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Ben Jonson: The Poet as Maker

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BEN JONSON: THE POET AS MAKER

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Master of Arts

By
Glenda Pevey Rhyne
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

In the past scholars and critics dealing with the work of Ben Jonson have either overlooked, minimized, or superficially evaluated his poems. The concepts of modern poetry, moreover, are taking us further and further from an appreciation of his poetic theory.

Ben Jonson’s poems—as distinguished from his plays and masques—deserve attention, however, as intense, deliberate products of a particular conception of poetry. Influenced both by his study of the classics and by the poetic thought Sidney expounded in his own day, Jonson dogmatically maintained that the poet is a "maker." With the meticulous care of a craftsman, the poet fashions—through study, practice, and art—a "correct" composition. But the creation of the poem is only the first step. The ideas expressed in the poem itself must then "make": they must create higher ideals, better attitudes, stronger moral fibers in the reader. Only the man who thus attempts to improve his society by means of his poetry, Jonson believed, may claim to be a true poet.

In his effort to inspire his readers, Jonson took pains to slant his verse to the tastes of his audience, to keep his meaning clear, to maintain an air of frankness. He intended to give concrete examples and ideals to his particular reading public—not to vie for a place of universal greatness in English literature. His poems require, then, neither apology nor indiscriminate praise. They stand as a monument to this conception of the dedicated poet.
Wee doe not require in him meere 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 em-battaling them.

--Ben Jonson, Discoveries
BEN JONSON: THE POET AS MAKER

At a time when men wrote poetry as a fashionable hobby or as a serious occupation only when guaranteed a livelihood by some more practical position or employment, Ben Jonson made poetry his sole profession. He intended to earn his living on the merits of his literary work, and he intended to devote his energies to fulfilling the responsibilities of his calling. To Jonson, a "poet" was a molder of culture, a counselor and spokesman for society, a kind of secular priest. A "poem" was a "making," not only in itself a specific verbal creation, but, by its example, the creation of other good literature and, by the influence of its ideas, of good lives and enlightened society. For this reason Jonson maintained, as George Burke Johnston points out, that even the author of his plays was a poet and that they were his poems. He felt that all literary forms were the realm of the "poet" and that the earnest poet was obligated to attempt to use all of them well. He wrote what our literary categorizing divides into plays, masques, and poetry, translated Horace's Ars Poetica, worked on The English Grammar, and compiled Timber: or, Discoveries, one of his time's important records of literary thought. It is known from his "Exe­cation upon Vulcan" that he lost other works in the 1623 fire. Though Jonson would have called nearly all his works "poems," we classify as poetry only the following: the "Epigrammes" and the fifteen poems of "The Forrest" published in the 1616 Folio entitled Works, a presumptuous title previously reserved for publications of
only the most austere nature; the "Under-woods," or "The Under-wood," in the 1640 Folio; the various occasional and commendatory verses in contemporary volumes and manuscript poems called in the Oxford edition "Ungathered Verse"\(^2\) and in Bernard Newdigate's edition "Drift-wood";\(^3\) and poems of doubtful authorship. This study does not exclude poems from the plays and masques, but it is confined to those which are "poems" in the modern sense.

It is strange that in the usual estimate of Jonson so little of his fame actually stems from his poems. He was an unofficial poet laureate of England. His poetry is inevitably discussed in studies and histories of English poetry. Moreover, his other writing has been more exposed to the public and been thereby more scarred by criticism. During his own lifetime his drama suffered, as many say it does now, in comparison with his contemporary Shakespeare's and in the unenthusiastic reception of his "purified" classical plays. His achievement with the masque form has been difficult to appreciate because of the uniquely Jacobean orientation of that genre. And Jonson's reputation as a critic has been analyzed as the result of a domineering classicist personally creating a literary dictatorship during a transitional period, decreeing critical opinions too often translated and paraphrased from his beloved ancients. Nevertheless, his drama, masques, and critical opinions have consistently received more attention than has his poetry. Whenever his poetic work has been considered, his position in the history of poetry has interested scholars to a greater extent than have his poems themselves. Only in the last few decades have such scholars as R. S. Walker, Geoffrey Walton,
and John Hollander attempted to explore his poetry more thoroughly and to point out that indiscriminate summation of it as mediocre, yet highly influential, is an insufficient approach to the admittedly noteworthy legacy left by Ben Jonson, the poet. Current interest is slowly beginning to shed new light on the work which won for its author both praise as a vital figure in poetic history and condemnation as a poor poet. In line with the present re-evaluation, this discussion seeks to define anew the Ben Jonson of poetry. To do this, we must first extricate his poems from beneath a tangle of half-hearted and indecisive criticism which has long hidden them. Then we must attempt to understand the conception of poetry which in the seventeenth century prompted their creation and gave them their particular poetic traits. Finally, we must observe that conception at work in the poetry which has, to the amazement of some, entitled the author to a permanent place in the history of English poetry.

The history of critical comment on Jonson's poetry reflects its confounding nature. What Ben Jonson was trying to do as a poet is evidently a question that first arose in his own day. The Oxford edition quotes these lines from a poem by Michael Oldisworth, Iter Australe, 1632:

Behind the Abbey lives a man of fame;  
With awe and reverence wee repeat his name,  
Ben Johnson:  

... His whole Discourse  
Was how Mankinde grew daily worse and worse,  
How God was disregarded, how Men went  
Downe even to Hell, and never did repent,  
With many such sad Tales; as hee would teach  
Us Scholars, how heraftter Wee should preach.  
Great wearer of the baies, looke to thy lines,
Lest they chance to bee challeng'd by Divines:
Some future Times will, by a grosse Mistake,
Johnson a Bishop, not a Poet make.4

William Gifford's 1816 edition of Jonson's poetry praised him without reserve and remained standard for nearly a century. Charles Swinburne's 1889 Study of Ben Jonson carried the evaluation to the other extreme. Stating that more than justice had been extended to Jonson's lyric poetry, he portrayed his subject as a man of sheer intelligence and no inspiration or refinement, a conception which began in Jonson's own day. When Newdigate published the first complete edition of Jonson's poems in 1936, he felt it necessary to defend them against the neglect all but a few had suffered. From time to time scholars like Felix Schelling, L. C. Knights, and Harry Levin have commented on Jonson's poetry, but the emphasis is nearly always on the author's influence rather than on his creation. Jonson has been called the "father of occasional verse,"5 first of the neo-classicists who would triumph at the Restoration, the "legislator of Parnassus as Dryden, Pope, Johnson would later be,"6 the meeting point of the classics, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance,7 the "source for the whole current of poetic style during the course of the seventeenth century."8 In his 1945 publication George Burke Johnston, attempting to bring together the various aspects of scholarship on Jonson, leaves the impression that the poet was primarily a scholar. The standard Ben Jonson edited by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson takes the apologetic approach to Jonson's verse which has been common since the rediscovery of Jonson's contemporary, Donne, established what now are the criteria by which a poem is considered to be a poem.9
Present ideas about poetry have for some time pushed Jonson further into the shadows. He wrote what is termed "poetry of statement." For him, a poem was an idea expressed in verse. He wrote out his subject, his idea, first in prose, as "his master Cambden had learned him," a fact which raises the question among unre­lenting modernists as to whether Jonson wrote poetry at all. Cole­ridge set forth the organic concept of poetry which underlies modern criticism; he argued that a poem is not merely the embodiment of prose meaning, but the imaginative unifying of many elements of poetry. The modern conception of poetry maintains that a poem must grow organically from an original image, melody, genesis in a poet's mind. T. S. Eliot's praise of Donne relegates Jonson and his followers to that line of side-tracked English poets guilty of "dissociation of sensibility," or separation of thought and emotion which Eliot hoped to unify. Critic Cleanth Brooks speaks of a poem as the expression of "an experience," not of a prose idea. Herbert Read's *Form in Modern Poetry* contradicts Jonson's views entirely. Read speaks of "form imposed on poetry by the laws of its own origination, without consideration for the given forms of traditional poetry" as being "the most original and most vital principle of poetic creation"; this form depends upon "the nature of the poet's personality." He condemns all poets who engage in what Dryden described as "wit-writing," the "Art of clothing and adorning that thought... found and varied, in apt, significant and sounding words." He concludes that Dryden and others of his school (in this case, Jonson) produced "verbal art of a high order," but "such art is not poetry."

In modern terms, a poem cannot say; it is.
For us, the meaning of a poem consists in its imagery and elaboration as much as in its subject, and the separation of 'sense' from expressive content in poetry is the arch-heresy of orthodox reading today.12

It is clearly evident that Ben Jonson was determined to say something by means of his poetry and that his poems may often be described, quite justifiably, as "versified prose." The fact that modern criticism has thus far neglected his verse is, therefore, not at all surprising. Twentieth-century poets can no more accept Jonson's idea that "practice" forms in one the "habit" of writing good verse than Jonson could accept what he would call their eccentric, obscure, and undisciplined poetry.

It has indeed been difficult to understand and appreciate the opinionated Jonson. He stood apart from his time and is therefore not easily categorized. The still-flickering flamboyance of the Renaissance writing, as well as the reactions to it found in Donne's influential metaphysical poetry and the work of his imitators, surrounded on all sides the individual realm of Ben Jonson. Immediately after him would come the lyrical creations of his own Sons of Ben, whose work showed his influence but often escaped his strained simplicity and rugged precision. Jonson maintained, as R. S. Walker puts it, that "true wit does not consist in mere word-play and that decadent Elizabethan verse-craftsmanship was a craftsman'ship wrongly applied."13 But Jonson did not choose Donne's course away from the Petrarchans; though many of his poems evidence that Jonson could deal successfully with the metaphysical approach,14 he was dubious of its strange paradoxes and difficult oppositions. He feared "not being understood," a fault for which Donne, he thought,
would perish. Instead, Jonson turned to the ancient writers and there found the corroboration for his own personal position. Because he revived the classical concepts of poetry and argued for the return of form and scholarly correctness in composition, Jonson has been considered to fall into the stream of literature which proceeded to Milton and the neo-classicists. His attention to the classics has also been at the root of the charges that have continually been brought against him: some of his poems are mere translations; he is too imitative; he lacks inspiration and lyricism because of his dependence upon formal rules; he is too labored a realist, too pedantic a scholar. His conception of a poet, influenced by the classics, demanded that he experiment with the many forms offered for his trial by the annals of the ancients and by his contemporaries and, some say, spread his talent too thinly. In his effort to "purify" contemporary literature, Jonson attempted everything from classical tragedy to the Pindaric ode. It is indeed hard to categorize a writer of such diversity and to praise him for importance in a particular poetic trend. Nor can the critic easily discover in any single poem Jonson's right to fame. The individual creations are, for the most part, units in a dedicated career. For Jonson, a particular poem represented only one small application of "poetry."

The new attitude toward Jonson is evidencing, moreover, that we can no longer casually praise him as an important, "influential poet" and at the same time ignore, minimize, or apologize for his poems. However simple, uninspired, or plain they may perhaps seem, they, in a body, rather than his personality or his scholarship or
simply his plays, have made him "influential." All past criticism on Jonson has agreed upon one thing: his poetry had a substantial effect on English poetry in general, and on the young poets who followed him in particular. The very critics who have felt that only "the influence of his poetry" could be honestly commended have paid Ben Jonson the greatest compliment of all. While supposedly slighting his poems, they have declared his poetry successful, because the body of poetry left by Jonson was created for the purpose of influencing. He meant "to show the right way to those that come after." When Jonson's poems are judged, then, by the criteria which he maintained for poetry as a whole, many of them must be recognized as far better than "mediocre."

To fairly determine whether Jonson's poetry does, by its own merit alone, justify his immortality in the history of poetry, the critic must pass over the conflicting views on Jonson and understand what his conception of poetry was. He left no formal treatise on poetry, though we know that there was to have been a preface to his translation of Horace, for it was read to Drummond and spoken of as Aristotelian in poetic theory. A great deal of scholarship, however, is available concerning Jonson's sources, his reading, the classical influences upon his work. Out of his study, modified by his observation of poetry in his own day, and the opinions which formed in his own obstinate, determined mind, grew his criteria for poetry. That Jonson took many of his ideas from writers of antiquity is an accepted fact. He borrowed from Martial, Juvenal, Catullus, Philostratus, Plautus, Seneca, and many others. It is generally agreed that Horace, more than any other one classical writer, in-
fluenced Jonson's theories on literature. These theories are to be found in *Discoveries*, "a sort of notebook in which he recorded and to some extent commented on his reading in literary theory," in the prologues to his plays and passages within the plays, and in his practice as a poet. He frequently repeats thoughts from Horace's *Ars Poetica* and describes Horace in these words:

> Such was Horace, an Author of much Civilitie: 
> And (if any one among the heathen can be) the best master, both of vertue, and wisdome; an excellent, and true judge. (Discoveries, p. 642)

But if the classics furnished the material for Jonson's poetic fire, Sir Philip Sidney was the igniting spark. Jonson called him a "great Master of wit, and language; and in whom all vigour of Invention, and strength of judgement met," (Discoveries, p. 591) and wrote to Sidney's daughter Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland,

> That Poets are far rarer births then Kings,  
> Your noblest father prov'd; like whom, before,  
> Or then, or since, about our Muses springs,  
> Came not that soule exhausted so their store.

Sidney wrote the great Renaissance treatise on literary theory. His *Defence of Poesie*, published in 1595, sought to answer the charges of the Puritans that poetry was useless and immoral. In his attempt to explain poetry as a purposeful and uplifting moral force, Sidney reiterated many of Horace's ideas and brought together the classical concepts and the literary history that made up what was both a personal statement and a document representative of poetic theory in contemporary England. What M. H. Abrams
terms the "pragmatic theory" of poetry was held by the majority of Renaissance writers. This theory came to the Elizabethans from the *Ars Poetica*, which stated that "the poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful," the latter being Sidney's contention. The *Defence* declared that poetry is highly purposeful, that it has an aim; it must effect delight and profit at once, it must create and be useful. Jonson, though a leader toward the purer classical discipline of a later age, was a disciple of this theory; he represented the close of the first stage of English criticism, at the center of which was Sidney. The poets of that day believed that poetry was the blend of moral effectiveness, the ultimate end, with delight, the necessary auxiliary. This conception of poetry is the reason why men like Spenser, Sidney, and Jonson had such enthusiastic faith in the fundamental importance and value of poetry. Spenser had written his *Faerie Queene* with a "generall end therefore of all the booke"—"to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline"; he sought to make his writing "pleasing," because "the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of the ensample."  

The concepts set forth in *The Defence* should be taken into consideration in ascertaining Jonson's own views. Sidney spoke of poetry as "that which in the noblest nations and languages that are knowne, hath bene the first light giver to ignorance," and maintained that "no learning is so good, as that which teacheth and moveth to vertue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as Poesie" (*Defence*, p. 28). Sidney saw this "moving to virtue"
as the poet's great ability; by teaching and delighting at one and the same time, he can *inspire* mankind rather than merely inform or preach to them. By the criteria of poetry which Sidney set forth, the poet is a *vates*, or priest, who has become "learn'd" through study and experience. As such, he ministers to fallen mankind, hoping to inspire man, by his poetry, to seek again the higher state from whence he fell. To do this, the poet must persuade men "to take that goodnes in hand" which their "erected wit," undamaged by the fall, can comprehend, but which their "infected will" hinders them from attaining. This element of persuasion, the energizing of the infected will, causes the concern with rhetoric seen both in Sidney and in Jonson's frequent references to Quintilian and to technique in the *Discoveries*. Poetry, to move men toward higher morality, must hold the interest of its audience (a problem which concerned Horace) and give a convincing "speaking picture" of "virtue exalted, and vice punished" (*Defence*, p. 18). By presenting the "Idea, or fore conceit of the worke" (Jonson's prose idea) to the readers in as "delightful" a way "as if they took a medicine of Cherries" (*Defence*, p. 21), the poet hopes to motivate his audience toward what should be and away from what should not be. Sidney argued that

Poetrie ever sets vertue so out in her best cullours, making fortune her well-wayting handmayd, that one must needs be anamoured of her. (*Defence*, p. 18)

The poet, the artist, is better able, Sidney continued, to instruct and persuade mankind than are even historians and philosophers; the former have at their command only events and facts which are within the scope of the known world, while the latter are
handicapped by "abstractions" which are grasped with such difficulty by average men that they lose motivating power. Only the poet has resources beyond the scope of physical reality and logical reasoning. He may range freely within the "Zodiack of his owne wit" (Defence, p. 8) and feign "notable images" which will "teach and delight." Sidney wrote,

I conclude therfore that he excelleth historie, not onely in furnishing the minde with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserves to be called and accounted good: which setting forward and moving to well doing, indeed setteth the Lawrell Crowne upon the Poets as victorious, not onely of the Historian, but over the Philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable. (Defence, pp. 18-19)

The poet may feign images because he is "not laboring to tel you what is, or is not, but what should, or should not be" (Defence, p. 29). Because "a fained example hath as much force to teach, as a true example" (Defence, p. 18), the poet may create his own "fable," as Jonson called it, or he may beautify and revitalize an actual example in order to make it more pleasing and instructive. This fact ranks the poet with nature as a "maker"; the poet is an imitator of nature in that he, too, creates. He creates examples. He first creates an artistic piece of literature, the poem in its written form. It is an independent object, free of his own personality. The poem itself, then, gives an inspiring example--a Cyrus, an Aeneas, a Camden, a Morison. In this way, the poem "makes" in the reader a noble person, a certain understanding, an attitude, a mood. In writing of Xenophon's Cyropaedia Sidney said,

so farre substantially it worketh, not onely to make a Cyrus, which had bene but a particular
excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyrusses, if they will learne aright, why and how that maker made him. Neither let it be deemed too sawcy a comparison, to ballance the highest point of mans wit, with the efficacie of nature: but rather give right honor to the heavenly maker of that maker, who having made man to his owne likenes, set him beyond and over all the workes of that second nature, which in nothing he sheweth so much as in Poetry. (Defence, p. 8)

It is to this idealistic conception of poetry that Ben Jonson dedicated himself. Marchette Chute states that Jonson no doubt read the Defence of Poesie within three years of its publication and was inspired to bring back to poets the honor Sidney said was due them.21 "Repeated and unequivocal allusions to the Defence of Poesie" have been discovered in Jonson's writing;22 his definition of poetry in Discoveries is quite similar to Sidney's; the "poet-apes" of Sidney are mentioned in The Poetaster; the Prologue to Every Man in His Humor makes use of Sidney's criticism of drama; and he advised that Sidney be read before Donne--these are only a few examples of his affiliation with that earlier poet. From both the comments he left on poetry, and, more important, the poems he worked on to make obvious their intent, it is clear that Jonson aligned himself with the pragmatic, idealistic view of poetry deriving from the classics and expounded so fully by Sidney. Of poetry he wrote, "Learning, well used, can instruct to good life, informe manners, no lesse perswade, and lead men" (Discoveries, p. 595). Sidney's influence is seen in his definition of the poet as a "Maker, or a fainer: His Art, an Art of imitation. . . . of one perfect, and entire Action" (Discoveries, pp. 635 and 645). Perhaps the best statement of
Jonson's attitude toward poetry is embodied in the following:

I could never thinke the study of Wisdom confin'd only to the Philosopher: or of Piety to the Divine: or of State to the Politicke. But that he which can faine a Common-wealth (which is the Poet) can governe it with Counsels, strengthen it with Lawes, correct it with Judgements, informe it with Religion, and Morals; is all these. Wee doe not require in him meere 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 embattaling them. (Discoveries, p. 595)

Jonson saw the poet as the creator of an ideal "Common-wealth," one which he must maintain through poetry which governs, strengthens, corrects, and informs. To fulfill his obligations as a "maker" of virtuous society, the poet must meet several requirements: not only must he have an excellent faculty in verse, but he must also have a clear knowledge of which standards and practices should be those of an ideally civilized society and which should not be, with the ability to persuade his society to accept the one and reject the other.

This idea of poetry as a means of raising the ideals of society had received wide acceptance and was generally followed; that the motive behind a poem should be essentially moral was not at all unusual among Jonson's contemporary poets. But the poetic responsibility of creating first a sound, delightful, and meaningful poem itself was being overlooked. Jonson saw applauded in his own times so many "poet-apes" and metaphysical poets who seemed to him merely to toy with poetry or to use it as mental gymnastics that
he concentrated his efforts on creating, through his poetry, not only a whole enlightened society about him, but especially a group of poets who would understand and practice "righte" poetry. He believed his duty to be both the fulfillment of his personal responsibility as a "maker" of virtuous society and the instruction of would-be "makers" who were neglecting the "proper embattaling" of "notable" images. Jonson felt that "meere Elocution" was not enough; the poet should hold up his lines to some higher authority than his own or the public's pleasure. For this reason, Jonson has often been written off as solely a classicist and technical reformer. He insisted that true "faculty in verse" came not only from wit, or genius, but also from thorough study, imitation, or assimilation, of the best authors, practice, and adherence to rules.

In his own case, Jonson's less spontaneous wit was perhaps overweighed by his scholarship, his attention to the precepts of his masters, and his demand for technical precision. His emphasis on study stemmed from his conception of poetry as the work of a man wise in all knowledge, a "learn'd" man of "erected wit." The true poet, he maintained, had to know the best that had been done and thought before him, to which he might add the knowledge gained by his own experience; in this way, by first "drawing forth out of the best, and choicest flowers" (Discoveries, p. 639), the poet would be able to start his own work on the good foundation of an earlier scholar-poet's best. The criticism often directed at Jonson's authoritarianism actually overlooks a fact which is to his credit: he knew that he had indeed thoroughly studied, as opposed to those he accused of being "busie in the skirts, and out-sides of Learning"
(Discoveries, p. 570). According to his own record, his memory was remarkable; his mind was so saturated with his wide and varied reading that the knowledge gained thereby became completely his own, a fact which made it impossible to trace all his sources, even at the request of a prince. His faith in the authorities stored in his mind gave him the confidence that his own outspoken opinions had the backing of the world's best minds. That same faith in his authorities led him to advise all poets to imitate past masters, as he did.

Such as accustom themselves, and are familiar with the best Authors, shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not. (Discoveries, p. 616)

However, the models were to be "guides, not commanders." In this stage of his training, the professional poet, Jonson said, learned "that having obtain'd first to write well, then custom made it easie, and a habit" (Discoveries, p. 616).

Going beyond the preparation of the poet himself, Jonson had much to say about the particulars of writing verse. He warned against accepting the first ideas and words that came to mind. Even the poet's language was of concern to Jonson; it had to be understood; it had to be simple, concise, and unaffected, and it had to be the language of "Custom." He agreed with Sidney that the English language was excellent for poetry, and his use of colloquialism was to be carried further by some of his "Sons." He argued for the "keeping of meter" and for the exactness of form. He held that "a poem...is the worke of the Poet; the end, and
fruit of his labour, and studye" (Discoveries, p. 636), and felt that technical requirements had to be met by both the poet and his writing if the external poem were to be successful in teaching and motivating the poet's audience. The readers, he thought, would be more delighted, hence more inspired, by ideals expressed in well-written verse. Moreover, part of the poet's responsibility was to inspire the writers in his audience to become better writers; these could only be taught and delighted by what was well done.

Jonson tried faithfully to be the serious poet who went beyond "meere Elocution." He studied, he wrote prolifically, he sought to keep his language concise and simple, he translated the works of time-proven authorities. Among his poems we find those which are easily classified as the "imitation" he demanded of himself. His epigrams quite often may be traced to a theme, a strategy, an attitude in those of Martial. He translated two epigrams of Martial and adapted many others to his own use. An epigram on Inigo Jones is modeled after Martial, xii. 61, and others of Martial, vii. 20 and viii. 35, furnished ideas for Jonson's epigrams on Brayne-hardie (xvi) and on Giles and Joan (xlii), the married pair who always agree—in their opinion of each other. From the prose of Philostratus Jonson took thoughts with which he composed "Song. To Celia" (Forrest, ix). Catullus furnished the inspiration for two love lyrics, Forrest v and vi. Jonson imitated both the form and content of his masters. A Jacobean humanist, he brought to his day a keener revelation of the literature of Greek and Roman writers.

"Practice" in the technical art of poetry was another of his own doctrines which Jonson followed. It is easy to observe
his imitation of models. Though Drummond said he "cursed Petrarch," Jonson wrote at least five sonnets, one of them to Lady Wroth (Under-wood, xxviii). In this particular one, he says of his exercise in sonneteering,

I that have beene a lover, and could shew it,  
Though not in these, in rithmes not wholly dumbe,  
Since I escribe your Sonnets, am become  
A better lover, and much better Poet.

Also, Herford and Simpson point out the probably early composition of Jonson's ode to the Earl of Desmond. In it we observe the young Jonson "exercising"; it contains a rare homage to another artist:

. . . Arise Invention,  
Wake, and put on the wings of Pindars Muse,  
To towre with my intention  
High, as his mind, that doth advance  
Her upright head, above the reach of Chance;  
Or the times envie.

He worked uncompromisingly for strict meter and artfully constructed poems. Even when dealing with a subject as broad as the whole "false world," Jonson unified his poem; he does this in "To the World" (Forrest, iiiii) by speaking in the person of a "Gentle-woman, vertuous and noble," keeping his direction as he leads the reader to a conclusion which glorifies personal fortitude. He often used the conceits familiar to his day to aid in tightening his poem's structure; in Epigrammes, lxxvi, he tells Lady Bedford about dreaming of an ideal creature which he then discovers to be her, the addressee—a pattern which enables Jonson to construct his poem in an orderly, complete manner and maintain the reader's interest to the end. It is true that many of his poems seem the result of copying exercises and the strained labor of conscious art. His
rendering of some of Horace's lyrics yields such disappointing rhymes as "yoke" and "ope" (Under-wood, lxxxvii). Any stanza from "Epithalamion" (Under-wood, lxxv) may illustrate the contrived quality often criticized:

See, how with Roses, and with Lillies shine,
   (Lillies and Roses, Flowers of either Sexes)
The bright Brides paths, embelish'd more then thine
   With light of love, this Paire doth intertexe!
     Stay, see the Virgins sow,
   (Where she shall goe)
The Emblemes of their way.
0, now thou smil'st, faire Sun, and shin'st, as thou wouldst stay!

His exercise, however, in many different types of poetic composition made other poets aware of the choice open to them. When mentioned in a study of English literature's history, Jonson is credited with significant work with the heroic couplet, with satire, with epigrams, epistles, and typical forms of his day, with epitaphs and with the Pindaric ode. Even "On the Famous Voyage" (Epigrannes, cxxxiii), whatever else must or must not be said about it, is admittedly a toying with the epic style.

In several of Jonson's religious poems his poetic struggles are clearly visible. "The Sinners Sacrifice" (Under-wood, i) reveals Jonson's intellectual labor as he strives to attain disciplined dignity in such lines as the following:

0, behold me right,
   And take compassion on my grievous plight.
What odour can be, then a heart contrite,
   To thee more sweet?
   ...
Eternall God the Sonne, who not denyd'st
To take our nature; becam'st man, and dyd'st,
To pay our debts, upon thy Crosse, and cryd'st,
   All's done in me.
These lines display the compactness, the strict meter and rhyme, the intentional simplicity Jonson would have worked, rewriting and revising, to achieve; he had advised all poets to distrust the first easy flow of an inspiration. His experimentation with brief line length and terseness may be seen in "A Hymne to God the Father" (Under-wood, ii):

Sinne, Death, and Hell,
His glorious Name
Quite overcame,
Yet I rebell,
And slight the same.

But, I'le come in,
Before my losse
Me farther tosse,
As sure to win
Under his Crosse.

The last poem in The Forrest, however, is religious verse which exhibits the simplicity of language and frank straightforwardness of thought he always sought:

Good, and great God, can I not thinke of thee,
But it must, straight, my melancholy bee?
Is it interpreted in me disease,
That, laden with my sinnes, I seeke for ease?
0, be thou witnesse, that the reynes dost know,
And hearts of all, if I be sad for show,
And judge me after: if I dare pretend
To ought but grace, or ayme at other end.

His dedication to perfected intellectual technique had value for the literature of a time when, he said, poetry was filled with "peccant humours" and "the Age is growne so tender of her fame, as she calles all writings Aspersions" (Discoveries, p. 633). Even those who scorned his methods were brought, by his thundering criticism, face to face with faults prevalent among their own number. Like the
"correct" drama which won him respect if not popularity in the Elizabethan theatre, his poetry was based upon standards of the classics revered by all, but wholeheartedly and seriously applied by none so much as by Jonson. For his followers, the Tribe of Ben, he experimented from poem to poem with form and current classical themes, hoping to provide them good patterns. The classic themes he used included the claim for immortality of poetry and its subjects, inevitable death, pleasure in wine, carpe diem, disappointment in mistresses, flowers' and women's beauty. He probably discussed with his "Sons" the attitudes of the civilized society they represented and tried to teach them his formulas for the poetic means of stimulating that civilization's betterment. Jonson constantly expounded the responsibilities of the poetical profession—responsibilities deriving from the Sidnean conception of poetry as the making, through verse intellectually perfect according to the classical standards of rhetoric, logic, and "poesy," a more civilized society. It is not to be understood by this discussion that Jonson was free of the faults which he so deplored; critics have been quick to point out Jonson's lack of success in many realms. But he, to a greater extent than his contemporaries, set before himself an ideal which he tried to attain. The standards he preached and sought to practice influenced others.

Past critical study of Jonson's poetry has seldom delved deeper than the mere form and style of Jonson's written words. His lines have usually been cited as examples of his classicism, his scholarship, his "ruggedness," or his "plain" didacticism. A "faculty in verse" was not, however, the most important concern of
this "true" poet. The whole purpose of "proper embattaling," Jonson said, was to communicate "the exact knowledge of all vertues." Just as Sidney had maintained that poetry sets forth virtue, Jonson stated that in "expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony," (Discoveries, p. 635) poetry must have truth at its heart. The primary requirement of the poet, then, was that he recognize and present those ideals of attitude and behavior which should be the goals of his society. Though he felt compelled to restore order, form, and discipline to the English poetry of his time, his basic conception of poetry placed a greater value on what a poem said than on the way in which that subject was expressed. He thought that the Faerie Queene should be read for its "matter" even though he did not approve of Spenser's craftsmanship. Walton has pointed out that in the dedication of his translation of De Oratore Jonson reversed Cicero's order of qualities, making moral strength more important than literary skill. Jonson knew that the vast majority of a poem's readers may benefit, not from the fine example of a poetic form, but from the "notable image" "feigned" therein, if it at all shines through. It was only if he had "prayed, unfortunately, any one, that doth not deserve; or, if all answered not, in all numbers, the pictures I have made of them" that he then hoped secondarily that his poems would at least be thought "no ill pieces."

One critic, R. S. Walker, does mention, however, an "ideal of beauty" which he says is expressed in some of the lyrics; but before passing quickly on to Jonson's influence on other poets, he states that his "lyric at its best... seems to express nothing
beyond or behind itself, but, in its final state, to be itself the idea which it expresses. . . . It is not what it says, but what it is that matters." Jonson would certainly have disagreed with the last statement. The ideal of beauty, as Walker calls it, can "be" a poem—a beautiful lyric; in "Song. To Celia" Jonson may be said to have technically achieved an ideally beautiful lyric, one which can teach other writers by its example. It does, however, express in its original context—the play Volpone—that which is beyond itself; it aids in depicting the character of that lecherous figure. Walker finds a limited number of "best" lyrics due to the fact that he considers only one aspect of Jonson's idea of poetry. Here we hope to apply to Jonson's poems the other and more important criteria which his conception of poetry set forth. Jonson meant to express virtues in all his poems—ideals of moral integrity, gracious living, sincerity, as well as of poetic form; these a poem cannot always "be"; these it may have to "say," imply, or simply hope to inspire. Determined to cure the infected will of man, he planned to set forth "what should be," writing of what should not be only to insure "that the good are warn'd not to bee such; and the ill to leave to bee such" (Discoveries, p. 634).

From his vast reading and from his own experience with life, Jonson gathered his ideals, his "exact knowledge of all vertues." From the golden age of the classics came the moral ideals which he felt could teach his readers and better English culture. The sophistication, urbanity, and genteel conception of honor which he discovered in the age of Horace furnished the virtues he wanted to instill in his own times. As Walker has written, Jonson was a
classicist in a very special sense; he absorbed the tone and attitude of the educated men who wrote during the age of antiquity. The sunny, well-balanced, courteously formal atmosphere of the ancients guided Jonson to emulate that society's calm search for truth. Jonson did not dream of a world of lush beauty and feeling; lines like these from "To Sir Robert Wroth" --

Along'st the curled woods, and painted meades,
Through which a serpent river leads
To some coole, courteous shade, which he calls his,
And makes sleepe softer then it is!
Or, if thou list the night in watch to breake,
A-bed canst heare the loud stag speake --

are very rare. Rather, he built with classical materials a "cool, paved terrace," where the reader may intellectually gain new appreciation of dignity, courtesy, honor, self-discipline, manliness. It is as if Jonson saw in Augustan civilization the state from which infected mankind fell or the world of perfection "embattled" in the "Song" from The New Inne:

It was a beauty that I saw
So pure, so perfect, as the frame
Of all the universe was lame,
To that one figure, could I draw,
Or give least line of it a law!

Jonson was more completely involved in the ideas of the classics than those of his day and later who may be called "classicists" only in the form and style of their writing.

The virtues which Jonson determined to "make" were not deduced solely from this calm thoughtfulness of ancient Rome, however. He found in his own environment examples of the good he wished to foster and the evil he hoped to erase from his society.
He called upon his own observations of life in the army, the theatre, the court, the tavern, the country, and the streets of London. In the Sidney family and estate Jonson found current symbols of the honor and nobility the Augustans represented. In his sovereign the patriotic Jonson determined to find all the signs of rightful royalty that would have adorned the emperor of Rome. In the women he deemed worthy his trust and admiration, Jonson saw the grace and virtue he desired all women to possess. In his friends and fellow scholars he recognized the loyalty, courage, and hearty seriousness which characterized the society he idealized. The most civilized culture he had discovered in his reading and the most noble men he knew at first hand furnished Jonson with the virtues he wished to render "lov'd." He desired, through poetry, to create in his England a society which combined the best of ancient Rome and the best of contemporary London.

In his poems of commendation Jonson made his conception of poetry most effective. Therein, the subject, whether a Penshurst or a Wroth, is an ideal place or person; the subject represents the virtue he wished to communicate. The poem's structure and style could be made ideally sound, interesting, and attractive; all readers could be stimulated to "take that goodnes in hande" which is evident in that poem. Jonson chose those he could honestly praise and set them forth as examples to his readers. Ladies he admired, not for outward beauty, but for character and virtue, are often presented as paragons of goodness. In the poem to Lady Bedford (Epigrammes, lxxvi), he creates the

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kinde of creature I could most desire,  
To honor, serve, and love; as Poets use.  
I meant to make her faire, and free, and wise,  
... 
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I meant shee should be curteous, facile, sweet,  
Hating that solemne vice of greatnesse, pride;  
I meant each softest vertue, there should meet,  
• • • *
Onely a learned, and a manly soule  
I purpos'd her; that should with even powers,  
The rock, the spindle, and the sheeres controule  
Of destinie, and spin her owne free houres.  
Such when I meant to faine, and wish'd to see,  
My Muse bad, Bedford write, and that was shee.

While ladies of Penshurst and of Durance receive praise as being chaste, unaffected matrons, Lady Aubigny also is honored for her "even and unaltered gait," unchanged by her high position. Jonson sought to "make" many Venetia Digbys among his readers when he wrote "Elegie on my Muse":

All Nobilitie  
(But pride, that schisme of incivilitie)  
She had, and it became her!  
• • • *
She had a mind as calme, as she was faire;  
• ••  
And by the awfull manage of her Eye  
She swaid all bus'nesse in the Familie!  
• • • *
She was, in one, a many parts of life;  
A tender Mother, a discreeter Wife,  
A solemne Mistresse, and so good a Friend,  
So charitable, to religious end,  
In all her petite actions, so devote,  
As her whole life was now become one note  
Of pietie, and private holinesse.

The elegy on Lady Jane Pawlet lists other characteristics which Jonson wished his feminine readers to cultivate:

Her Sweetnesse, Softnesse, her faire Courtesie,  
Her wary guardes, her wise simplicitie,  
Were like a ring of Vertues, 'bout her set,  
And pietie the Center, where all met.

In an epigram against smallpox, Jonson instructs women to be like
the noble lady whose concern was not the painting of her face, but
the purity of her character. He gives us many "notable images"
with regard to personal integrity and virtuous womanhood.

There are more poems which seek, by praising an interesting
example of strong character and genuine merit, to impress upon the
minds of the gentlemen what all of them "should be." Jonson had a
very practical view of morality and of self-improvement, as seen
in "An Epistle to Sir Edward Sackville":

I have the lyst of mine owne faults to know,
Looke to and cure; Hee's not a man hath none,
But like to be, that every day mends one,
And feeles it;

Men have beene great, but never good by chance,
Or on the sudden. It were strange that he
Who was this Morning such a one, should be
Sydney e're night!

The poems attempt to furnish readers with a list of virtues to
acquire and of evils to avoid. Jonson suggests personal excellence
in everything from physical prowess to spiritual strength. In the
young Earl of Newcastle Jonson saw vigor and virility; he praises
his fencing and his horsemanship (Underwood, liii and lix). Selden
is used (Underwood, xiv) to picture the character of a scholarly
gentleman:

Which Grace shall I make love to first? your skill,
Or faith in things? or is't your wealth and will
T' instruct and teach? or your unweary'd paine
Of Gathering? Bountie! in pouring out againe?
What fables have you vext! What truth redeem'd!

During the poverty-stricken years near the end of his life, Jonson
wrote poems concerning generosity and gratitude. One of his most
interesting poems of this sort is "An Epistle to Sir Edward
Sacvile" in appreciation of a gift. From its lines we learn much about his ideas of honor.

And though my fortune humble me, to take
The smallest courtesies with thankes, I make
Yet choyce from whom I take them.

"Gifts and thankes," he writes, "should have one cheerefull face."
The classical ideals of justice and temperance appear also in the poem:

I only am alow'd
My wonder, why the taking a Clownes purse,
Or robbing the poore Market-folkes should nurse
Such a religious horroour in the brests
Of our Towne Gallantry! or why there rests
Such worship due to kicking of a Punc!

Or feats of darknesse acted in Mid-Sun,
And told of with more Licence then th'were done!
Sure there is Misterie in it, I not know,
That men such reverence to such actions show!

I thought that Fortitude had beeene a meane
'Twixt feare and rashnesse: not a lust obscene,
Or appetite of offending, but a skill,
Or Science of discerning Good and Ill.

Vincent Corbet, praised for a mind "pure, and neatly kept," is extolled by Jonson because "his very manners taught t'amend"; no doubt our poet admired that in Corbet which he wished to attain himself:

No stubbornnesse so stiffe, nor folly
To licence ever was so light,
As twice to trespasse in his sight,
His lookes would so correct it, when
It chid the vice, yet not the Men.

Jonson very seldom "chid the vice" alone, as his satirical and condemnatory poems show.
It appears that Jonson did keep his criterion always before him in most of his work. He constantly drew on what he considered his "exact knowledge of all vertues." The lines to the Lord Treasurer (Underwood, lxxvii) "imitate" what "should be" true of a statesman:

But you I know, my Lord; and know you can
   Discerne betweene a Statue, and a Man;
Can doe the things that Statues doe deserve,
   And act the businesse, which they paint, or carve.
What you have studied are the arts of life;
   To compose men, and manners.

The next lines, however, aim at making the governed the grateful citizens they "should be," and the kings the seekers of peace that they "should be":

   make the Nations know
      What worlds of blessings to good Kings they owe:
   And mightiest Monarchs feele what large increase
      Of sweets, and safeties, they possesse by Peace.

Lucius Cary wrote a tribute to Jonson that must have greatly pleased the poet who conceived of poetry as a maker of what should be:

   he did our youth to noble actions raise,
      Hoping the meed of his immortal praise.28

One has only to pass from poem to poem to observe the poet's efforts to raise mankind to noble action by displaying virtue. He congratulated and revered in his poetry those he considered to be worthy examples for the rest of his readers and, to Selden, wrote that he had

   prais'd some names too much,
      But 'twas with purpose to have made them such.
Poems of condemnation also furnished Jonson with a means of curing the ills of mankind. In his epigrams, he teaches that those who have a true knowledge of virtue will scorn the hypocritical, the affected, the court lady who has no time for pregnancy, the lecherous, and many such offenders who constantly deface society. Of Brayne-hardie's swearing he writes, "He that dares damne himselfe dares more then fight." "On Don Surly" is a good example of Jonson's use of censure to make clear what is virtuous and what is not. Aspiring to the name of a great man, Surly speaks in a certain manner, reads verses, has "tympanies of businesse, in his face," forgets names gracefully, argues, and can "discourse in oathes." Surly laughs at ill-made clothes and is proud of his own; "he drinkes to no man." Jonson ends his condemnation of Surly with the lines:

He keepes anothers wife, which is a spice
Of solemne greatnesse. And he dares, at dice,
Blaspheme god, greatly. Or some poore hinde beat,
That breathes in his dogs way: and this is great.
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.

Here Jonson succeeded in poetry by which "the good are warn'd not to bee such; and the ill to leave to bee such."

Of course, much of Jonson's poetry is simple statement of what he considers a virtuous idea, rather than compliment, satire, and condemnation. The didacticism of the classics is seen in Epigrammes, lxxx:

The ports of death are sinnes; of life, good deeds;
Through which, our merit leads us to our meeds.
How wilfull blind is he then, that would stray,
And hath it, in his powers, to make his way!
In "Of Death" he writes,

He that fears death, or mournes it, in the just,
Shewes of the resurrection little trust.

The ideas of such poems represent attitudes and realizations which Jonson felt to be prerequisite for gracious living. The courteous tone of his non-satirical poetry depicts the atmosphere he wished to generate in his society. There were particular aspects of society's behavior which he often commented on. For example, in "An Epistle to a friend" (Under-wood, xxxvii) he speaks disapprovingly of

Countrie-neighbours, that commit
Their vice of loving for a Christmassse fit;
Which is indeed but friendship of the spit.

He sought to make in "Penshurst" the ideal country neighbors:

But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne:
And no one empty-handed, to salute
Thy lord, and lady, though they have no sute.

Moreover, in "Wroth" we are given the ideal attitude toward these neighbors:

The rout of rurall folke come thronging in,
(Their rudenesse then is thought no sinne)
Thy noblest spouse affords them welcome grace;
And the great Heroes, of her race,
Sit mixt with losse of state, or reverence.
Freedome doth with degree dispense.

Whether Jonson used praise, blame, or simple statement, it is clear that he hoped to communicate to his readers his "knowledge of all vertues."
As noted earlier, Jonson believed that the poet must possess not only a skill in verse and this knowledge of virtues needed by society, but also the ability to render those virtues "lov'd," and their "Contraries... hated, by his proper embattaling them." The criterion by which he himself judged his talent and its product, then, lies in the latter requirement. A poet is gifted and successful when he can evoke from his readers the appropriate response—agreement with him as to what is admirable and what is not and motivation to attain to the one and to avoid the other. Jonson's aim was to create virtue in his readers by counseling them toward more honorable attitudes and actions. We have already examined those traits and practices which Jonson thought to be virtues his society should adopt. Now we must look more closely at his "embattaling" of these—at his skill in "rendering" these ideals and the contrary evils loved and hated. By his own conception of poetry we are led to measure his success by his power of persuasion.

Jonson was aware that a convincing teacher, a counselor, must have a thorough understanding of the people to whom he is appealing. In Neptune's Triumph he writes:

COOKE: Were you ever a Cooke?  
POET: A Cooke? no surely.  
COOKE: Then you can be no Poet; for a good Poet differs nothing at all from a Master-Cooke. Either Art is the wisdom of the Mind... I am by my place, to know how to please the palates of the guests; so, you, are to know the palate of the times: study the severall tastes.

The entire body of his poetry testifies to Jonson's knowledge of the society he wished to counsel toward virtue. That Jonson was
in a position to know the general tastes in contemporary England is a well-known fact. Until the end of his life he enjoyed the company of many people. He was a part of social gatherings at court, where he often wrote the masques which highlighted crowded occasions; he met on quiet country estates with scholars and lovers of books like Selden, Cotton, Drummond, and Camden; he knew the coarse language of the tavern, the ribaldry of the groundlings; he knew the attitudes of men who had been his fellow-inmates in London jails; he knew well women like Lucy, Countess of Bedford, and like his estranged wife, "a shrew, but honest." We have only to see the variety of social levels referred to in his poetry to recognize his familiarity with the people he sought to civilize therein. He composed epigrams to his "booke-seller," to King James, to "alchymists," to critics, to parliament, to John Donne, to Camden, to John Roe, to Francis Beaumont, to countesses, to earls, to Lord-Treasurers; he made subjects of spies, affected courtiers and women, a child actor, playwrights, a reformed gamester, gypsies, knaves, and many more.

The fact that Jonson was well acquainted with the people for whom his poetry was written enabled him to be the counselor-poet he wanted to be. Because he knew the "severall tastes," he could employ the tactics of rhetoric successfully in winning the confidence of his audience and in motivating them. He knew what would delight them so that he might teach them; he knew how to make their minds pliable to his arguments so that he might inspire them to live up to particular ideals. The fact that he was made poet-laureate and that he was the best known poet in England during his last active decade proves that he did reach his audience. He
purposefully manipulated his titles, manner of address, tone, intimacy, public interest, and subjects in such a way as to gain the attention and acceptance of his readers.

The titles of his poems denote Jonson's effort to cater to the public tastes he knew so well. Besides showing his knowledge of a wide range of people and practices familiar to his public, the titles also establish a point of view. He used "to" when he addressed the poem to his subject and "on" when he addressed it to the reader about that subject. Jonson generally is thought of as a writer of impersonal poems and justly so. He believed that a poem is an objective, external work resulting from an artist's "crafte." He did not, however, sacrifice the nearness to his reader that could be gained by occasional personalizing. There is no question that Jonson was well aware that addressing his poem to a particular person gave it added interest for the rest of his audience; they read what a famous poet was writing to another famous person. While many of these poems are quite personal and warm in tone, they also denote an awareness that others than the addressee are to read the lines. It is worth mentioning, also, that Jonson often entitled his poems by type: "A Nymphs Passion," "A Hymne," "A Celebration of Charis in ten Lyrick Peeces," "An Epigram To the small Poxe," "An Epitaph (On Elizabeth Chute)," "An Ode. To himselfe." The marked observation of poetic form evidences his concern with correctness and scholarship, and his pride in having brought to satisfactory completion that which he set out to create. Jonson might well have been composing the titles and exercises in a textbook for young poets. The simplicity and organization of his works, combined with his easy repetition of
such headings as "To the same," "Epode," and "Song," built up a kind of understanding between poet and reader, especially when the reader was another poet.

After introducing, by his titles, those to whom his poems are addressed, Jonson made the respectful or scornful manner of the poem an example for his readers to follow. Jonson hoped that his manner and attitude toward the one spoken to—and the virtues praised, or deplored as being absent—would be copied; admiration and respect for people who were praiseworthy and scorn for the way of life led by those he condemned were a part of the outlook he hoped to create in his society. When writing to respected ladies, always those above him in station, he combined exclamatory compliment with what seems honest admiration, as in "To Mary Lady Wroth":

How well, faire crowne of your faire sexe, might hee,  
That but the twi-light of your sprite did see,  
And noted for what flesh such soules were fram'd,  
Know you to be a SYDNEY, thou un-nam'd?  
And, being nam'd, how little doth that name  
Need any Muses praise to give it fame?

Another example of this courtly manner appears in the opening lines of a poem to Lucy, Countess of Bedford (Epigrammes, xciii):

Lucy, you brightnesse of our sphære, who are  
Life of the Muses day, their morning-starr!  
If workes (not th'authors) their owne grace should looke,  
Whose poemes would not wish to be your booke?

Those to whom he wrote courteously were those he deemed examples of virtue; Lady Bedford was a circumspect, as well as high-ranking lady of Queen Anne's court, and Lady Wroth was, by all, considered worthy her place in the Sidney line. By addressing such as these in lofty phrases, Jonson hoped to instill in other women the de-
sired "love" for the virtues that merited them poetic praise. Jonson would lead his readers toward disrespect, however, for such women as "Fine Lady Would-bee" (Epigrammes, lxiii):

Fine Madame Would-bee, wherefore should you feare,  
That love to make so well, a child to beare?  
The world reputes you barren: but I know  
Your 'pothecarie, and his drug sayes no.

The poems addressed to men whom Jonson admired and wished, by his tone, to point up as examples to his public, are less flamboyant than those to the ladies; they are courteously formal, yet sometimes warmly done. There is a virile, matter-of-fact quality in the poems written to men of equal rank with him. In "To Edward Allen" (Epigrammes, lxxxix) he writes,

How can so great example dye in mee,  
That, Allen, I should pause to publish thee?  
Weare this renowne. 'Tis just, that who did give  
So many Poets life, by one should live.

Jonson writes a poem (Epigrammes, lxxxvi) to Sir Henry Goodyere, one in which we see the sort of sincere homage he often paid to his friends:

When I would know thee Goodyere, my thought lookes  
Upon thy wel-made choise of friends, and bookes;  
Then doe I love thee, and behold thy ends  
In making thy friends bookes, and thy bookes friends:  
Now, I must give thy life, and deed, the voice  
Attending such a studie, such a choice.  
Where, though 't be love, that to thy praise doth move,  
It was a knowledge, that begat that love.

That Jonson intended his poems to create love for virtue and scorn for vices, rather than to win him favor in high places, is shown
when he calls honest soldiers the "strength of my Countrey" (Epigrammes, cviii), yet addresses to the court generally such poems as "To Fine Grand" (Epigrammes, lxxiii), which opens,

What is't, fine Grand, makes thee my friendship flye,
Or take an Epigramme so fearefully:
As't were a challenge, or a borrowers letter?
The world must know your greatnesse is my debter,

and "To Court-ling" (Epigrammes, lxxii), with its lines,

'Tis not thy judgement breeds the prejudice,
Thy person only, Courtling, is the vice.

The common man in the army merited more respect in Jonson's poems than did the court hypocrites who so flagrantly abused the moral values in which Jonson believed.

As a poet, Jonson sought to portray the courtesy in which he believed. Such lines as

The Wisdome, Madam, of your private Life,
Wherewith this while you live a widow'd wife

from Under-wood, l, are, indeed, an example of the measured gentility he idealized. When he wrote the first lines of "To William Camden" (Epigrammes, xiii),

Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe
All that I am in arts, all that I know,

he used a reverence in direct contrast to the sort of attitude chosen for "To Groome Ideot" (Epigrammes, lviii):

Ideot, last night, I pray'd thee but forbeare
To reade my verses; now I must to heare:
For offering, with thy smiles, my wit to grace,
Thy ignorance still laughs in the wrong place.
To those like Camden, Salisbury, Selden—those he deemed superior to himself in age, worthy station, or wisdom—Jonson spoke in a humble manner which lost all trace of the biting, deriding style with which he censured others. These complimentary poems often feature lines less broken, smoother and more graceful, like these in *Epigrams*, lxiii:

> Who can consider thy right courses run,  
> With what thy vertue on the times hath won,  
> And not thy fortune; who can cleerely see  
> The judgement of the king so shine in thee;  
> But I am glad to see that time survive,  
> Where merit is not sepulcher'd alive,  
> Where good mens vertues them to honors bring,  
> And not to dangers.

Thus we see that Jonson tried to present in a skillful, attractive manner the virtues his poems extolled.

Jonson also used what Geoffrey Walton calls a "characteristic tone and civilized quality" to create the ideal atmosphere with respect to the particular subject at hand. The coarse, crude language of Jonson which has so bothered Swinburne and others is used to render very pointedly the "contraries" of virtue "hated." In "On the Famous Voyage" Jonson is dealing with a dirty section of London, with its "whores," its smells, its filth. "On Gut" (*Epigrams*, cxviii) merely sheds on depravity and lustful gluttony the light by which Jonson believed civilized people should view it; it is disgusting:

> Gut eates all day, and lechers all the night,  
> So all his meate he tasteth over, twice:  
> And, striving so to double his delight,  
> He makes himselfe a thorough-fare of vice.  
> Thus, in his belly, can he change a sin,  
> Lust it comes out, that gluttony went in.
When he wished to warn the good against unchastity, he used the terms that portray it in its ugliest sense. On the other hand, when he wished to guide his reader into admiration for a particular kind of life, he used the language, tone, and pictures which make his subject attractive and "lov'd." For this reason "To Penshurst" is one of his most famous poems; it paints such an attractive picture that it has continued to please readers and to make the noble life of the Penshurst owners, the Sidneys, deeply appealing and sought after. One of the most perceptive articles written about Jonson deals with this poem; it is Paul M. Cubeta's "A Jonsonian Ideal: 'To Penshurst'." Therein he concentrates mainly on the poet's borrowing from the classics of Martial and Horace, both in expressed images and ideology which Jonson brought to his poem from his absorbed classical attitudes. A "painted partrich... willing to be kill'd" and fish which "runne into thy net" were not new inventions by Jonson, but he used these threads which ran through works of the Roman poets to weave an atmosphere which motivates the reader to emulate the virtuous lives which merited such gracious living. Mr. Cubeta's article can add much to our appreciation of Jonson's purpose as a poet.

A poem often linked with "To Penshurst" is "To Sir Robert Wroth," a graceful description of tranquil life at Durance. The first half of the poem is quite similar to the second epode of Horace, though much of it, for instance, "crowne-plate," is definitely Jonson's own. The tone of the poem, which praises the steady life of the country as opposed to that of the city and court, is one of calm wisdom and an almost philosophical resignation to
the transitory nature of all but the simple, commonplace pleasures of life. There is emphasis on outdoor sport, with lines like

Or hawking at the river or the bush,
Or shooting at the greedie thrush,
Thou dost with some delight the day out-weare,
Although the coldest of the yeere!

We sense the sophisticated, calm quality which underlies the advice, "let others watch," "let this man sweat," "let thousands more goe flatter vice." The counselor-poet states that man can "make thine owne content" by striving to "live long innocent" of such vain show as court masques, of such fury as war, of such ruthless existence as lawyers and place-seekers know. The last lines of "To the World" (Forrest, iv),

Nor for my peace will I goe farre,
As wandrers doe, that still doe rome,
But make my strengths, such as they are,
Here in my bosome, and at home,

show the same Stoicism of tone with which "Wroth" ends:

God wisheth, none should wracke on a strange shelve:
To him, man's dearer, then t'himselfe.
And, howsoever we may thinke things sweet,
He always gives what he knowes meet;
Which who can use is happy: Such be thou.

Jonson's tone varies, of course, as the occasion of his poem varies. There is a less serious vein in Jonson's classic tone; though his struggle to be clear in meaning sometimes hindered his efforts at terse wit, the blunt quality of "On Poet-ape" and many others discloses humor as well as a straightforwardness akin to the gentler "Wroth" poem. "An Execration upon Vulcan" delightfully
blends the mature resignation of "Wroth" with the quick frankness of the epigrams:

And why to me this, thou lame Lord of fire,  
What had I done that might call on thine ire?  
Or urge thy Greedie flame, thus to devour  
So many my Yeares-labours in an houre?  
I ne're attempted, Vulcan, 'gainst thy life;  
Nor made least line of love to thy loose Wife.

The changing line length and bouncy effect of the poem to William Sidney on his birthday testify to Jonson's desire to fit his tone to the instance; in the poem, however, he makes it clear that though Sidney might celebrate, he must live up to his name by his own merit. Jonson was always the teacher, whether he applied his wit to gentle wisdom or to smart satire. In "On Don Surly" the keen observations, the dry mocking quality, the neat construction of the poem join to make it delightful and interesting; this poem is his satire at its best. Underlying each extreme of tone, however, is the firmness of stroke which prompted him to speak of "loughing heards, and solide hoofes," and the classical thought which led to the imitation of Martial, "Inviting a Friend to Supper" (Epigrammes, ci). Here he began by honoring his guest-to-be:

To night, grave sir, both my poore house, and I  
Doe equally desire your companie:  
Not that we thinke us worthy such a ghest,  
But that your worth will dignifie our feast,  
With those that come;

the humble tone here is similar to that used to honor Selden, when Jonson pointed up his respect for the scholar by confessing, "every Muse hath err'd, and mine not least." Jonson goes on to
promise his guest good food, rich "Canary-wine," readings of Virgil, and "no Pooly', or Parrot by" (government spies):

Nor shall our cups make any guiltie men:
    But, at our parting, we will be, as when
We innocently met. No simple word,
    That shall be utter'd at our mirthful boord,
Shall make us sad next morning.

This poem pictures the sort of gathering at which Jonson did indeed wish to see the men of his poems, the educated, important, honest men he called his friends and praised in his poetry. Had Jonson always written about this level of his society, he would have had no cause to drop his civilized tone and disciplined quality to deal with coarseness, as he does in some of his poems. Because he felt compelled to change what was crude and uncivilized, however, he applied himself to various methods of reaching and curing the infected will of his public. The general tone and quality of his verse would, he hoped, separate for his reader good from evil, making the one far more attractive than the other.

Whatever his tone, Jonson sought to attain what orators call "reality" or "nearness" to the audience; it amounts to an intimacy which makes the reader read. Jonson often spoke directly to his readers, establishing an imperative personal contact, as in Under-wood, xvi:

Reader, stay,  
And if I had no more to say, 
But here doth lie, till the last Day, 
All that is left of Philip Gray, 
It might thy patience richly pay,

or in "To the Reader,"
This Figure, that thou here seest put,
   It was for gentle Shakespeare cut;
Wherein the Graver had a strife
   With Nature, to out-doo the life.

When speaking directly to a friend instead of to his reader, he made his conversation all the more personally aimed at that person in order to increase the "in" feeling of his unaddressed readers. The intimacy of the opening lines of "To Sir Thomas Roe" (Epigrammes, xcvi),

Thou hast begun well, Roe, which stand well too,
   And I know nothing more thou hast to doo,

and of "An Ode" (Under-wood, xxvi),

   High-spirited friend,
I send nor Balmes, nor Cor'sives to your wound,
   Your fate hath found
A gentler, and more agile hand, to tend
The Cure of that, which is but corporall,

comes through to the reader. Jonson, in appealing to his reader to imitate his own attitudes, would seem to side with his audience. Some of the very ones who laughed at the lines of "On English Mounsieur" and "On some-thing that walkes some-where" may have, on second thought, realized that they were his target. Other tactics used by Jonson to reach his audience include his parenthetical asides which seem especially added for the particular reader. He must have known that he had an audience in those who found the poetry of Donne and other metaphysical writers difficult. He at times wrote in pointed contrast to their style, using explanatory comments like the following from Forrest, xl:
Which to effect (since no brest is so sure,
Or safe, but shee'll procure
Some way of entrance) we must plant a guard
Of thoughts to watch, and ward
At th'eye and eare (the ports unto the minde)
That no strange, or unkinde
Object arrive there, but the heart (our spie)
Give knowledge instantly.

"Penshurst" yields two examples of "person-to-person" asides:

And I not faine to sit (as some, this day,
At great mens tables) and yet dine away,

and, when the king came unexpectedly,

What (great, I will not say, but) sodayne cheare
Did'st thou, then, make 'hem!

His keen observation constantly furnished him with valuable
points of contact with the audience he wished to persuade to love
virtue. His epigrams, both commendatory and condemnatory, were on
people with whom his readers were familiar, or whom they at least
recognized. He capitalized on topical allusions. The complaint
about dining at, and yet away from, great men's tables was some­
thing his readers knew about. The four vehement lines in "To Sir
Robert Wroth" on masques would have been of great interest to the
many who were acquainted with him as an outstanding writer of such
pieces. To his court audience he wrote a poem concerning the 1630
decree that landed gentry live on their estates and not in London.
He did not pass up references to the well-known "whores," Kate
Arden and Bess Broughton, the "French disease," or particular vices
commonly observed. In "Execration upon Vulcan" he refers to many
fires and instances of which his audience would have had knowledge.
He used the death of Sir Henry Morison, and his friendship with Sir Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, statesman and scholar, as an opportunity to show an example of a Pindaric ode (introduced for the first time into English), a well-rounded life, and notable friendship. Jonson even used references to his own "mountaine belly, and my rockie face" in the poem which mentions his walking tour to Scotland. His public feuds with Inigo Jones, John Marston, and others always supplied flavor with which to entice an audience.

Once he had a reader's attention, Jonson knew that he must maintain interest if that reader were to respond to his poetry. To this end he used unexpected observations, well-turned phrases, and humor. Many of these methods have already been noted in quotations from his poems. One example of his surprising humor is found in the lines of *Epigrammes*, lxxxiii:

> To put out the word, whore, thou do'st me woo,
> Throughout my booke. 'Troth put out woman too.

The division of his name between stanzas in the Pindaric ode is typical of his constant play on words:

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Hee leap'd the present age,
Possest with holy rage,
To see that bright eternall Day:  
Of which we Priests, and Poets say
Such truths, as we expect for happy men,
And there he lives with memorie; and Ben

Jonson, who sung this of him, e're he went
Himselfe to rest. . . .
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He divides the word "twilight" in the same poem to give it another meaning:
Where it were friendships schisme,  
(Were not his Lucius long with us to tarry)  
To separate these twi- 
Lights, the Dioscuri.

The crude pun which ends "On the Famous Voyage,"

And I could wish for their eterniz'd sakes,  
My Muse had plough'd with his, that sun A-JAX,  
is another example of his word-play; according to Hollander, "a jakes" refers to Sir John Harington's Metamorphoses of Ajax, in which the first flush toilet is described, and is thus the pronunciation for the Greek hero's name here. Puns are found throughout Jonson's verse. He also wrote acrostics. Much of his ability in this realm of intellectual play was gained by his reading of the witty, urbane Roman writers. His desire for brevity and succinct verse, as opposed to the decoration of early Renaissance poetry, caused him to work for apt phrases and simple, rapid sentences. This fact made his work easy and interesting reading for a large segment of English society and no doubt partially accounted for Jonson's reputation as the outstanding poet of his day.

The "I" in most of Jonson's poetry is either the secular priest advising his listeners, or it is an editorial "we." Often he spoke as if he were the public, utilizing what is the "band-wagon" technique. The counselor-poet expected the reader to follow his advice or to join his attitude as if it were the popular thing to do. He tried to fulfill his duty by writing poetry for the public occasions he felt merited opinion or thought--and poetry. As a guide for his public, the poet Jonson demonstrated in his countless
occasional poems the proper attitude toward all sorts of public concerns and events to which they had to respond. His subjects were timely ones: the king's birthday, the prince's christening, the queen's "lying-in," a court wedding, the publication of Shakespeare's Folio and many other works whose authors he saluted, the deaths of famous people, the new appointments to high positions, even the dedication of the king's new wine cellar. In these poems he tried to make what he considered the virtuous outlook appealing. In "On My First Sonne" he imitates the right attitude of a father whose child had died; Jonson's son died during the plague of 1603, a loss which would have been well understood by many readers. Teaching the virtuous character of a father facing such grief, he writes:

O, could I loose all father, now. For why
Will man lament the state he should envie?
To have so soone scap'd worlds, and fleshes rage,
And, if no other miserie, yet age?
Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye
Ben. Jonson his best piece of poetrie.

In "On my first Daughter" he says,

Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due,
It makes the father, lesse, to rue.

In his poem to Camden, after stating his personal debt, he calls him the one "to whom my countrey owes the great renowne, and name wherewith shee goes." He goes on to give, not to Camden, but to his countrymen the reasons why England is so indebted to this scholar. The "Execration upon Vulcan" sets an example for those who meet personal disaster. In the delicate "Epitaph on S P"
Jonson realized, more than at any other time perhaps, his position as sympathetic spokesman for the public; he directs the grief of those "that read this little storie" to the conclusion that the child actor died by mistake,

But, being so much too good for earth,  
Heaven vowes to keepe him.

As an example of the many poems recognizing special events in the lives of people Jonson knew, we may examine lines from the epigram to Lord Weston celebrating his being made Earle of Portland:

Looke up, thou seed of envie, and still bring  
Thy faint, and narrow eyes, to reade the King  
In his great Actions: view whom his large hand  
Hath rais'd to be the Port unto his Land!  
Weston! That waking man! that Eye of State!  
Who seldome sleepe{s}! whom bad men only hate!

One of the best examples of Jonson's serving as a poetic spokesman for all England, hoping to draw along with him in righteous viewpoint the entire citizenry, is "To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author Mr. William Shakespeare" ("Ungathered Verse," xxvi). The musing in the first lines arouses interest in Ben Jonson's problem:

While I confesse thy writings to be such,  
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.  
'Tis true, and all mens suffrage. But these wayes  
Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise.

What are the proper "paths" by which he should praise Shakespeare? Seriously concerned about his responsibility, that of writing the frontal verse for the dead author's Folio, Jonson considered those factions which might in any way have misconstrued his lines on an
old rival—Ignorance, Affection, or crafty Malice. Jonson's failure to make his classical dramas as successful as Shakespeare's plays and Jonson's ideas about his work (like that in Discoveries which suggested that Shakespeare should have "blotted" more lines) had no doubt become known. He was aware that this poem would be read with exceptional scrutiny. He declares that he will write his poem in belief that

thou art proofe against them, and indeed
Above th'ill fortune of them, or the need.
I, therefore, will begin.

The last line is typical of Jonson's plain manner and straightforwardness. He makes use of the publicized question of a fit resting place for Shakespeare:

My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
A little further, to make thee a roome:
   Thou art a Moniment, without a tombe,
   . . .
   That I not mixe thee so, my braine excuses;
   I meant with great, but disproportion'd Muses:
   For, if I thought my judgement were of yeares,
   I should commit thee surely with thy peeres.

He neatly leads up to a comparison of Shakespeare with his contemporaries. At this point, Jonson's determination to maintain truth in his poetry, no matter how complimentary he may wish to be, forced him to insert the fact that his subject "hadst small Latine, and less Greeke." The note is not a jarring one, however, for it serves as an introduction to the lines which rank Shakespeare with "Aeschilus, Euripides, and Sophocles," and Seneca in tragedy. As to comedy, Jonson makes a very keen observation for one who viewed Shakespeare's work from so short a distance:
Or, when thy Sockes were on,
Leave thee alone, for the comparison
Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

Speaking for the audiences of England, whose favorite Shakespeare had been, he writes in proud nationalism,

Triumph, my Britaine, thou hast one to showe,
To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!

Shakespeare dressed Nature, he declares, in lines "so richly spun" that all the ancient dramatists are now "antiquated." Shakespeare had created new

flights upon the bankes of Thames,
That so did take Eliza, and our James!

As a poet writing to a literary audience also, Jonson credited Shakespeare with the "art" necessary "to write a living line." In the lines "For a good Poet's made, as well as borne" and

In his well-torned, and true-filed lines:
In each of which, he seemes to shake a Lance,
As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance,

there is conscious avowal of Jonson's own conception of poetry. The play on Shakespeare's name ("shake a Lance") is typical of Jonson. Here he emphasizes that a good poet must make himself good by working at his art and by purposefully fighting ignorance and other "diseases of the Soule." His ideas about writing are clearly stated also in the lines,

Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage.
So often did Jonson himself "with rage" chide his readers; he was more successful, however, when he forced his pen along lines aimed at "influence," hence pleasing, not chiding, the reader.

In inheriting from Sidney and the classical writers the idea that poetry must persuade and teach truth by delighting its readers at the same time, Jonson fell heir to an inherent problem in the rhetoric which he thought the poet must use to motivate the reader to love virtue and hate evil. We have seen that he used many rhetorical principles and devices for establishing contact with his reading audience. It is the reader's response to that contact, however, which finally determines the success of the poet's work. Two things directly affect that response: the respect of the reader for the poet and the ability of the poem to maintain interest and stimulate the reader. These two things can be opposed to each other. To gain the respect of his audience, the poet must be known as honest and truthful, else they may apply to him the old adage, "What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

On the other hand, to captivate a reader and move him from what he is to something better, the poet is to an extent forced to use "showy" devices and rhetorical trickery: winning the confidence of the reader before slowly revealing the ulterior motive. Just as television commercials become a "joke" because we know from the start that they are simply trying to persuade us to do something, so the poet who constantly tries to sell his reader a decorated "bill of goods" is in danger of eventual distrust or disinterest on the part of his readers. Readers may recognize the appetizing dressing as mere sham and then doubt even the diet of truth that should lie underneath. On the other hand, as the poet is more
frank and non-decorative in his appeal, so is he often less successful in moving his audience toward that which he sincerely believes to be good for them. There results the plain and tedious prose statement often complained of in Jonson's poems.

Jonson declared in "The Poet to the Painter,"

I can but write:
A Poet hath no more but black and white,
Ne knowes he flatt'ring colours, or false.

He told Drummond that he had rather be "styled honest" than anything else and called flattery the "common Poets shame." In "To My Muse" (Epigrammes, lxv), Jonson rebukes his poetry for having "betray'd me to a worthlesse lord" and calls that a happier "muse" which

shall instruct my after thoughts to write
Things manly, and not smelling parasite.

His dedication was to simple, unadorned language as opposed to "false Baytes" with which others courted the "greedie Frie."

Jonson felt that all writers should be concerned with truthful thought and honest conveyance of that thought; being of "erected wit," the poet should not lower his standards to those of readers looking merely for enjoyment. He placed honesty, an ideal he wished to create in his readers, above the techniques and tricks of his trade, considering those decorations a cheap bid for public approval. Because he saw the poet as a kind of priest and philosopher, a counselor for the people, and a spokesman, he sought to maintain a personal reputation for poetic integrity. Though the poet could draw his material from imagination, from the "Zodiack
of his owne wit," he had to treat his subject truthfully. We have noted that even in the commendatory poem to the dead Shakespeare, Jonson dared to mention his lack of classical scholarship, which to Jonson would have seemed a more serious failing than the poem indicates. He determined never to sacrifice technical perfection, truth, and uplifting ideas for mere entertaining and applause. In an epigram to John Donne he wrote,

My title's seal'd. Those that for claps doe write,
    Let pul'nees, porters, players praise delight,
    And, till they burst, their backs, like asses load:
    A man should seeke great glorie, and not broad.

That he had yearned for popular appeal from time to time may be seen in his not infrequent experiments in typically Elizabethan conceits and styles or in metaphysical writing. "A Song" (Underwood, iv) is one such as many other poets of his day might have written:

Oh doe not wanton with those eyes,
    Lest I be sick with seeing;
Nor cast them downe, but let them rise,
    Lest shame destroy their being:
O, be not angry with those fires,
    For then their threats will kill me.

But, as Jonson writes to Selden, he did not believe that facility with words and forms made one the best poet:

Lesse shall I for the Art or dressing care,
    Truth, and the Graces best, when naked are.

Just as he learned, however, that well-designed, clearly worded poetry did not automatically delight the reader, Jonson also learned that sincerity did not necessarily win over to virtue
an audience. Readers have not always been willing to take the "medicine" without the cherry flavoring. Jonson had had ample opportunity to study the "severall tastes"; if he failed to capitalize on that fact completely, it was due to his own refusal to understand and approach that which he could in no way condone. He writes in "An Ode To himselfe,"

'Twere simple fury still thyselfe to waste
On such as have no taste.

... ...
'Tis crowne enough to vertue still, her owne applause.

When he wanted to "please the palate," he was well equipped for doing so; while preparing a "medicine of Cherries" often was too great a tax on his patience, it was never too great a task for his talent. In Discoveries (p. 634) he says,

Is it such an inexpiable crime in Poets, to taxe vices generally. . . . If men may by no meanes write freely, or speake truth, but when it offends not; Why doe Physicians cure with sharpe medicines, or corrosives? Is not the same equally lawfull in the cure of the minde, that is in the cure of the body?

Throughout his life the public often responded less well to his works than to those of poets he considered his inferiors both in honorable intent and in "skill, or Crafte of making."

When we observe Jonson's intentional use of simplicity and frankness (colloquialism, appropriate language--coarse or high-flung, revelations like the "great, I will not say" of "Penshurst") as a means of appeal, we are also persuaded that, for the most part, he remained dedicated to truthfulness with his readers. He wrote openly of his temptations to flatter, of his irritation, of his
disgust, of his poverty, of his success, of his admiration. That his poetry sometimes fails to arouse an answering response in his reader is seldom because he appears frivolous or suspiciously pleasing in manner. Possibly his epigrams on King James and later poems to King Charles may strike us as such, but we must remember that he was both fulfilling his responsibility as a classical poet (his first epigram to James exercises Martial's praise for his king) and as a patriotic Englishman whose ideals lay in a world of wise monarchy, noble gentry, and temperate countrymen. Jonson's difficulty lay not in maintaining a reputation of sincerity (his adherence to what he thought was right earned him the adjective "obstinate"), but in motivating his readers to the response he desired. It is a well-known fact that no audience responds positively to that which constantly remonstrates, condemns, or bluntly reminds them to be better people. To obtain the result he wished, Ben Jonson would have had to court his readers as well as tell them what was wrong with them. Sometimes he did this; often he did not. Moving as he did among people in many social circles and becoming increasingly aware of the immorality of the court, Jonson, typically idealistic, allowed himself to become bitter and disillusioned. The looseness and vanity of most of the women he knew drew from him such bitter attacks as to label him a woman-hater, despite the beautiful tributes he composed for those he truly respected. In many instances, Jonson shows contempt for the very audience who will read his poem; he speaks of their "vulgar taste." He writes in disgust of courtiers who took bribes to plead for thieves. It no doubt hurt Jonson that on several occasions those he had honored in his poems later proved to be guilty of accepting
bribes, or even, in one case, of murder. He wanted to set forth examples of virtue, but he saw less and less which he could honestly portray as such. If he could not honestly praise, he blamed—and often refused to "please the palate" while doing so. For this reason, Jonson's power of persuasion was not always as successful as it might have been.

We have discussed Jonson's conception of poetry as a making of virtue; we have sought to determine how he measured up to his own criteria for a poet. We have examined the sources of the ideals he hoped to create in the society he served, and we have noted outright mention of these in his poems. We have observed his methods of persuasively placing those ideals before society. Lastly, we have noted the problem that an impatient man like Jonson encountered in seeking to "erect" his "infected" readers. It is quite clear that Jonson's poetry does attempt to live up to his conception of verse. There are beautiful examples of his success at rendering virtue "loved" by delighting his readers at the same time that he teaches them. A schooled and exacting poet, Jonson knew and used the means of winning his audience and of teaching them. Only occasionally must we witness his struggle to overcome his displeasure and to restrain the bitter dose of "cure-all" he wished to pour forth. Those were the times when he had to speak honestly of things as they were, not as they should have been.

"An Epistle Answering to one that asked to be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben" shows the tirade of censure he could loose on London when he considered those "I have no portion in." The situation of the poem might have offered a promising one for creating the wise, tempered atmosphere which he learned from the classics and for
suggesting the traits a young man should strive for, but his desire to say something he truly felt overruled his concern for delicately motivating his audience. The epistle to Lady Aubigny yields an even more confused amassing of virtues and vices. He starts out to picture that which is good, but is often overcome by the desire to scold opposing evil. In his better poems of condemnation we have seen that Jonson exercised restraint enough to concoct captivating and pert, if not pretty, messages for his readers. At other times, though, we can only assume that the dam broke and let his disgust run rampant on the page. It is then that Ben Jonson is too rugged, too straightforward, too blunt and harsh for the public taste which he must, to succeed, delight in some measure.

Jonson's conception of poetry, expressed so well by Sidney, demanded that verse move men to "take goodness in hande." Because he believed that the poet is thus a "maker" of virtue, all his poems are, in one way or another, a comment on morality and "goodness." It is time that we cease to look upon Jonson as merely a classicist, even though he took from the classics his ideas of virtue in poetry and made his poems conform to those ideas. Indeed, even when he "practiced," it was for the purpose of making himself a more ideal poet. But he was perhaps the most consistently pragmatic poet of all; his verse was never idly composed, never created for the sake of versifying alone. He was not setting examples of poetic excellence only; he was furnishing his fellow Englishmen with written imitations of perfection in character, in gracious living, in sincerity and wisdom of attitude. Quite clearly he made it known that he wished to make virtue loved and its contraries hated. This conception of poetry naturally demanded that he have an effect on people, that
he motivate toward goodness those whom he could reach, those whose failings he observed about him, those for whose society he was a spokesman. He therefore concentrated his efforts on his immediate readers, those he knew needed teaching. In this respect, Jonson was definitely a man of his own time. To read his poetry intelligently, one must not only know current language and topical allusions; one must know the character of the people, real people, who fill his poems. In a way, Jonson's poetry is esoteric. Perhaps it is for this reason that we now find only form and classicism in his poetry to be interesting and praiseworthy to us. The celebrities, common faults, popular aspirations, and general attitudes of the combined Hollywood, New York, and Washington of his day and nation fail to arouse a response in us now.

By the standards by which he created his poems, however, his poetry is eminently successful; in his own times it was perceptive propaganda for the further civilizing of society and the refining of culture—propaganda that was widely read and, no doubt, influential enough to merit its author a place of honor then. Since the time of his writing, his poetry has made itself felt from time to time as a maker of the classically oriented literature which Jonson idealized and meant to popularize; the literature he wished to influence has sustained a memorable response to his teachings. Moreover, though the people his poems were primarily meant to affect are dead now, there lies within the pages of his poetry a civilization which he created out of ideal virtues and peopled with noble characters—in hopes that it would spring to life at any period in history. Because he made a deep impression
on his own time, because he has had a lasting influence on poetry, and because he left a body of poetry consistently dedicated to his lofty conception of the true poet, Ben Jonson does and will continue to appear in our studies of English poetry.
FOOTNOTES


4 Herford and Simpson, I, 113.


7 Johnston, p. 161.


9 Hollander, p. 10.

10 Herford and Simpson, I, 143.


12 Hollander, p. 12.


14 Hollander, p. 18.

15 Herford and Simpson, VIII, 617. All quotations from Discoveries are from this text.


18 Abrams, p. 16.


20 Albert Feuillerat, ed., *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney, III* (Cambridge, 1925), 4. All quotations from Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* are from this text.


23 Johnston, p. 6.

24 Herford and Simpson, II, 399.


26 Walker, p. 192.

27 Walker, p. 183.

28 Chute, p. 314.

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