BEN JONSON'S HAPPIER LIFE: A RECONSIDERATION OF UTOPIA

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BEN JONSON'S "HAPPIER LIFE": A RECONSIDERATION OF UTOPIA

An Abstract

Presented to

the Graduate Council of

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Charlotte Beckley Warren

August, 1977

ABSTRACT

The theme of "the happier life" is central to Ben Jonson's poetry, although the poet's concept of that life changes in the course of his writing career. This change is particularly evident in the epigrams, the type of poem Jonson wrote most frequently and continuously. In the epigrams of his first-published work, the poet's concept of the "happier" life is actually that of the "happiest" life, a Utopian existence patterned after Golden Age ideals. Through the vigorous satire of "Epigrammes," Jonson strives to reform Jacobean society along the lines of his own lofty vision of life as it should be.

In later work, Jonson's last-published epigrams, the "happiest" life has become the "happier" life. Although he does not abandon the ideals he set forth in earlier work, the poet has altered his view. In the epigrams of "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry," Jonson presents a simpler, more limited picture of what man can hope to attain on earth; the poems reflect a re-evaluation of man's best existence. A study of "the happier life" concept as it appears in epigrams taken from Jonson's early and late work illustrates the change which did take place in Jonson's vision of life.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Charlotte Beckley Warren entitled "Ben Jonson's 'Happier Life': A Reconsideration of Utopia." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Don W. Der
Major Professor
(by Edward E. Irwin)

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

D Richard Covington
Second Committee Member

Lewis C. Tatham
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate Council:

William H. Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

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Chapter I

The Argument

In discussing Ben Jonson's theory of literary art, Elisabeth Woodbridge makes a surprising statement about the man himself:

> . . . his (Jonson's) was a nature that hardened young. He did, indeed, pass through a 'romantic' period, but once he had reached his characteristic standpoint--from the date, that is, of Every Man Out of His Humour--he is stationary. From that time to the culmination of his art in Volpone . . . his power grows, but his attitude is unchanged; while in the last twenty years of his life, marked as they were by unpopularity and failure both social and professional, he clings with dogged tenacity to his time-worn maxims, flinging them in the teeth of his public sometimes with arrogant defiance, sometimes with an affectation of philosophical indifference that deceives no one. But except for this sharper note of bitterness, the critical utterances of his latest prologues and epilogues and those of his earliest might have been written on the same day--in 'these forty years' he has not moved an inch. . . . [1]

When Every Man Out of His Humour was first performed (the date cited above as the point at which Jonson's attitude became fixed), the year was 1600, and Jonson was twenty-eight years old. Ahead of him were the years of his greatest success as a dramatist, his long and often disillusioning experience at the court of James I, the deaths of his three children, the fire that destroyed much of his painstaking work, public ridicule, poverty, paralysis, and finally death in 1637. Appearing concurrently with these and the other events of these years was

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[1] Elisabeth Woodbridge, V Studies in Jonson's Comedy (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 6 - originally published in 1898; reprinted in 1966.

the writing: thirteen additional plays, thirty-one masques, and several hundred poems. In other words, after 1600 Jonson had thirty-seven more years of life, most of it vigorous and productive; and any assertion that the poet's attitude toward his art—or toward anything else—changed not one whit in thirty-seven years implies that he was either simpleton or fool. But Jonson was neither; his was one of the greatest minds of the Renaissance; therefore, Ms. Woodbridge's sweeping statement must be explained by either noting that she was talking about Jonson's attitude toward literary art only, not his work, life, or anything else (and that there is no relationship among these); or that Ms. Woodbridge's study, published as it was in 1898, did not have the advantage of later scholarship.

Such an explanation will not work, however, because J. G. Nichols, in a recent (1969) study of Jonson's poems, makes essentially the same assertion. Nichols doubts that Jonson's later poems can be accurately dated and then remarks,

> . . . it is not helpful to consider Jonson's poems in order of composition, even when this is known, for there is no sense of a gradual development either of attitude or style. [2]

Although Nichols and Ms. Woodbridge are discussing Jonson's attitude as it appears in different areas of his work—toward literary art and toward whatever he considered in his poems—they both seem to have arrived at the same conclusion: Jonson's attitude became firmly fixed early in his literary career and remained unaltered throughout the

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[2] J. G. Nichols, The Poetry of Ben Jonson (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), p. 98.

remainder of his life. Since the writing of the poems—and probably the critical comments—spanned Jonson's entire adult life, it is but little exaggeration to say that, in the view of Nichols and Ms. Woodbridge, Jonson became a finished product upon reaching adulthood and his literary efforts thereafter were but replications of the same "time-worn maxims" in the same, one assumes, "time-worn" style.

It is interesting that Jonson's attitude as reflected in his critical studies and poems is described as static when no such description is applied concerning the plays. For years critics of Jonson's plays have felt that the plays, considered in chronological sequence, outlined the rise and fall of Jonson's talent and, correspondingly, his changing attitudes toward life and his craft. For example, in _Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy_, Jonas A. Barish describes Jonson's attitude as growing more tolerant as he approached the climax of his career in _Bartholomew Fair_,[3] 1614:

> The satiric tendency to insist on the gulf between things as they are and things as they ought to be wanes noticeably in the course of his (Jonson's) career, and his attitude becomes more and more that of the man whose recognition of folly in himself prevents him from judging it too harshly in others.[4]

In _Vision and Judgment in Ben Jonson's Comedies_, G. B. Jackson takes a

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[3]J. A. Bryant, Jr., _The Compassionate Satirist: Ben Jonson and His Imperfect World_ (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1972) p. 3. Different critics place the high point of Jonson's dramatic achievement at various points, and Bryant is here using Barish's placement.

[4]Jonas A. Barish, _Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy_ (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, 1967), p. 146.

contrasting view of Jonson's attitude. He sees Jonson as becoming increasingly harsh as the succeeding years brought disillusionment:

> Inability to accept imperfection is a distinguishing characteristic of those who love too well, whether the beloved is a human being or the world of human beings. In such cases the lover has a choice of adhering to the vision or compromising with the reality before him. Jonson adhered to the vision . . . In order to maintain the cosmic optimism of his vision, Jonson was forced to judge more and more harshly of the world around him.[5]

That Jonson's attitude was modified even further in his last plays was clear to Robert N. Knoll:

> Jonson was no longer capable of the fierce satiric temper of the great comedies after his illness of 1628, and the plays that he wrote thereafter are marked by a gentleness unlike anything in his earlier work . . . As different as he and Shakespeare generally are, at the last both wrote varieties of romance, plays whose judgments are softened by age, or wisdom, or fatigue.[6]

Although the opinions presented here differ as to the direction Jonson's mind took in the course of his career, they are alike in one important respect: each notes a change in Jonson's attitude through the years.

This purported change in Jonson's attitude toward life and human frailty, as reflected in his plays, has been the subject of some scrutiny in recent years. In his study of Jonson's comedies, J.

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[5]Gabriele B. Jackson, *Vision and Judgment in Ben Jonson's Comedies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 163.

[6]Robert N. Knoll, *Ben Jonson's Plays: An Introduction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 181.

A. Bryant, Jr. gives careful attention to changes in the tone of the dramatic works, changes which, in Bryant's view, chart Jonson's growth or movement toward self-knowledge as he "tried on" through his characters the various robes which the public comic poet must don--moralist, literary critic, satirist--in order to fulfill his commitment to his audience, his society. The study also gives particularly lucid treatment to Jonson's vision of life as it appears in the early plays, the plays of his mature genius, and the last plays.[7]

With such compelling evidence of change in Jonson's attitude through the years, as reflected in the plays, it seems strange that, to date, no one has noted a similar movement in the non-dramatic poems. It is entirely possible, however, that evidence of change in Jonson's attitude, seen so readily in the plays, could exist and yet go undetected in the poems because the poems themselves have been so little studied. J. G. Nichols begins his study of Jonson's poems by remarking facetiously that Jonson's place as a poet is secure "in the ranks of the great unread,"[8] and Nichols in no way exaggerates the neglect. In the more than three hundred years since his death, Jonson's work as a whole has been frequently published, but what critical acclaim has been accorded him has been limited to the plays, especially such well-known comic satires as Every Man in His Humour and Volpone. The greatest study of Jonson's work has come in this century with the monumental

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[7]Bryant, p. 2; p. 3; p. 5; pp. 18-19.

[8]Nichols, p. 1.

Oxford edition published by Herford and Simpson in 1952, [9] an eleven-volume work of which substantial parts of only two volumes are devoted to the non-dramatic poems. Perhaps because of this edition and the highly-regarded essay published by T. S. Eliot in 1920, [10] more critical attention has been afforded Jonson in recent years than in all the centuries since his death. Yet, even though Jonson's reputation seems to be growing, attention has focused almost exclusively on his plays. Until very recently, 1945 to be precise, in the fine critical study by G. Burke Johnston, [11] Jonson has been largely ignored as a poet, as distinct from a playwright. Since the pioneering efforts of Johnston, however, two other fine volumes have given careful attention to aspects of Jonson's poems: Wesley Trimpi's _Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style_, 1962, [12] and J. G. Nichols' _The Poetry of Ben Jonson_, 1969. [13] But criticism of Jonson's poems is just beginning, and these three valuable studies have been necessarily limited to categorizing and illuminating various broad aspects of the work: Johnston studies Jonson's characteristic subject matter in the poems; Trimpi, the classical roots

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[9] Charles H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, ed., _Ben Jonson_ (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925-1952), 11 volumes. This is the standard edition of Ben Jonson's work.

[10] Thomas S. Eliot, "Ben Jonson" in _Selected Essays_ ed. by Jonas A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 14-23.

[11] Burke Johnston, _Ben Jonson: Poet_ (New York: Octagon Books 1945, 1970).

[12] Wesley Trimpi, _Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style_ (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

[13] Nichols.

of Jonson's "plain style"; and Nichols, the types of poetry Jonson wrote—odes, lyrics, occasional poems. Thus far, no study of Jonson's poems gives attention to the changes in Jonson's attitude which are apparently so evident in the plays.

Such an oversight is unfortunate, for if such change exists, it is likely to be as evident in the poems as in the plays—perhaps more evident. Jonson wrote poems all his life, even when he had given up writing plays and masques. Written over a longer period, the poems are more likely to reflect any changes in Jonson's views. Moreover, unlike the plays, the poems possess a journal-like quality, relating as they do to Jonson's attitude toward a variety of events, both public and private, which had bearing on his life. The poems record the crowning of a king, the prestigious deeds of Elizabethan "greats," the reprehensible conduct of others; they tell of the deaths of Jonson's daughter, of his first-born son, and of others close to him or simply known to him; they describe state affairs and private dinners; they record Jonson's assessment of other writers' talents and his reaction to criticism of his. In sum, the poems are the result of a life-long labor, a chronicle of events and reactions which reveal, more often than the plays, the author's privately-held beliefs, in addition to those which he chose to expose to public gaze. Taken _in toto_, Jonson's poems should reflect not only his attitudes but also any changes which those attitudes undergo in the course of years.

Furthermore, the attitudes expressed in the poems are more likely to be honest reflections of the poet's thought than are those of the plays simply because of the more personal nature of poetry. While it is true that Jonson's poems are "public" in the sense of having been published, they are still less "public" than the plays written expressly for performances at the Globe or Blackfriars. The poems are personal recollections as well as public utterances, and they have a private as well as a public life. Of course, Elizabethan poets had an abiding sense of themselves as public men and of their writings as public utterances, [14] and it is therefore possible that Jonson, mindful of his readers' approbations, occasionally modified his stance to bolster or maintain his "image," whatever he conceived it to be, or to exemplify for his readers the right-minded response to events. But Jonson was never one to pander to public taste. Speaking his mind with regularity—and frequent asperity [15]—Jonson was often rude to his audiences [16] and openly critical of contemporary writers. [17] Jonson did not often subscribe to the public view of anything, and there is therefore little reason to suspect that he disguised his true feelings in order to curry public favor. The poems are also more likely than the plays to be honest—or at least complete—reflections of the poet's thought because, while all his plays were set before the public during his lifetime, all the poems were not. Although Jonson arranged the

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[14] J. B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1959, 1965), p. 32.

[15] Bryant, p. 2.

[16] Bamborough, p. 11.

[17] Jonson's disparagement of much contemporary writing appears so frequently throughout his work that to cite any single instance is misleading. But perhaps the earliest public statement of such criticism appears in his preface to Volpone, 1608, quoted in this study on p. 14.

bulk of his poetry for publication, a number of other poems were published posthumously and might have expressed attitudes or opinions which he would have withheld from public gaze had he decided what was to be published and what was not.

As it was, however, so far as is known, every poem that Jonson wrote sooner or later made its way to the printer and thence to the public forum.[18] Jonson produced nearly three hundred poems during his career, and through this great body of work the author's mind is revealed and his attitudes opened to scrutiny. Therefore, the poems are a valuable—perhaps the most valuable—source of information available for a study of Ben Jonson's attitudes and any changes those attitudes undergo.

This paper is such a study, although a very limited one. To examine the poet's attitude in a variety of areas—art, morality, politics, for example—or to discuss all of the non-dramatic poems would be far too great a task for so short a study. But since all attitudes probably spring from one source—one's attitude toward life—and the type of poem Jonson wrote most often and throughout his career is the epigram, a study of the poet's attitude toward life as it appears in certain representative epigrams taken from his early and late work should provide enough information to make some general observations.

An examination of Jonson's attitude toward life is an integral part of the larger purpose of this study: to illustrate the changing

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[18]With the exception of those poems in manuscript which were lost when Jonson's lodgings burned in 1623.

nature of Jonson's vision of life. While the terms "vision of life" and "attitude toward life" are often used interchangeably, the two are not precisely synonymous: "vision" refers to one's conception of life; "attitude," to one's reaction to what he sees in that vision. Yet even though this distinction must be maintained, the two ideas are inexorably yoked and must be considered together. One's vision of life directly impels his attitude toward life; therefore, a change in vision is faithfully reflected by a change in attitude, and a change in attitude is indicative of a change in vision. It is clear from an examination of Jonson's epigrams that the poet's attitude and therefore vision—or vision and therefore attitide—do undergo change. It is also evident that this change corresponds to a change in time; i.e., the vision of life which appears in Jonson's early work is different from that which appears in late work. In the poems as in the plays, Jonson's vision of life changes in the course of time.

Perhaps the plainest evidence of this change in Jonson's vision is derived from a study of his changing concept of the best or "happiest" life for man. The basis for Jonson's "happiest life" concept is essential to understanding his work in the poems and is discussed in a later chapter, but it is useful here to note the outlines of the poet's thought. In early work, Jonson's concept of "the happiest life" is indeed Utopian—the idealist's dream of life in a perfect owrld, a society based on Golden Age principles. Infused with this concept, the poet has a two-fold vision of life—the <u>ideal</u> as opposed to the <u>real</u>. Given this vision and struck by the vast gulf between what <u>should be</u> and what <u>is</u> in the life of his contemporaries, the poet is moved to indignation and to vigourous efforts at reform. His method is satire, and his vehicle, the epigrams.

In "Epigrammes" Jonson presents the two poles of his vision: he points out and denounces the vice and corruption around him, the lamentable "underside of the Golden Age dream" [19]; and he eulogizes what virtue and goodness he finds in his society, the Golden Age dream in all its glory. Thus in "Epigrammes" Jonson presents, respectively, the black and white, thesis and antithesis, of his vision and in this juxtaposition, delineates his concept of "the happiest life."

In later work, however, this "happiest" life becomes the "happier" life, and the difference in degree points up the fact that the ideal-real poles of Jonson's vision are no longer so far apart. In the epigrams of "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry," the poet does not abandon the deals he set forth in earlier work, but he has altered his view. In such poems as "Martial. Epigram XLVII," the poet presents, not a Utopian existence, but a simpler, more-limited picture of what man can hope to attain on earth—"the happier life."

This modification of vision, this re-evaluation of man's best existence does appear in the poems, and it is evident therefore that the poet experienced a change of mind, if not of heart. It is also evident, therefore, that the characteristic stance often attributed to Jonson cannot, strictly speaking, be accurately assigned. The nature that "hardened young," the attitude that never developed, the fiery,

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[19] Edward B. Partridge, The Broken Compass (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 234.

satiric temper that never softened—all these descriptions are but half-truths, inadequate in a discussion of the poet's vision/concept/attitude; and an examination of several epigrams taken from his early and late work illustrates this point.

Chapter II

"The Happiest Life"

In 1616, Ben Jonson presented seventeenth-century English society with his first-published work, a collection of plays and poems entitled The Workes of Benjamin Jonson. In publishing this work, Jonson startled and amused his society with two important innovations. First, he had caused his plays to be printed in a folio edition when hitherto they had circulated only in the less expensive and less prestigious quartos; [20] secondly, he had affixed the honorable title of "Workes" to a collection of plays, [21] previously regarded as mere acting vehicles or entertainment. [22] What followed is a well-known story: critics, courtiers, and fellow-playwrights jeered at the benighted and presumptuous "ayres" of the man who "thought he had written literature when he had onely written plays." [23] Scarcely before the laughter died out, however some of those same playwrights were scurrying to the printer with their own plays, and shortly thereafter, numerous editions of other playwrights'

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[20] G. Burke Johnston, ed., The Poems of Ben Jonson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. xxxi.

[21] Arthur Sale, "Introduction to Every Man in His Humour." From Every Man In His Humour, ed. Arthur Sale (University Tutorial Press, 1949), pp. x-xviii. Rpt. in Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Jonas A. Barish (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 75-92.

[22] Bamborough, p. 10.

[23] Herford and Simpson, XI, p. 509.

"Workes" adorned the bookstalls. Vogue became tradition and Ben Jonson had triumphed.[24]

But Jonson had won a battle, not the war—the war that had been going on for some time between Jonson, on one side, and his contemporary playwrights and almost the whole of Jacobean audiences on the other. It was an uneven struggle, but this victory was significant; the poet was gaining ground. Himself a master dramatist and probably the most learned scholar of his day, Jonson held high standards for drama and had long deplored what he saw as the deficiencies of his colleagues. As he said in the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Volpone, 1608,

> If my muses be true to me, I shall raise the despised head of poetry again, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags wherewith the Times have adulterated her form, restore her to her primitive habit, feature, and majesty, and render her worthy to be embraced and kist of all the great and master-spirits of our world.[25]

Jonson's statement citing the salubrity of the "primitive" or classical model was, as well, a sharp attack on his contemporaries—on the playwrights, for the "rotten and base rags" which they passed off as plays, and, by implication, on the audiences, for their poor taste in being content with such adulterations—excepting, or course, those "master-spirits" who would at last be satisfied. Not surprisingly, Jonson's criticism brought antagonism[26] but little reform. His action in publishing the plays, however, brought immediate and far-reaching results:

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[24]Johnston, The Poems of Ben Jonson, p. 11.

[25]Herford and Simpson, V, p. 21.

[26]Bamborough, p. 13.

(1) through seeing the plays in the larger, more expensively and carefully-prepared folios, the public was led to assess plays as literature and, by extension, to regard playwrights as literary men—a status more elevated than any they had previously held; [27] and (2) responding to this new circumstance, playwrights were led to follow Jonson's example of meticulousness by exercising greater care in preparing their texts for printing, [28] lest their "Workes" not live up to the title. Through these and other "ripple" effects of his folio edition, Jonson achieved much of the theater reform he sought. While he was never able to transmit completely his loftier vision of dramatic art, he did, nevertheless, establish a standard and a system through which the quality of plays was improved—then and thereafter. Jonson's accomplishment is a significant one in the history of English drama, and had he done nothing else, he would still be remembered for this one contribution.

But he intended to do much more. In all the furor over the publication of the plays, it is likely that few paid much attention to the non-dramatic poems also contained in the Workes. Anyone who did read the poems, however, must have seen immediately that Jonson's efforts at reform were by no means limited to the stage. Always concerned with both Art and Man, [29] Jonson intended that his writing should serve a correspondingly two-fold purpose: to illustrate by artistic pre-

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[27] Bamborough, pp. 13-14.

[28] Bamborough, p. 11.

[29] Nichols, p. 60; p. 64.

cision how literature should be formed and to dictate by content how men should live. Apparently, there was much in contemporary life that Jonson objected to, that he thought corrupt and debilitating; and it was to the correction of manners and morals, as well as the elevation of art, that Jonson addressed the poems. Just as through the publication of the plays, Jonson intended to reform the stage and restore it to its rightful place in the Arts, so he intended, through the content of the poems, to reform his society and restore it to its "former greatness." For Jonson had a dream of the Arts and Man as they had once existed in a former, better time; and it is according to this great ideal that Jonson sought to re-order his world, Jacobean society.

When Jonson longs for a "former greatness," he is following in a very old tradition. Utopian literature traces its ancestry back at least as far as 750 B. C. to the writings of Hesiod, who postulated the existence of "Five Ages" beginning with the first and most glorious time in man's history, the "Golden Age," and tracing man's gradual decline thereafter through the succeeding four eras.[30] Since Hesiod's time, legions of writers have expressed similar views of man's "progress," loss, and for some, hope: Plato, Vergil, More, Montaigne, Bacon, Bellamy, and in the twentieth-century, science-fiction writers. It seems that in all ages, men have supposed the existence of a former "golden" time, lamented its loss, and sought to create in their own time and place a new and better world patterned after the old, the

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[30]Philip P. Wiener, ed., Dictionary of the History of Ideas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), Vol. III, p. 578.

lost paradise.

These ideal worlds have taken various forms as they emerged from the pens of various writers: Plato's ideal society is governed by philosophers; Bacon's society is led by scientists; Rousseau's perfect world turns back to the "innocent goodness" of the "noble savage." The dream has taken many forms as it conformed to the vision of men shaped by their times; but they (the dreams) are all forms, apparently, of that most ubiquitous Utopian model of all, the "Golden Age"—a legendary or idealized time in the pre-history of mankind. [31]

It is this idea of the Golden Age that particularly appealed to the mind of Renaissance writers, [32] Jonson among them, and the motif appeared frequently in their writings through allusion or direct description. These writers, like those before and after them, conceived the Golden Age according to their own specifications and, in so doing, deviated from the original. In antiquity, classical writers, expressing "the disapproval of the civilized with civilization," [33] looked back to a simpler, better time than their own busy, sophisticated present. In such a former time—when men lived in peace and plenty under the rule of Chronos [34]—life was bucolic and simple, they believed,

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[31] P. H. Epps, "The Golden Age," Classical Journal, 29 (1933-1934), pp. 292-93.

[32] Partridge, p. 234.

[33] Harry Levin, "The Golden Age and the Renaissance" in Literary Views: Critical and Historical Essays, ed. Carrol Camden (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press for William Marsh Rice University, 1964), p. 1.

[34] Wiener, p. 578.

a time when men dwelt with nature and without the encumbering and corrupting luxuries of later ages—even, in Juvenal's approving view, without the strenuous mental activity required for education and the cultivation of the arts.[35] As described further by these writers--Theocritus, Ovid, Vergil—the Golden Age was a time in man's pre-history before agriculture, industry, commerce, and private property destroyed the good life.[36] In such a time men

> loved one another without knowing that to do so was benevolence; they were honest and leal-hearted without knowing it was loyalty; they employed the services of one another without thinking they were receiving or conferring any gift.[37]

And the earth yielded her fruits spontaneously without the "wound" of plow.[38] Such was the child-like simplicity of life in the Golden Age according to the classical model.

The classical concept of the Golden Age remained unchanged throughout the Middle Ages, for "from the last of the ancients . . . to the first of the moderns," references to the Golden Age are virtually non-existent.[39] But when the concept emerged in the literature of the English Renaissance, it had taken on some new features. Renaissance

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[35]Wiener, p. 578.

[36]Epps, p. 295.

[37]Epps, p. 295. Epps is quoting H. J. Massingham, The Golden Age (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1928), p. 14.

[38]Levin, p. 3.

[39]Levin, p. 5.

writers had shaped and molded the "Golden Age" until its new form embodied all the facets of the best life they knew—and the best life they knew was that of Classical Greece and Rome, not life in some child-like never-never land of long ago and far away. Elizabethans were avid humanists; they read, admired, and often imitated the art of the ancient writers. It is not surprising, then, that their concept of the Golden Age automatically was, as their writings, an imitation of Greece and Rome. That the ancient model was tangible as well as appealing is evident from Huizinga's account:

> The classical way of life was the first that could be made the object of faithful imitation down to details. Antiquity provided guidance and the finest examples for every form of expression. One's art and learning, one's epistolary style and eloquence, one's concepts of the state and military tactics, one's philosophy and faith could be imbued with or made conformable to divine antiquity, which provided a full abundance of rich nourishment for the ideal.[40]

But however much they assimilated "divine antiquity" into their own lives, Renaissance men did not adopt the ancients' concept of the Golden Age—at least not all of it. In their admiration for the Classical Age, they assumed that the Classical Age was the Golden Age.[41] Accordingly in Renaissance writings, the locale of the Golden Age shifted from the "long ago and far away" to the more tangible and desirable Classical Age—a time when, ironically enough, its own writers were looking back longingly to an earlier period. In keeping

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[40]Johan Huizinga, Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1960), p. 90.

[41]Wiener, p. 482.

with its new locale, the Golden Age was no longer conceived to be merely the time of the simple, good life described by the ancients, but in addition, a time of great education, a time of scientific and cultural attainment. Corresponding to this new description of the Golden Age was the new description of its citizen. The Renaissance ideal man was still virtuous, benevolent, and manly; but he was also intelligent, learned, and cosmopolitan—a capable man of affairs. As it turned out, Renaissance man created his ideal in his own image: his ideal was a synthesis, a conflation—as much of a classicist as his reading could make him and as much of a modern as his spirit insisted on. Thus, when historians report, as they so often do, that the Golden Age was a particularly popular idea during the Renaissance, they are correct; but the Golden Age which appeared so frequently in Renaissance literature was the one of their own making; and they never knew the difference.

The Renaissance added one other facet to the Golden Age concept not usually found in the earlier version, the possibility of restoration.[42] Ancient writings on the subject indicate that these early writers spent considerable time describing the Golden Age and lamenting its loss, but they seemed to foresee only further decline in the ages ahead.[43] But many Renaissance men, more optimistic than their predecessors, believed that the Golden Age could indeed be restored--and more than this, that it had already been restored in their own time

[42] Huizinga, p. 81.

[43] Wiener, p. 580. (Wiener also adds that Vergil is the exception.)

and place.[44]

While it is now known that the Dark Ages were never as dark as once supposed and that the term renaissance was not applied to that age until it had long passed, it is also true that the people of the Renaissance felt some sense of the greatness of their age and regarded themselves as infinitely superior to their immediate predecessors in history, the medievals.[45] Feeling no affinity for what they considered to be the ignorance and provinciality of the preceding era, they looked back to a time for which they did feel an affinity—the Classical Age, which led them back to themselves. Imitation of the classical writers was the common and accepted practice in the Renaissance, the only rule being that the imitator was to improve on the original.[46] Infused with a sense of the greatness of their age and confident of their own ability to effect even greater things, Renaissance men felt that in life, as in art, they had improved on the original: the Golden Age had not only been restored in their own time; it had been glorified.

That such confidence was the mood of the poeple is evident from the following lines in a letter from Gabriel Harvey, a Cambridge scholar, to Edmund Spenser. Harvey objected to a passage in The Fairie Queene which idealized ancient pastoral living:

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[44]Levin, p. 10.

[45]Levin, p. 13.

[46]Bamborough, p. 19.

> You suppose the first age was the Golden Age. It is nothing so. Bodin defendeth the Golden Age to flourish now, and our first grandfathers to have rubbed through in the Iron and Brazen Age at the beginning, when all things were rude and unperfect in comparison with the exquisite fineness and delicacy that we have grown to in these days.[47]

Such confidence was evidently shared by many subjects of Queen Elizabeth, for she appeared in numerous poems and masques as Astraea, ancient Golden Age goddess of justice, who, according to the myth, had fled the earth when men became wicked.[48] Since Astraea had "returned," the Golden Age had evidently returned as well. The people of the Renaissance were the first[49]-- though not the last--to believe that their own age was the "best of all possible worlds"; i.e., that the direction of history had reversed and that instead of a steady decline, civilization had experienced a steady ascension until the ideal was epitomized in them.

There was, however, at least one dissenting voice--that of Ben Jonson. Jonson was the classicist of classicists. He, probably more than any other man of his era, had studied the writings of the ancients --Horace, Martial, Vergil. Jonson greatly admired these ancient writers and had imitated their art even more conscientiously

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[47]Levin, p. 10.

[48]C. F. Wheeler, Classical Mythology in the Plays, Masques, and Poems of Ben Jonson (Port Washington, New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 106

[49]Levin, p. 13.

than his contemporaries.[50] It is not surprising then that he subscribed wholeheartedly to the Elizabethan version of the Golden Age--that is, the setting, character, and restoration possibilities of their version. He differed, however, in this last-discussed facet of the Elizabethan version, the belief that a restoration of the Golden Age had been effected in his own time. Quite the contrary, Jonson saw his own age as a lamentable "falling away" from the classical mode. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Jonson saw this "falling away" in reference to the Elizabethan-Jacobean theater; and he saw it as well in the manners and morals of his society. Jonson's view of the Golden Age is plainly set forth in the following poems, "Epigram CXXI. To Bejamin Rudyerd," and its companion piece, "CXXII. To The Same."

> Rudyerd, as lesser dames, to great ones use,
>   My lighter comes, to kiss thy learned Muse;
> Whose better studies while shee emulates,
>   Shee learnes to know long difference of their states.
> Yet is the office not to be despis'd
>   If onely love should make the action pris'd:
> Nor her, for friendship, to be thought unfit,
>   That strives, his manners should procede his wit.
>
> If I would wish, for truth, and not for show,
>   The aged Saturne's age, and rites to know;
> If I would strive to bring backe times, and trie
>   The world's pure gold, and wise simplicitie;
> If I would vertue set, as shee was yong,
>   And heare her speake with one, and her first tongue;
> If holiest friend-ship, naked to the touch,
>   I would restore, and keepe it ever such;
> I need no other arts, but studie thee:
> Who prov'st, all these were, and againe may bee.[51]

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[50] Kathryn McEuen, Classical Influence on the Trike of Ben (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1939), p. 14; p. 41; p. 49.

[51] William B. Hunter, Jr., The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963, 1968), p. 61. All future references to Jonson's poetry will be to this edition and will be included in the text.

In these poems, Jonson praises a friend, and more than that, eulogizes an age; and in the praise and the eulogy, his correspondence to and deviation from the Golden Age concept of his contemporaries are summed up. From the poems, it is clear that (1) Jonson subscribed to the Elizabethan view of the Golden Age setting as Classical Greece and Rome (he desires a return to "Saturne's age." Saturn was a Roman god; the ancients desired a return to the reign of Chronos, the deity of the original Golden Age);[52] (2) he subscribed also to the original characteristics of Golden Age inhabitants which had been set forth by the ancients and adopted by the Elizabethans in their version ("truth," "verture," "wise simplicitie," "holiest friend-ship"); (3) Jonson also accepted those characteristics of the ideal citizen which were purely Elizabethan additions (Rudyerd, a knight and poet,[53] is complimented by Jonson for his "learned Muse" and "better studies." Noteworthy also is Jonson's own embodiment of the Elizabethan ideal in his belief that "his manners should procede his wit"); and (4) he believed, with his contemporaries, in the possible restoration of the Golden Age (the last line agrees that "all these were and againe may bee"). In these four facets of the Golden Age concept, it is clear that Jonson's view was typically Elizabethan. However, the whole statement of the poem points up his emphatic disagreement in the matter of the Golden Age having been restored. The hope that restoration "may bee," expressed

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[52]Wheeler, p. 106.

[53]Hunter's note, p. 61.

in the last line, and Jonson's frequently repeated "If" indicate clearly that the poet longed for a return of the Golden Age but did not agree that it had been restored (much less surpassed) in his own time. In his longing for the better life of a by-gone era, Jonson breaks away from his fellow Elizabethans and takes his place beside the Classical writers, the original postulators of the original Golden Age dream.

Jonson differed from the ancients as well as the Elizabethans, however. Martial and Horace were able to laugh at their contemporaries for their foibles and failings, their falling away from the ideal.[54] But Jonson cherished the ideal too much. Throughout his life, he was never able to simply laugh at those who did not "measure up"—and by their not "measuring up," prevented the return of the Golden Age in his lifetime. His laughter was always satiric and often tinged with bitterness at "the happiest life" others had lost for themselves and for him.

This lengthy consideration of the Golden Age in Classical and Elizabethan thought is particularly important to a study of Ben Jonson's poems for several reasons. First, Jonson's poems abound with references to the Golden Age and its attendant mythology; and when the poet speaks of the Golden Age, it is helpful to know which one he means so that one can discern which virtues he intends to recall or recommend. Secondly, it would be difficult to over-emphasize the influence of the Golden Age concept on the poet's thought as it appears in the poems. As Nichols points out,

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[54] McKuen, p. 16; p. 43; p. 48.

> no one can fail to be struck by the number of times Jonson mentions the myth of the Golden Age in his poems. It is not surprising that he does so, since this myth makes a fit symbol for his ideal of perfection.[55]

Although Nichols seems to see the Golden Age as more myth than Jonson did, more historical allusion than present point of reference, he acknowledges the prevalence of the idea and its connection to the poet's ideal. If it is true that everything a writer writes reflects his thinking, and that all the direct and indirect appearances of an idea attest its presence, then the Golden Age was pre-eminent in Jonson's thought. Thirdly, and most importantly, this is a study of Jonson's vision of life (his perception of both the <u>ideal</u> and the <u>real</u>) and the change that vision undergoes in the course of his career; and there is a connection between that vision, the Golden Age ideal, and the poet's attitude toward life: the basis and impulse for the poet's vision of life is his concept of the best or "happiest" life for man; and his notion of "the happiest life" derives from his (and his contemporaries') version of life in the Golden Age. The Golden Age in Elizabethan thought is Utopian. Thus, Jonson's description of "the happiest life" (As Utopian or something less) is the measure of his adherence to his Golden Age ideal; the degree of his devotion to the ideal is the determinant of his vision of life, and his vision of life is the cause of his attitude toward life.

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[55]Nichols, p. 84.

Jonson's concept/vision/attitude changes in the course of his career; but in "Epigrammes," his dream is at its brightest, his vision at its most dichotomous, and his attitude at its most denunciatory.

Chapter III

"Epigrammes": How Not To Live"

Jonson, in his opening epigram, admonishes his reader to

PRay thee, take care, that tak'st my booke in hand
 To reade it well: that is, to understand. (I, p. 4)

There is, of course, much to understand in the remaining one hundred thirty-two epigrams of his "booke," but what Jonson wants the reader to understand first of all is the poet's motives, which he makes partially clear in Epigram II.

IT will be look'd for, booke, when some but see,
 Thy title, Epigrammes, and nam'd of mee,
Thou should'st be bold, licentious, full of gall
 Wormewood, and sulphure, sharpe, and tooth'd withall;
Become a petulant thing, hurle inke, and wit,
 As mad-men stones: not caring whom they hit.
Deceive their malice, who could wish it so.
 And by thy wiser temper, let men know
Thou are not covetous of least selfe fame,
 Made from the hazard of anothers shame:
Much lesse with lewd, prophane, and beastly phrase,
 To catch the worlds loose laughter, or vaine gaze.
He that departs with his owne honesty
 For vulgar praise, doth it too dearely buy. (i, p. 4)

Although Jonson rhetorically addressed his "booke" in this epigram, in reality, he is at pains to immediately inform his reader what he is not doing; to wit, that he, Jonson, is not hurling invective indiscriminately or with personal animus and that he is not publishing the poems in order to purchase for himself the "least selfe fame" or to "catch the worlds loose laughter or vaine gaze," for to do any of these things would be to "depart with his owne honesty for vulgar praise." If the reader can take Jonson at his word, he understands then what Jonson's purpose in the epigrams is definitely not--it is not selfish and it is not self-seeking. If the reader wants to know, however, what Jonson is doing and seeking in his "booke," he must read the poems--or else glance ahead to a positive statement of purpose contained in later work. In such a work, Discoveries, a prose work published posthumously, Jonson sets forth his conception of the poet:

> I could never think the study of Wisdom confined 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 Religion, and Morals; is all these. We do not require in him meere Elocution; or an excellent faculty in verse; but the exact knowledge of all vertues, and their Contraries; with the ability to render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattling of them.[56]

There are three sentences in this statement: in the first two, Jonson describes the unique ability of the poet, and in the third, the poet's responsibility. In the first two sentences, Jonson sees the poet as both maker and sustainer. The poet can "faine a Common-wealth"--that is, imaginatively create (OED) a kingdom or "world"; then, having created that "world," the poet is able to combine wisdom, statecraft and piety to "governe it with Counsels, strengthen it with Lawes, correct it with Religion, and Morals." Nichols points out that "poets naturally value poetry, but it is doubtful if any ever valued it more highly than Jonson."[57] It is also doubtful if any ever claimed mightier powers for the poet. Jonson here says that a poet, because

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[56]Herford and Simpson, VIII, p. 595.

[57]Nichols, p. 58.

he can "faine a Common-wealth"—in other words, because he is a poet—is also endowed with sufficient wisdom, statecraft, and piety to governe a country well—a remarkable assertion. Indeed, the poet is described here as greater than a philosopher, statesman, or holy man because he combines the abilities of all three. He is even greater than a king: kings but rule the countries they inherit; poets, having the greater power, can both conceive and rule a kingdom. Jonson once avered that "poets are of rarer birth than kings" (LXXIX, p. 33). Apparently, he meant what he said.

In the third sentence, Jonson turns to the responsibility of the poet. Having such superior ability, the poet must, in Jonson's view, use his gifts—his "excellent faculty in verse" and his "exact knowledge of all vertues and their Contraries"—for the good of his country. To accomplish this good, the poet must properly "embattle" or <u>display</u> (OED) virtue and vice, rendering the one "lov'd" and the other "hated." In other words, Jonson believes that the function of the poet is to guide his countrymen toward the "good" in their selection of life: through his verse, the poet must render virtue attractive and rewarding and vice repellant and unprofitable. To use his talents thus to elevate his country is, in Jonson's view, the exalted responsibility of the poet, a responsibility commensurate with and attendant upon his exalted position.

One does not have to travel far along the road toward understanding Jonson's conception of the poet before he comes upon the truth: Jonson is not really describing just any poet; he is describing himself.

And the "Common-wealth" in the statement is not just any commonwealth either. Jonson is a poet; he can "faine a Commonwealth"--in fact, he has already done so in his dream of the Golden Age. Therefore, the sequence follows naturally: given his calling, given this dream, given the remarkable powers he attributes to himself and his poetic gifts, Jonson turns to his responsibility—the work of bringing his dream to earth. From the statements he makes in "Epigramme II" about what he is not doing and the statement in Discoveries about what he is doing, it is clear that in the epigrams Jonson is following his own dictum: he is "embattling" vice and virtue for the sake of his society.

Given a similar high purpose, another reformer bent on elevating his society might have some decisions to make before doing his "embattling," such as which aspects of his society's life fall into the category of "vice" and which into "virtue." Not so, Jonson. Jonson was, first of all, a poet—and thereby endowed as he described, with "an exact knowledge of all vertues, and their Contraries"; and in addition, he had his dream. As discussed earlier, Jonson was infused with a concept of life, of life as it should be—and once was, he believed, in antiquity; and every facet of that ideal life was encompassed by the term "Golden Age." In his conception of life in the Golden Age, Jonson had "fained a commonwealth," and he was zealous to model his own commonwealth, Jacobean society, after the ideal enjoyed by the ancients, the happiest life possible for man. In his devotion to the Golden Age ideal and his certainty of the "rightness" of its every element, the Golden Age became the measuring stick against which Jonson measured contemporary life. Following this model, the designations of "vertue" and "vice" were a simple matter for Jonson: that which conformed to the ideal was "vertue"; that which deviated from the ideal was "vice." And in the epigrams, Jonson celebrated or condemned according to the dictates of the ideal.

However, a careful study of the epigrams reveals that Jonson, while dividing the matter of Jacobean life into the two broad categories of "vertue" and "vice," made yet a further distinction within the category of "vice." While Jonson's treatment of "vertue" remained relatively constant, his treatment of "vice" varied enough to suggest that he imputed degree; i.e., there were, apparently, those features of Jacobean life which Jonson regarded as merely "bad"; there were others, however, which he regarded as worse or "evil." In actual practice, then, Jonson divided his society's deeds into three rather distinct categories" "good," "bad," and "evil." And the people who performed the deeds in these categories were grouped as well—under, perhaps, such titles as "Angels," "Clods," and "Devils." These epithets do not actually appear in the poems, of course, but they are nevertheless apt and appropriate descriptions of Jonson's attitude toward his contemporaries, who, like their deeds, he divided into categories: those whose virtuous lives embodied and upheld Golden Age ideals were Jonson's "Angels"; those whose base lives fell far short of the ideal were the "Clods"; and those wicked lives perverted and destroyed the ideal were the "Devils." The use of these categories to illustrate Jonson's work in the epigrams is a convenient method.

Angels, Clods, and Devils

When Jonson published the <u>Workes</u> in 1616, he dedicated the "Epigrammes" to the Earl of Pembroke, a long-tine patron and friend. In the dedicatory preface, therefore, Jonson addressed many compliments to Pembroke and, in addition, asked his protection in the name of "truth" and "libertie" should his verses bring him "danger." He then offered Pembroke a reason for granting such protection:

> In thankes whereof, I return you the honor of leading forth so many good, and great names (as my verses mention on the better part) to their remembrance with posteritie.[58]

In "returning the honor," Jonson here states that those epigrams which are tributes to "good and great names" form the "better part"--that is, the more numerous part--of his verses. However, Jonson's claim that of the one hundred thirty-three epigrams, more are tributes than are not, is not strictly accurate. There are some fifty-seven epigrams which do indeed extol the virtuous lives of "good and great names"--Jonson's "Angels"; but there are also some forty-three which scorn the "Clods" and seventeen which denounce the 'Devils." In addition, there are five poems which denounce either "Clods" or 'Devils"--the distinction is not clear; and eleven other poems which do not deal with or deal-with-to-judge the actions of Jonson's contemporaries.* Of the total, the

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[58]Hunter, p. 3.

*Among this last group are the three opening epigrams ("To My Booke" <u>et al</u>); the two religious poems ("Of Life and Death" and "Of Death"); the three epitaphs to children (two were his own and the other, a boy actor); and three poems of a miscellaneous nature (such as "Inviting a Friend to Supper" and "On the Famous Voyage).

fifty-seven are tributes to "vertue," sixty-five are criticisms of "vice," and eleven fall into neither of these two categories. It is obvious from the numbers that in the epigrams, Jonson is acting in accordance with his avowed purpose in poetry; almost all of the epigrams do "embattle" virtue and vice.

It is also obvious from the numbers that Jonson's claim that the majority of his epigrams are tributes is not true. Jonson's claim becomes even less true when one considers the nature of the tributes, for Jonson often illuminated virtue by including vice as a foil, as he did in his tribute to Pembroke:

> I doe but name thee Pembroke, and I find
> It is an Epigramme, on all man-kind;
> Against the bad, but of, and to the good:
> Both which are ask'd to have thee understood
> Nor could the age have mist thee, in this strife
> Of Vice and vertue; wherein all great life
> Almost, is exercis'd: and scarse one knowes
> To which, yet, of the sides himselfe he owes.
> They follow vertue, for reward, to day;
> Tomorrow vice, if shee give better pay:
> And are so good, and bad, just at a price,
> As nothing else discernes the vertue' or vice.
> But thou . . .   (CII, p. 48)

Such juxtaposition of virtue and vice is frequent in Jonson's epigrams, and therefore the tributes cannot accurately be described as solely commendatory. Often the commendation is only obvious as it shines from the surrounding dark. Of course, it is the nature of epigrams "to praise or dispraise," said William Camden, [59] possibly expecting praise and blame to appear in separate poems. Jonson, however, apparently felt that the contrast was necessary within the poem as well as in separate

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[59] Hunter, p. 1.

poems, as he points out in line four of the above poem. Whatever Jonson's reasons for criticizing vice more often than commending virtue, the fact remains that his claim to the reverse is simply false. In the epigrams, Jonson "embattles" vice much more often than virtue, and the poems are therefore chiefly denunciatory.

Angels

While the denunciatory tone of the epigrams cannot be denied, the commendatory verses are there and do form a substantial part of the whole; and the function of the tributes was of supreme importance to Jonson. After all, it was through the medium of his verses that he intended to guide his contemporaries toward "the happiest life," to lead them back to the Golden Age; and it was through the tributes that Jonson expressed and transmitted his concept of the ideal life to the public. The ideal life is lived by ideal men and women, and Sir Horace Vere was apparently one of these:

> WHich of thy names I take, not onely beares
> A romane sound, but romane vertue weares,
> Illustrous Vere, or Horace; fit to be
> Sung by a Horace, or a Muse as free;
> Which thou art to thy selfe: whose fame was wonne
> In th'eye of Europe, where thy deeds were done,
> When on thy trumpet shee did sound a blast,
> Whose rellish to eternitie shall last.
> I leave thy acts, which should I prosequute
> Throughout, might flatt'rie seeme; and to be mute
> To any one, were envie: which would live
> Against my grave, and time could not forgive.
> I speake thy other graces, not lesse showne,
> Nor lesse in practice; but less mark'd less knowne:

Humanitie, and pietie, which are
 As noble in great chiefes, as they are rare.
And best become the valiant man to weare,
 Who more should seeke mens reverence, then feare. (XCI, p. 39)

Sir Horace Vere must have been a well-known figure in Jonson's day. Hunter explains that Vere was a "noted English soldier," and Herford and Simpson record that Vere led the English forces to three significant victories in Europe.[60] As such a soldier, Vere was, no doubt, as valiant as Jonson declares in line seventeen, as well as amply skilled in military tactics. But Jonson is quick to point out Vere's other attributes: he is generous and good ("Humanitie"), and he is pious ("pietie"). Further, although he is valiant and strong, his worthy life evokes the respect ("reverence") of his men rather than their "feare." In ascribing all these virtues to Vere, Jonson obviously regarded him as—or presented him as—a contemporary embodiment of Golden Age ideals--as was evident at the outset of the poem because of his name.

That Jonson would pen a tribute to a worthy man in his society is not at all surprising; Jonson wanted to reward and bolster "good" through his verse. What is surprising (and must have been to Jonson as well) is that he should find a man in his society who had both exceptional worth and precisely the right name—both of them. For the reader with some knowledge of Jonson's dream and purpose, one of the striking features of this poem is the speed with which Jonson capitalizes on Horace Vere's name to tie him to antiquity:

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[60]Herford and Simpson, XI, p. 17.

> WHich of thy names I take, not onely beares
> A romane sound, but roman vertue weares
> Illustrous Vere, or Horace . . .

Here in the first three lines of the poem, Jonson connects Vere to the Golden Age; just the "romane sound" recommended the man to Jonson and suggested the list of virtues which followed. But Jonson goes on to say that each name "romane vertue weares"--and he intends a double meaning: the names themselves "weare romane vertue," and also, they are fit apparel for the man. The word vere is, significantly, Latin for truly; and when Jonson thinks of the word, he thinks of it in the same sense with which he used it in another epigram when he was defending the antiquity (and therefore superiority) of his epigrams from the censure of "Meere English Censurer."

> To thee, my way in Epigrammes seemes new,
> When both it is the old way, and the true. (XVIII, p. 10)

For Jonson, the word true means "the old way and the true"; and Vere is therefore vere--a faithful, truthful, pure rendering of Golden Age virtue. To Jonson, Vere, like the epigram, is truly Roman, truly Golden Age, and truly ideal; and his emphasis on the name reinforces the statement of the poem--that Vere is ideal because he is Golden Age.

Jonson's emphasis on Vere's first name, "Horace," is as important to the statement of the poem as is "Vere." Horace, of course, was one of the greatest Classical poets and greatly admired by Jonson. Therefore, by association if nothing else, "Horace" recommended Vere to Jonson. But there is more. In the tribute, Jonson has specifically enumerated only those Golden Age virtues which the Elizabethans had adopted from the ancients (the Classical Age); there has been no mention of such Elizabethan additions as learning and culture—and there could hardly be. Vere was a soldier, a talented soldier, but a soldier--no more than that. He was not learned, not a poet. But Jonson would have him so; he would have him live up to the name he bears and the ideal he represents. Thus, in order to add the missing feature to the ideal portrait, Jonson makes Vere a poet: if he was not a poet by the pen, he would be so by the sword:

> Illustrous Vere, or Horace; fit to be
> Sung by a Horace, or a Muse as free;
> Which thou art to thy selfe: whose fame was wonne
> In th'eye of Europe, where thy deeds were done,
> When on thy trumpet shee did sound a blast,
> Whose rellish to eternitie shall last.

It is clear from the forced addition of this last "vertue" that in Vere, Jonson has created, rather than paid homage to, an ideal man. What was lacking was added; what did not fit was omitted (since it is a tribute). Therefore, the portrait of Sir Horace Vere is a tribute to the man; but more than a tribute, it is Jonson's clear statement of the ideal.

An interesting and pertinent sidelight here is Jonson's personal connection with the name "Horace." In a discussion of Elizabethan drama, G. B. Harrison [61] tells of a "war between the theaters," ("Paul's Boys" and "Children of the Chapel" were the acting companies), which resulted from the rivalry between the leading playwrights of those two companies, John Marston and Ben Jonson. It seems that Jonson began the war by introducing into Every Man Out of His Humour a pair of gulls who

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[61] G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: Major Plays and the Sonnets (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), pp. 44-46.

try to pass themselves off as wits by speaking in Marston's particular manner. The slight was easily recognized, and Marston retaliated in his next play by calling people like Jonson "bombast wits that are puffed up with arrogant conceit of their own worth." The two continued to trade insults through their plays, and shortly, other playwrights, galled by Jonson's critical and supercilious manner, joined the battle against him. Dekker ended the war with this final blow to "Horace " in Satiromastrix; or The Un-Trussing of the Humourous Poet:

> The underplot was a comedy of contemporary middle-class intrigue. In the midst walked Roman Horace (alias Jonson), who was most viciously abused and finally made to swear that he would thereafter behave himself. Dekker knew Jonson well, and his Horace is a brutal but vivid and most amusing caricature . . . Jonson was bitterly offended and withdrew from writing plays altogether for the time being.[62]

It seems evident from Harrison's account that in his own eyes, as well as those of his contemporaries, Jonson was Horace. He says as much in the first four lines of "Sir Horace Vere."

> WHich of thy names I take, not onely beares
> A romane sound, but romane vertue weares,
> Illustrous Vere, or Horace; fit to be
> Sung by a Horace, or a Muse as free;

Since Jonson goes on to "sing" Vere's praise, he evidently regards himself as "a Horace" or "a Muse as free." Such a self-concept is noteworthy because Jonson goes on to make Vere a "poet-Horace" as well as an embodiment of other Golden Age ideals. Therefore, by surrounding Horace Vere with every Classical and Elizabethan virtue and by identifying himself with "Illustrous Vere," Jonson proclaims his own status

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[62]Harrison, p. 46.

as the ideal man--or at least expresses that sense of his own superior position implicit in the work of the satiricist. 63

In addition to "To Sir Horace Vere," numerous other such tributes and their ideal men appear among the epigrams: the Earls of Salisbury and Pembroke, Sirs John and William Roe, Thomas Overbury. Obviously, most of Jonson's ideal men were titled men, but there were exceptions as long as those men embodied the ideal. Such a one was William Camden, the famous scholar and antiquary, (Ep. XIV, p. 9) who was Jonson's teacher and mentor. In each case, the portraits seem to be sincere tributes, but they are also, in keeping with Jonson's purpose, statements of the ideal placed there for his contemporaries to see and, he hoped, emulate.

Also worthy of emulation were the ideal women--or more accurately, ladies--of Jacobean society, Jonson's "lady Angels." Such a one was Lucy, Countess of Bedford.

> THis morning, timely rapt with holy fire,
> I thought to forme unto my zealous Muse,
> What 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,
> Of greatest bloud, and yet more good that great;
> I meant the day-starre should not brighter rise,
> Nor lend like influence from his lucent seat.
> I meant shee should be curteous, facile, sweet,
> Hating that solemne vice of greatness, pride;
> I meant each softest vertue, there should meet,
> Fit in that softer bosome to reside.
> 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. (LXXVI, p. 32)

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63 Louis I. Bredvold, "A Note in Defence of Satire" in English Literary History (1940), pp. 253-64, rpt. in Essential Articles: for the Study of English Augustan Backgrounds, ed. by Bernard N. Schilling (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1961), p. 256.

Lucy, obviously the ideal subject for a poet's fancy as well as the ideal woman, possesses, of course, those feminine attributes considered desir able in every age: she is "faire," pleasant, soft and sweet. In addition, she embodies those qualities characteristic of the ideal in the Classical Age: she is independent ("free"), virtuous ("more good than great"), courageous and honorable ("a manly soule"). Further, Lucy possesses those features added to the portrait in the Elizabethan version of the Golden Age: she is "learned" and "curteous" (no doubt as a result of her "greatest bloud"); and she is able to calmly control her life ("with even powers/ The rock, the spindle, and the sheeres controule/ Of destinie, and spin her owne free houres"). Thus, Lucy is a composite; all of the qualities most desired in her era come together in her. The portrait is of course, a romantic fiction, unless the reader is to believe that such paragons really existed whose brightness outshone the "day-starre." But it is fiction to a purpose. The tribute is certainly a compliment to Lucy, but as was the case with Vere, the tribute is a representation of the ideal, the ideal that the poet says he first "fained" and named "Bedford."

Tributes to ideal women are far fewer in the epigrams than are those of men, but the "lady Angels" are represented there, by --in addition to Lucy--Elizabeth,Countesse of Rutland, Mary Lady Wroth, Lady Sidney, and others; and Jonson's purpose in placing them there is the same as in the case of the men: to serve as examples of the ideal for his contemporaries to see, admire, and follow--back to the Golden Age. And in each case, the portraits are painted in the most glowing, persuasive terms that the poet can call forth--his earnest effort to render virtue "lov'd."

Clods

To move from a consideration of these ideal portraits to a look at some other, less savory, pictures is to move from heaven to earth--or more specifically, from Sidney's estate to Shoreditch. In contrast to the Angels, there were apparently many in Jacobean society whose lack of virtue, culture, and learning drew Jonson's scorn--the Clods; and they, too, appear in the epigrams. Such a one Jonson names and characterizes as simply "Gut":

> GUt eates all day, and lechers all the night,
> So all his meate he tasteth over, twise:
> 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. (CXVIII, p. 59)

The scene of Gut's "all the night" lechery is depicted with the same disdain. Like Gut, the "New Hot-House" has changed only from vice to vice:

> WHere lately harbour'd many a famous whore,
> A purging bill, now fix'd upon the dore,
> Tells you it is a hot-house: So it ma'
> And still be a whore-house. Th'are Synonima. (VII, p. 6)

Jonson places usury on a level with bawdry; it, too, is a profitable exchange:

> IF, as their ends, their fruits were so, the same
> Baudrie', and usurie were one kind of game. (LVII, p. 24)

That neither game is ultimately profitable, however, Jonson points out in his account of Banck, the Usurer, whose twisted legs reflect the inner man:

> BAnck feeles no lamenesse of his knottie gout,
>   His monyes travaile for him, in and out:
> And though the soundest legs goe every day,
>   He toyles to be at hell, as soone as they. (XXXI, p. 15)

In such vignettes, Jonson captures his society in its baser moments, and he often expresses his disapproval by invoking a Christian context, as he does in the case of Banck. Indeed, references to such traditional Christian concepts as "heaven," "hell," "God," "Satan," and "the narrow way" are frequent in the epigrams; and through them Jonson preaches to his readers that "good men but see death, the wicked tast it" (LXXX, p. 34). But despite the distinctly moral tone of the epigrams, Jonson often reaches beyond the scope of doctrine to satirize persons whose transgressions are sins only to him. "Groome Ideot," for example, offends the intellect rather than the conscience.

> IDeot, last night, I pray'd thee but forbeare
>   To reade my verses; now I must to heare:
> For offring, with thy smiles, my wit to grace,
>   Thy ignorance still laughs in the wrong place . . .
> So have I seene at Christ-masse sports one lost,
>   And, hood-wink'd, for a man, embrace a post. (LVIII, p. 24)

Jonson had little patience with ignorance, especially when it invaded his sphere of learning, literary arts; and he is particularly contemptuous of "Poet-Ape," the plagiarist:

> POore Poet-Ape, that would be thought our chiefe,
>   Whose workes are eene the fripperie of wit,
> From brocage is become so bold a thiefe,
>   As we, the rob'd, leave rage, and pittie it . . .
> Foole, as if halfe eyes will not know a fleece
>   From locks of wooll, or shreds from the whole peece?
> (LVI, p. 24)

Poet-Ape lacks all that he professes to have—learning, skill, and honesty.

In these and some forty-odd other epigrams, Jonson describes and exposes to ridicule the misdeeds of his contemporaries, and in his depiction of vice, makes clear the scruffiness of life at the bottom of London society. To Jonson's mind, those whose base lives show forth the absence of virtue, learning, and culture are Clods; and his treatment of them in the epigrams tells the reader so.

The reader can hardly fail to be struck by the sharp contrast in "Epigrammes" between the denunciatory epigram and the tribute, between the Clods and the Angels. Gypsee is indeed not Lucy and Gut is not Vere—in character or way of life. But the difference can be felt as well as seen; Jonson's scorn for the Clods is communicated from his treatment of them in the epigrams. For instance, the epigrams to Clods are, in general, shorter than those to Angels—as though the Clods do not merit sustained consideration, but rather only a cursory "sum up" and a quick dismissal. Further, Jonson's diction is far from the same. The Angels are rendered heroic through dignified, ornate language and frequent allusion to historic or mythological figures; the Clods are made caricatures and their deeds described with the coarsest plainness, a fitting of diction to subject. Jonson's attitude is apparent also in his point of view. He indicates that he identifies with the Horace Veres of his society but is so far above "Foole" or "Knave" that neither can touch him:

> THy praise, or dispraise is to me alike,
> One doth not stroke me, nor the other strike. (LXI, p. 25)

In all, it is clear that Jonson presented his subjects differently because he saw them differently and wanted his contemporaries to share his view. To Jonson, there was a very great distance between Clods and Angels—as great, perhaps, as the difference between earth and heaven, or life and "the happiest life." Therefore, in order to drive out the evil in his society and restore the "happiest" life of the Golden Age, he sought to have his Angels admired and their deeds emulated; the Clods scorned and their acts shunned. In the tributes and the denunciatory epigrams, Jonson is doing what he set out to do--use his "excellent faculty in verse" to properly "embattle" virtue and vice so as to "render the one lov'd, and the other hated."

But though Jonson satirized the Clods, he did so with less vehemence than one might expect considering his devotion to the ideal. It seems that his derision was sometimes moderated by genuine humor, as in the case of the enterprising Gypsee and the man who kissed a post. Perhaps Jonson felt that those at the bottom of London society—often economically as well as culturally—were usually the victims of their own misdeeds. He pointed out the workings of justice (poetic or otherside) in the tale of Old Colt, the adulterer who is repaid in his own coin:

> FOr all night-sinnes, with others wives, unknowne,
> Colt, now, doth daily penance in his owne. (XXXIX, p. 17)

Perhaps Jonson regarded the Old Colts of his society as "humbler" sinners, and thus unfair or unworthy subjects for bitter attack. They had fallen far short of the ideal, but they had already destroyed themselves. There were others in Jonson's society, however, who, he believed, did merit his utmost vehemence. Old Colt, Gut, Gypsee, Banck—these had ruined themselves, but, in a sense, only themselves. There were others whose corrupt practices not only destroyed the ideal, but threatened to destroy the state. Against these Jonson loosed a tirade of invective far more intense than the mere scorn he directed at the Clods, the common men of vice.

Devils

The Elizabethan era has long been recognized as one of the most glorious in English history. Under Elizabeth I, England rose to great heights as a world power; and in the period from 1590 to 1610, her poets gave rise to what Priestley calls the great "May morning of English poetry,"[64] literature unequaled in succeeding ages. Much of the credit for the accomplishments of her nation belongs to Elizabeth, the most brilliant ruler of her age.[65] A contemporary, Sir John Hayward, described her as

> . . . a lady on whom nature had bestowed and well placed many of her fairest favors . . . every motion of her seemed to bear majesty . . . her virtues were such as might suffice to make an ugly woman beautiful . . . of wonderful knowledge both in learning and affairs; skillful not only in Latin and Greek, but in divers other foreign languages . . . she was religious, magnanimous, merciful and just . . . lovely and loving . . . with great wisdom . . . courtesy[66]

Whether Hayward described a lady or an ideal, the fact remains that Elizabeth was a woman of uncommon attainments; and those who attended the queen at court were expected to follow her much-admired example. One such courtier, Sir Thomas Hoby, listed the qualities expected in a courtier in his "The Chief Conditions and Qualities in a Courtier." Among a great many other things, the courtier was

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[64] J. B. Priestley, "The Elizabethan Age" in Adventures of English Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), p. 85.

[65] Priestley, p. 79.

[66] Edward J. Gordon, ed., English Literature (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1964), pp. 133-34.

> To be well born and of a good stock . . . To be seen in tongues, and especially in Italian, French, and Spanish . . . Not to praise himself unshamefully and out of reason . . . Not to carry about tales and trifling news . . . To be well spoken and fair languaged . . . To be handsome and cleanly in his apparel . . . Not to love promotions so, not unshamefastly to beg any office . . . To endeavor himself to love, please and obey his Prince in honesty . . . His love toward women not to be sensual or fleshly, but honest and godly, and more ruled with reason than appetite; and to love better the beauty of the mind than the body . . . [67]

The "Chief Conditions and Qualities in a Waiting Gentlewoman" were equally specific and equally stringent. The courtier who shaped his character and manners upon Hoby's model was certain to be a superior man—like his soverign, a person of uncommon attainments.

Whatever success the courtiers of Elizabeth's reign may have had in reaching this ideal, those who served in the court of her successor, James I, certainly fell short—at least the ones Sir Thomas Overbury knew and characterized:

> To all men's thinking (a courtier) is a man, and to most men the finest: all things else are defined by the understanding, but this by the senses . . . He smells; and putteth away much of his judgment about the situation of his clothes. He knows no man that is not generally known. His wit, like the marigold, openeth with the sun, and puts more confidence in his words than meaning, and more in his pronunciation that his words. Occasion is His Cupid, and he hath but one receipt of making love. He follows nothing but inconstancy, admires nothing but beauty, honors nothing but fortune, loves nothing . . . [68]

Overbury's opinion of courtiers was evidently founded in fact: He was later imprisoned and murdered as the result of court intrigue.

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[67]Gordon, pp. 130-31.

[68]Gordon, p. 132.

Such courtiers as Overbury described here were a type that Jonson came to know well. Jonson had found favor with the new king, James I, soon after he ascended the throne in 1603; and the decade which followed was Jonson's most prosperous one. It was the time of his profitable collaboration with Inigo Jones and the period when his masques were immensely popular at court. It was also, apparently the time when his lengthy exposure to court life brought considerable disillusionment. Apparently, Jonson, the step-son of a bricklayer and a man who spent more time drinking in taverns or studying in his lodgings than anything else, had believed that courtiers were uncommon men; he found that they were uncommon men of vice. He recorded what he saw at court in an epistle to a friend, in which he urges him to flee the court, a place he calls "hell on earth."

> Rather then here so bogg'd in vices stay:
> The whole world here leaven'd with madnesse swells
> And being a thing, blowne out of nought, rebells
> Against his Maker . . . what we call
> Friendship is now mask'd Hatred! Justice fled,
> And shamefastnesse together! All lawes dead
> That kept man living! Pleasures only sought! . . .
> . . . and mans whole good fix't
> In bravery, or gluttony, or coyne,
> All which he makes the servants of the Groine . . .
> Friend flie from hence; and let these kindled rimes
> Light thee from hell on earth: where flatterers, spies,
> Informers, Masters both or Arts and lies;
> Lewd slanderers, soft whisperers that let blood
> . . . where envious, proud,
> Ambitious, factious, superstitious, lowd
> Boasters, and perjur'd, with the infinite more
> Praevaricators swarme. (Ud. 17, p. 149)

When Jonson satirized the Clods, the pictures he drew of their lives were unsavory—the streets, the taverns, the brothels. But there is nothing in those epigrams to match the concentrated evil depicted in this description of court life. And Jonson's exclamatory tone evidences his shock and outrage.

Jonson was particularly disturbed by the evil he saw at court chiefly because it was at court. In contrast to the humbler lives of Clods, courtiers lived in relative luxury and elegance at the court of James I, an exalted position which set them apart from common men. It was expected that greater position, influence, and responsibility presupposed greater virtue, knowledge, and attainment—as outlined in Hoby's list of qualities. Jonson found, however, that quite the reverse was true, that greater position often meant greater evil. Many courtiers were venal, ignorant, and wicked. And these were, to Jonson's mind, far worse than the Clods, whose "sins," like their lives, were limited by their position. Courtiers had wider scope of action and powerful influence; and therefore wicked courtiers were doubly dangerous: they prevented the return of the Golden Age and threatened the safety of the state. Jonson's view of court life as a "hell on earth" makes clear his attitude toward such wicked courtiers; they were "Devils."

The depraved lives of these Devils must have been profoundly disheartening to a man who professed a desire to restore the Golden Age. What he saw in life at court was the antithesis of every ideal he held, the perversion of every Golden Age attribute. He told Salisbury that the Golden Age had become the "age of gold" (LXIV, p. 27). The vice, intrigue, hypocrisy, and corruption surrounding Jonson daily must have been a steady vexation to his spirit. Faced with daily evidence of the depths to which man could fall and filled with his dream of the heights to which man could rise—and had done so, he believed, in antiquity—Jonson set about satirizing the courtier with a vengeance—which indeed it was. Thus, the courtier is bitterly, scathingly denounced in some seventeen epigrams, far more than the number directed at any other one group.

He begins by showing his contempt for the courtier's person: he has no manliness about him:

> ALl men are wormes: But this no man. In silke
> 'Twas brought to court first wrapt, and white as milke;
>
> Where, afterwards, it grew a butter-flye:
> Which was a cater-piller. So t'will dye. (XV, p. 9)

Silk envelops the silkworm, as it does the court-worm. The courtier has no virtue either; Jonson's use of <u>dye</u> probably includes a reference to the licentiousness of court life. The courtier's character is expounded further in another epigram, where, on the simplest level, Jonson shows how graft confounds justice:

> RIdway rob'd Duncote of three hundred pound,
> Ridway was tane, arraign'd, condemn'd to dye;
> But, for this money was a courtier found,
> Beg'd Ridwayes pardon: Duncote, now, doth crye;
> Rob'd both of money, and the lawes reliefe,
> The courtier is become the greater thiefe. (VIII, p. 6)

Though justice often prevails on the lower levels of society (as in the case of Old Colt), on the higher levels, there is none—thanks to the courtiers. However, this courtier will rouse himself to do evil; most will not even do that:

> AT court I met it, in clothes brave enough,
> To be a courtier; and lookes grave enough,
> To seem a statesman: as I neere it came,
> It made me a great face, I asked the name.

A lord, it cryed, buried in flesh, and blood,
 And such from whom let no man hope least good,
For I will doe None: and as little ill,
 For I will dare none. Good Lord, walke dead still. (XI, p. 7)

One courtier dresses like the "worme" he is; another will do only evil; another will "dare" neither evil nor good. Such men of shallow character also demonstrate shallow learning:

I Grieve not, Courtling, thou are started up
 A chamber-critick, and dost dine, and sup
At Madames table, where thou mak'st all wit
 Goe high, or low, as thou wilt value it.
'Tis not thy judgement breeds the prejudice,
Thy person only, Courtling, is the vice. (LXXII, p. 30)

The vice of "Courtling" was not restricted to the men; and the ladies, too, came in for their share of satiric comment. Witness the case of "Fine Lady Would Bee," whose liasons and abortions were apparently well known:

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.
Is it the paine affrights? that's soone forgot.
 Or your complexions losse? you have a pot,
That can restore that. Will it hurt your features?
 To make amends, you'are thought a wholesome creature.
What should the cause be? Oh, you live at court:
 And there's both losse of time, and losse of sport
In a great belly. Write, then on thy wombe,
 Of the not borne, yet buried, here's the tombe. (LXII, p. 26)

It was obvious to Jonson from his experiences at court that the present age was filled with men and women who had lost all virtue, strength, and learning—and thus vitality. Jonson's last line to "Fine Lady Would Bee" indicates his view of her as a "life-in-death" figure, a walking "tombe." Also, the courtier who will do no good and "dare" no evil is told to "walke dead still." The vice-ridden society Jonson had come to know was a far cry from the ancient and good society he dreamed of. As long as wickedness prevailed, the Golden Age was dead, could not be brought to life in his world. The life-in-death figure he presents in these epigrams is Jonson's metaphor for the age.

But Jonson was concerned not only for life in the sense of "the happiest life" as opposed to "the worst life." He was also concerned for the actual survival of the state. Elizabethans had an abiding belief in a firmly-structured world order, an order thoroughly pervading every corner of the universe; and this belief in world order, called the "Chain-of-Being," had been so long a part of their collective mind as to be taken for granted.[69] In this concept, the Great Chain stretched from the "foot of God's throne to the meanest of inanimate objects,"[70] and thus every living creature, "from the highest archangel to the lowest worm,"[71] was united to every other creature, each occupying his designated position as a link in the chain. In this orderly hierarchy, each creature who occupied his position to the height of his powers "echoed forth the supreme goodness of the Almighty."[72] If, however, any link was inferior or faulty, the whole strength of the Chain was impaired. Such a creature disturbed the whole order of the universe and threatened to bring chaos.

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[69] E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (New York: Vintage Books, 1943), p. 9.

[70] Tillyard, p. 26.

[71] M. H. Abrams, ed., The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1962), p. 335.

[72] Abrams, p. 335.

As Tillyard explains, chaos was a terrifying word to the Elizabethans:

> To us chaos means hardly more than confusion on a large scale; to an Elizabethan it meant the cosmic anarchy before creation and the wholesale dissolution that would result if the pressure of Providence relaxed and allowed the law of nature to cease functioning.[73]

The seventeenth century is often said to have been a time of vigorous intellectual activity, a time of "new science" and unstable political frameworks.[74] But it was the middle and later seventeenth century that saw the Cavalier-Puritan wars, the beheading of Charles I, the tenuous grasp of the Commonwealth, and finally, the Restoration. As profoundly shattering to the Elizabethan scheme of things as these developments were, they came later. In Jonson's time, turn-of-the-seventeenth-century England, most people still subscribed to belief in the "Chain-of-Being" order of things and cherished their faith in the 'Divine Right of Kings."[75] As God's anointed on earth, the king was at the top of the earth-bound hierarchy, the Chain in microcosm, and the lowliest serving girl on the bottom. Others in between were valued in descending order of rank. The king, therefore, was the "father of his country"; as such, he was to be revered, his conduct emulated, his judgments honored and obeyed. Therefore, in the proper functioning of the Chain, the king's

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[73]Tillyard, p. 16.

[74]Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1945, 1952), Chapter 1.

[75]Abrams, p. 329.

glorified virtues were reflected by his courtiers, the noble example of the courtiers descended to the populace, and peace and harmony ensued.

Ben Jonson viewed the world as most Elizabethans did,[76] and he therefore regarded the scene at court with considerable alarm. The corrupt lives that he saw there were disordered lives, and indeed that disorder had already brought about a degree of chaos. Jonson's description of court life, presented in part earlier, contains more than a little intimation of the cosmic anarchy so feared by the Elizabethans:

> The whole world here leaven'd with madnesse swells.
> And being a thing, blowne out of nought, rebells
> Against his Maker; high alone with weeds,
> And impious ranknesse of all Sects and seeds:
> Not to be chekt, or frighted now with fate,
> But more licentious made, and desperate!
> Our Delicacies are growne capitall,
> And even our sports are dangers! what we call
> Friendship is now mask'd Hatred! Justice fled,
> And shamefastnesse together! All lawes dead
> That kept man living! Pleasures only sought!
> Honour and honestie, as poore things thought
> As they are made! Pride, and stiffe Clownage mixt
> To make up Greatnesse! and mans whole good fix't
> In bravery, or gluttony, or coyne,
> All which he makes the servants of the Groine,
> Thither it flowes . . . O times,
> Friend flie from hence; and let these kindled rimes
> Light thee from hell on earth . . . (Ud. 17, p. 147)

Man, in the form of courtier, had, like Satan, rebelled against his Maker and created for himself a "hell on earth."

As dangerous as this one rebellious link was in itself, the danger was greatly magnified by its connection to the other links of the Chain. The example of corruption could proceed downward to the

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[76] Tillyard, pp. 108-9.

people and eventually wreak total havoc. The "thither it flowes" in the lines above points to Jonson's concern—a concern evident in his account of Mill, a "ladies woman" who was a good woman until she came to court.

> WHen Mill first came to court, the unprofiting foole,
> Unworthy such a mistris, and such a schoole,
> Was dull, and long, ere shee would goe to man:
> At last, ease, appetite, and example wan
> The nicer thing to tast her ladies page;
> And, finding good secruitie in his age,
> Went on . . . (XC, p. 38)

Corruption was spreading and could—very possibly, would—bring chaos again. The position of courtier was an important one, and most of those Jonson knew not only threatened Jacobean society but jeopardized the whole estate of man.

However distressing such thoughts must have been to Jonson, the epigrams indicate that he still had hope for his society. Of course, by their very existence, the satirical epigrams attest Jonson's hope of reform. But this hope is reflected more positively in his congratulatory epigram to the Earl of Salisbury, who had recently been named Treasurer:

> NOt glad, like those that have new hopes, or sutes,
> With thy new place, bring I these early fruits
> Of love, and what the golden age did hold
> A treasure, art: contemn'd in th'age of gold.
> Nor glad as those, that old dependents bee,
> To see thy fathers rites new laid on 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. When so wise a king
> Contends t'have worth enjoy, from his regard,
> As her owne conscience, still, the same reward.
> These (noblest Cecil) labour'd in my thought,
> Wherein what wonder see thy name hath wrought?
> That whil'st I meant but thine to gratulate,
> I'have sung the greater fortunes of our state. (LXIV, p. 27)

Since Salisbury's worth had been recognized, and since he had been appointed to high position in government, there was still hope that good instead of evil might spread throughout the kingdom—that good might not be "sepulcher'd alive," that the "age of gold" might sometime become the Golden Age, and that Jacobean society might some day enjoy even "greater fortune." As he said in line thirteen, these all "labour'd" in his thought.

In the poems of "Epigrammes"—one hundred thirty-three in all—Jonson devoted a massive effort to bringing about these better conditions. He wrote panegyrics to Angels, denunciations to Clods, and condemnations to Devils—all in an effort to render virtue "lov'd" and vice "hated"; and his intent always was to rid his society of that which prevented the restoration of a wholesome, ordered society—the Golden Age. If, considered together, the denunciatory note is the stronger one in "Epigrammes," and the contours of "the happiest life" can only be discerned as the antithesis of the lives he satirizes, his purpose was good: to show the world how not to live. What E. B. Partridge says of Jonson's comedies applies with equal strength to the non-dramatic poems:

> When Aristophanes ridiculed his absurd Athens and Jonson his foul London, both were talking about heaven: an ideal Athens and an ideal London.[79]

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[79]Partridge, p. 233.

Chapter IV

"The Happier Life"

The "heaven" that Jonson was talking about was, of course, the Golden Age; and his intense devotion to this ideal thoroughly directed his work in 'Epigrammes." Jonson once professed that he was "in love with every vertue" and "at fewd with sinne and vice"; but it is his "fewd" with vice that is the more memorable "embattling" in these early epigrams. Jonson called these epigrams the "ripest of my studies," but because of the poet's pervasively critical attitude, many readers would likely regard them as the "sourest" of his studies. In discussing Jonson's attitude as it appears in his early plays, C. H. Herford wrote:

> Jonson gave the rein to the impulses of a temperament censorious and aggressive in unsurpassed degree; a temperament in which the critical severity which discovers misdoers everywhere was combined with the militancy which relishes the battle the more the greater the numbers of the foe, and the rigor which suffers no fault to go without its meed of punishment.[80]

While Herford's assessment is probably an overstatement, there is considerable truth in what he says. The epigrams are largely denunciatory, and Jonson does seem to derive a certain satisfaction from delivering the perfectly-aimed blow to "misdoers." But however harsh Jonson's treatment of evil and folly may have been in these early poems, there is considerable evidence that his attitude changed in later work. Before discussing this change, however, it is necessary to define both "epigram" and "later work."

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[80] Herford and Simpson, I, p. 378.

According to Holman,[81] the term _epigram_ originally (in ancient Greece) meant an inscription, especially an epitaph. Later it came to mean a short poem summing up in inscription-like verse what was to be made permanently memorable. The Roman poet Martial, Jonson's favorite model, used the epigram for various themes and purposes: satire, friendship, compliment, eulogy, epitaphs, philosophic reflections, and _jeux d' esprit_. By Jonson's time, however, the classical model was cultivated chiefly as a means of satire. But Jonson, the greatest writer or epigrams in English,[82] used the epigram to include not only satirical poems, but also epistles, verses of compliment, epitaphs, and reflective verses—a pattern closer to Martial's. However, he used different forms in different collections: in "Epigrammes" his epigrams are chiefly satires, but he also used the form for numerous tributes, some epitaphs, and one or two reflective poems. In "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry," Jonson expanded his use of the epigram to include, in addition to these, numerous epistles and dedicatory prefaces to literary works. Thus, the epigrams of the later collections exhibit greater variety than those of the earlier work. They are also usually longer and less terse than those typical of the first collection. Thus when this paper discusses Jonson's epigrams in "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry," the term designates not only satires, epitaphs, and tributes, but also epistles

[81]C. Hugh Holman, _A Handbook to Literature_ (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 196-97.

[82]Holman, p. 197.

and dedicatory verses. The study does not focus on, but occasionally refers to, other poems of the later collection such as odes, elegies, lyrics, and "songs" from the plays.

The designation "later work" also requires some explanation. When Jonson published his first collection of poetry, he entitled it "Epigrammes: Book I." A "Book II" never appeared, but Jonson was apparently in the process of arranging this second collection when he died in 1637. He had arranged some of the poems for publication and entitled the group "Underwood," which title he explained in the preface:

> With the same leave the Ancients call'd that kind of body Sylva . . . in which there were workes of divers nature, and matter congested; as the multitude call Timber-trees, promiscuously growing, a Wood, or Forrest: so am I bold to entitle these Poems, of later growth, by this of Under-wood, out of the Analogie they hold to the Forrest, in my former booke, and no otherwise. (Ud., p. 117)

("Forrest" is, or course, the second collection of poems published as a companion piece to "Epigrammes.") But Jonson died before this later group of poems went to press, and "Underwood" was published posthumously in 1640 by a friend of Jonson's, Sir Kenelm Digby. Digby included for publication with "Underwood" (1) verse that Jonson had apparently not arranged for publication under the title "Ungathered Verse" (now called "Uncollected Poetry"); (2) a revised edition of an earlier work, Horace's "Art of Poetry"; and (3) Jonson's critical studies ("Discoveries"). Although this publication contains chiefly the poet's later work, the title description of the work as poems "of later growth" is not strictly accurate. "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry" do contain some poems which were written before 1612 (the date the book went to the printer) but, for one reason or another, were not included in the earlier publication. Nevertheless, most of Jonson's poems were occasional and can therefore be dated. Thus, it is usually possible to distinguish between early and late work and therefrom to draw some conclusions about the poet's thinking at two different periods of his life.

The most important observation regarding the early and late epigrams is that the unyielding, fiery satiric temper so evident in "Epigrammes" is considerably less evident in "Underwood" and "Uncollected Poetry." A look at some numbers illustrates this contrast: in the one hundred and thirty-three poems of "Epigrammes," sixty-five are denunciatory; of the thirty-odd epigrams in "Uncollected Poetry," five are denunciatory. To total, then, the sixty-five epigrams of the two later collections contain only nine or ten denunciations. Of these, three are directed at Jonson's long-time enemy and rival, Inigo Jones; three at courtiers; two at detractors; and one or two at "the Times." From a consideration of the numbers, it is evident that Jonson's mind was less disposed to criticism in the later work, and an examination of the poems reveals that often his denunciations were directed at those he believed to have attacked first (the courtiers, detractors, and Inigo Jones); Jonson does not usually begin the attack with a "To Thee . . ." so frequent in the early epigrams. He seems less inclined to open the argument by vehemently pointing out and denouncing the folly of his contemporaries. To be sure, there are still angry passages and bitter poems (as "To a Friend, to Perswade Him to the Warres," and "An Epigram on the Court Pucell"), but more typically such denunciation is mentioned only as passing references to how miserable the times have become compared to what they were "long ago," a nostalgia from which the poet quickly passes on to other things in the poem. As Bryant pointed out,[83] Jonson was never a sunny man; but he is considerably more so in the later poems.

Such an obvious change leads to a consideration of possible reasons behind Jonson's shift in attitude. One such possibility is suggested in the epigrams themselves, in a before-and-after look at the poet's attitude toward money and position in society.

Jonson dedicated the epigrams of the 1616 folio to the Earl of Pembroke and, in his preface, asked Pembroke's protection should his verses bring him "danger." But it appears from what he said in that book that he had already encountered some difficulties because of his "Muse":

> AWay, and leave me, thou thing most abhord
> That hast betray'd me to a worthlesse lord;
> Made me commit most fierce idolatrie
> To a great image through thy luxurie.
> Be thy next masters more unluckie Muse,
> And, as thou'hast mine, his houres, and youth abuse.
> Get him the times long grudge, the courts ill will;
> And, reconcil'd, keepe him suspected still.
> Make him loose all his friends; and, which is worse,
> Almost all wayes, to any better course.
> With me thou leav'st an happier Muse then thee,
> And which thou brought'st me, welcome povertie.
> Shee shall instruct my after-thoughts to write
> Things manly, and not smelling parasite.
> But I repent me: Stay. Who e're is rais'd,
> For worth he has not, He is tax'd, not prais'd. (LXV, pl 27)

As the poet pictures it here, he was indeed "unluckie": he had incurred the "times long grudge," provoked the "courts ill will," lost "all his

[83] Bryant, p. 5.

friends," cancelled nearly all his prospects for a better "course," and, as a result, been left in "povertie." If the circumstances were really as dire as Jonson describes, he was certainly taking it well; he even says that his poverty is "welcome." There is a reason for such stoic-seeming good humor, however, and that reason is indicated in the last four lines of the poem. The occasion for the poem was Jonson's chagrin at having praised a man (perhaps one of his "Angels") who turned out to be a "worthless lord," hence his half-serious desire to be rid of his erring "Muse." Such misguided praise made Jonson appear to be flattering the subject of the poem and thus servilely currying favor for gain ("smelling parasite"). But in the last lines Jonson indicates that he has reconsidered his mistake and is still satisfied with his Muse, for "Who e're is rais'd/ For worth he has not, He is tax'd, not prais'd." Jonson means that despite his error, he still "got his man," still censured the man for not being what he should have been. Thus Jonson's aim was fulfilled: he denounced vice and praised virtue. To do so was his avowed intention and firm determination, and if speaking out for what he believed was right and denouncing what he believed was wrong would be repaid by public censure and poverty, well, his ideals were worth the cost. Besides, to Jonson, money was only that "filthy lucre" which had corrupted virtue many times in the "age of gold." He was not of his age; he was a poet; he could not be "bought." It was a question of integrity.

While it no doubt was actually a question of integrity, it must be added that it was also a question of situation. Circumstances were not as bleak as he described. Jonson was never a wealthy man, but his position as popular masque-maker in the court of James I did render him more comfortably-fixed than he had ever been. Thus it was from the vantage point of some money and court favor as opposed to no money and favor that he boasted his cavalier disregard for both. Later circumstances were to change that attitude.

Jonson's fortunes declined after James I died in 1625. Charles I did not share his father's regard for the poet and often neglected to pay him the pension granted by his father in 1616. Further, Jonson's masques were no longer popular, his later plays were poorly received, his income dwindled, and his health deteriorated badly. Jonson suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1628, and the epigrams written after that date include numerous petitions from Jonson (the "Bed-rid Wit," he called himself) to Charles asking for his pension or a gift. By 1632, he had become a complete mendicant, as is clear from his "The Humble Petition of Poore Ben. To th'best of Monarchs, Masters, Men, King Charles":

> —Doth most humbly show it,
> To your Majestie, your Poet:
>
> THat whereas your royall Father
> James the Blessed, pleas'd the rather,
> Of his special grace to Letters,
> To make all the Muses debters
> To his bountie; by extension
> Of a free Poetique Pension,
> A large hundred Markes annuitie,
> To be given me in gratuitie,
> For done service, and to come . . .
> Please your Majestie to make
> Of your grace, for goodnesse sake,
> Those your Fathers Markes, your Pounds; (Ud., 28, p. 237)

Since Hunter explains that a mark is two-thirds of a pound, Jonson was asking for an increase in his pension. Certainly poverty was no longer "welcome" to Jonson; its reality was so much grimmer than he had foreseen. But to say, as Hunter does,[84] that Jonson compromised his principles by begging money is too great a judgment on too little evidence. A compromise of principle implies a violation of one's beliefs, and Jonson had never exhibited any scruples against asking for money; he had often asked before and did not blush to ask a gift of even a lady, like, for example, Lucy, Countess of Bedford:

> MAdame, I told you late how I repented,
>   I ask'd a lord a buck, and he denyed me;
> And, ere I could aske you, I was prevented:
>   For your most noble offer had supply'd me.
> Straight went I home; and there most like a Poet,
>   I fancied to my selfe, what wine, what wit
> I would have spent: how every Muse should know it,
>   And Phoebus-selfe should be at eating it.
> O Madame, if your grant did thus transferre mee,
>   Make it your gift. See whither that will beare mee.
>
> (LXXXLV, p. 35)

It was common practice in Jonson's time for poets to seek and receive financial support from patrons and friends, and the transaction did not then carry with it the embarrassing stigma assigned to it by the twentieth century. Further, in his petitions to the king, the poet was usually asking for what was rightfully his, the pension which had already been granted him; and the terms in which he couches his requests are probably no more servile than the traditional ones used by a subject addressing a king who ruled by Divine Right. There is a difference between Jonson's letter to Lucy and his petition to the king, but the difference is not of content, but of tone: one reflects the light heart of no great necessity; the other reflects the heavy heart of great need; and the difference between the two attitudes is knowledge. By

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[84] Hunter, p. 116.

the time of his petition to the king, Jonson had experienced poverty in full measure, and that experience had changed his attitude, not his ideals. Jonson never said he would not ask for money. Indeed, he was doing so at that very writing. What he did say was that if poverty was the price of speaking his mind, he would cheerfully pay it. There is no evidence in his petitions to the king that Jonson compromised his principles, that in violation of his ideals, he had "sold" his pen for money.

Of course, it should be admitted here that there is such evidence, evidence which suggests that Jonson did violate his beliefs in order to avoid, or more accurately, to alleviate, the poverty of his later years. In addition to petitions to the king such as the one just discussed, Jonson's later epigrams contain some seventeen complimentary poems to Charles, his family, and his treasurers; in "Epigrammes" there are five: four to James* and one to Salisbury when he was treasurer. Also in contrast, the early epigrams contain at least seventeen satires denouncing courtiers; the later epigrams contain just three. The combination of such unusual deference to the court and his obvious need for court favor does make Jonson appear in a light he most abhorred, that of "smelling parasite." Certainly the poet's earlier-expressed disregard for "povertie" and the "courts ill will" were luxuries he could no longer afford in his straitened circumstances; and it is therefore conceivable that Jonson curbed his tongue in order to try to provide for himself, a restraining of his "Muse" which would account, in part, for the milder

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*There are two others to James which appear among the later epigrams. The total number of tributes to James is then actually six, not four.

tone of the later epigrams.

But, once again, one cannot definitely assume from the evidence that Jonson did compromise his principles in an effort to gain the court's favor. His tributes to the king _et al_ could well have been sincere, or at least as sincere as his tributes had ever been. Jonson wrote fifty-seven tributes in "Epigrammes," and most of them pass from the designation _compliment_ into _panegyric_. Even allowing for the intentional hyperbole with which Jonson idealized his Angels, it is tolerably certain that some of what he said he knew to be false. One wonders especially about a deftly-turned compliment to James which appears in "Epigrammes":

> MArtial, thou gav'st farre nobler Epigrammes
>   To thy Domitian, than I can my James:
> But in my royall subject I passe thee,
>   Thou flattered'st thine, mine cannot flatter'd bee.
>
> (XXXVI, p. 16)

It is the nature of a tribute to eulogize, and Jonson's manners were impeccable, at least in the tributes; the Clods and Devils could fend for themselves.

It is also true that the greater number of tributes to the king, his family, and his treasurers which appear in the later work could be the result of Jonson's position. He was still "poet-laureate," so to speak; Charles did pay him from time to time; and he was still expected to produce poems for royal birthdays and other ceremonious occasions at court. Perhaps there were simply more of such occasions during the early reign of Charles. Also, the fact that relatively few denunciations of the courtiers appear in these epigrams can be easily explained by the fact that Jonson was no longer a frequenter of the court. Without the spur of regular exposure to the corruption he described earlier, his anger may well have subsided. In short, there is no indisputable evidence that Jonson compromised his principles in order to secure court favor. Any change in the epigrams could just as easily have resulted from a change in attitude as from a change in character.

That the poet's attitude could undergo change is strongly suggested by lines from an epitaph written on the death of Vincent Corbet in 1619. Jonson describes Corbet as

> . . . a friend and Father . . .
> His very Manners taught t'amend,
>   They were so even, grave, and holy;
> No stubbornnesse so stiffe, nor folly
>   To license 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.
>   Much from him I professe I wonne,
> And more, and more, I should have done,
>   But that I understood him scant;   (Ud. 14, p. 138)

Corbet was the father of one of Jonson's friends and apparently close to him since he calls him "friend and father." Perhaps contact with the man and respect for his good life led Jonson to reassess his earlier use of the pen. In an effort to exorcise the vice in his society, he had often "chid" the men, both as individuals and as types. And in his zeal for reform, he had not taken care to separate the man from his fault; indeed, he seemed to see little difference between the two. Jonson does say here that he learned from Corbet and "more, and more, I should have wonne/ But that I understood him scant." It is possible that Jonson "understood" better as years went by that destruction is not construction and that he had enjoyed his work too well. Such a different attitude, arising from greater knowledge, could explain the fact that there are fewer satires in the later epigrams. It is true that while the poet was less inclined to criticize the courtier in later years, he was also less inclined to criticize the other members of his society. He may have learned more sympathy for the man, if not the vice.

The same consideration of Corbet's "very Manners" which "taught t'amend" which may have prompted Jonson to modify his method of reform may also have prompted him to look withim himself: Lines from an epistle to the Earl of Sackville, a benefactor, do suggest a more introspective Jonson. In the epistle the poet has been talking about "crime in the streets, the robbing of "poore Market-folkes" and "kicking a punck" (prostitute), deeds which he makes analogous to the mistreatment of the poor by the greedy and indifferent rich. Persons who do these things, the "Towne Gallantry," Jonson observes, are often rewarded by notoriety instead of the censure they deserve:

> . . . feats of darknesse acted in Mid-Sun,
> And told of with more License then th' were done!
> Sure there is Misterie in it, I not know
> That men such reverence to such actions show!
> And almost deifie the Authors! . . . (Ud. 15, p. 142)

There is a "Misterie" in it, Jonson says. But then he goes on to tell Sackville:

> And you Sir know it well to whom I write . . .
> No more are these of us, let them then goe,
> I have the lyst of mine owne faults to know,
> Looke too and cure; Hee's not a man hath none,
> But like to be, that every day mends one
> And feels it, Else he tarries by the Beast: . . .
> . . . he must feele and know, that will advance.
> Men have beene great, but never good by chance . . .
> Or on the sudden . . .

'Tis by degrees that men arrive at glad
Profit in ought: each day some little adde,
In time 'twill be a heape; this is not true
Alone in money, but in manners too.
Yet we must more then move still, or goe on,
We must accomplish; (Ud. 15, pp. 142-43)

What is not said here is as revealing as what is said. Jonson has told Sackville that greed, cruelty, and misplaced values do abide in society and that such things are shocking; yet he leaves off at that: he lets "them then goe," an action highly uncharacteristic of the earlier "fire and brimstone" preacher. He explains his reason for offering no further reproach: he has his own faults to consider, his own life to amend. It is typical of Jonson to drape what he is currently doing with the mantle of long-standing theory and thus exemplary practice. But it does not hide the fact that the thinking he expresses here is different from that which he expressed before. In "Epigrammes" Jonson never admitted that he had any faults to consider, much less a "lyst." In the early work he portrayed himself as the ideal man, the Poet-Satirist with "exact knowledge of all vertues and their Contraries," not a man like other men. Yet here he speaks of the slow but steady growth required to reach the ideal. Jonson's statement here suggests greater knowledge of self and other men, a knowledge which may have made him, if not more sympathetic, at least less antagonistic toward those who were once the objects of his vehement denunciation. Such statements as this one, as well as the generally milder tone of the later epigrams, show that Jonson had changed his attitude and that he had taken his crusade within.

The foregoing discussion is presented to illustrate the poet's attitude toward poverty, satire, and human fallibility as it appears in the early epigrams and as it alters in the later epigrams; and to propose that the poet's altered attitude accounts, in part, for the milder tone of the later epigrams. Such a conclusion is a reasonable one from the facts at hand. However, it should not be inferred that the change in the poet's attitude was a drastic one; i.e., that the fire-breathing satirist suddenly (or even gradually) turned into a sweetness-and-light lyricist. No such radical change occurred. Jonson was always Jonson, and he was never satisfied with imperfection. But it is true that the later work is characterized by a restrained treatment of vice quite uncommon in the early work; and it seems reasonable to assume that this change is the same one noted by Barish in the plays:

> The satiric tendency to insist on the gulf between things as they are and things as they ought to be wanes noticeably in the course of his career, and his attitude becomes more and more that of the man whose recognition of folly in himself prevents him from judging it too harshly in others.[85]

There are others who agree with Barish,[86] and therefore there seems to be general agreement that Jonson became increasingly aware of his own fallibility in later years and that his increased self-knowledge resulted in a less critical attitude toward misdoers. Other factors such as the poet's fuller understanding of poverty and of human nature are probably important also as a cause of the poet's altered attitude, at least as it appears in the poems. And, of course, there may be numerous other minor factors, never to be known, which, in addition to

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[85]Barish, p. 146.

[86]Bryant, p. 1.

these just-mentioned ones, contributed to the milder tone of the later epigrams. There is one other factor, however, which is perhaps the most influential one; and it, too, emerges from a study of the later epigrams.

The Golden Age was the ruling dream of Jonson's life. But it must be remembered that the Elizabethan concept of the Golden Age was a conflation: a joining of the simple, naturally good life described by the ancients to the learned and cosmopolitan life admired by the Elizabethans. Thus, Jonson's concept of the Golden Age, as it emerges from his early epigrams, is the typically Elizabethan one; and it was therefore the Elizabethan version of the Golden Age that Jonson was striving so earnestly to restore in his time. But the poet's concept of life in the Golden Age, "the happiest life," altered in the course of years, as did his attitude. And it is this altered ideal which appears in and directs the later work.

The change in Jonson's concept of "the happiest life" can be seen, perhaps unexpectedly, in a comparison of two suppers, one in "Epigrammes" and the other in "Underwood." In "Inviting a Friend to Supper," Jonson first issues the invitation,

> TO night, grave sire, 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 . . .

And then shows his guest the menu:

> Yet shall you have, to rectifie your palate,
>   An olive, capers, or some better sallade
> Ushring the mutton; with a short-leg'd hen,
>   If we can get her, full of egs, and then,
> Limons, and wine for sauce: to these, a coney
>   Is not to be despair'd of, for our money;
> And, though fowle, now, be scarce, yet there are clarkes,

The skie not falling, thinke we may have larkes. (CI, p. 46)

The meal will be ample: four meat dishes—mutton, hen, rabbit, and lark—accompanied by condiments, lemons, and wine, the best that can be bought "for our money." But lest this menu not be persuasive enough, the poet enlarges on the offerings:

> Ile tell you of more, and lye, so you will come:
>   Of partrich, pheasant, wood-cock, of which some
> May yet be there; and godwit, if we can:
>   Knat, raile, and ruffe too . . .
> Digestive cheese, and fruit there sure will bee;
>   But that, which most doth take my Muse, and mee,
> Is a pure cup of rich Canary-wine,
>   Which is the Mermaids, now, but shall be mine . . .

His dream meal, Jonson's "lye," will consist of seven additional edible birds, as well as cheese, fruit, and imported Canary wine purchased from the Mermaid Tavern. The poet describes his favorite Canary as superior to any tasted even by the renowned ancients:

> Of which had Horace, or Anacreon tasted,
>   Their lives, as do their lines, till now had lasted.

Their lines, if not their wine, will provide the "sauce" for the evening:

> . . . my man
> Shall reade a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
>   Livie, or of some better booke to us,
> Of which we'll speake our minds, amidst our meate;

And Jonson adds that there will be no fear to spoil this spendid supper; there will be no court spies present to report the conversation:

> Of this we will sup free, but moderately,
>   And we will have no Pooly', or Parrot by;
> Nor shall our cups make any guiltie men:
>   But, at our parting, we will be, as when
> We innocently met . . .

In the supper described here, Jonson has indulged in a bit of whimsy, and in so doing, has described his ideal supper, the one he would have if he could.

In "Underwood," Jonson describes another supper; it, too, is an ideal, but a later one. The poem is "The Praises of the Countrie Life," and obviously, therefore, the setting is different. The first supper was to be taken at Jonson's "poore house" in London; this one is to be eaten at a farm away from the city and the shadow of the court:

> HAppie is he, that from all Businesse cleere,
>   As the old race of Mankind were,
> With his owne Oxen tills his Sires left lands,
>   And is not in the Usurers bands:
> Nor Souldier-like started with rough alarmes . . .
>   But flees the Barre and Courts, with the proud bords . . .
>
> (Ud. 87, p. 264)

In this case, Jonson is to be guest, not host; and his farmer-host is a "happie" man. He inherited his land; so he is free from "Usurer's bands." Also, though the meal will be set at a farmhouse table and "no proud bord," the scene is so far removed from the city that the host (and perhaps the guest) need fear no threat of legal jeopardy or court intrigue. This peaceful setting is shown to be fruitful:

> . . . in the bending Vale beholds a-farre
>   The lowing herds there grazing are:
> Or the prest honey in pure pots doth keepe
>   Of Earth, and sheares the tender Sheepe:
> Or when that Autumne, through the fields lifts round
>   His head, with mellow Apples crown'd
> How plucking Peares, his owne hand grafted had,
>   And purple-matching Grapes, hee's glad! . . .
> Then when the thundering Jove, his Snow and showres
>   Are gathering by the Wintry houres;
> Or hence, or thence, he drives with many a Hound
>   Wild Bores into his toyles pitch'd round:
> Or straines on his small forke his subtill nets
>   For th'eating Thrush, or Pit-falls sets:
> And snares the fearfull Hare, and new-come Crane . . .
>   That penning the glad flock in hurdles by
> Their swelling udders doth draw dry: . . .

As portrayed here the farm is a self-sustaining, abundant world. No food for the farmhouse table need ever be purchased, as was the case in London; and there is no scarcity here. In addition, Jonson sees the farm as an orderly world, an order presented in and emphasized by the design of the poem. It opens with a farmer and his oxen in the fields, moves to the cattle grazing in the "Vale," then to the orchards and vineyard closer to the house, then to the "penning the glad flocks in hurdles by" the farmhouse itself—an orderly progression from far to near. The seasons reflect this order as well, since the poem presents them in natural sequence: summer with its grazing herds and "prest honey"; "Autumne" with "mellow Apples crown'd"; "Wintry houres" with the farmer's trapping of game; and finally, spring with the "glad flock" penned in "hurdles by" ready for shearing. This second supper will be eaten in the midst of this pervading order and harmony, a sharp contrast to the first supper, which, despite its richer fare, is set against a backdrop of confused city life and disorder at court. And Jonson seems to like this simpler meal at least as well as the first one:

> (the farmer) . . . from the sweet Tub Wine of this yeare takes,
>   And unbought viands ready makes:
> Not Lucrine Oysters I could then more prize,
>   Nor Turbot, nor bright Golden eyes: . . .
> Th'Ionian God-wit, nor the Ginny hen
>   Could not goe downe my belly then
> More sweet then Olives, that new gather'd be
>   From fattest branches of the Tree:
> Or the herb Sorrell, that loves Meadows still . . .

It is evident that in these two meals, Jonson's dream-fictions, he has described not only two ideal meals but also two ideal ways of life. In the first supper, Jonson has described the learned and cosmopolitan life of the Elizabethan Golden Age: a city house; a dignified, educated dinner guest; fine food—a "feast"; imported Canary wine; literary conversation; and the absence of all the bad features of court life, although court life itself has not been excluded. The "grave sir," Jonson's dignified, educated guest, and the poet's felt need to offer the best indicate that the guest is a frequenter of the court, as is Jonson; if it were not so, there would be no need to exclude court informers from the table to insure that what the host and guest discuss there will not be repeated at court. Jonson did not relish the "courts ill will," considered himself "unluckie" to have it, though he was willing to accept it if it was the price of conscience. In sum, the first supper represents "the happiest life" of the Elizabethan Golden Age, represented in Jonson's early epigrams as the life he would have if he could.

The second supper presents a series of contrasts to the first: a farmhouse instead of a city house; a farmer-host instead of Jonson; home-grown, simple fare instead of expensive food; home-made wine instead of imported Canary; dinner conversation of, perhaps, hand-grafted pear trees instead of books; the complete absence of the court, not only its corruption; and the exclusion of all "Business" connected with city life. In short, the second supper outlines the simple, good life of the original Golden Age.

That the two meal-lives reflect the two versions of the Golden Age ideal is especially clear from a comparison of the men and women of each version. Jonson describes the farmer's wife as:

> . . . a chaste Wife meet
> For houshold aid, and Children sweet;
> Such as the Sabines, or a Sun-burnt-blowse,
> Some lustie quick Apulians spouse,
> To deck the hallow'd Harth with old wood fir'd
> Against the Husband comes home tir'd; . . .

The farmer's wife is a simple, chaste woman, a good worker who bears sweet children and tends the hearth for her "tir'd" husband. She is quite a contrast to the shining "day-starre" beauty of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, whose learning, virtue, and manners provide a noble example for Jacobean society. It is difficult to picture Lucy as a "Sun-burnt-blowse" who would carry in wood for the fire.

The farmer is also described in the poem:

> Then now beneath some ancient Oke he may,
> Now in the rooted Grasse, him lay,
> Whilst from the higher Bankes doe slide the floods,
> The soft birds quarrell in the Woods,
> The Fountaines murmure as the streames doe creepe,
> And all invite to easie sleepe.

The farmer may be tired from hard work, but he sleeps "easie"; he is not "Souldier-like started with rough alarmes," as is, perhaps, Horace Vere. Neither does this farmer exhibit Vere's valor on the battlefield or Salisbury's on the "court-field"; the farmer does not possess Rudyerd's learning, Sidney's poetic gifts, or Roe's spiritual strength. And it is difficult also to picture any of these men, Jonson's Angels, as the "lustie quick Apulian." The contrast between the heroes of the Elizabethan Golden Age and those of the ancient Golden Age is certainly great.

It is clear from the contrast between the two "worlds" represented by the two poems that they are separate; one is the "modern" ideal and the other, the "old." In writing both poems Jonson has presented both ideals, and the question which arises is whether Jonson was simply presenting each part of the total ideal at different times in his life or whether the presentation of one ideal in early work and another in late work signifies that he had separated out the old from the new and chosen the old, the ancient way. It seems likely that the latter is true. In the first place, Jonson's Angels were usually described as embodying all of the total Golden Age attributes: virtue, simple goodness, manliness, learning, ability. Yet the "heroes" of this later work are non-heroic, naturally good, simple people who lack the learning and ability of the Angels. The Angels were the instructive examples in the earlier epigrams, and their pressure there means that Jonson was trying to restore the Elizabethan Golden Age, a concept which included but added to the features of the original Golden Age. Therefore, the ideal presented in the early work was the total ideal, the conflation; and the ideal that came later is different and something less.

The later work reflects this second choice in ways other than direct statement. The milder tone noted in later epigrams is accounted for, in part, by the poet's increased introspection, and this increased introspection is a direct result of the poet's altered ideal. A turning inward is also, to some extent, a turning away; and lessened antagonism often indicates lessened interest. And, in truth, Jonson's decreased concern for reforming Jacobean society is a reflection of his decreased interest in that society itself. It no longer offered him even the hope of the life he once desired, and it was nothing like the life he had come to want. At one time, Jonson sought a "course" in life, the busy, cosmopolitan life of the educated Londoner; in later life, however, he sought the simple, good life of the ancients. The contrast presented by the difference between the "old" and the "modern" ideals explains his choice: natural, not artificial; free, not burdened with "Business" and "Usurer's bands"; ordered, not disordered; peaceful, not strife-ridden. Jonson's choice is indicated also by his treatment of the wine in the two supper poems. In the first he asserts the superiority of his favorite Canary wine to anything tasted by the ancients, and he means not only the wine, but the entire life brought together at that table. In the second supper poem, however, Jonson decides that "new" wine is better; and that decision marks his return to equality with the ancients:

> HAppie is he, that from all Businesse cleere,
> As the old race of Mankind were . . .

It seems that somewhere between "Epigrammes" and "Underwood" Jonson dropped the Elizabethan requirement of learned and cosmopolitan living from his ideal. To be "happie," Jonson returned in his dream to the life of the ancients, "the happier life."

Of course, it would not be correct to assume that through this second choice of life Jonson had actually forsworn all learning, that he indeed wished to spend the rest of his life without his beloved books. That is not exactly what he said. And even if he had, the assertion would prove itself false as it was uttered because it appears in a poem, an exercise of learning. Rather than having excluded all learning, Jonson seems to have separated learning into two divisions, perhaps something like "public" and "private"; and it was the "public" learning, that connected with the city and court, that he had dropped from his ideal. Such "public" learning included plays performed in public theaters and poems read and discussed at formal dinners. What Jonson means here is what he meant in his well-known "Ode To Himself," written after his worst-received play, The New Inn, had been hissed off the stage in 1629:

> COme leave the loathed Stage,
> And the more loathsome Age,
> Where pride and impudence in faction knit,
> Usurpe the Chaire of wit:
> Inditing and arraigning every day,
> Something they call a Play.
> Let their fastidious vaine
> Commission of the braine,
> Runne on, and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn:
> They were not made for thee, lesse thou for them . . .
> . . .
> Leave things so prostitute,
> And take th'Alcaike Lute:
> Or thine owne Horace, or Anacreons Lyre;
> Warme thee by Pindars fire: . . . (UP 53, p. 387)

In Jonson's mind, poetry was implicit in the ancient ideal, but public literature was not. It was the "rage, sweat, censure, and condemn" that he wished to exorcise from his life, not the "Alcaike lute."

That Jonson had indeed left the "loathsome Age" and joined himself to the ancient ideal is re-affirmed by his second direct statement of that ideal, this time in "Uncollected Poetry":

> THe things that make the happier life, are these,
> Most pleasant Martial; Substance got with ease,
> Not labour'd for, but left thee by thy Sire;
> A Soyle, not barren; a continewall fire;
> Never at law; seldome in office gown'd;
> A quiet mind; free powers; and body sound;
> A wise simplicity; freindes alike-stated;
> Thy table without art, and easy-rated:
> Thy night not dronken, but from cares layd wast;
> No sowre, or sollen bed-mate, yet a Chast;

Sleepe, that will make the darkest howres swift-pac't;
Will to bee, what thou art; and nothing more:
Nor feare thy latest day, nor wish therfore. (UP XLVII, p. 404)

The poem is a serious, concise statement of the author's later ideal as it is set forth in "Praises of the Countrie Life" and as it is evidenced by the poet's altered attitude and milder tone of the later epigrams. The poem is Jonson's credo in later life, and as such should certainly be an important part of the Jonson canon. Yet it is not. As important as the poem is, it is almost completely ignored by Jonson's editors and critics. In contrast to his careful and useful annotation of most poems, Hunter includes no explanation whatever of this one. Herford and Simpson simply label it a translation of Martial [87] and say no more. Nowhere is this poem singled out for special consideration. It is likely that the poem's importance goes unrecognized because it is a translation of a work by Martial and considered therefore as unoriginal and not as sincere a statement of the author's beliefs as are his other poems. Such a conclusion is short-sighted.

It is difficult to find "other" poems among Jonson's work that do not reflect in either content or style something of Horace, Martial, or the other ancient writers he admired. Their influence is fundamental throughout his entire work. But Jonson's translations are adaptations, not servile copies of the original. Elizabethan literary theory and taste advocated frequent translation of ancient writings, the only rule being that the translator was to improve on the original. Jonson always tried to improve on the original, in Golden Age ideals as well as

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[87]Herford and Simpson, XI, p. 155.

writings. And if his efforts did not result in an improved product, he at least managed to make the product his own. Further, close adherence to the original model was, in Jonson, a sign that he was conferring the sincerest compliment or expressing the deepest emotion. Bush points out that Jonson's epitaphs on his daughter and son and the child actor, Solomon Pavy, "enshrine the most felicitous adaptations of Martial."[88] Certainly it cannot be that because a Jonson poem owes its original thought to an ancient writer, it is less than an expression of Jonson's own belief. There is no persona here in this poem or in "Praises of the Countrie Life," also a translation of an ancient work. In the poem Jonson is simply agreeing with the ancients that "the happier life" is best.

It is clear from his summary of "the happier life" in "Martial. Epigram LXVII" (UP LXVII, p. 404) that Jonson had not only altered his concept of the best life possible for man, but that he had also in his dream moved away from the ideal in the direction of the real, from the unattainable toward the attainable. It might not be possible to change the world into a perfect society of the good and the just, but one might come to own his own land, to be peaceful and healthy. Everyone might never be valorous, learned, and wealthy, as were Jonson's Angels, but one might have friends "alike-stated," a table simply but amply-laden, and a pleasant wife. The second ideal does require less than the first.

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[88]Bush, p. 106.

Yet it is one of the sad ironies of life that even though the poet's dream became more realistic and therefore theoretically more attainable, it was not so for Jonson. He was never any closer to attaining the second ideal late in life than he was the first early in life. According to Hunter's chronology, the poem—Jonson's summation of "the happier life"—was written around 1636; that is, the poem was written after Jonson's paralyzing stroke of 1628, after the failure of The New Inn and all subsequent works; it was written after his quarrel with Inigo Jones, his resulting loss of favor at court and declining fortunes; it was written after he had been bedfast for eight years, after he had experienced in full measure the poverty that had nipped at his heels all his life, and after he had experienced what must have been a crushing blow, the death of his second son Benjamin. In short, the poem was written at a time in Jonson's life when he had endured eight years of unrelenting adversity. In 1636, Jonson was a sick, ignored, bedridden, poverty-stricken man. Yet this poem, written after all these misfortunes and only one year before his death--a death that Jonson must have seen approaching inexorably—is, unexpectedly, a simple, quiet summary of all that composes the good, the "happier" life.

Because the poem appears at this particular time in Jonson's life, it elicits both pity and admiration from the reader. The poem evokes pity in the reader because in his listing of the conditions that comprise the "happier" life, Jonson is, ironically, point-by-point, listing those things that he does not have. For example, he begins by pointing out the serenity that accompanies the absence of financial worries; he, himself, of course, was beset by money problems all his life, especially in later years, as is attested by his numerous poems on the subject to friends, patrons, and the king. In addition, Jonson points out the value of avoiding constant legal jeopardy, another experience all too common to Jonson, who had been imprisoned three times and whose untamed "Muse" had led him close to the legal shoals on numerous other occasions. Jonson also touts the value of a "Soyle, not barren; a continewall fire," a reference, perhaps, not only to fruitful fields, but also to his inability to pass on his name through a living heir. The line may also refer to another disappointment: his declining powers as a poet and dramatist; line six, listing "free powers" as one component of "the happier life" suggests as does "Underwood 19," that he had become increasingly unable to produce work that fulfilled his expectations or approached in quality his previous work:

> All is not barren land, doth fallow lie.
> Some grounds are made the richer, for the Rest;
> And I will bring a Crop, if not the best. (Ud. 19, p. 154)

In addition, Jonson cites as requisite to happiness the "body sound," a night free from anxiety or care, a pleasant, but "chast" bed-mate, and "Sleepe, that will make the darkest howres swift-pac't"--all that he does not have but would surely welcome in his affliction. In short, the contrast between the poet's ideal, even the second one, and what he has of it speaks eloquently to the reader.

Yet the poem elicits the reader's admiration, as well as his pity. It is to Jonson's credit that the poem is not a sustained whine or an angry shriek at the Fates which created his predicament. Instead of the earlier diatribes against misdoers and detractors or the self-pitying denunciation of those who refused to like his plays, Jonson ends his life on a mellow note. The poem expresses the warm philosophy of a man who no longer asks a great deal of life, only the

> Will to bee, what thou art; and nothing more:
> Nor feare thy latest day, nor wish therfore.

Perhaps at the last Jonson did possess one of the attributes he so wistfully listed in this last poem, a "wise simplicity."

The assessment of Jonson's altered ideal as a "wise simplicity" is, of course, subject to challenge. To many, no doubt, the poet's movement from the first ideal to the second represents a retreat from the first ideal. And it is true that the second ideal is less rigorous and less unattainable than the first. But whether the poet's change of ideal should be regarded as a compromise of principle or a growth toward a better understanding of life is, like other things, in "the eye of the beholder."

In either case, the assertion that the poet's attitude never changed or developed in the course of his career is false. This study of Jonson's "happiest life" concept and of his attitude toward life and human frailty as they appear in the early epigrams and as they alter in later epigrams reveals that the poet could and did change his mind. In the poems as in the plays, "the happiest life" became "the happier life" for Jonson.

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