must act to keep man's appetite in control. Briefly, Jonson says that "the securest policie we have, To make our sense our slave" (11. 17-18) is to have knowledge of what virtues and vices are in order to judge sense
perceptions as soon as they are received. However, scarcely any men
follow this method, and thus their appetites often misdirect them.

Thus, by these subtle traines,
Do severall passions (still) invade the minde,
And strike our reason blinde.
Of which usurping rancke, some have thought love
The first; as prone to move
Most frequent tumults, horrors, and unstreets,
In our enflamed brests:

The thing, they here call Love, is blinde Desire,
Arm'd with bow, shafts, and fire;
Inconstant, like the sea, of whence, 'tis borne,
Rough, swelling, like the storme;
With whom who sailes, rides on a surge of feare,
And boyles, as if he were
In a continual tempest (ll. 28-43)

Man is mistaken if he considers this passion true love, for its
consequences are chaos. This passion is born from the sea like
Aphrodite, and if man believes this is the only kind of love there is,
he is ignorant and following blind desire rather than recognizing
a kind of love which is supernatural in origin. Jonson usually
describes those who love the wrong things as ignorant. As he
says in the Discoveries, "I know no disease of the Soule, but Ignorance;
not of the Arts, and Sciences, but of it selfe: Yet relating to those
it is a pernicious evil: the darkner of man's life: the disturber
of his Reason, and the common confounder of Truth" (VIII, 588).
Thus in the "Epode" this mistaken view of love "doth from the cloud of
error grow" (l. 35).

The poet then tells us what his "owne true fire," his reason,
tells him true love really is.
Now, true Love

No such effects doth prove;
That is an essence, farre more gentle, fine,
   Pure, perfect, nay divine;
It is a golden chaine let down from heaven,
   Whose links are bright, and even.
That falls like sleepe on lovers, and combines
   The soft, and sweetest mindes
In equal knots: This beares no brands, nor darts,
   To murther different hearts,
But, in a calme, and god-like unitie,
   Preserves communitie (ll. 43-54)

Thus true love is a participation in a God-created order, and when thus understood, no discord can result because all that comes from God is good. Any pagan conceptualization of love is thus put aside as cupid, the brands, the darts are put aside. What Jonson's "owne true fire" tells him is that love must be seen as a gift of God. Man can understand this abstractly, but wonders, "O, who is he, that (in this peace) enjoyes/ The 'Elixer of all joyes?'" (55-56) Because man is fallen he has difficulty understanding such perfection which would be equal to the memory of Eden: "A forme more fresh, then are the Eden bowers/ And lasting, as her flowers" (ll. 57-58). Doubts arise which Jonson puts aside in the form of a medieval psychomachia.

But soft: I heare
Some vicious foole draw neare,
That cries, we dreame, and sweares, there's no such thing,
As this chaste love we sing.
Peace Luxurie, thou art like one of those
   Who, being at sea, suppose,
Because they move, the continent doth so:
   No, vice, we let thee know
Though thy wild thoughts with sparrows wings doe flye,
   Turtles can chastly dye: (ll. 65-74)

The lustful person is thus a skeptic who has no faith that love could be part of a supernatural order; he assumes that because he uses
pleasures of the flesh for their own sake the rest of the world does the same. However, Jonson confidently states that the flesh is good when bridled by reason. Those who live according to God's plan for love, symbolized by the turtledove here, can "chastly dye," with the full meaning of the seventeenth-century pun. In lines 75-90 Jonson also rejects continence and abstinence as ideals of behavior in favor of the neoplatonic symbols of the Phoenix and the Turtledove, the perfect woman and the faithful man. These manifest the order of nature in themselves and thus find the perfection in human love which is only possible by recognizing it as God's gift.

But we propose a person like our Dove,  
Grac'd with a Phoenix love;  
A beautie of that cleere, and sparkling light,  
Would make a day of night,  
And turne the blackest sorrowes to bright joyes:  
Whose od'rous breath destroyes  
All taste of bitternesse, and makes the ayre  
As sweet, as shee is fayre.  
A body so harmoniously compos'd,  
As if Nature disclos'd  
All her best symmetrie in that one feature!  
O, so divine a creature  
Who could be false to? chiefly, when he knowes  
How onely shee bestowes  
The wealthy treasure of her love on him;  
Making his fortunes swim  
In the full floud of her admir'd perfection? (11, 91-107)

When man lives according to God's plan, the "symmetrie" of nature is realized in himself, and peace and harmony are established in nature because man is living properly; thus even the air becomes as sweet as the lady's breath. There will be neither chaos nor sin in these people because their love is not a passion which strikes the reason blind, but a full participation in what their reason leads
them to know as God's plan for man. Their actions are as harmonious as nature because, as Hooker says: "Laws of Reason have these marks to be known by. Such as keep them resemble most lively in their voluntary actions that very manner of working which Nature herself doth necessarily observe in the whole world" (p. 233). Such abstracted ideals as the Phoenix and the Turtle are extremely rare in Jonson, however, who is much more interested in verifying supernatural truths in experiential terms. Jonson chose an allegorical mode here because he was writing an appendix to Robert Chester's Love's Martyr and thus used the neoplatonic symbols of that work. In other poems Jonson stated the same ideal of love in terms of ladies he actually knew, such as Lady Katherine Aubigny (For. XIII), Lady Venetia Digby (Und. 86), and Lady Sidney in "To Penshurst" (For. II).

See William B. Hunter's edition of The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson (New York, 1963), p. 96n for an explanation of these neoplatonic ideals in Chester's work.
"TO PENSHURST"

Since these ladies of the complimentary verse were to be examples of virtues in their perfection for men to follow, in "To Penshurst" (For. II) Jonson compliments a family by showing how its virtues are reflected in the harmony of the entire estate. Before discussing the poem itself, however, the principles upon which these hyperbolic poems were written should be reviewed. This poetry often made divine figures out of the real persons who were the objects of the compliments, thus forcing the readers to look at the virtues themselves in their cosmic sense. Jonson does not use this method in all of his complimentary verse, but he does explain in such poems as "To Elizabeth, Countesse of Rutland" (For. XII) how poetry can give the lady's virtues the everlasting fame they deserve.

*It is the Muse, alone, can raise to heaven,*
*And, at her strong armes end, hold up, and even,*
*The soules, shee loves (ll. 41-43).*

There was nothing blasphemous in showing the virtues of good people as divine, because all virtue comes from God, and living according to God's laws makes man like him. The moral function of these poems was to give man a concrete example of a real person who embodied certain virtues to such an extent that he was nearly divine. Often these people were figured as Biblical types who revitalized old myths because they represented instances of God's continuing grace in the world. For example, in "To Susan, Countesse of Montgomery" (Epig. CIV), Jonson asks,

*Were they that nam'd you, prophets? Did they see,*
*Even in the dew of grace, what you would be?*
Or did our times require it, to behold
A new Susanna, equal to that old?
Or, because some scarce thinke that storie true,
To make those faithfull, did the Fates send you?

On the surface "To Penshurst" is a complimentary poem which praises the virtues of the Sidney family and notes how the estate itself has the same virtues as the family. But the poem also shows the perfected virtues of the Sidneys and thus forces us to look at these virtues in their cosmic sense. It is also a poem which revitalizes an old myth, Eden, and verifies in human experience and in terms man can understand such promises as St. Paul's in 1 Rom. 8:28, "We know that to them that love God all things work together unto good." By seeing through the particulars of what he experienced at Penshurst, the poet is able to generalize to the divine realities of which these particulars are physical representations. Jonson has a vision of the divine order of which all things he saw at Penshurst are a part because the people there live according to the truth.

"To Penshurst" will thus be seen as a poet's vision of the perfection of a God-given order, and an example of what will happen if all creation performs its functions properly. The poem begins with a distinction from which the entire poem, and actually all of Jonson's nondramatic poetry, grows, the distinction between that which only seems and that which really is.

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show,
Of touch, or marble; nor can boast a row
Of polish'd pillars, or a rooffe of golde:
Thou hast no lantherne, whereof tales are told;
Or stayre, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile
And these grudg'd at art reverenc'd the while.
Thou joy'st in better markes, of soyle, of ayre,
Of wood, of water; therein thou art faire (ll. 1-8)

This difference between ostentation and living according to the simple truth of nature is also discussed in Discoveries. Jonson writes:

"He that can order him selfe to the Law of nature is not onely without the sense, but the feare of poverty. O! but to strike blind the people with our wealth, and pompe, is the thing! what a wretchednesse is this, to thrust all our riches outward, and be beggars within: to contemplate nothing but the little, vile, and sordid things of the world; not the great, noble, and pretious?" (VIII, 605). In order to appreciate the truth behind the particulars, however, man must use his reason: "Where, if wee will looke with our understanding, and not our senses, we may behold vertue, and beauty, (though cover'd with rags) in their brightnesse; and vice and deformity so much the fowler, in having all the splendor of riches to guild them, or the false light of honour and power to helpe them" (VIII, 607). Thus Penshurst is made from the bare essentials earth, air, wood, and water, and is fair enough.

Those who have built their homes only for "envious show" have no concern for the spiritual truths which sensible things embody, for they are concerned with physical things to the end of ostentation.

The only commentator on "To Penshurst" to date who has defined the seventeenth-century concept, the Great Chain of Being, upon which Jonson based the ideas of this poem, is Gayle Edward Wilson. Wilson
believes that Jonson builds the poem on the difference between the sacred and the profane estate in Biblical terms. The profane estates refer to Solomon's temple in the Old Testament: the touchstone, marble, pillars, roof of gold, and "lantherne" were all included in this profane temple. The Sidney estate, according to Wilson, "enjoys the benefits of nature because its owners have not abused nature as Solomon did; on the contrary, they have successfully established a relationship with nature which allows the Great Chain of Being to manifest itself at Penshurst, and which Jonson treats as a physical metaphor for the religious truths that man should abhor material wealth and conspicuous display." Since the function of the poet was to show both what happens when men live according to God's plan and what happens when they distort this plan, Jonson tells us that the country houses which are built for ostentation are "grudg'd at," while Penshurst is "reverenc'd."

In the next lines several figures from classical mythology are gathered at Penshurst.

Thou hast they walkes for health, as well as sport;
Thy Mount, to which the dryads doe resort,
Where Pan, and Bacchus their high feasts have made,
Beneath the broad beech, and the chest-nut shade;
That taller tree, which of a nut was set,
At his great birth, where all the Muses met.
There, in the wraithed barke, are cut the names
Of many a Sylvane, taken with his flames.
And thence, the ruddy Satyres oft provoke
The lighter Faunes, to reach thy Ladies oke. (11, 9-18)

The intrusion of these mythological figures into the English landscape has not been adequately explained by Jonson's critics. Herford calls these lines "decorative embellishments in the style of pseudo-classical

10Wilson, p. 80.
11Wilson, p. 81.
pastoral" (II, 369) although it is nearly impossible to imagine Jonson resorting to pure ornament. George Burke Johnston believes the gods are not really present in this scene, since each is used as a personified activity rather than as a person. There is in these lines, however, a suggestion that Sir Philip Sidney's birth is figured as an incarnation nearly equal to the birth of Christ. "At his great birth" is rather heavy language for a Renaissance man, and in "To Elizabeth Countesse of Rutland" (For. XII), Jonson refers to Sir Philip as "the god-like Sydney" (1. 91). If Jonson did not consider it out of place to say "Hail Mary, full of grace" to Queen Mary (Und. 68), there would be no offense in figuring the noble Sir Philip Sidney who died young as Christ. Thus, besides reminding the readers of the literary accomplishment of this famous member of the family, Jonson might be indicating that Sir Philip was a Christ figure who redeemed this chosen family. The central tree which is a memorial of this great birth is also a convention of the medieval locus amoenus, a pleasant place, described like the Garden of Eden, where a poet goes to have a dream-vision of truth which is supernatural in origin.

12Johnston, p. 40.

The next lines catalogue the natural cycles and show the peace and harmony of nature in an essentially unfallen state. Everything cooperates for the good of the whole which was how nature was supposed to have been before man disturbed the order of things by his sin. Plenitude, fertility, generosity, and cooperation are the main qualities of nature in this state.

Thy coppis too, nam'd of Gamage, thou hast there, That never failes to serve thee season'd deere, When thou would'st feast, Or exercise thy friends. The lower land, that to the river bends, Thy sheepe, thy bullocks, kine, and calves doe feed; The middle grounds thy mares, and horses breed. Each banke doth yeeld thee coneyes, and the topps Fertile of wood, Ashore, and Sydney's coppis, To crowne thy open table, doth provide The purpled pheasant, with the speckled side: The painted partrich lyes in every field, And, for thy messe, is willing to be kill'd. And if the high swolne Medway faile thy dish, Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish, Fat, aged carps, that runne into thy net. And pikes, now weary their owne kinde to eat, As loth, the second draught, or cast to stay, Officiously, at first, themselves betray. Bright eeles, that emulate them, and leape on land. Before the fisher, or into his hand. (11, 19-37)

The outrageous hyperbole in these lines is evidence of how far beyond mere complimentary verse this poem goes. At Penshurst Jonson has a vision of the perfection of order among the various levels of creation in the Great Chain of Being. Eels jumping onto land and into the fishermen's hands could only be the type of metaphor which tells, in terms man can understand in his fallen state, what the perfect order is. The poet who said "metaphors farfet hinder to be understood" (VIII, 621) found an occasion when he needed to use one in order to reveal truth.
hidden to the senses. The truth is that if every part of creation fulfilled its duty, nature would return to its unfallen state and willingly serve man. Wilson believes that this description of nature refers to the truth that "if man loves God and fulfills his role as an image of God, if he acts as an earthly embodiment of the first cause that created the ordered universe depicted in Genesis 1,26-30 and ix,1-3, then the multiple facets of nature will imitate man and perform their God-given functions and act to enhance the well-being of man." 14

After the fruits are catalogued Jonson moves to the hierarchy of human society. "The blushing apricot, and wooly peach / Hang on thy walls that every child may reach" (ll. 43-44). That is, the plenitude of nature is available to everyone in the society. The next lines recall the mention at the beginning of the poem that the other estates are "grudg'd at."

And though thy walls be of the country stone,
They're rear'd with no mans ruine, no mans grone,
There's none, that dwell about them, wish them downe;
But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne (ll.45-49)

Here the political level of the poem is most obvious; with such total participation in the use of God's gifts, there could be no threat of insurrection. The Sidneys so perfectly assume their responsibilities as governing figures that a perfect social order exists here. And as the animals gave of themselves so generously, so the peasants all bring something of themselves to the feast at Penshurst. The master of the house has obviously inspired the people around him by his own generosity,

14Wilson, p. 82.
and thus they all exhibit the same virtue, although Jonson is quick to add that this is not really necessary.

And no one empty-handed to salute
Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.
Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,
Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make
The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send
By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare
An emblem of themselves, in plum, or pear. (ll. 51-56)

This, of course, is the true spirit in which a prayer to God should be offered, with nothing of your own gain in mind. Jonson says these freely-given gifts are only expressions of the love of the people toward their lord, which leads one to agree with Wilson that the word lord is a pun in this poem to remind us of the feeling we owe toward God. The lord at Penshurst represents in the human sphere the lord of all creation.

But what can this (more then expresse their love)
Adde to thy free provisions, farre above
The need of such? Whose liberall boord doth flow,
With all that hospitality doth know! (ll. 57-60)

Penshurst thus represents an ideal of hospitality, which could be seen as a secular or classical virtue, but here Jonson defines hospitality as a participation in God's plenitude. The Sidneys are as generous as God with the fruits of nature, for they know that with perfection in every link of the chain there could be abundance for all.

Jonson then relates how the poet is welcome at Penshurst, and by this intrusion of himself into the poem reminds the reader of his own relationship with the Sidney family.

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15 Wilson, p. 85.
Where comes no guest, but is allow'd to eate,
Without his feare, and of thy lords owne meate:
Where the same beere, and bread, and selfe-same wine,
That is his Lordships, shall be also mine.
And I not faine to sit (as some this day,
At great mens tables) and yet dine away.
Here no man tells my cups; nor, standing by,
A waiter doth my gluttony envy:
But gives me what I call, and lets me eate,
He knowes, below, he shall finde plentie of meate.

(11. 61-70)

Jonson tells us that even the poet has shared the experience of living according to God's truth at Penshurst. There is neither as much drama nor as much wit here as in other poems where Jonson has this persona intrude, but the perfection of the experience at Penshurst is further verified by the poet's feelings toward it. Throughout this poem which has been a serious statement of faith, the good cheer which is also a part of this perfect life has been emphasized. Gluttony, one of the seven deadly sins, is not evil in the context of Penshurst because the entire estate is blessed with such abundance that everyone may have whatever he wishes. As in the "Epode," all things of the sense are good when they are appreciated as part of a"golden chain let down from heaven". Of course, Jonson is laughing at himself in this reminder of his "mountain belly," the picture of himself which he uses in other poems, but this further contrasts the good feelings shared by all at Penshurst with the hard feelings which result from dining at the tables of lords who are not so generous as the Sidneys. Everyone, including the poet, is treated equally at Penshurst, and the reference to partaking of the lord's own bread and wine also adds to the religious seriousness of the poem and makes the feast a celebration of God's gifts.  

16Wilson, p. 85.
Penshurst is always ready for the visit of a more important
guest than the poet, however, for in the next lines (ll. 75-83) there
is a surprise visit from King James and his son, which Wilson feels
refers to the Bible's warning that we must always be ready for the
lord's unexpected visit. When the King came to visit

What (great, I will not say, but) sodayne cheare
Did'st thou, then, make 'hem! and what praise was heap'd
On thy good lady, then! who, therein, reap'd
The just reward of her high huswifery;
To have her linnen, plate, and all things nigh,
When shee was farre: and not a roome, but drest,
As if it had expected such a guest!
These, Penshurst, are thy praise, and yet not all.
Thy lady's noble, fruitfull, chaste withall.
His children thy great lord may call his owne:
A fortune, in this age, but rarely knowne.
They are, and have beeene taught religion: Thence
Their gentler spirits have suck'd innocence.
Each morne, and even, they are taught to pray,
With the whole household, and may, every day,
Read in their vertuous parents noble parts,
The mysteries of manners, armes, and arts. (ll. 82-98)

This is one of the most secular sections of the poem, but the items of
Lady Sidney's huswifery seem to form almost another natural cycle for
which she is rewarded when the King comes. Even the linens and plates
work together for the whole here. The lady is also the perfect, faith-
ful wife, in the same sense as the Phoenix of the "Epode." The children
learn the "mysteries of manners, armes, and arts" from the examples of
their parents, and although these are secular virtues, the prayers and
the learning of religion come first in their education.

17 Wilson, p. 85.
The end of the poem brings us back to the contrast with those estates which violate the truth of nature.

Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion thee
With other edifices, when they see
Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else,
May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells.

(11, 99-102)

The profane estates are "proud, ambitious, heaps, and nothing else," that is, they are embellished form only with no lasting truth embodied in them because they refer to no higher order of truth. Wilson describes this metaphor of the nothingness of evil with the comparison to Solomon.

Solomon disobeyed God, and because of his violations of God's statutes and his abuse of nature, his houses, temple, and line, although they flourished briefly, were not founded on the "Law of nature" derived from the first cause—God; consequently, they fell from glory. Solomon merely "built."

On the other hand, Jonson argues, Penshurst survives as a metaphor for the efficacy of the 'metaphysical' truth that makes the Great Chain of Being a manifestation of God's power and man's proper governance of God's gifts. As Paul says, 'if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you' (Romans viii,11). Conversely, if the divine presence does not inform a human being, then he is spiritually dead.

The Sidneys, therefore, dwell in the spirit of the Lord. Jonson has figured the perfection of life at Penshurst by generalizing from the details of the life he saw there to the truths behind them. The moral application of the poem is obvious. Jonson has a vision of what we need to see clearly in order to understand how God wants us to live, how God has manifested himself in his creation. At Penshurst Jonson

18Wilson, p. 88.
discovered a concrete example of a good life, the virtues of which he could show in their perfection, and thus make the good so attractive to fallen man that he would direct his will toward the life presented in the poem. The value of Penshurst as a moral corrective for society was hidden from the man who tends to see things only with his senses until Jonson, the poet, was able to make the truth attractive to both sense and reason. Thus, he has "Feigned a commonwealth" to give man "a Patterne for living well, and happily."
In "To Sir Robert Wroth" (For. III), a companion piece of "To Penshurst," Jonson shows how a good man, though fallen, attempts to manifest in his life the truth which one can see clearly in "To Penshurst." A comparison of the beginnings of the two poems will illustrate that although both praise the virtues which can be found in the country life as compared to the city life, "To Sir Robert Wroth" is displaced to a more mundane level.

How blest art thou, canst love the countrey, Wroth,  
Whether by choice, or fate, or both;  
And though so neere the citie, and the court  
Are tane with neithers vice, nor sport. (ll. 1-4)

Rather than addressing the place here, Jonson reminds Wroth that he is blest, that it is God's grace which makes his good life possible. In the next two lines it is interesting that Jonson considers the possibility that Wroth may have attained his state by his free choice or perhaps he is an innocent who does not know vice at all and "keeps true state", a possibility which the "Epode" also considers. However, these lines illustrate the difference between the type of compliment "To Penshurst" is and the example of virtue which Jonson is giving us here. It would be unthinkable to ask the Sidneys whether they happen to be living in the country by choice or fate; since they are figured as virtue in its perfection, there is no need to question them about anything, just as there is no need to question God. Wroth attempts to incorporate the unquestioned ideals of "To Penshurst" in practical experience, and he does such a good job that
his life can also be a model of the good life for the rest of society.

Penshurst is extremely distanced from the rest of society; we see the other world only by the first reference to the profane estates and by the poet's recollections of the other places he has dined. Wroth, however, lives very close to the corrupt city and yet manages to avoid its activities. He is

no ambitious guest
Of Sherifhes dinner, or Majors feast
Nor com’st to view the better cloth of state;
The richer hangings, or crowne-plate;
Nor throng’st (when masquing is) to have a sight
Of the short braverie of the night;
To view the jewells, stuffes, the paines, the wit
There wasted, some not paid for yet!
But canst, at home, in thy securer rest,
Live with un-bought provision blest; (11. 5-14)

Wroth is neither impressed with the appearance of things which are fleeting and impermanent ("the short braverie of the night") nor with things which actually waste the abundance of nature. He can live serenely because he is blessed with abundance from God which he knows how to use properly. The next lines contain some of the most sensory imagery found anywhere in Jonson. Wroth lives

Free from proud porches, or their guilded roofes,
'Mongst loughing heards, and solide hoofes
Along'st the curled woods, and painted meade.
Through which a serpent river leads
To some coole, courteous shade, which he calls his,
And makes sleep softer then it is!
Or, if thou list the night in watch to break,
A-bed canst hear the loud stag speake, (11. 15-22)

The serenity which Jonson believes can come from living within God's natural order is thus sharply contrasted with "the jewells, stuffes, the pains, the wit." The sensory imagery is not used for its own sake,
but to give us "exact knowledge of all vertues, and their contraries; with ability to render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattling them" (VIII, 595). The poet makes virtue attractive and vice ugly so man will direct his will toward the good.

The King enters earlier in this poem than in "To Penshurst," and the next fourteen lines describe the activity of hunting with the King. Hunting is not mentioned in "To Penshurst" except for the one reference that the King was hunting nearby. At Penshurst nature was too cooperative to be prey, and the reference to "the greedie thrush" (1. 34) is further evidence that nature is fallen in this poem. Nature is abundant, however, and although there are no outrageous hyperboles in this poem, the cataloguing of the natural cycles is almost the same as in "Penshurst." Fallen or unfallen, the cycles of nature remain the same.

And whilst, the severall seasons thou hast seene
Of flowrie fields, of cop'ces greene,
The mowed meddowes, with the fleeced sheepe,
And feasts, that either shearers keepe;
The ripened eares, yet humble in their height,
And furrows laden with their weight;
The apple-harvest, that doth longer last;
The hogs return'd home fat from mast;
The trees cut out in log; and those boughes made
A fire now, that lent a shade! (ll. 37-46)

All nature is at the peak of fertility, and a cycle of use is indicated by trees which are both shade and fire to further emphasize the contrast with the things in the city which are wasted and not paid for yet.

The center of the poem is a feast similar to the one at Penshurst, although rowdier.
Thus Pan, and Sylvane, having had their rites,
Comus puts in, for new delights;
And fills thy open hall with mirth, and cheere,
As if in Saturnes raigne it were;
Apollo's harpe, and Hermes lyre resound
Nor are the Muses strangers found:
The rout of rural folke come thronging in,
(Their rudenesse then is thought no sinne). (ll. 47-54)

The revelry, music, poetry, and good cheer are described in terms equivalent to the mythical Golden Age; when used properly all these things are good. As at Penshurst these goods are shared by the entire society, and no grudges are caused by forced respect to those higher than others on the Great Chain. Lady Wroth, a Sidney, treats everyone as equals.

Thy noblest spouse affords them welcome grace,
And the great Heroes, of her race,
Sit mixt with losse of state, or reverence.
Freedom doth with degree dispense. (ll. 55-58)

The rural rout in this poem are different from those at Penshurst in that the feast is seen as an escape from the world for them, while at Penshurst the peasants were as serene and cheerful as the animals. These people are not free from the "jewells, stuffes, the paines, the wit."

And in their cups, their cares are drown'd;
They thinke not, then, which side the cause shall leese
Nor how to get the lawyer fees.
Such, and no other was that age, of old,
Which boasts t'have had the head of gold. (ll. 60-64)

The immediate juxtaposition of the references to the misery from which the people are escaping and to the Golden Age may be a rejection of the pagan conception of the perfect society in favor of the Christian ideal of Penshurst. The pleasures of the Golden Age are not judged
as sinful, however, for the next two lines indicate that they may be enjoyed with complete innocence by a good man: "And such since thou canst make thine owne content / Strive, Wroth, to live long innocent" (ll. 65-66). A perfection similar to the mythical Golden Age may be the best that fallen man can achieve since he can only read God's truth imperfectly, but it is not equal to the perfection possible with the new revelation of Christianity. A return to the Golden Age would be much better, in Jonson's judgment, than "the money-gett, Mechanik age!" which Jonson brings in once more for contrast in ll. 67-90, of which the following lines again show the nothingness of those who direct their wills toward material things.

Let that goe heape a masse of wretched wealth,
Purchased by rapine, worse then stealth,
And brooding o're it sit, with broadest eyes,
Not doing good, scarce when he dyes. (ll. 81-84)

Greed here is figured as complete inaction which never does anything good. By contrast Wroth's life is a model of healthy activity and the good things which a fallen man can do.

Jonson then instructs Wroth by telling him that his life is good enough that he does not need to discover new knowledge.

Thy peace is made; and, when man's state is well,
Tis better, if he there can dwell. (ll. 93-95)

Jonson makes an exception to Selden's circle of general knowledge here: there are some instances when life is so good that man might live well enough at home. Jonson seems unsure as to whether Wroth seems to have understood the truth of nature well enough not to need to search for it,
or whether he is an innocent. However, Wroth is still a fallen man and needs to be instructed by the priest-poet at the end of the poem.

God wisheth, none should wracke on a strange shelfe:
    To him, man's dearer, then t'his selfe.
And, howsoever we may thinke things sweet,
    He alwayes gives what he knowes meet;
Which who can use is happy: Such be thou,
    Thy morning's, and thy evening's vow
Be thankes to him, and earnest prayer, to finde
    A body sound, with sounder minde;
To doe thy countrey service, thy selfe right;
    That neither want doe thee affright,
Nor death; but when thy latest sand is spent,
    Thou maist thinke life, a thing but lent. (ll. 95-105)

Wroth knows how to use what God has "lent" man but he owes thanks to God for these gifts and must continually remind himself of this. There is no need to instruct the Sidneys at Penshurst who have so perfectly discovered the truth of Nature that they already know they should pray, and thus the poet has nothing to tell them. The purpose of "To Sir Robert Wroth" was to give an example of a man who has chosen well within man's limited sphere and thus lives with the happiness God wants for man. The purpose of "To Penshurst" was to define those goods which man should choose. Jonson has verified in practical, experiential terms that the vision of truth which is presented in "To Penshurst" can be applied to a fallen man's life. As Hooker says, "The Will notwithstanding doth not incline to have or do that which Reason teacheth to be good, unless the same do also teach it to be possible" (p. 221), and in this poem Jonson shows that the good is possible.
With "To Penshurst" in mind as the ethical standard, the satiric epigrams are much easier to understand. Most of these poems are directly addressed to particular individuals or to their representative types. The poet exposes these characters to themselves by creating caricatures of them, and the poems often depend upon an ironic twist of meaning or a pun to deliver the message. Many are only a couple of lines in length and very few summarize the meaning at the end of the poem. Wesley Trimpi describes how Jonson derived the form of these epigrams from Martial; according to Trimpi, "The descriptive vividness of the epigrams seems usually... to be a result of Jonson's taking certain details from a conventional stereotype and making them so incisive that he seems to be depicting a particular and unusual individual."19 Although Jonson is able to use these epigrams as his personal instrument of revenge against people who have aroused his contempt, the ethical purpose of these poems is analogous to the medieval grotesques, to turn man from the ugliness of vice.

These were the poems which Algeron Charles Swinburne found "so bad, so foul if not so dull, so stupid if not so filthy, that the student stands aghast with astonishment."20 This was exactly the


response Jonson wanted his readers to have, although Swinburne did not realize how the filthy poems could be morally edifying. Although Edward B. Partridge was concerned with Jonson's drama, he explains Jonson's use of the inverted world in terms useful to an understanding of the satiric epigrams; in this world, "Jonson inverted the values which are commonly accepted and made those inverted values the real values of the world which he dramatically created." Rather than cynicism, Partridge explains this use of inversion in terms of idealism: "To gain ironic perspective, Jonson habitually used the devices typical of a small and sometimes misunderstood group of writers who celebrate their allegiance to an ideal world by creating the perversions of the ideal." Herford and Simpson noted that the caricatures in the satiric epigrams exposed "an even lower and fouler stratum of Jacobean humanity" (II, 355) than the comedies, but within the bounds of the short epigram, these characters could only be sketched, and thus were not even allowed the dimension of speaking or acting.

The relationship of these satires to the medieval grotesques is seen by reference to D. W. Robertson's A Preface to Chaucer which describes the idea of evil behind these figures: "All creation is good to the medieval mind, for 'God saw all the things that he had made, and they were good' (Gen. 1,13). Evil was not an entity in itself, not even a 'negation' of the good, but merely a privation of it. It results from the corrupted will of man.

22Partridge, p. 225.
which places qualities good in themselves in unnatural order.\textsuperscript{23} Johnston noted that "fleshly sinners did not greatly rouse the 'satyr' unless they supplemented their weakness with vanity or hypocrisy"\textsuperscript{24} but this is because the essential sin is directing the will toward things in themselves rather than using reason as a guide to the truth beyond particulars. Man in his middle position on the Great Chain can either rise toward the angels or sink toward the beasts, and reason is the power man has which should separate him from the beasts and make him most like God. If man does not use his reason, he becomes like a beast, and thus Jonson figures many of his satirized characters as beasts. Two epigrams are addressed to Sir Voluptuous Beast, one to an Old Colt, one to a Hornet, one to a Court-Parrat, and one to a Poet-Ape. In "On Court-Worme" (Epig. XV) the character changes from one beast to another and gets nowhere.

If not figured as beasts, the satirized characters are often seen as having turned into the vice which they represent, such as in "On the Townes Honest Man" (Epig. CXV), of ironic title, where Jonson claims this person "Suffers no name, but a description: /Being no vituous person, but the vice." These caricatures are of people who do not see behind appearances to the general truths. They worship nonentity, and therefore become nonentity themselves. Commonly, they are sure they are one thing, but the poet exposes them for the base nothingness which they are. For example, in "On Spies" (Epig. LIX)

\textsuperscript{23}Robertson, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{24}Johnston, p. 73.
the spies think they are candles which give light to the state, but they are only used and then discarded.

Spies, you are lights in state, but of base stuffe,
Who, when you have burnt yourselves down to the snuffe,
Stinke, and are throwne away. End faire enough.

The satiric epigram which is most interesting here because it shows the complete inversion of everything "To Penshurst" stands for is "On Don Surly" (Epig. XXVIII). In attempting to be a great man, Surly has tried to make his life an imitation of what he thinks a great man is, but he has obviously either imitated the wrong great men, or imitated wrongly. Instead of becoming like God in his attempts to improve his condition, he has become like a beast.

Don Surly, to aspire the glorious name
Of a great man, and to be though the same,
Makes serious use of all great trade he knowes,
He speaks to men with a Rhinocerotes nose

Even Lady Wroth treated the rural rout as equals, but Surly has decided great men should be snobs. In the next lines Surly perverts hospitality, by reversing what God expects man to do with his gift of plenitude.

He doth, at meales, alone, his pheasant eate,
Which is main greatnesse, And, at his still boord,
He drinkes to no man: that's, too, like a lord.
He keeps anothers wife, which is a spice
Of solemn greatnesse, And he dares, at dice,
Blaspheme god, greatly. Or some poore hinde beat
That breathes in his dogs way: and this is great.

Surly has read appearances only and thus inverted the truth. He believes that since good men have plenty of food, he should keep it all to himself rather than share it. He does not drink to anyone else
because he has not realized that he owes respect to those higher than him on the chain of being. He inverts the virtue of chastity not realizing that a great man's wife is like Lady Sidney. He also blasphemes God if he does not win at dice. The entire Sidney household pray together "without sute," but Surly blasphemes if he does not get more than his share of abundance. This distorts all social relations, because Surly cares for his dog more than for fellow human beings to whom he shows neither respect nor compassion, and for whom he feels no responsibility. In the last four lines, Jonson does not merely call Surly evil—he calls him a fool.

Nay more, for greatnesse sake, he will be one
May heare my Epigrammes, but like of none
Surly, use other arts, these only can
Stile thee a most great foole, but no great man.

Don Surly's fundamental mistake is misunderstanding, or not using his reason to see what the externals of a truly great man's life stand for. From this ignorance the other vices, here all of the seven deadly sins, follow. The first of these is pride, the foolish vanity which convinces Surly that he is a great man. He is also too proud or too slothful to read such poems as epigrams carefully, and these are the poems which might serve as moral correctives for him. Jonson is able to advertise his own poetry here, but he further indicates the purpose he intended the satiric epigrams to have.

The most infamous character in Jonson's bestiary is Inigo Jones, the architect who built sets for Jonson's masques and who was Jonson's long time enemy. The poems against Jones illustrate how Jonson was
able to use the technique of the bestiary as his own personal instrument of revenge. The architect was concerned only with things of the sense, only with appearances, which he thought were the most important part of a work of art. Whereas, the poet was the voice of reason who could give meaning to the visual parts of the masques. Jones has so totally directed his will toward mere design that he falls down and worships it. In "An Expostulation with Inigo Jones" (Ungath, 56), Jonson ironically asks, who can reflect on Jones' work,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And not fall downe before it? and confess} \\
\text{Allmighty Architecture? who no less} \\
\text{A goddess is, then paynted Cloth, Deal-boards,} \\
\text{Vermilion, Lake, or Cinnopar affords} \\
\text{Expression for! with that unbounded line,} \\
\text{Aymed at, in thy omnipotent Design! (ll. 91-96)}
\end{align*}
\]

Jones is figured as having directed his worship toward man-made design rather than toward god-given understanding; thus these things of the surface become ends in themselves rather than physical manifestations from which general truths can be derived.

Jonson uses this imagery from the masques in "An Epistle Answering to One that Asked to Be Sealed to the Tribe of Ben" (Und, 49), in a passage which summarizes nearly all that has been said about the nature of Jonson's poetry thus far. The poet resolves at the end of this poem that although he has had a difficult time getting his message across to the public,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Live to that point I will, for which I am man} \\
\text{And dwell as in my center as I can} \\
\text{Still looking too, and ever loving heaven;} \\
\text{With reverence using all the gifts thence given} \\
\text{\'Mongst which, if I have any friendships sent} \\
\text{\'Such as are square, wel-tagde, and permanent,}
\end{align*}
\]
Not built with Canvasse, paper, and false lights
As are the Glorious Scenes at the great sights;
And that there be no fev'ry heats, nor colds
Oylie Expansions, or shrunke durtie folds.
But all so cleare, and led by reasons flame,
As but to stumble in her sight were shame.
These I will honor love, embrace, and serve.

Jonson begins with the centered self image which is immediately re-
ferred to heaven. The solid moral center thus has this obvious point
of reference: what we know by keeping one eye on heaven is the most
important knowledge to begin with. As at Penshurst, Jonson will use
God's gifts reverently, and true friendship, like love, is a heaven-
sent gift. True friendship should be as solid and cle r as Jonson
felt poetry should be. It is led by "reason's flame" which recalls
Jonson's "owne true fire" of the "Epode." False friends are what Inigo
Jones thought the masque should be, but they are nothing except "Oylie
Expansions, or shrunke durtie folds," a line which shows how nothingness
(expansions and folds out of context) is soiled, grotesque, and ugly.
If led by reason, however, the poet will "honor, love, embrace, and serve"
the gifts which God has given. Since it is by reason that man learns
what the good is, it is the power by which one recognizes true friendship.
Thus Jonson sees Jones' part of the masque, mere appearance, as
equivalent to everything opposite what reason leads you to know to be
good.

Jonson's purpose in using inversion in the nondramatic poems is sum-
marized by Partridge's comments on how this principle operates in the
comedies.
In such a "transchang'd" world sin becomes piety, devils appear as angels, and blasphemy is the true religion. This sense of inversion or perversion appears in some form or other in most of Jonson's plays, but most clearly in Volpone and The Alchemist. In part, Jonson hoped that, if his plays could show men how preposterous their manners and natures had come to be, they would go and sin no more. In part, too, he apparently found that this particular vision of a distorted and dislocated life satisfied him aesthetically in a way that the clearer and sunnier mood of romantic comedy could not. At any rate, consistently in two of his best plays and sporadically in his last plays, there is an attempt to create a world which is governed with counsels, strengthened with laws, corrected with judgments and informed with religion and morals, but a world so "preposterously transchang'd" in religion and morals that it appears ridiculous. Like all great masters of irony, Jonson celebrated the good obliquely; he made the foul ludicrous.

On a smaller scale, the satiric epigrams, taken together, operate by the same principles. They are a portrait gallery of citizens of the "transchang'd" world.

Such a view of Jonson's satiric epigrams shows the function they served as contrasts to the complimentary verse. Together all these poems constitute a form of Christian allegory which does not sound like the traditional allegory because Jonson referred to experience in order to verify the Christian truths. They are allegory in that the characters in the two kinds of poems are abstract representations of virtues and vices, who, although they do not "embattle" each other in one plot, are constantly exposed for what they really are by the simple device of contrast with each other. The poems do not sound like allegory because Jonson finds concrete examples of people he knows for the compliments, and uses the methods of the bestiary for his own revenge in the satires.

25 Partridge, p. 69.
WIT TRIUMPHANT

Thomas A. Greene, who categorizes Jonson's poems according to centered and uncentered selves, warns that: "To sketch these categories is to seem to suggest absolute poles, ethically positive and negative. But although much of Jonson's writing encourages that suggestion, it does not lack its tensions, its ambivalences, its subtle shifts of emphasis. If the categories are not themselves transformed, they show up as altered under varying artistic light." Many of the poems which do not easily belong in the allegory just described show a limited man, often Jonson himself, trying to fill in his circle of general knowledge by relating Christian truths to practical experience. Trimpi believes that the influence of the classical plain style is evident in these poems, a style which he describes as personal and self-revelatory, dedicated to the investigation of individual experience in order to discover and teach the truth.

Although the discussion of the poems above may make Jonson's poetry appear entirely medieval, these more personal poems depend more on wit than figurative metaphors. A representative piece is "My Picture Left in Scotland" (Und. 9), where Jonson treats much more economically than in "A Celebration of Charis in ten Lyric Pieces" (Und. II) the idea of the ugly old poet in love with the beautiful girl.

26 Greene, p. 326.
27 Trimpi, p. 41.
I now thinke, Love is rather deafe, then blind,
For else it could not be,
That she,
Whom I adore so much, should so slight me,
And cast my love behind:
I'm sure my language to her, was as sweet,
And every close did meet
In sentence, of as subtle feet,
As hath the youngest Hee,
That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree.

Oh, but my conscious feares,
That flie my thoughts betwene,
Tell me that she hath seene
My hundred of gray haires,
Told seven and fortie years,
Read so much wast, as she cannot imbrace
My mountaine belly, and my rockie face,
And all these through her eyes, have stop't her eares.

The wit which is immediately apparent here is the ironic twist on
the traditional blindness of love, but in the hierarchy of the senses,
sight is the first and therefore should dominate. Jonson's observation
here is that Love actually sees too well, but does not hear. That is, the
prejudices of the girl's senses overpower her appreciation of the beauty
of the old poet's mind. There are two "truths" in this poem which run
into each other in a particular, perhaps autobiographical, situation.
The first is that you should love someone for his wisdom rather than his
physical appearance, and since the older man would have more wisdom
(poetic talents in this poem), he should be more worthy of love than the
younger poets. Wesley Trimpi makes much of this aspect of both this
poem and "A Celebration of Charis," by reference to the neoplatonic
ideal that the ugly old man who is the wisest, such as Socrates, should
be the best lover, and Trimpi feels that these poems are a regret that
this neoplatonic ideal is no longer applicable to the real world.  

However, the second "truth" in this poem is the truth of the January-May stories, that an ugly old man is a fool to expect to win a young girl, and it would upset the balance of nature for him to even attempt it. These two truths encounter each other in a particular situation. Neither is invalidated; the second merely tips the balance. George A. E. Parfitt feels that in Jonson's consolatio poems, such as this one, and even more so in the famous epitaphs, Jonson is showing a religious conflict: "Jonson examines consolatio themes with a telling mixture of desire to accept their consolation and uncertainty whether they can really be consoling: his mind is operating on conventional material and the inability to merely accept such materials indicates some reservations of religious faith."  

If, however, the wit of this poem is considered in terms of T. S. Eliot's definition of wit, "a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible," the wisdom of this poem could be viewed as the recognition that in the application of one truth, there may be another truth which is equally valid. It is true that someone should be loved for his soul, rather than for his appearance; but it is equally true that ugly old men should not expect to win the love of young girls.

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28 Trimpi, pp. 209-228.
29 Parfitt, p. 133.
Several critics have claimed that Jonson shows the conflict between the real and the ideal in his poetry, but if this poem is understood in terms of these two truths, there is neither conflict nor paradox, but a mature, self-amused acceptance of what really happens in life.

What makes such a poem most attractive, however, is the personal expression which Jonson gives to traditional material. "My Picture Left in Scotland" is a highly stylized poem, complete with the cruel lady and the poets in competition for her favors. Jonson's memorable description of himself, the mountain belly and rocky face, are intimate and self-revelatory to an extent not usually found in Renaissance poetry, but the details of the description are certainly more representative of the category "ugly old poets" than they are even close to naturalistic description.

Much more than this self-amused description, it is the tone which makes the poem "Jonsonian" wit rather than medieval allegory. F. R. Leavis probably defined this tone as well as anyone: "consciously urbane, mature and civilized;" however, this poem shows more sophisticated awareness of man's weaknesses than some of the other poems. What is beyond figurative metaphor here is the interest in a human being's feelings as he relates truth to experience. This quality is one which Robertson warns us not to look for in medieval literature: "the free revelation of the inner feelings of the personae which is impractical where those personae

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are restricted in their expression by a generally stylized representation." In Jonson's poem this interest in a feeling is not for its own sake, but for the purpose of further defining and verifying the wisdom of these poems. In this poem the phrases "I'm sure my language to her, was as sweet" and "Oh, but my conscious feares" reinforce the intimate self-revelation more than the physical description itself. Instead of indicating an unwillingness to accept the truth in this consolatio poem, Jonson seems amused at himself for ever having expected to upset the balance of nature.

33Robertson, p. 33.
CONCLUSION

The best way to discover the meaning of Jonson's verse, then, is to first look at it in terms of the traditional Christian elements. When these are established, what Jonson added to English poetry that went beyond medieval Christian allegory will be thrown into clearer perspective.

The fundamental Christian figuration and didacticism of the verse should not be overlooked, no matter how dependent Jonson was on classical sources for subject matter and form. The point to begin with is the realization that the poet uses his reason, the voice of God speaking in man, to discover truth hidden to the senses, and this truth is the truth of how God has manifested himself in his creation. In the poems discussed in this study, there is a calm conviction and restrained certainty as Jonson verified Christian truths in experience. In "To Penshurst" the poet gave men a vision of the perfection of God's order, but the people who inspired this vision were real and the poet lets us know that he has experienced the spirit of this place. Because men can know what the truth is from "To Penshurst," but since fallen may not completely attain it, Jonson wrote "To Sir Robert Wroth" to show us how these truths can be applied in man's limited sphere. In the satires, Jonson exposes evil people to themselves, so they will realize what they are and turn from their evil, but he is able to use the same methods against his own enemies. Poems which depend on wit rather than figuration such as "My Picture left in Scotland," are
concerned with how truths actually work themselves out in the real world, but there is no indication that the persona does not accept the Christian wisdom which is verified in these poems. This awareness of the difficulty one has trying to relate ideals to experience puts this sample of Jonson’s poetry somewhere between pure allegory and full-fledged conflict, but Jonson’s world view is essentially medieval in the terms with which Robertson describes the difference between modern and medieval thinking: the medieval writers thought in terms of symmetrical patterns, characteristically arranged with reference to an abstract hierarchy, while the modern tendency is to think in terms of opposites whose dynamic interaction leads to a synthesis. The bulk of Jonson’s poems are arranged in terms of an abstract hierarchy; the compliments and satires do not even conflict in a plot— they are only contrasted. There are opposites in some kind of conflict in such poems as "My Picture Left in Scotland," but the strongest half of the argument wins and the persona accepts the Christian wisdom; certainly no synthesis is created.

Jonson is probably the most secular of Renaissance poets in that he did not write many explicitly religious poems, that is, poems of meditation or poems addressed to God. Neither did he ever express the desire to escape the flesh and go on a spiritual journey, as Donne did in the "Anniversaries." However, the ethical frame of reference within which Jonson wrote these poems was thoroughly Christian, and the virtues

34 Robertson, p. 6.
which he wished to inculcate were not only urbane, classical, or stoic virtues, but virtues which also related to truths one derived by reason from reading God in nature. The poems analyzed in this study suggest that the solid moral center which Jonson maintains refers to a well-developed use of reason, man's "owne true fire" from which he discovers truth which is beyond appearances. Referring again to Selden's circle of general knowledge, it is obvious from this study that what Jonson expected to do with observations of men and manners was to test them in the light of reason and verify unquestioned Christian truths in experiential terms, an exercise which would help men see that the truths were applicable. There is in this poetry no actual rebellion against "half-medieval idealisms," but an effort to make these traditional Christian truths more relevant.

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A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX:
THE STATE OF THE ART

The standard eleven-volume edition of Jonson's Works by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1925-1952) includes a full discussion of the text of the nondramatic poems (VIII, 3-19). Jonson edited and saw through publication the folio including Epigrammes and The Forrest in 1616. That he intended to write more poetry at this time is evidenced in his titling the first collection Epigrammes I. However, the next publication of his poetry was in 1640, three years after his death. This two-volume folio publication of Jonson's Works was edited by Sir Kenelm Digby and included a collection of nondramatic poems entitled Under-wood, for which Jonson had already written a title page, explaining that he called "these lesser Poems, of later growth, by this of Under-wood, out of Analogie they hold to the Forrest, in my former booke, and no otherwise" (VIII. 126). There have been editions of Jonson's poems in 1756, 1816, 1871, 1936, 1947, 1955, and 1963. Although William B. Hunter, Jr.'s edition, The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson (New York, 1963), is very convenient, the Herford and Simpson 1947 edition has been used for this study. The last collection of Jonson's verse in the standard edition is what the editors call Ungathered Verse and it includes songs from the masques and plays and verse not previously collected, such as the commemorative pieces prefixed to Shakespeare's first folio.

That Jonson's poetry was regarded highly in his own age is proven
by Gerald Eades Bentley in *Shakespeare and Jonson: Their Reputations in the Seventeenth Century Compared* (2 vol., Chicago, 1945), where he discovers many allusions to Jonson’s verse in the first eight decades of the seventeenth century (I. 114). However, the comments of John Dryden on the difference between Jonson and Shakespeare were to set the tone for almost all later criticism. Dryden says of Jonson: "If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare" (The Literary Criticism of John Dryden, ed. Arthur C. Kirsh, [Lincoln, Nebr., 1966], p. 49). Dryden also elaborated upon Jonson’s personal characteristics which he judged to have affected his work adversely, rendering it sullen and passionless.

As for Jonson, to whose character I am now arrived... I think him the most learned and judicious writer the theater ever had. He was a most severe judge of himself as well as others. One cannot say that he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it... Humour was his proper sphere; and in that he delighted most to represent mechanic people (p. 48).

Here, in brief, is the type of comment which all future severe critics of Jonson were to make. Dryden had recognized that the self-righteous moralist in Jonson prevented him from taking imaginative flights and from developing characters with whom audiences would identify. But Dryden also commented on Jonson’s assimilation of the classics: "He invades authors like a monarch, and what would be theft in other poets is
only victory in him" (p. 49).

The next noteworthy criticism of Jonson's drama was that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who noticed that besides being mechanic, Jonson's characters were abstractions. "Some very prominent feature is taken from the whole man, and that single feature or humour is made the basis upon which the entire character is built up. . . . He was a very accurately observing man; but he cared only to observe what was external, or open to and likely to impress the senses" (The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, Vol. I, London, 1936, 98-100). The social, rather than introspective, character of Jonson's verse was thus noticed, but Coleridge also made some interesting comments on the style: "Ben Jonson exhibits a sterling English diction, and he has with great skill contrived varieties of construction; but his style is rarely sweet or harmonious, in consequence of his labor at point and strength being so evident" (p. 100).

The Victorian view of Jonson is represented by Algeron Charles Swinburne's A Study of Ben Jonson (London, 1889), the first book to devote considerable criticism to the poetry itself. Swinburne carries Dryden's comment on the difference between Shakespeare and Jonson one step farther. "If poets may be divided into two exhaustive but not exclusive classes,—the gods of harmony and creation, the giants of energy and invention,—the supremacy of Shakespeare among the gods of English verse is not more unquestionable than the supremacy of Jonson among its giants.... No giant ever came so near to the ranks of the gods" (p. 3). But
Swinburne was only able to name one quality which was missing from Jonson's verse: "the flowers of his growing have every quality but one which belongs to the rarest and finest among flowers: they have colour, form, variety, fertility, vigour: the one thing they want is fragrance" (p. 4). One trend in much future criticism of Jonson's verse is evident here—that there is some nearly indefinable quality missing from Jonson's verse which keeps him from the ranks of the greatest English poets. Dryden called it wit, Coleridge called it sweetness and harmony, and Swinburne called it fragrance.

Writing for the English Men of Letters Series, G. Gregory Smith devoted one chapter of his book *Ben Jonson* (London, 1919) to the poetry. Smith commented on the sincere, personal quality of Jonson's verse: "His compliments are successful for the same reason [as the epitaphs], that he is direct and has, or assumes, a genuineness which is so often wanting in Donne" (p. 233). But Smith felt that despite this intimacy, there is still something missing: "with all his art in transforming the good things of classical or humanist thought, he seldom gives that spiritual suggestion which in master-verse lies behind the magic of phrase and rhythm" (p. 243).

T. S. Eliot noticed the same deficiencies in Jonson's verse but did not necessarily consider them detrimental in his essay on Jonson in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London, 1920, pp. 104-122). Eliot described Jonson's poetry as "of the surface" and claimed that it lacks "a network of tentacular roots reaching down to
the deepest terrors and desires" (p. 115). He felt that the problem with such poetry is that it cannot be understood without study.

for to deal with the surface of life, as Jonson dealt with it, is to deal so deliberately that we too must be deliberate in order to understand. Shakespeare, and smaller men also, are in the end more difficult, but they offer something at the start to encourage the student or to satisfy those who want nothing more; they are suggestive, evocative, a phrase, a voice. ... But the polished veneer of Jonson reflects only the lazy reader's fatuity; unconscious does not respond to unconscious; no swarms of inarticulate feelings are aroused. The immediate appeal of Jonson is to the mind; his emotional tone is not in the single verse, but in the design of the whole (p. 105-106).

Eliot agreed that Jonson's characters are one-dimensional, but did not consider this a liability. "The 'world' of Jonson is sufficiently large; it is a world of poetic imagination; it is sombre. He did not get the third dimension, but he was not trying to get it" (p. 121). Thus Eliot realized that Jonson's characters exist in an imaginative world of their own and are created this way for sententious purposes.

Herford and Simpson included a seventy-six page introduction to the poems in the standard edition (II, 337-413), but they took a rather cool view of the poetry and devoted most of their energy to tracing Jonson's classical sources. They agreed with critics before them that "His passion, again, was not on the whole the high-wrought enthusiasm which cannot utter itself sufficiently save through rhythm or figure" (II, 340). Although they deny shaping imagination in the poems, they noticed the personal quality of Jonson's verse and his concern with observation and thought. The poems "reflect, moreover, this experience and these relations simply and directly, with a minimum of literary
elaboration or adornment, and with an eye to immediate, practical effect" (II, 338). Herford and Simpson consider Jonson mostly as a precursor of neoclassicism, and thus believe his verse represents the triumph of recondite wit over allegory. Of the "Epode," they say, however, that Jonson "manages allegory with easy dexterity possible only to the man who has searched some of the deeper places of human nature" (p. 402).

Since Eliot's suggestions that an intelligent study of Jonson's verse might be rewarding, and the groundwork done by Herford and Simpson, several different approaches have been taken to the study of Jonson's verse, although they do not appear to constitute a full-fledged critical revival. The main thrust of this criticism has been to see Jonson as not merely a precursor of neoclassicism, but a fully developed lyric poet who was as important in developing elements of the English tradition in poetry as he was in adapting subject matter and forms from the classics. Ralph S. Walker in "Ben Jonson's Lyric Poetry," (Criterion, III [1933-34], 430-48; rpt. in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry; Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. William R. Keast, New York, 1962, pp. 193-214), has been the only critic to date to claim that Jonson's verse might be greater art than his plays. "In spite of Epicoene and The Alchemist, and in spite of Bartholomew Fair, it is in the lesser products of his genius, the poems, that Ben Jonson's originality achieves his most triumphant expression" (p. 181). Walker believed that when Jonson's ideal of beauty found an expression that agreed with his ideal of art the fusion created perfect lyrics; however, strangely enough, Walker felt Jonson's poetry lacked any apparent moral
value (p. 190).

F. R. Leavis in *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (New York, 1947) saw Jonson as equal to Donne in initiating what he called "the line of wit" in English poetry. Leavis described the tone of this wit as "consciously urbane, mature and civilized," and felt the line which is traced to Pope should begin with Jonson rather than Waller (p. 21). Also concerned with Jonson's influence on the Augustans was Geoffrey Walton who in his article "The Tone of Ben Jonson's Poetry," in *From Metaphysical to Augustan: Studies in Tone and Sensibility in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1955), pp. 23-24; rpt. in Keast, pp. 193-214, said that the Augustan idea of decorum traces back to Jonson, and that the ultimate basis for the idea of decorum is courtesy. Walton, however, disliked the coarse side of Jonson, and claimed that "His tone only fails him when personal bitterness or excessive indignation causes him to lose his bearings and his sense of fellowship in the republic of letters" (p. 200).

which few critics of Jonson have noticed. "The wisdom of poetry of this kind lies not in the acceptance of a truism, at least formally, but in the realization of the truth of the truism: the realization resides in the feeling, the style. Only a master of style can deal successfully in a plain manner with obvious material... and inspire universals with their full value as experience" (pp. 95-96).

George Burke Johnston's book length study, Ben Jonson: Poet (New York, 1945) was the first to deal with Jonson's religious poetry at length, although the secular poems are not discussed in the same terms. Johnston noted no formal or material unity in the four collections of Jonson's poetry, and devoted his study to the subject matters of mythology, religion, chivalry and courtly love, and the dispute between Jonson and Inigo Jones. Johnston also felt that the term "classicist" was not enough to describe Jonson. "In him meet the classics, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, and (what has been far less generally realized) the principal trends of English literature of the three centuries following his death." (p. 161).

Other works concentrated on the political-social milieu in which Jonson wrote. L. C. Knights in Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson (London, 1937) gave a good account of the political and economic problems which would lead a poet to write a poem like "To Penshurst," and discussed the basis of the anti-acquisitive attitude in Jonson. Two more recent studies which specifically related the poetry to the social situation were G. R. Hibbard's "The Country House Poem of the
Seventeenth Century," (Essential Articles for the Study of Alexander Pope, ed. Maynard Mack. Hamden, Conn., 1964, pp. 401-437), and Hugh Maclean's "Ben Jonson's Poems: Notes on the Ordered Society," (Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age, ed. Millar Maclure. Toronto, 1964, pp. 43-68). Hibbard related the changes in the country house poems to the changes in society; the Sidneys were the last of the great families to let the rural folk come in for dinner. Hibbard also noticed that "To Penshurst" is the fullest statement we have of the traditional piety which is the basis of Jonson's satire (p. 409). Maclean believed that the poems contain "not an explicit and detailed outline of the social order Jonson admired, but rather 'notes' on particular elements that ought to mark a society well-ordered as well as suggestions for conduct in the midst of a disordered one" (p. 44).

Two recent studies have dealt with the formal qualities of Jonson's verse. Thomas M. Greene in "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," (SEL, X [Spring 1970], 325-348), believed that an image of inner moral equilibrium informs most of Jonson's work in terms of circle and center imagery. The circles are complete in the masques and broken elsewhere. Of the poetry Greene showed that the virtuous people all have fixed stability, while the vile are uncentered and volatile. W. V. Spanos in "The Real Toad in the Jonsonian Garden: Resonance in the Nondramatic Poetry," (JEGP, LXVIII [Jan. 1969], 1-23), could think of no better definition of Jonson's classicism than Marianne Moore's metaphor that poetry is "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Spanos showed
how tonal shifts in Jonson's poetry, which are usually created by his personal intrusions into the poems, render intimate what has been distanced by stylization.

L. A. Beaurline was also concerned with the nature of Jonson's classicism in "The Selective Principle in Jonson's Shorter Poems," (Criticism, VIII [1966], 64-74), where he marked how Jonson selected and rejected from his classical sources to make "On My First Sonne" a personal poem. George A. E. Parfitt in "Compromise Classicism: Language and Rhythm in Ben Jonson's Poetry," (SEL, XI [Winter 1971], 109-123), showed that the primary stylistic feature which Jonson adopted from his Latin studies was the isolation of words and phrases within the line, a quality which sets him apart from earlier English plain stylists.

The most monumental work on the stylistic nature of Jonson's classicism is Wesley Trimpi's Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style (Stanford, 1962). Trimpi believed Jonson's attitudes toward language were essentially those of the classical plain style whose purpose was to discover and teach the truth. Trimpi's effort received a devastating review from Arnold Stein, "Plain Style, Plain Criticism, Plain Dealing and Ben Jonson," (ELH, XXX [1963], 306-316), who felt that Trimpi worked too hard placing Jonson into one tradition and disregarded all the other influences on his style.

Paul M. Cubeta has written two articles on individual poems, "'A Celebration of Charis': An Evaluation of Jonsonian Poetic Strategy," (ELH, XXV [1958], 163-180), the first lengthy discussion of this poem, although Trimpi devoted several pages to it also; and "A Jonsonian
Ideal: 'To Penshurst', (PQ, LXII [1963], 14-24), but neither of these articles seem to notice the theological dimensions of either poem. Two of the most recent articles on Jonson give opposite views on the nature of his ethics. George A. E. Parfitt in "Ethical Thought in Ben Jonson's Poetry," (SEL, XI [Winter 1971], 109-123), felt Jonson is unique among Renaissance Englishmen for the absence of theological and metaphysical references in his poetry, and believed Jonson determined his ethics from social relations and observations in the method of the Roman stoics. Gayle Edward Wilson in "Jonson's Use of the Bible and the Great Chain of Being in 'To Penshurst,'" (SEL, VIII [Winter 1968], 77-89), believed that Jonson based his ethics on truth which is found by reading God in nature. Another recent commentator who studied the Christian elements in Jonson's verse was W. David Kay who in "The Christian Wisdom of Ben Jonson's 'On My First Sonne'," (SEL, XI [Winter 1971], 125-36) showed that what Jonson actually did with his sources for this poem was Christianize them.

Since Johnston's beginnings in 1945 no study has been made on the specifically English elements of Jonson's poetry, although two books on the plays have helpful information in this area. Edward B. Partridge's The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson (New York, 1958) included a concise explanation of Jonson's use of the inverted world in Volpone and The Alchemist which readily applies to the satiric epigrams. Charles Read Baskervill's English Elements in Jonson's Early Comedy (New York, 1967) traced the influence of English
Two recent books deal with Jonson's poetry quite generally without adding many new insights. Fred Inglis in The Elizabethan Poets: The Making of English Poetry from Wyatt to Ben Jonson (London, 1969), believed Jonson to have written the best short poems in early seventeenth-century England. J. B. Bamborough's book, Ben Jonson (London, 1971), included a chapter on the poems in which he stated that there is no need to query the genuineness of Jonson's ethical views; however, Bamborough does not view the secular poems in religious terms: "The religious poems give an impression of sincerity, but they are few and conventional. Perhaps he was restrained by prudential considerations, but it seems that, as a creative writer, at least, anything that might be termed religious was outside his range" (p. 173).

Despite this recent comment on the theological aspects of Jonson's verse, the trend in Jonson scholarship is definitely for looking backward to the English and Christian elements in Jonson's verse. Jonson's poetry has been seen as beginning, defining, or consummating nearly every tradition which has been part of English poetry. For this reason alone his poetry will always be of immeasurable historical importance even if he is never rediscovered in the sense which Donne was rediscovered. The large number of articles written on Jonson's poetry in the past two years show at least a revaluation of the traditional views of his poetry and a continued reconstruction of the world-view in which Jonson wrote, which cannot help but further the understanding of his poetry.