A SURVEY OF BEN JONSON'S REPUTATION FROM 1700 TO 1875

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

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May 1936

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his thanks to the following persons and to acknowledge with sincere gratitude their efforts in making this study possible:

To Dr. H. M. Priest for many helpful suggestions concerning methods of research and sources of information.

To Professor T. C. Owens for many valuable suggestions concerning sources of periodical allusions.

To Dr. V. A. Davis, who devoted a part of his vacation to checking the work for its final arrangement.

To Inez Swanson and Erma Stewart, whose conscientious work in the library stacks facilitated the production of the study.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to supplement the Jonson Allusion-Book of Adams and Bradley. Since the Adams-Bradley book covers the period up to 1700, it has seemed feasible to extend that study to recent times. Eighteen seventy-five has been arbitrarily fixed as the terminal date of the present study, because from that time on a great increase of activity has been shown in literary criticism, and the source material has become too abundant for adequate treatment within the limits of the present study.

In the preface to the Jonson Allusion-Book the editors state:

> While primarily intended to set forth the materials, within the limits specified, relating to Jonson's career as a man of letters, and to disclose the estimates of his genius as expressed by his contemporaries and immediate successors, it will also incidentally supply information on a variety of subjects connected with the literature of the time. For example, it will be of service as a partial allusion-book to many poets of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages; and it will be of no little value as a body of seventeenth-century dramatic criticism.[1]

What the editors of the Jonson Allusion-Book claim for their work, the present collection of allusions also will claim, except of course that the present collection is much more modest in scope and minuteness of detail. Only by the cooperation of many investigators, with labor extending over a long period of years, could a work of this nature be made even approximately complete. The writer hopes that with this modest

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[1] Jesse Franklin Bradley and Joseph Quincy Adams, The Jonson Allusion-Book (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. v-vi.

beginning he may some day produce a study much more scholarly and more nearly complete.

All allusions available to the writer contributing to the reputation of Ben Jonson between the dates 1700-1875 have been quoted. In reporting the citations from Whipple's Literature of the Age of Elizabeth and Gifford's Memoirs of Ben Jonson, it has been necessary to condense considerably because of the extreme length of the articles. These two sources are the only ones available to the writer which deal extensively with Jonson. Of the total number of allusions, by far the greater part are incidental remarks or comparisons doing homage to Jonson's learning and scholarship.

All the volumes in the University of Kansas and Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia libraries on poetry, criticism, prose fiction, and drama published between the arbitrarily selected dates were examined for possible allusions.

The plan of arrangement, which is apparent on inspection, is chronological with authors, rather than strictly chronological as to time as found in the Jonson Allusion-Book. The writer feels that such an arrangement should result in giving the study a unity and compactness that a purely chronological arrangement would not assure.

It has not always been possible to determine the date of the passage quoted; and in dealing with such a mass of detail, doubtless errors have been made; but the writer indulges the hope that such errors are neither numerous nor disproportionate to the scope and nature of this study.

CHAPTER I

THE JONSON ALLUSION-BOOK

Before proceeding to an account of the reputation of Jonson after 1700, it will be well to review the state of his fame in the seventeenth century, using the Jonson Allusion-Book as a source of information.

It appears that during Jonson's life time there was a great variety in the temper of the allusions, ranging from bare announcements in 1597 to a general increase in favor in 1605. During the next twenty years he was in great favor, but the later years of his life show a general decline in his popularity.

The very first allusion to Ben Jonson (1597) seems to anticipate the tempestous career he was to lead. A letter concerning the acts of the Privy Council relates the imprisonment of Ben Jonson, Robert Shaw, and Gabriel Spencer, for acting The Isle Of Dogs;[1] Jonson was particularly indicted for writing part of it. We find from five references in Henslowe's Diary that Jonson borrowed from Henslowe on plays in 1597-98.[2] In 1598 Francis Meres listed among many others Shakespeare and Jonson as being best for tragedy.[3] The Middlesex Session Rolls of 1598 give an account of Jonson's killing of Gabriel Spencer, which led to his being

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[1] Jesse Franklin Bradley and Joseph Quincy Adams, The Jonson Allusion-Book (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] Ibid., p. 3.

imprisoned.[4] Yet in spite of all his unpopular traits, at the close of the century John Weever compares him to Horace.[5]

In three years then he evidently mortgaged his future work to Henslowe, was twice imprisoned, and twice received favorable recognition.

During the first two years of the seventeenth century many derogatory statements were made about Jonson's satire and his quarrelsome disposition. John Marston says:

> I'll tan the hide
> Of thick-skinned Hugeness. . .
> This is the strain that chokes the theatres.[6]

An anonymous reference in 1601 says, "Jonson should betake himself back to his bricklaying,"[7] and another the following year says, ". . . . but he has become nowadays something humorous, and too-too satirical up and down, like his great grandfather Aristophanes."[7]

With the production in 1605 of Sejanus, Jonson seems to have put to flight his last enemy, for in that year even John Marston, who had previously railed at his satire said:

> Sejanus' Fall shall force thy merit rise;
> For never English shall, or hath before
> Spoke fuller grac'd.[8]

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[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] Ibid., p. 6.

[6] Ibid., p. 11.

[7] Ibid., p. 33.

[8] Ibid., p. 50.

Following closely on Sejanus, came in 1607 Volpone, an even greater success in comedy than Sejanus had been in tragedy. Francis Beaumont said, relative to Volpone:

> . . . .thou alone
> Hast taught our tongue, the rules of time, of place,
> And other rites, delivered with the grace
> Of comic style, which only, is far more
> Than any English stage hath known before.[9]

It was shortly after the production of Volpone that Beaumont wrote the letter to Jonson containing the famous quotation, "I lie and dream of your full Mermaid wine."[10]

Catiline, The Silent Woman, and The Alchemist all added to Jonson's fame and brought him additional praise. John Fletcher in 1611 expressed the general opinions of other writers, only in more fluent fashion, when he said:

> Thy labors shall outlive thee; and, like gold
> Stampt for continuance, shall be current where
> There is a sun, a people, or a year.[11]

During the second decade of the century Jonson seemed to be turning out plays and masques prolifically. Indicative of his popularity is John Chamberlain's statement in 1615:

> The only matter I can advertise since I wrote the last week is the success of the masque, Mercury Vindicated, on Twelfth-night, which was so well-liked and applauded that the king had it represented again the Sunday night after, in the very same manner,

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[9] Ibid., p. 58.

[10] Ibid., p. 65.

[11] Ibid., p. 79.

> though neither in device nor show was there anything extraordinary, but only excellent dancing, the choice being made of the best, both English and Scots.[12]

The tenor of the allusions from 1615 to 1620 seems to imply that Jonson's reputation was much better in drama than in his court masques. William Browne in 1616 said, "For the theatre not Seneca transcends his [Jonson's] worth of praise,"[13] while Nathaniel Brent in 1618 said, "The Masque of Twelfth Night was so dull that people say the poet (Ben Jonson) should return to his old trade of brick-making."[14]

An indication of Jonson's popularity at court was a reversionary grant from the king, in 1621, of the Office of Master of the Revels.[15]

George Wither, in 1622, wrote of the "now-flourishing Jonson,"[16] and all the allusions of the twenties indicate his position as such. However, an anonymous note in 1629 says,

> Listen (decaying Ben) and Counsell heare
> Wittes have their date and strength of braines may weare
> Age, steept In sacke, hath quencht, thy Enthean fier
> Wee pittye now, whom once, wee did admire:
> Surrender then thy right to th' stage; forbeare
> To do wright, what others Loath to heare
> And Justlye, since thy Crazye Muse doth now
> To quitte her Spartane province; fayntly knowe
> Swear not by God tis good; for yff you doe;
> The world will take your zeale, and Judgment too.[17]

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[12] Ibid., p. 88.

[13] Ibid., p. 93.

[14] Ibid., p. 108.

[15] Ibid., p. 122.

[16] Ibid., p. 127.

[17] Ibid., p. 149.

It is seen, therefore, that in the late twenties Jonson was suffering a falling off of favor, a falling off which was due perhaps somewhat to envy and jealousy on the part of his contemporaries.

Milton says in "L'Allegro" in 1632,

> Then to the well-trod stage anon,
> If Jonson's learned sock be on,"[18]

and the following year John Marriott says, "All men, we know, delight in Benjamin."[19]

The year 1633 seems to be the turning point of his popularity during his lifetime. In that year Thomas Heywood criticized Jonson's ego for publishing his "workes."[19] Again in that year George Chapman published an invective directed at Ben's old fault of vitriolic satire.[20] And yet again the same year an anonymous note says,

> For since he so ill keeps what hee earst wonne,
> Since that his reputation's lost and gone,
> The age sweares she'll no longer hold him play
> With her attention; but without delay
> Will rise, if some fresh Gamester will not fitte,
> That's furnished with a better stocke of witte.[21]

Sir Edward Walker, in 1637, at Jonson's death said:

> Anno 1637 -- Thursday, 17 August. --
> Died at Westminister Mr. Benjamin Jonson, the most famous, accurate, and learned poet of our age, especially in the English tongue, having left behind him many rare pieces which have sufficiently demonstrated to the world his worth.

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

He was buried the next day following, being accompanied
to his grave with all or the greatest part of the nobilitye
and gentrie then in the towne.[22]

The great number of epigrams published as Jonsonus Virbius after his death indicate that Jonson's faults were largely overlooked and that his contemporaries joined in doing homage to one whom they recognized as a master. Among the authors who contributed to the collection were Sackville, Beaumont, Hawkins, Henry Coventry, Edmund Waller, George Donne, John Ford, George Daniel, and Richard Brome, all of whom have come down as prominent writers of the period.[23]

To the Jonsonus Virbius poems should be the epigram, Robert Herrick's "Hesperides":

Here lyes Johnson [sic] with the rest
Of the Poets; but the Best.
Reader, wo'dst thou more have known?
Aske his Story, not his Stone.
That will speake what this can't tell
Of his glory. So farewell.[24]

In addition to Jonsonus Virbius, many other epigrams were written on Jonson, mainly in the same vein. Many an enthusiastic poet advised some younger writer to use the learned Ben as a model. Through the fifties his praises continued, although the Puritans found cause to berate his vulgarity.

With the increased activity in theatrical circles following the Restoration, Jonson's plays were much in demand. Pepys reported in his

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[22] Ibid., p. 198.

[23] Ibid., pp. 203-256.

[24] Ibid., p. 290.

diary in 1660. "My letters tell me . . . . that the two dukes do haunt the Park much, and that they were at a play, Madame Epicene, the other day."[25]

In general the tone of the allusions following the Restoration were favorable. However, it is easy to see that each year dimmed his memory just a little more and brought forth more authors for comparison. In 1672 George Villiers strikes a somewhat harsher note by saying, "I despise your Johnson sic and Beaumont, that borrowd all they writ from nature."[26]

In 1663, appeared an allusion by Dryden, which conformed more nearly to modern critical standards. Whereas previous allusions had been of three general types, namely, favorable, unfavorable, or merely historical, Dryden first presented some logical views, pointing out good and bad elements of Jonson's works and reasons for his opinions. In his allusion of 1663 Dryden indicated that Fletcher and Jonson were the wittiest writers in history.[27] The following year he said that if Fletcher and Jonson "have out-writ all other men, 'Tis with the drops from Shakespeare's pen."[28]

In 1668 Dryden in his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" referred to Jonson as the greatest man of the last age. In the same essay, he said Sejanus and Catiline are examples of an unnatural mixture of comedy and tragedy; Bartholomew Fair is the lowest kind of comedy, and Jonson's wit was not extraordinary, but that in judgment he was superb.[29]

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[25] Ibid., p. 321.

[26] Ibid., p. 372.

[27] Ibid., p. 329.

[28] Ibid., p. 331.

[29] Ibid., p. 340.

Dryden's open-minded criticism seemed sufficient to arouse many writers to defend the great Jonson. For instance Samuel Butler said about 1680:

He (Dryden) complaynd of B. Johnson
for stealing 40 sceanes out of Plautus.
Set a Thief to finde out a Thief.[30]

While many words were used in the last quarter of the century to praise him, nothing really new was said. Many extravagant terms were used to describe his style and abilities. An indication of the popularity of his works following the Restoration is found in an allusion to a title page in 1692:

The Works of Ben Jonson,
Which were formerly Printed in
Two Volumes, are now Reprinted
in One.[31]

The Jonson Allusion-Book has a total of 900 allusions to Jonson, of which 375 are favorable, 125 are unfavorable, and 400 are incidental or historical.

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[30] Ibid., p. 398.

[31] Ibid., p. 440.

CHAPTER II

FROM DRYDEN TO SAMUEL JOHNSON

TOBIAH GREENHATT, 1709

Of these military performances, the direction is undertaken by Epicene, the writer of 'Memoirs from the Mediterranean,' who, by the help of some artificial poisons conveyed by smells, has within these few weeks brought many persons of both sexes to an untimely fate; and, what is more surprising, has, contrary to her profession, with the same odours, revived others who had long since been drowned in the whirlpools of Lethe.[1]

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1711

The morality of this little club is guarded by such wholesome Laws and Penalties, that I question not but my Reader will be as well pleased with them, as he would have been with the Leges Convivales of Ben Johnson . . . .[2]

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1711

A man of your Reading must know that Abel Drugger gained great applause by it in the Time of Ben Jonson.[3]

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[1] Temple Scott, editor, The Prose Works Of Jonathan Swift D. D. (London: George Bell, and Sons, London, 1902), ix, p. 16.

[2] Joseph Addison, The Spectator, Everyman Edition, (London: J. M. Dent and Company), Vol. I, p. 38.

[3] Ibid., p. 104.

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1711

The old 'Song of Chevy-Chase' is the favourite Ballad of the common People of England: and Ben Johnson used to say he had rather have been the author of it than of all his works.[4]

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1711

It is also said, that they observe the Law in Ben Johnson's Club, which orders the Fire to be always kept in (focus perennis esto) as well for the Convenience of lighting their Pipes, as to cure the Dampness of the Club-Room.[5]

RICHARD STEELE, 1711

I cannot better close this Moral, than by a short Epitaph written by Ben Johnson, with a Spirit which nothing could inspire but an Object as I have been describing:

'Underneath this Stone doth lye
As much Virtue as cou'd die:
Which when alive did Vigour give
To as much Beauty as cou'd live.'[6]

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1712

. . . .When I am commending Wilks for representing the tenderness of a husband and a father in Macbeth, the contrition of a reformed prodigal in Harry the Fourth, the winning emptiness of a young man of good nature and wealth in The Trip to Jubilee, the officiousness of an artful servant in the Fox; when thus I celebrate Wilks, I talk to all the world who are engaged in any of those circumstances.[7]

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[4] Ibid., p. 264.

[5] Ibid., p. 274.

[6] Ibid., p. 124.

[7] Ibid., v. p. 200.

JOSEPH ADDISON, 1712

In short, he added and curtailed in such a Manner that he vexed me; insomuch that I could not forbear thinking, (what, I confess, I ought not to have thought of in so holy a Place) that this young Spark was as justly blameable as Bullock or Penkethman when they mend a noble play of Shakespeare or Johnson sic .[8]

RICHARD STEELE, 1712

The scene between Fulvia and Curious, in the second Act of Johnson's [sic] Catiline, is an excellent Picture of Power of a Lady over her Gallant.[9]

RICHARD STEELE, 1712

Ben Jonson, as I remember, makes a Foreigner, in one of his Comedies, admire the desperate Valour of the bold English, who let out their Wives to all Encounters.[10]

JOHNATHAN SWIFT, 1714

Yours, etc.
My humble service to Dame Pliant.[11]

A letter of Swift's to Knightly Chetwode. Apparently Swift is comparing the widow of Jonson's Alchemist to Chetwode's wife.

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[8] Ibid., vii, p. 244.

[9] Ibid., p. 134.

[10] Ibid., p. 199.

[11] F. Elrington Ball, editor, The Correspondence of Johnathan Swift D. D. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1911), ii, p. 259.

JOHNATHAN SWIFT, 1732

Described, it's thus: Defined would you 't have?
Then the world's honest man's an errant knave.[12]

These two lines from Ben Jonson were used as a text by Johnathan Swift for an essay entitled, "A Description of What the World Calls Discretion.

ALEXANDER POPE, 1715

Pope amused himself on one occasion by drawing up rather definite lists of writers whose sanction might be regarded as rendering words 'correct.' In talking over the design for a dictionary that might be authoritative for our English writers, Mr. Pope rejected Sir Walter Raleigh twice, as too affected. -- The list for prose authors from whose works such a dictionary should be collected was talked over several times, and quite settled. There were eighteen of them named by Mr. Pope, but four of that number Ben Jonson, L'Estrange, Congrene and Vanbrugh were named only as authorities for familiar dialogues and writings of that kind.[13]

ALEXANDER POPE

. . . .Was Shakespeare ignorant of these (unities of time, place, and action) or did he consciously choose to disobey them? Today it seems pretty certain that the latter was the case. . . . 'Is it likely that the greatest dramatic genius of this time should have been ignorant of what must have been discussed by every playwright whom he was in the habit of meeting daily? Could the intimate friend of Ben Jonson have been unacquainted with Ben Jonson's opinion. . . .'[14]

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12 Temple Scott, editor, The Prose Works of Johnathan Swift D.D. (London: George Bell, and Sons, 1898), iii, p. 290.

13 Austin Warren, Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist, (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1929), p. 54.

14 Ibid., p. 141.

ALEXANDER POPE

. . . . Before 'Ben Jonson, getting possession of the stage brought critical learning into vogue,' not only the common audience had no notion of the rules of writing, but few even of the better sort piqued themselves upon any great degree of knowledge or nicety that way. . . .[15]

ALEXANDER POPE

. . . . But whether Shakespeare read these sources in the original or not, whether he had languages or only reading Pope thinks the common opinion of his (Shakespeare's) want of learning proceeded not from any proof but from the assertions of actors and others who thought it redounded to Shakespeare's credit by enhancing his 'originality' and natural genius, or who wanted t neat antithesis between Jonson and Shakespeare and 'endeavored to exalt the one at the expense of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable as that because Ben Jonson had much the more learning it was said on the one hand that Shakespeare had none at all. . . . .'[16]

ALEXANDER POPE

It may be added, that not only the common audience had no notion of the rules of writing, but few even of the better sort piqued them selves upon any great degree of knowledge or nicety that way; 'till Ben Jonson, getting possession of the stage, brought critical learning into vogue. And that this was not done without difficulty, may appear from those frequent lessons (and, indeed, almost declamations) which he was forced to prefix to his first plays, and put into the mouths of his actors, the Grex, Chorus, &c., to remove the prejudices, and inform the judgment of his hearers. 'Till then, our authors had no thoughts of writing on the model of the ancients: their Tragedies were only histories in dialogue; and their Comedies followed the thread of any novel as they found it, no less implicitly than if it had been true history.[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 142.

[16] Ibid., p. 147.

[17] Elwin Whitwell and William John Courthope, The Works of Alexander Pope (London: John Murray, 1886), x, p. 537.

ALEXANDER POPE

I am inclined to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our authors, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expense of the other. It is ever nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable as that because Ben Jonson had much the more learning, it was said on the one hand that Shakespeare had none at all; and because Shakespeare had much the most wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other, that Jonson wanted both. Because Shakespeare borrowed nothing, it was said that Ben Jonson borrowed everything. Because Jonson did not write extempore, he was reproached with being a year with every piece; and because Shakespeare wrote with ease and rapidity, they cried, he never once made a blot. Nay, the spirit of opposition ran so high, that whatever those of the one side objected to the other, was taken at the rebound, and turned into praises; as injudiciously as their antagonists before had made them objections.

Poets are always afraid of envy; but sure they have as much reason to be afraid of admiration. They are Scylla and Charybdis of authors; those who escape one, often fall by the other. _Pessimum genus inimicorum laundantes_, says Tacitus: and Virgil desires to wear a charm against those who praise a poet without rule or reason.

Si ultra placitum laudarit, baccare frontem Cingito, ne vati noceat.
But however this contention might be carried on by the partisans on either side, I cannot help thinking these two great poets were good friends, and lived on amicable terms, and in offices of society with each other. It is an acknowledged fact, that Ben Jonson was introduced upon the stage, and his first works encouraged by Shakespeare. And after his death that author writes to the Memory of his beloved Mr. William Shakespeare, which shows as if the friendship had continued through life. I cannot for my own part find anything invidious or sparing in these verses, but wonder Mr. Dryden was of that opinion. He exalts him not only above all his contemporaries, but above Chaucer and Spencer, whom he will not allow to be great enough to be ranked with him; and challenges the names of Sophocles, Euripides, and AEschylus, nay, all Greece and Rome at once, to equal him; and (which is very particular) expressly vindicates him from the imputation of wanting art, not enduring that all his excellencies should be attributed to nature. It is remarkable too, that the praise he gives him in his 'Discoveries' seems to proceed from a personal kindness; he tells us that he lov'd the man, as well as honoured his memory; celebrates the honesty, openness, and frankness of his temper; and

only distinguishes, as he reasonably ought, between the real merit of the author, and the silly derogatory applause of the players. Ben Jonson might indeed be sparing in his commendations (though certainly he is not so in this instance), partly from his own nature, and partly from judgment.[18]

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18 *Ibid.*, x, pp. 540-542.

CHAPTER III

FROM SAMUEL JOHNSON TO WILLIAM GIFFORD

SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1759

Then Jonson came, instructed from the school
To please in method, and invent by rule;
His studious patience, and laborious art,
By regular approach, essay'd the heart.
Cold approbation gave the lingering bays;
For those who durst not censure, scarce could praise.
A mortal born, he met the general doom,
But left, like Egypt's kings, a lasting tomb.[1]

EDMUND BURKE, 1747-8

Ben Jonson of all the comic writers the only one in whom unite all the graces of true Comedy without the monstrous blemishes that stain and disfigure the merits of others. Had this man lived in the times of Grecian learning he might have stood up for the laurel agains't the most excellent of them, but his writings instead of doing honour to our age, will always be a proof of its degeneracy that could neglect such delicious feasts as his happy muse has provided for us, to feed on the garbage of vile and uninstructed authors.[2]

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[1] Joseph Epes Brown, The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1926), pp. 382.

[2] P. I. Samuels, The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of Edmund Burke, (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), p. 166.

JOHN WILKES, 1763

Your Lordship loves the stage, so does Mr. Murphy. Let me entreat your Lordship to assist your friend in perfecting the weak scenes of this Tragedy; and from these crude labours of Ben Jonson and others, to give us a complete play. It is the warmest wish of my heart that the Earl of Bute may speedily compleat the story of Roger Mortimer.[3]

JAMES BOSWELL, 1765

At the later end of 1620 Ben Jonson went on foot to visit Drummond. His adventures in this journey he wrought into a poem; but that copy with many other pieces, was accidentally burned.[4]

JAMES BOSWELL, 1769

In the Garrick Corres. i. 385, there is a letter from Mrs. Montagu to Garrick, which shows the ridiculous way in which Shakespeare was often patronized last century, and 'brought into notice.' Mrs. Montagu is a little jealous for poor Shakespeare and says if Mr. Garrick often acts Kitely, Ben Jonson will eclipse his fame.[5]

JAMES BOSWELL, 1774

Late to dinner because young Mr. Tytler brought essay he had written to Johnson to read. . . . .but I would by no means lose the pleasure of seeing my friend at Hawthornden -- of seeing Sam Johnson at the spot where Ben Jonson visited the learned and poetical Drummond.

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[3] George Birkbeck Hill, editor, Boswell's Life of Johnson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), iii, p. 541.

[4] Ibid., v, p. 460.

[5] Ibid., ii, p. 92.

We surveyed Raslin Castle, ...; and I all the while Rare Ben in my mind, and was pleased to think that this place was now visited by another celebrated wit of England.[6]

JAMES BOSWELL, 1774

To it we owe the Table-Talk of Selden, the conversation between Ben Jonson and Drummond of Hawthornden, Spence's anecdotes of Pope, and other valuable remains in our own language.[7]

MRS. THRALE, 1775

The sister at the Speak House looked more like Lungs in the Alchemist than anything else.[8]

ANONYMOUS, 1783

Ben Jonson wrote Leges Convivales that were 'engraven in marble over the chimney in the Apollo of the Old Devil Tavern, Temple Bor; that being his Club Room.[9]

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[6] R. W. C. Chapman, editor, Johnson and Boswell: Tour to the Hebrides (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 432.

[7] Ibid., p. 442.

[8] Moses Tyson, The French Journals of Mrs. Thrale and Doctor Johnson (Manchester: The Manchester University Press, 1932), p. 88.

[9] George Birkbeck Hill, editor, Boswell's Life of Johnson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), iv, p. 537.

GEORGE STEVENS, 1793

Quoth Ben to Tom, the lover's stole,
'Tis Shakespeare's ev'ry word;
Indeed says Tom, upon the whole,
'Tis much too good for Ford.

Thus Ben and Tom the dead still praise,
The living to decry;
For none must dare to wear the bays,
Till Ben and Tom both die.

Even Avon's swan could not escape
These letter-tyrant elves;
They on his fame contriv'd a rape,
To raise then pedant selves.

But after times, with full consent,
This truth will all acknowledge.
Shakespeare and Ford from heaven were sent,
But Ben and Tom from college.[10]

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[10] George Stevens, "The Plays of Shakespeare." The British Critic (London: Ford and Rivington, 1793), Vol. I, May, 1793, pp. 126-7.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1810

It would be amusing to collect out of our dramatists from Elizabeth to Charles I proof of the manners of the times. One striking symptom of general coarseness of manners, which may co-exist with great refinement of morals, as, alas! vice versa, is to be seen in the very frequent allusions to the olfactories with their most disgusting stimulants, and these, too, in the conversation of virtuous ladies. This would not appear so strange to one who had been on terms of familiarity with Sicilian and Italian women of rank: and bad as they may, too many of them, actually be, yet I doubt not that the extreme grossness of their language has impressed many an Englishman of the present era with far darker notions than the same language would have produced in the minds of one of Elizabeth's or James' courtiers. Those who have read Shakespeare only, complain of occasional grossness in his plays; but compare him with his contemporaries, and the inevitable conviction is that of exquisite purity of his imagination.

The observation I have prefixed to the Volpone is the key to the faint interest which these noble efforts of intellectual power excite, with the exception of the fragment of the Sad Shepherd; because in that piece only is there any character with whom you can morally sympathize. On the other hand, Measure for Measure is the only play of Shakespeare's in which there are not some one or more characters, generally many, whom you follow with affectionate feeling. For I confess that Isabella, of all Shakespeare's female characters, pleases me the best; and Measure for Measure is, indeed the only one of his genuine works, which is painful to me.

Let me not conclude this remark, however, without a thankful acknowledgment to the names of Ben Jonson, that the more I study his writings, I the more admire them; and the more my study of him resembles that of an ancient classic, in the minutiae of his rhythm, metre, choice of words, forms of connection, and so forth, the more numerous have the points of my admiration become. I may add, too, that both the study and the admiration cannot but be disinterested, for to expect therefrom any advantage to the present drama would be ignorance. The latter is utterly heterogeneous from the drama of the Shakespearian age, with a diverse

> object and the contrary principle. The one was to present a model by imitation of real life, taking from real life all that in it which ought to be, and supplying the rest; -- the other is to copy what is, and as it is, -- at best a tolerable but most frequently a blundering, copy. In the former the difference was an essential element; in the latter an involuntary defect. We should think it strange, if a tale in dance were announced, and the actors did not dance at all; -- and yet such is modern comedy.[11]

Coleridge follows with a discussion of Every Man Out of His Humour, Poetaster, Sejanus, Volpone, Epicoene, The Alchemist, Catiline, Bartholemew Fair, The Devil Is An Ass, The Staple of News, and The New Inn, but the preceding quotation seems a sufficient reflection of his point of view.

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[11] W. G. T. Shedd, editor, The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884), IV, p. 185.

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SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1811

. . . . Or the word contemporaries may mean those whose compositions were contemporaneous in such a sense as to preclude all liklihood of the one having borrowed from the other. In the latter sense, I should call Ben Jonson a contemporary of Shakespeare, though he long survived him.[12]

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1872

I am inclined to consider The Fox as the greatest of Ben Jonson's works. But his smaller works are full of poetry.[13]

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, 1822

In Ben Jonson you have an intense and burning art. Some of his plots, that of the Alchymist, for example, are perfect. Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher would, if united, have made a great dramatist indeed, and yet not have come near Shakespeare; but no doubt Ben Jonson was the greatest man after Shakespeare in that age of dramatic genius.[14]

GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL, 1812

Charles Knight, describing a walk in 1812 from Convent Garden to Pimlico, says: — 'We make our way to Charing Cross, deviating a little from the usual route, that I may see how some of the worthy electors of Westminister are lodged and fed. We are in the alleys known in the time of Ben Jonson as the Bermudas but since called the Caribbee Islands. . . Close at hand is Porridge Island, then famous for cook-shops, as in the middle of the previous century.'[15]

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[12] Ibid., p. 252.

[13] Ibid., IV, p. 287.

[14] Ibid., IV, p. 528.

[15] George Birkbeck Hill, editor, Johnsonian Miscellanies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), I, p. 218.

GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL, 1812

And each true Briton is to Ben so civil,
He swears the Muses met him at the Devil.[16]

SYLVANUS URBAN, 1814

Jonson's and Decker's [sic] quarrels were quarrels from personal motives, the same as Hobbes's quarrels with Dr. Wallis, Camden and Brooke, Martin and Mar-Prelate.[17]

ANONYMOUS, 1814

From the state of the Sale of two Libraries at Edinburgh (those of the second Duke of Queensberry, and the last Mr. Hunter), the extravagance of the black-letter-mania appears to be somewhat on the wane. Among the Duke's books, which it is probable were collected for his library by Gay, who was tutor in the family, were many of great curiosity and scarceness, and yet we do not find the prices they sold at extravagant. A very fine 'King's Vale Royal' brought 15 l.; and King James's Exercises, given probably by Ben Jonson to the Duke, as his well known autograph appears on the title-page, sold for 44 l.[18]

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16 Ibid., p. 433.

17 Sylvanus Urban, "Review of New Publications." Gentleman's Magazine, 84: 360, April, 1814.

18 "Literary Intelligence." Gentleman's Magazine, 84: 40, January, 1814.

CHARLES ELTON, 1815

It would be easy to find the parallel of these successive periods in modern times, and particularly among our own indigenous poets. The sudden splendour of the age of Pericles brings to our view the literary glory of the age of Elizabeth: Shakespeare, comprehending within himself the excellences as well as the defects of the three tragic poets of Greece; and Ben Jonson forming the counterpart of Aristophanes.[19]

R. B. WHELER, 1815

. . . . ., for the correctness of which we have his friend Jonson's testimony; and "surly Ben" would surely not have unnecessarily complimented the artist.[20]

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[19] Charles Elton, "Specimens of Classical Poets from Homer to Tryphoidorus." Gentleman's Magazine, 85: 53, January, 1815.

[20] R. B. Sheler, "The Bust of Shakespeare at Stratford." Gentleman's Magazine, 85: 5, January, 1815.

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CHAPTER IV

FROM WILLIAM GIFFORD TO ALGERNON SWINBURNE

WILLIAM GIFFORD, ESQ., 1816

Since its first publication in 1816, Gifford's biography of Jonson has been the standard work of reference to which all subsequent writers on the subject sooner or later admit a debt.

Gifford says in his opening paragraph that the reader must prepare to see many of his prejudices overthrown, to hear that he has been imposed upon by the grossest fabrications.

He follows with a biographical account which takes Jonson through childhood, young manhood and service in Holland, entry into the theatre, and career in the field of letters.

Through nearly 250 pages Gifford has toiled incessantly to present Jonson in a heroic light. He takes issue with everyone who had anything derogatory to say about his subject. The book is worked out in such infinitesimal detail that it can be appreciated only by reading.[1]

ANONYMOUS, 1816

A review of Gifford's The Works of Ben Jonson, highly complimentary to Ben and to Gifford, appears in the British Critic. Gifford, the author says, perhaps was too vitriolic in his denunciation of Ben's enemies, and Drummond was a dealer in second-hand gossip.

Gifford had placed Jonson on a lofty height, but the writer disagrees, saying, and it is important, that of Ben's sixteen plays not a one could be found on the stage at that time (1816). "The plain truth is," he says, "Jonson is Caveare to the general." His is closet drama. Sejanus and Catiline are masterpieces of translation and Roman history.

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[1] William Gifford, Works of Ben Jonson, (Bickers and Son, London, 1875), p. xxii.

[2] . . . . ,"Works of Ben Jonson." The British Critic, 41: 288-59, July, 1816.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1812

In a series of five lectures on "The Age of Elizabeth," Hazlitt refers to Ben Jonson many times as follows:

. . . .

Jonson is one of the greatest men in the greatest age for great men.

. . . .

Webster, Dekker, Marston, Marlow, Chapman, Heywood, Middleton, and Rawley were Jonson's chief rivals.

. . . .

. . . . Ben Jonson's tragedies of Catiline and Sejanus may themselves be considered as literal translations into verse of Tacitus, and Cicero's Orations in his consulship.

. . . .

. . . . The names of Ben Jonson, for instance Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, are almost, though not quite, as familiar to us, as that of Shakespeare; and their works still keep regular possession of the stage.

. . . .

Ben Jonson tried to overcome the difficulty by the force of learning and study, and thought to gain his end by persisting in error; but he only made matters worse; for his clowns and coxcombs (if we except Bobadil), are the most incorrigible and insufferable of all others.

. . . .

He (Marston) was first on terms of great intimacy, and afterwards at open war with Ben Jonson.

* *

After Jonson got out of jail he gave a party. His mother (more Roman than Briton) drank with them, showing him poison she had intended to give him if his sentence had been executed.

* *

Ben Jonson's serious productions are, in my opinion, superior to his comic ones. What he does, is the result of strong sense and painful industry; but sense and industry agree better with the grave and severe, than with the light and gay productions of the Muse. 'His plays were work,' as someone said of them, 'while other's works were plays.' The observation had less of compliment than truth in it.

* *

Two of the most poetical passages in Ben Jonson, are the description of Echo in _Cynthia's Revels_, and the fine comparison of the mind to a temple in the _New Inn_; a play which, on the whole, however, I can read with no patience.

* *

Ben Jonson's detached poetry I like much, as indeed I do all about him, except when he degraded himself by 'the laborious follery' of some of his farcial characters, which he could not deal with sportively, and only made stupid and pedantic. I have been blamed for what I have said, more than once, in disparagement of Ben Jonson's comic humour; but I think he was himself aware of his infirmity, and has (not improbably) alluded to it in a speech of Crites in Cynthia's Revels.

'Oh, how dispised and base a thing is man.'[3]

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[3] A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, _The Collected Works of William Hazlitt_ (London: J. M. Dent, 1902), V, pp. 175-303.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1816

. . . .It has been observed of Ben Jonson that he painted not so much human nature as temporary manners, not the characters of men, but their humours, that is to say, peculiarities of phrases, modes of dress, gesture, etc., which becoming obsolete, and being themselves altogether arbitrary and fantastical, have become unintelligible and uninteresting.

Brainstorm is a particularly dry obstruse character. We neither know his business nor his motives; his plots are as intricate as they are useless, and as the ignorance of those he imposes upon is wonderful. This is the impression in reading it. Yet from the bustle and activity of this character on the stage, the change of dress, the variety of affected tones and gypsy jargon, and the limping distorted gestures, it is a very amusing exhibition as Mr. Munden plays it.[4]

(An essay concerning a view of the public stage on Every Man In His Humour, first appearing in The London Examiner June 9, 1816.)

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1816

. . . .The account given by Schlegel, of the contemporaries and immediate successors of Shakespear is good, though it might have been better. That of Ben Jonson is particularly happy. He says, that he described not characters, but 'humours,' that is, particular modes of expression, dress and behaviour in fashion at the time, which have since become obsolete, and the imitation of them dry and unintelligible. The finest thing in Ben Jonson (not that it is by any means the only one), is the scene between Surly and Sir Epicure Mammon, where the latter proves his possession of the philosopher's stone, by a pompous display of the riches, luxuries and pleasures he is to derive from it; and, by a happy perversion of logic, satisfies himself, though not his hearer, of the existence of the cause, by a strong imagination of the effects which are to follow from it.[5]

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[4] Ibid., viii, p. 89.

[5] Ibid., x, pp. 117-118.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1816

. . . .The first inference is by no means in our favour: for though I think that the grossness of manners prevailing in our fashionable comedies was a direct transcript of the manners of the court at that time, or in the period immediately preceding, yet the same grossness of expression and allusion existed long before, as in the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, when there was not this grossness of manners, and it has of late years been gradually refined.[6]

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1820

. . . .Without waiting for the final award, or gradual oblivion of slow-revolving ages, we may be bold to say of our writers for the stage, during the last twenty or thirty years, as Pope is reported to have said of Ben Jonson's somewhat unadvisedly, 'What trash are their works, taken altogether.'[7]

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1824

. . . .The depth and tenderness of his Shelley's feelings seems often to have interfered with the expression of them, as the sight becomes blind with tears. A dull, waterish vapour clouds the aspect of his philosophical poetry, like that mysterious gloom which he has described as hanging over the Medusa's Head of Leonardo da Vinci. The metre of this poem, too, will not be pleasing to every body. It is in the antique taste of the rhyming parts of Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson -- blank verse in its freedom and unbroken flaw, falling into rhymes that appear altogether accidental -- very colloquial in the diction -- and sometimes sufficiently prosaic.[8]

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[6] Ibid., viii, p. 162.

[7] Ibid., viii, p. 416.

[8] Ibid., p. 261.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1826

It is curious to what a degree persons, brought up in certain occupations in a great city, are shut up from a knowledge of the world, and carry their simplicity to a pitch of unheard-of extravagance. London is the only place in which the child grows completely up into the man. I have known characters of this kind, which in the way of childish ignorance and self-pleasing delusion, exceeded anything to be met with in Shakespear or Ben Jonson, or the old comedy.[9]

WILLIAM HAZLITT, 1824

. . . .Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakespeare, who was not present to defend himself. 'If he grows disagreeable,' it was whispered aloud, 'there is G-- can match him.' At length, his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favor.[10]

ANONYMOUS, 1817

The Cotswold Games, instituted by Robert Dover, an attorney of Barton on the Heath, were of great celebrity in the reigns of James I and Charles I. Ben Jonson, Drayton, and other poets of that age, wrote verses on these athletic exercises, which verses were collected in 1636, and published under the name of 'Annalia Dubrensia.'[11]

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9 Ibid., vii, p. 73.

10 Ibid., xii, p. 34.

11 . . . .,"Miscellaneous Remarks," Gentleman's Magazine, 87: 414, May, 1817.

ANONYMOUS, 1818

In the time of James I, punning attained its zenith. By Andrews, Donne, Ben Jonson, Purchas, and innumerable others, raised its character, and applied to it on every occasion.[12]

NATHAN DRAKE, 1818

. . . . It is, in short, to his picture of the Fairy World that we are indebted for the Nymphidia of Drayton, the Robin Goodfellow of Jonson, the miniatures of Fletcher and Browne, the full-length portraits of Herrick, the sly allusions of Corbet, and the spirited and picturesque sketches of Milton.[13]

JOHN KEATS, 1819

Ben Jonson was a common soldier and in the low countries, in the face of two armies, fought a single combat with a French trooper and slew him.[14]

ANONYMOUS, 1819

4th. The Band. This ornament is so frequently seen, as being alike worn by the Pleader of the Law, and the Preacher of the Gospel, that I shall not attempt to describe it. However, I would observe, that it is designated as 'a pair of bands' by some persons; but I can only find the authority of Bp. Taylor and Addison for this designation; whilst the term 'band' is sanctioned by the names, and mentioned in the writings of Ben Jonson, Swift, Pope, Crabbe, and others.[15]

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12 . . . . , "Apology for Puns." Gentleman's Magazine, 88: 223, September, 1818.

13 Nathan Drake, "Shakespeare and His Times." Gentleman's Magazine, 88: 338, October, 1818.

14 Maurice Buxton Forman, The Letters of John Keats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), ii, p. 375.

15 . . . . , "On Clerical Dress." Gentleman's Magazine, 89: 398, May, 1819.

ANONYMOUS, 1820

The names of Bacon, Coke, Ben Jonson, Spelman, Selden, etc., show the state of learning at this period.[16]

CHARLES LAMB, 1825

In a discussion of The Case Is Altered, Lamb compares the miser Jaques to Marlowe's Barbas. Lamb says the passion for wealth has become quite commonplace in his day.[17]

J. B. NICHOLS, 1827

Of Jonson in particular, the first poet of his age in the estimation of his contemporaries, though Shakespeare has so much eclipsed him in the opinion of posterity, a standard edition was certainly a greatdesideratum. The impartial reader must peruse with delight and admiration the able and convincing vindication of the Poet's personal character, which is contained in the 307 introductory pages. The folly and the falsehood displayed by the enemies' of Jonson, -- by those prinsipally who have pondered to flatter the popular deification of Shakespeare by sacrificing at his altar every author who could possibly be brought into comparison with him,--no writer could have so completely and thoroughly exposed, as the author of Baviad and Maeviad.[18]

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16 . . . .,"Marriage Articles of Charles I." Gentleman's Magazine, 127: 113, June, 1820.

17 The Works of Charles Lamb, New edition, (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1886), IV, p. 119.

18 "Memoir of William Gifford, Esq.," Gentleman's Magazine (J. B. Nichols, Cicero's Head, 25 Parliament St., Westminister), 97: 111, February, 1827.

ANONYMOUS, 1828

. . . .Ben Jonson has given us a curious epitome of these revels in his Masque of Christmas, where he has personified the season and its attributes. The characters introduced in his farce are Misrule, Caral, Mince Pie, Gamboll, Post and Pair, New Year's Gift, Mumning, Wassall offering, and Babie Cache.[19]

WALTER C. DENBY, 1828

At Swains, in this parish, tradition informs us that Ben Jonson resided, and one of the rooms is denominated his study. Here we may suppose some of his dramatic works were written although his most brilliant effusions were produced under the excitement of potations at the Devil tavern. At what time he resided here is uncertain, though probably it was when he was released from prison.[20]

LORD MACAULAY, 1827

The little novel of Belphegor is pleasantly conceived, and pleasantly told. But the extravagance of the satire in some measures injures its effect. Machiavelli was unhappily married; and his wish to avenge his own cause and that of his brethern in misfortune, carried him beyond even the license of fiction. Jonson seems to have combined some hints taken from this tale, with others from Boccaccio, in the plot of The Devil is an Ass, a play which, though not the most highly finished of his compositions, is perhaps that which exhibits the strongest proofs of genius.[21]

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19 . . . .,"Christmas Festivities." Gentleman's Magazine (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1828), 98: 505, December, 1828.

20 Walter C. Denby, "Original Communications." Gentleman's Magazine (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1828), June, 1828.

21 Lord Macaulay, The Complete Works of Lord Macaulay (London: Longman's, Green and Company, 1913), vii, p. 93.

LORD MACAULAY, 1837

. . . .Ben Jonson, a most unexceptionable judge, has described Bacon's eloquence in words, which, though often quoted, will bear to be quoted again. 'There happened in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speaking. His language, where he could spare or pass by a jest, was nobly censorious. No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough or look aside from him without loss. He commanded where he spoke, and had his judges angry and pleased at his devotion. No man had their affections more in his power. The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end.' From the mention which is made of judges, it would seem that Jonson had heard Bacon only at the Bar. . . .[22]

LORD MACAULAY, 1837

. . . .Here it was that, in January, 1620, he [Jonson] celebrated his entrance into his sixtieth year amidst a splendid circle of friends. He had then exchanged the appellation of Keeper for the higher title of Chancellor. Ben Jonson was one of the party, and wrote on the occasion some of the happiest of his rugged rhymes. All things, he tells us, seemed to smile about the old house, the fire, the wine, the men.' The spectacle of the accomplished host, after a life marked by no great disaster, entering on a green old age, in the enjoyment of riches, power, high honours, undiminished mental activity, and vast literary reputation, made a strong impression on the poet, if we may judge from those well known lines

'England's high Chancellor, the destined heir,
In his soft cradle, to his father's chair,
Whose even thread the Fates spin round and full
Out of their choicest and their whitest wool.'[23]

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[22] Lord Macaulay, The Complete Works of Lord Macaulay (London: Longman's, Green and Company, 1914), viii, p. 518.

[23] Ibid., p. 564.

LORD MACAULAY, 1837

. . . .'My conceit of his [Bacon] person,' says Ben Jonson very finely, 'was never increased towards him by his place or honours; but I have and do reverence him for his greatness that was only proper to himself; in that he seemed to me ever, by his work, one of the greatest men and most worthy of admiration, that had been in many ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength; for greatness he could not want.'[24]

LORD MACAULAY, 1843

A line must be drawn, we conceive, between artists of this class, and those poets and novelists whose skill lies in the exhibiting of what Ben Jonson called humours. The words of Ben are so much to the purpose that we will quote them:

'When some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluxions all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour.'[25]

LORD MACAULAY, 1843

Ben Jonson was a great man, Hoole a very small man. But Hoole, coming after Pope, had learned how to manufacture decasyllable verses, and poured them forth by thousands and ten thousands, all as well turned, as smooth, and as like each other as the blocks which have passed through Mr. Brunel's mill in the dockyard at Portsmouth. Ben's heroic couplets resemble blocks rudely hewn out by an impractised hand with a blunt hatchet. Take as a specimen his translation of a celebrated passage in the AEneid:

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[24] Lord Macaulay, Critical, Historical and Miscellaneous Essays (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1875), v. vi, p. 308.

[25] Ibid., p. 588.

'This child our parent earth, stirred up with spite.
As all the Gods brought forth, and, as some write,
She was last sister of that giant race
That sought to scale Jove's court, right swift of pace,
And swifter far of wing, a monster vast
And dreadful. Look, how many plumes are placed
On her huge corpse, so many waking eyes
Stick underneath, and which may stranger rise
In the report, as many tongues she wears.'

Compare with these jagged misshapen distichs the neat fabric which Hoole's machine produces in unlimited abundance. We take the first lines on which we open in his version of Tasso. They are neither better nor worse than the rest:

'O thou, whoe'er thou art, whose steps are led,
By choice or fate, these lonely shores to tread,
No greater wonders east or west can boast
Than yon small island on the pleasing coast.
If e'er thy sight would blissful scenes explore,
The current pass, and seek the further shore.[26]'

LEIGH HUNT, 1846

Hunt gives a cutting of Volpone to illustrate his point that though the greatest portion of Jonson's comic writing is in prose, the best part is in verse. He adds that the humours of Jonson's characters are a little overdone; that these same overdone humours give the characters an air of conscious falsehood and pretension.[27]

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[26] Ibid., p. 334.

[27] Leigh Hunt, Wit and Humor (London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1890), p. 138.

LEIGH HUNT, 1846

If asked to give our opinion of Ben Jonson's powers in general, we should say he was a poet of high order, as far as learning, fancy, and an absolute rage of ambition, could conspire to make him one; but that he never touched at the highest, except by violent efforts, and during the greatest felicity of his sense of success. The material so predominated in him over the spiritual,-- the sensual over the sentimental,-- that he was more social than loving, and far more wilful and fanciful than imaginative. Desiring the strongest immediate effect, rather than the best effect, he subserved by wholesale in his comedies to the grossness and commonplace of the very multitude whom he hectored; and in love with whatsoever he knew or uttered, he set learning above feeling in writing his tragedies, and never knew when to leave off, whether in tragedy, or comedy. His style is more clear and correct than impassioned, and only rises above a certain level at remarkable intervals, when he is heated by a sense of luxury or domination. He betrays what was weakness in himself, and even a secret misgiving, by incessant attacks upon the weakness and envy of others; and, in his highest moods, instead of the healthy, serene, and good-natured might of Shakespeare, has something of a puffed and uneasy pomp, a bigness instead of greatness, analogous to his gross habit of body: nor, when you think of him at any time, can you well separate the idea from that of assuming scholar and the flustered man of taverns. But the wonder after all is, that, having such a superfactation of art in him, he had still so much nature, and that the divine bully of the old English Parnassus could be, whenever he chose it, one of the most elegant of men.[28]

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[28] Leigh Hunt, Men, Women, and Books (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), ii, p. 297.

THOMAS CARLYLE, 1857

. . . .Did not Ben Jonson, in his young hard days, bear arms very manfully as a private soldado there. Ben, who now writes learned plays and court-masks as Poet Laureate, served manfully with pike and sword there for his groat a day with rations. And once when a Spanish soldier came strutting forward between the lines, flourishing his weapon, and defying all persons in general,-- Ben stept forth, as I hear; 'fenced that braggart Spaniard, since no other would do it; and ended by splitting him in two, and so silencing him.' Ben's war-truck, to judge by the flourish of his pen, must have had a very dangerous stroke in it.[29]

EDWIN P. WHIPPLE, 1859

In an essay delivered as a lecture before the Lowell Institute and first printed in The Atlantic Monthly in 1867, Whipple says:

If Shakespeare represents mankind, Ben as unmistakably stands for English-kind. . . . .Jonson represents John Bull's emergence as an individual.

While we admit his claim to rank next to Shakespeare among the dramatists of his age, we beg our readers to understand that we do it under intimidation.[30]

FRANCIS CUNNINGHAM, 1874

Cunningham, who was the editor of the 1875 edition of Gifford's Works of Ben Jonson, in a prefatory essay laments that Gifford could not

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[29] Thomas Carlyle, Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1885), xv-xvi, p. 335.

[30] Edwin P. Whipple, The Literature of the Age of Elizabeth (New York: (Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), p. 85.

consider the Drummand conversations more broadmindedly. Cunningham is of the opinion that Gifford, like many biographers, became imbued with the greatness of his subject and could not countenance any derogatory criticism.[31]

W. DAVENPORT ADAMS, 1875

. . . .We are further informed by Ben Jonson that Sidney meant eventually to have transformed the 'Arcadia' into an English romance, with King Arthur as its hero.[32]

W. DAVENPORT ADAMS, 1875

. . . .The conversations of his John Seldine friend Ben Jonson are perhaps too meagerly reported by Drummond to admit of fair and equitable comparisons, but those of Dr. Johnson and of Coleridge, which have come down to us with more completeness--rich as they are in variety and suggestiveness scarcely impress us more favorably than the slim volume which contains the 'talk' of Selden. . . .[33]

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[31] Francis Cunningham, editor, Works of Ben Jonson (London: Bickers and Son, 1875), p. i.

[32] W. Davenport Adams, Famous Books (London: Virtue, Spalding and Company, 1875), p. 126.

[33] Ibid., p. 252.

ALGERNON SWINBURNE

Ben Jonson

Broad-Based, broad fronted, bounteous, multiform,
With many a valley impleached with ivy and vine,
Wherein the springs of all the streams run wine,
And many a crag full-faced against the storm,
The mountain where thy Muse's feet made warm
Those lawns that revelled with her dance divine
Shines yet with fire as it was want to shine
From tossing torches round the dance aswarm.

Nor less, high stationed on the gray grave heights,
High-thoughted seers with heaven's heart-kindling lights
Hold converse: and the herd of meaner things
Knows or by fiery scourge or fiery shaft
When wrath on thy broad brows has risen, and laughed,
Darkening thy soul with shadow of thunderous wings.

[34] John D. Williams, editor, The Poetical Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne (New York: John D. Williams, 1887), p. 757.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

In summarizing the reputation of Ben Jonson over a period of one hundred and seventy-five years as shown by the allusions of writers of that period, it must be borne in mind that the writers of 1700 to 1875 did not have the proximity to Jonson's period that writers did before that time.

Dryden, Pope, Gifford, and Hazlitt are the principal writers who, judging by the nature of their criticisms and references, studied Jonson's works carefully and critically. With the other writers we cannot be sure that Jonson was more than a name, a name to be worshipped or condemned from afar as the fancy occurred.

The allusions found in the Spectator are examples of incidental allusions in which similes are drawn, passing tribute is paid, or mere mention made. That Jonson was mentioned frequently by eighteenth century writers is important, as it indicates that he was not forgotten. However, there are few direct references in all the allusions of the eighteenth century to indicate that Jonson's plays were still played and appreciated. The oft-repeated statement that Jonson's plays were "of an age" seems verified therefore, since his age had passed. His close relation to Sophocles, Horace, and Aristophanes seems to have another point of relationship in that like them he has become great in legend,

but his works are less popular for public performance.

Austin Warren says in his Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist that Jonson's plays were still well known in Pope's youth, and every Briton boy must know of Jonson's art. It is characteristic of Pope's critical methods that he should call Jonson's plays trash, and yet list Ben as among the four best dramatists of all time.

Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke both subscribe to the old tradition of worshipping Jonson's classical learning and scholarly attainments. This seems important because it indicates that time did not diminish his prestige, but instead strengthened the opinions of those who had valuable opinions to offer.

It would be fallacious to assume that during a period of one hundred and seventy-five years no one would utter a dissenting opinion about "Rare Ben." It is not surprising, therefore, to find John Wilkes in 1763 referring to the "crude labours" of Ben Jonson. Thirty years later, George Stevens made the comment already cited:

> Shakespeare and Ford from heaven were sent,
> But Ben and Tom from college.

Coleridge opens the nineteenth century allusions by saying that the more he read Ben Jonson the more he admired him. He says Ben's rhythm, metre, choice of words, and forms of connections all add to his admiration. Comparing Elizabethan drama to present drama, Coleridge says the former was an imitation of real life while the latter was a cheap copy. Coleridge in his logical explanation of Jonson more nearly

approached Dryden and Pope, rather than a naive repeating of the ideas of others.

For the first time in more than a hundred years, in 1815 the old "surly Ben" tradition rises like the Phoenix in the words of R. B. Wheeler, "and 'surly Ben' would surely not have unnecessarily complimented the artist." This attitude apparently must persist even though it had been fairly definitely settled that Ben's alleged surliness arose, not from disposition, but from a sincere desire to reform the drama on scholastic lines.

In 1816 appeared William Gifford's biography of Ben Jonson, which has been accepted ever since as the most complete work of its kind on Jonson. Gifford presented facts in minutest detail, but the whole work was colored by the blind adoration of a biographer for his subject. Unfortunately, Gifford was at considerably more pains to refute Jonson's critics than to give a critical review of Jonson's works.

An anonymous article in the British Critic in 1816, the year Gifford's work was published, says that Gifford was too vitriolic in his denunciation of Ben's enemies. The anonymous writer says that of Ben's sixteen plays not a one was at that time appearing on the stage. "The plain truth is," this writer says, "Jonson is 'Caveare to the general.' His is closet drama. Sejanus and Catiline are masterpieces of translation and Roman history." This dignified tribute to Jonson's learning and ability is quite a contrast to Pepys' entries in his diary noting public appreciation of Jonson's plays.

From 1816 to 1830 no memorable allusions are to be found, favorable or unfavorable. But in 1830 Lord Macaulay said Jonson's classicism was disgusting and his satire was unnatural.

Lord Macaulay, in his prolific writings, said many things of Jonson, but his remarks were incidental observations rather than critical studies.

Leigh Hunt makes the unique observation that Jonson was more social than loving and far more fanciful than imaginative. A study of allusions through nearly three hundred years has disclosed many things laid at Jonson's feet, but never before was he called fanciful. It was Lyly's fancy that was partly responsible for Jonson's avowed intention to reform the drama along scholarly lines. His realism is taken for granted, but it is hard to justify the existence of fancy and realism, thriving side by side in the body of one man, mammoth though he be.

Ben Jonson seems to have succeeded admirably in his ambition to reform the drama along scholarly lines. More than any other thing his scholarship and classical learning are alluded to. His reputation was established as he wished, and perhaps beyond his ambition, for he became a legendary figure in English drama. As a dramatist he holds an enviable position among English dramatists; as a poet he is credited with one of the most delicate poems found in an English anthology; as a presenter of Elizabethan England he pictured the grossest and the finest things of

life, but--his plays are not on the stage today: In presenting Elizabethan England, Jonson presented the fashions and fancies of a short period of world history, and fashions change. Shakespeare presented man, his thoughts, deeds, and acts; and these attributes maintain a fairly constant level through all time.

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