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Report from the Opposition Camp: Jonson Studies in the 1980s

Leah S. Marcus

Richard S. Peterson. *Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981. Pp. xxi, 247; 9 illus.

Alexander Leggatt. *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art*. New York: Methuen, 1981. Pp. xvi, 300.

Mary Chan. *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980. Pp. xii, 397; 7 illus. 43 musical examples.

D. Heyward Brock. *A Ben Jonson Companion*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983. Pp. ix, 307.

Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds. *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben*. Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1982. Pp. xvii, 290; 1 illus.

Katharine Eisaman Maus. *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. ix, 212.

John Gordon Sweeney III. *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater: To Coin the Spirit, Spend the Soul*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985. Pp. xi, 243.

Anne Barton. *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. xiv, 370. Hard covers and paperback.

Don E. Wayne. *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History*. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984. Pp. xv, 228; 23 illus.

There is a *John Donne Journal* but no Jonson journal as yet. In the twentieth century, at least until recently, Jonson and Donne have been like opposites on a see-saw, the ascendancy of one requiring the abasement of the other according to our valuation of classicism, decorum, and the "keeping of accent." Now in the 1980s

that traditional division is breaking down, in part because Ben Jonson is turning out to contain within his own work the antinomies that used to be parcelled out between the two rival poets. The present survey, limited to books from the 1980s with Ben Jonson as their single subject and to only some of those, will assess where things stand at present in the Jonson camp and which are the most promising new directions. Jonson is still the arch-moralist among seventeenth-century poets he has always been, but his ethical vision seems much less frontal, less serene than it once did; he is still the arch-classicist, but his classicism is more mercurial and problematic—less an endpoint of discussion than a phenomenon itself requiring interpretation. The decade began with two major books offering antithetical readings of Jonson, a study of Jonsonian modes of classical imitation by Richard Peterson and a portrait of Jonson as brooding realist by Alexander Leggatt. More recently, in addition to a dictionary and a collection of essays, we have been offered an updated recasting of the antithesis in works by younger scholars but also new readings that break down the polarities of Jonson criticism through the application of new techniques for analysis. The interpretation of Ben Jonson, perhaps more than any other single area of seventeenth-century studies at present, has become a laboratory for new methodologies: volatile, multivalent, full of promise.

Richard Peterson's *Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson* speaks for Jonson the classicist. By defining Jonsonian imitation as "the creative use of the thoughts and words of the ancients in a spirit of emulous rivalry" (p. xiii), a definition that allows space for the poet's notorious contentiousness along with his devotion to Latin and Greek "authority," Peterson makes Jonson's classicism dynamic, the wellspring of his originality as a poet. The book is structured upon terminology associated with the danced choral ode of ancient Greece, the *turn* and the *stand*, used to delineate stages in Jonson's construction of poems of praise. "Turn" is a crucial verb in Jonson associated with the related activities of digestion, transformation, and poetic shaping; if the classical material is not "turned," digested, made one's own flesh and blood, the result will be not a unified work of art, but mere pilferage, revolting lumps of unassimilated matter. True imitation, in writing or in conduct, is the creation of a new animate being which resembles its original as a child its father, related yet distinct and autonomous. "Stand" is a similarly organic term as Peterson understands it—the monumentality and uprightness assumed by the

objects of Jonsonian praise. They thrust up like "outcroppings of the Golden Age; looming like survivals or restorations of antique structures and images" but also like venerable "straight trees firmly rooted in the English soil" (p. 44), at once static and animate, living columns of virtue.

Peterson's discussion is beautifully nuanced, attentive to detail, and that is its strongest feature. He adduces numerous new classical sources for critical and poetic motifs in Jonson, never in the spirit of a mere "undigested" catalogue, always with an eye to the poet's reanimation of his materials. What emerges is an "often exquisite specificity of Jonson's use of words, themes, and motifs" (p. 235); as he turns his sources to stand on English soil, the poet creates something monumental, ageless, yet precisely embodying a specific poetic occasion, a felt contemporary reality. So, in the "Epistle Answering to One that Asked to Be Sealed of the Tribe of Ben," written after Jonson's exclusion, presumably at the instigation of Inigo Jones, from a "late Mysterie of reception" planned in 1623 to welcome Prince Charles and the Infanta, Jonson salves his wounded feelings by constructing his own alternate "reception" of a son, based on Orphic and Apollonian traditions of the poet as *vas*, oracular vessel of the divine (Chapter Three). And in his praise of Shakespeare, whom he had criticized vocally, Jonson makes pointed use of the Horatian tradition of balancing praise and blame to deal with an author only equivocally admired (Chapter Four). Peterson's study comes full circle with an intricate analysis of the Cary-Morison Ode, in which Jonson actually utilizes the structural divisions of the choric ode, "turning" classical modes of consolation into one of his last and finest "stands," a monument to his own craftsmanship as to the immortal pair.

Like most critics who deal in the Jonsonian lyric and its classical backgrounds—for that matter, like Jonson himself in his view of the poet as an upholder of ancient *mores*—Peterson is consciously and deliberately idealizing, giving far more weight to the monumentalizing strain in Jonson's poetry of praise than to its imbeddedness in contingency. That is, perhaps, what we should expect in a book about praise, yet it scants the organic and agonistic elements of Peterson's own model. In structuring his chapters to echo choric terminology, he has omitted the "counterturn," understood by Renaissance theorists as a "Contrariety" to the "turn" (p. 200), a new, opposite motion that accompanies a challenge or answer to the original turn, so that the "stand" is a synthesis achieved through a dialectical process, not through straightforward assimilation.

Peterson's discussion would be enlivened by more attention to Jonsonian "counterturns," the resistance of the poet's materials to his idealizing refinement, the local, contingent realities that undermine the process of creative assimilation and thereby deepen the *resolution* achieved by the "stand." For example, Peterson notes the pervasiveness of gustatory and commercial language that so often dominates Jonsonian treatments of proper borrowing from the past, expressed, for example, as a fullness or roundness (the "poet as vessel," Chapter Three) that makes the poet's notorious girth a sign of salutary repletion and success in the "business" of bringing home valuable poetic freight. But surely, given Jonson's damning treatment of commercialism and culinary excess in some of his poems of praise, there is more ambivalence in his loaded language than Peterson chooses to deal with. Then too, given Peterson's exquisite sensitivity to the complexities of occasions like Jonson's praising of Shakespeare, it is curious that the category of civic and political achievement is almost absent from the discussion, even though the accomplishments of so many of the figures Jonson chose to praise lay in just that area. What were his strategies in these poems for "turning" classical models into a celebration of particular contemporary achievement? Peterson's book is invaluable in that it has pointed us in the direction of a new, more contingent notion of Jonsonian art in its major aims and achievements, but it retreats from its own dynamism to "stand" with the static, the monumental.

In Alexander Leggatt's *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art* monuments are forever melting down like Sejanus's statue. Leggatt proposes to consider Jonson's work as a whole, not just the "ideal moral universe" of the poetry: "I want to see what happens when we put Jonson's writings together, tracing threads that run through the various forms he worked in" (p. xiii). What emerges from this deliberate violation of the generic boundaries Jonson was so meticulous about preserving is the dark shadow of Peterson's Jonson, a poet more distanced and ambivalent, concerned with attaining an "honest vision of life as it is" (p. xv). Leggatt's method allows him to delineate a number of characteristic Jonsonian themes with new clarity. The poet is interested (some might say obsessed) with images of false creation, the perverse fashioning of secondary worlds that mimic the real world and call his own creative functioning into question. Some of these false worlds are enclosures for folly and vice, which "in Jonson's scheme of things . . . cannot bear the open" (p. 12). Yet the creation of false images is

both a "betrayal of reality" and a "way of concentrating reality in order to see one aspect of humanity more clearly" (p. 44).

Jonson is also interested in the dead heaviness of false creation, its horrific capacity to make of a human being a lifeless thing, of life itself a "meaningless, oppressive weight" (p. 48). Social institutions are both prime candidates for this emptying of significance, and a redeeming force against it: Leggatt notes how frequently Jonsonian characters organize themselves not as familial units, but microcosms of public establishments—royal courts, parliaments, courts of law. His discussion of Jonson and the law is particularly suggestive: the poet is at once legislator and object of judgment, fascinated by the creation of miniature trials in his plays and verses, envisioning even his relation with the almighty as a battle between rival judicial authorities. Leggatt observes of "To Heaven," "The ultimate judge of the world is God; the ultimate judge of the artistic world that Jonson creates is Jonson; and in this poem the two judges confront each other" (p. 183). Persistently, however, Jonson links judgment and "scenes of sudden transformation, intended to astonish the senses" so that the polar impulses of moralist and artist are fused (p. 198).

"The Poet as Character" is perhaps Leggatt's most valuable chapter, positing that Jonson himself is the most fully human figure Jonson ever created. The poet never bared his soul but revealed himself through repeated strategies, setting up defensive "barbed-wire entanglements," acknowledging his Falstaffian excesses but using them like a "gargoyle who points out by contrast the grace of the rest of the structure" (pp. 202-08). Finally, Leggatt's study deals with the important subject of Jonson's strategies toward his audiences, his preference for readers over viewers on account of the latter's distractibility and immersion in contingency. "Jonson's attempt throughout his work to control his audience by depicting it in his own art is part of a deeper strategy to deal with the imperfections of reality." The real world both "gives the lie to the vision and makes it doubly necessary. To tell the full truth about the world, one cannot be content with saying it is imperfect: it contains—indeed, it generates—the works of art that show man a pure reality. And the interplay between the pure vision and its impure context gives Jonson's art surprising subtlety and depth" (p. 274).

As even this cursory summary of some of Leggatt's main points reveals, his concept of the artist is (in traditionalist terms) post-romantic: it is no accident that he closes the book with a

reference to William and Dorothy Wordsworth's 1802 reading of Jonson's poems, so "*interesting*" for Wordsworth that they "would not let him go to sleep" (quoted, p. 279). Leggatt's Jonson is indeed troubling as for Leggatt reality itself is troubling: Jonson's divided perception is a function of his relentless realism, the power of his art deriving from his Herculean struggles with the intransigence of the actual. What Leggatt's book offers, though, is not realism but a full, complicated map of Jonsonian perception, a fecund gathering of the poet's guiding preoccupations which can be mined by scholars more interested in explaining than in describing. Critics interested in genre theory and its ramifications will be distressed by Leggatt's cheerful trampling over sacrosanct formal boundaries, even though he does make some effort to distinguish generic variants upon the motifs he discusses. Then too, some of his summary statements appear lame by contrast with the exposition that has preceded them. There are some memorable lapses, like Leggatt's assumption (*pace* Lawrence Stone) that an aristocratic title recently attained is likely to have been honestly earned (p. 123). But the surprising thing is how well Jonson stands up under Leggatt's totalizing method: he emerges as a large, brooding presence, more powerful and far ranging than any of the explanatory models with which we have tried to contain him. *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art* deserves more attention than it has received thus far.

In addition to these two major syntheses, the early 1980s saw the production of more specialized studies, one of them Mary Chan's *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson*, the first book to date to undertake a sustained study not only of the *idea* of music in Jonson's thinking and theatrical practice, but of its actual role in performances. There is tremendous need for such a work: even Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong in their massive study of court theater (*Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court* [Berkeley, 1973]) left the subject virtually unexplored, despite the enormous impact music must have had not only on masques at court, but on the public theater. Chan's book helps explain the gap: it includes careful transcriptions of what can reasonably be expected to have been the actual song settings and dance music used for performance, and is immensely valuable if only for that. But many of the settings have not survived. A clear sense of the development of theatrical music associated with Jonson's work is stymied by the paucity of examples. Then too, there is the crucial problem of theatrical collaboration: what control Jonson himself had over the

music that adorned his work is likely to have been even more tenuous than his control over the visual aspects of performance, so that whatever conclusions we come to about music in the Jonsonian theater will be unreliable as conclusions about Jonson.

Nevertheless, Chan offers a number of tantalizing bits of musicological information: the association in Senecan tragedy and later work between certain combinations of instruments and certain types of theatrical action, so that in *Macbeth*, to take a Shakespearean example, the oboes (hautboys), associated with supernatural events and impending doom, announce Duncan's arrival at Dunsinane rather than the cornets more usually associated with royalty; the fact that musical lament motifs are characterized by indecision between major and minor thirds—a structural principle which may well have a poetic equivalent awaiting our critical attention. She includes a useful discussion of "word painting" in late sixteenth-century music—the fashion for imitating the lyrics of a song through devices of musical structure (like the empty cadence accompanying *inanes* in Bach's *Magnificat*). Such musical onomatopoeia was derided by some of Jonson's contemporaries as akin to old-fashioned theatrical gesticulation; it was hilariously parodied by Jonson himself in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Poetaster*.

When she reaches the masque and the major comedies, however, Chan's discussion is less consistently enlightening because her reading of the works in which the music appears is often reductive: her sophisticated (at least to the non-specialist) analysis of relationships between song words and song texts is blunted by her heavy-handed readings of Jonson. She argues that "Come My Celia," for example, follows in its contemporary setting the most tasteful up-to-date declamatory style, restrained and attentive to the structure of the poetry, yet designed to move and persuade the listener. Nevertheless, she asserts, the song as sung by Volpone is a mockery of itself and of its performer because Volpone at that point in the play "has no personal identity" to communicate through such a performance (p. 98); he has become a mere stock type, a pantaloon. If there is more to Volpone than that Chan's argument falls to the ground, but only because she has conceptualized so imprecisely. It is not identity Volpone lacks, but credible affect. His song, based on new affective theories of the relationship between language and musical setting, separates itself so disconcertingly from its performer because we question his ability to feel what he is communicating with such passion.

Chan's discussion of *The Devil Is an Ass* is fuzzier still. She argues that Wittipol's song "Have You Seen but a White Lilly Grow" is, like Volpone's, equivocal in performance despite its musical integrity. It creates a moment of magical stasis but through "mimickry rather than eloquence" (p. 111) because it is compromised by the ludicrous seduction situation that frames it. But, as Chan herself agrees, Wittipol's song is genuinely eloquent. She has mislocated the source of the incongruity, failing to notice that the song in context works against Wittipol's sexual yearnings in that the unsmirched beauty he admires in Fitzdottrel's wife will exist only insofar as it remains unmarred by his lust. Wittipol must discover the implications of his own language. Chan's inquiry into the relationship between words, music, and meaning opens up complexities with which she is unable to deal. There is an unbridged gap between the close analysis of song structure and Jonson's larger concerns.

The same failing colors her discussion of music in Jonson's masques in Part 2. She argues that "the success with which the audience could be included within the masque's meaning must be a major criterion for judging the success of the whole" (p. 144), but gives us almost no sense of the milieu of performance—how the introduction of a new musical style or a patterned alteration among disparate styles, how an imitation of some well-known musical theme (like the folk motifs in *Gypsies Metamorphosed*) might affect an audience's perception of the meaning of a work. Part 2 includes an enlightening analysis of stylistic alterations in masque songs from Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* through *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* but her conceptual framework is wooden and outdated. For the later masques, except for *Gypsies*, which Chan dismisses on the questionable grounds that "its structure no longer used music organically" (p. 284), little of the music has survived.

Accordingly, in Part 3 Chan turns again to the drama, but scants practice in favor of theory, applying Neoplatonic ideas from the masques about music's transformative power to Jonson's late plays *The New Inn* and *The Sad Shepherd*. In *The New Inn*, she argues, Jonson was making a final claim for the comic theater itself as a kind of curative "talisman, a *figura mundi*" like Ficino's astral music (p. 334). This interesting suggestion is not so far-fetched as it may seem, given the pervasiveness of dilute Hermeticism not only at court but in the Caroline theater. Jonson's Son Richard Brome, for example, made a strong claim for the medicinal effects of

theater in his *Antipodes* within which the performance of a play cures a number of serious ailments. Not only song collections but the theater itself offered *Pills to Purge Melancholy*. Since the setting for Lovel's song in *The New Inn* has not survived, however, in this case again literary interpretation and musicological analysis remain asunder. *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson* is a brave pioneering effort but does not develop a methodology adequate to the breadth of its author's concerns. We are offered a gold mine of materials, some brilliant connections, but also considerable conceptual muddiness, a frustrating incompleteness generated only in part by the spotty survival of the music itself.

D. Heyward Brock's *A Ben Jonson Companion* is another work of great potential utility, a dictionary designed after the pattern of F. E. Halliday's *Shakespeare Companion*. Brock recounts charmingly in his preface how, during his long labors on the project, his youngest child was puzzled that "it took Daddy so long to make a book when he could easily put one together on a rainy afternoon with some scissors, a little paste, and a few magazine pictures" (p. ix). But, alas, there is altogether too much of the child's method in the father's compilation. One does not, perhaps, hope for eloquence in such a work, but here is sample of Brock's slapdash prose from his plot summary of *A Tale of a Tub*, Act 5: "Canon Hugh enters and reports that he has recently married a couple, and they turn out to be Awdrey and Pol. Thereafter the parties are reconciled, and Lady Tub invites them all to Totten Court for a merry celebration. As they all leave for Totten Court, Puppy and Wispe tarry behind, and Puppy proposes to her, and she accepts" (p. 271). And so Brock (or one of his editorial assistants) continues, and continues, not, apparently, out of some puckish desire to mimic stylistically a plot he considers too loose, for the summaries of more major works are similarly careless, often far more cryptic than the intricacies they purport to make plain. The level of prose throughout the *Companion* would shame a good undergraduate.

But then prose is not everything. The most important feature of such a dictionary is, after all, its capacity to impart reliable information. Brock displays surprising creativity with facts and interpretation. Here are a few errors gleaned from twenty minutes' haphazard searching. Of Inigo Jones, Brock asserts, "By the time he died in 1652, Jones's work had marked the beginning of classical architecture of the late Renaissance and Georgian periods in England" (p. 136). Something missing perhaps? The Parliamentary

Petition of Right (1628) Brock calls the "Petition of Rights." We are informed (p. 134) that England in 1625 was a "kingdom in which the Puritan revolution was well begun"—an interpretation which would not sit well with most British historians at present. Nor is Jonson himself immune from the compiler's omissions and errors. The summary of *Bartholomew Fair* discusses the epilogue to the king but completely omits the prologue, mentions the play's performance at the Hope Theater but not the performance at court (p. 19). Jonson is frequently quoted out of context. Brock is right to assert that the poet "could be quite candid with the King" but cites as his evidence Jonson's claim to Drummond that he would not flatter "though he saw death" without noting the qualifier that preceded it: "he heth a minde to be a churchman, & so he might have favour to make one sermon to the King, he careth not what yᵗafter should befall him, for he would not flatter though he saw Death." There are more glaring errors, such as Brock's claim (p. 134) that *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* and *Love's Welcome at Bolsover* were written for James's "private amusement." They were, of course, written for King Charles, James having been dead for some years at the time of their performance. And so the list of mistakes and infelicities could be lengthened. Simple cutting and pasting of existing Jonson scholarship would have generated fewer imbecilities. *A Ben Jonson Companion* is too unreliable to be useful for anyone at any level.

Let us hope that *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben* (ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth) is more representative of Jonson studies in the 1980s. The volume's fifteen essays, originally submissions to the 1980 University of Michigan-Dearborn celebration of the verse of Jonson and the Sons of Ben, have been grouped and edited with the care that we have come to expect of the hosts of the biennial Dearborn conferences on seventeenth-century literature. It is a polished collection, including work by known scholars like C. A. Patrides, Stella Revard, Susanne Woods, Raymond Waddington, Roger Rollin, John Shawcross, Thomas Clayton, and Robert Hinman. But it is also, as perhaps tends to happen at celebrations, at least academic ones, disappointingly level and well-mannered, lacking the open vitality of some of the other collections edited by Summers and Pebworth yet interesting for precisely that reason: here again we encounter the lyric Jonson as refuge, a haven from some of the troubling new approaches infiltrating Renaissance studies at present and from

some of the more disquieting aspects of Jonson's own literary production if considered in its entirety.

A few essays jostle the collective serenity. Minor sparks are set off between Susanne Woods and Martin Elsky on the subject of Jonson's Baconianism, whether in his consuming drive for uniting words and things he was participating in or reacting against the "New Philosophy," the answer depending on how we view Bacon's own enterprise, with Woods' Bacon being a relentless dualist and Elsky's, more plausibly, a conscious rebuilder of "philosophical grammar" who sought through scientific investigation, as Jonson did through poetry, to bridge pre-existing epistemological fissures and fashion a language of essences. There is also a provocative essay by Roger Rollin, "The Anxiety of Identification: Jonson and the Rival Poets," which adapts Harold Bloom's contention that "strong poets can only read themselves" (quoted, p. 139) to a consideration of Jonson's defensive strategies toward rivals "dangerously alive or but recently deceased" (p. 140). So, in *Epigrams* 96 Jonson copes with John Donne by fashioning a poem that reverses the expected situation: Jonson, not Donne, is the poet praised, and Donne complimented for his critical acumen in reading Ben Jonson. In Rollin's interpretation, when Jonson actually attempts to cope with Donne's poetry, as in *Epigrams* 23, the result is artistic floundering, a clumsy parody of Donne's own gnarled syntax or, more likely, a specimen of insufficiently sublimated aggression. But surely there is more control here: Jonson constructs a poem which begins, in imitation of Donne's own punning upon his name, with its own ending: "Donne, the delight of Phoebus and each Muse." Not only is the poem "Donne" at the point of its inception, simultaneously offering and undoing its initial compliment, but, after several lines of attempted praise, all of which are similarly both offerings and retractions, it ends by acknowledging that it cannot begin:

> All which I meant to praise, and yet I would,
> But leave, because I cannot as I should!

That is not to suggest that Rollin has misidentified the psychic mechanisms at work here, only that Jonson was aware of his own defensiveness. His poem about his inability to praise reflects his ambivalence about a rival poet *and* mocks his incapacity to cope with a genius so different from his own.

Six of the essays in the Summers and Pebworth volume are about Jonson in relation to his Sons and more distant literary

progeny—Herbert, Vaughan, Suckling, Marvell, Milton. Would that these sections could have been amplified, for they help to rewrite the seventeenth century by demonstrating the formidable impact Jonson had on later poets, no matter how markedly different their voice. John Shawcross discusses Vaughan's construction of amatory lyric sequences in the mode of *Charis*; Thomas Clayton, the aesthetic problems posed by Suckling's attack upon humanist notions of "high seriousness"; and Ilona Bell, circular strategies for poetic rethinking and self-correction Herbert may have inherited from Jonson. Particularly enlightening is Michael P. Parker's "'To my friend G. N. from Wrest': Carew's Secular Masque," which argues that Carew's poem enacts a major directional shift in country house poetry by disrupting the Jonsonian continuum between rural and courtly life: on the eve of Civil War, Carew transfers public motifs associated with the Stuart monarchs and the masque to a more private world defined by the particular concerns of Wrest's proprietors, the de Greys. It can be argued that the shift came earlier. Parker's interpretation will perhaps require modification once we recognize the close connections between *all* country house poems from "Penshurst" onward and the well-publicized Stuart policy to get idle aristocrats away from London and the court and back to their country estates. In light of that important if utterly impractical social program, the regular repudiation of the milieu of the court in country house poetry is a reflection of court attitudes, not a genuine departure from them. What Parker sees as a freeing and secularization of courtly motifs can be interpreted instead as the gradual surfacing of elements that had underlain the genre all along. Parker's study alerts us to the need for more attention to the Stuart masque as a shaping cultural institution. Masques may have been ephemeral in performance but they were talked about, muttered against, preserved, many of them, in printed texts that facilitated the accomodation of masquing motifs and schemata to other literary forms. That is another unexplored way in which Jonson's powerful influence was felt by succeeding generations of writers.

The most important essay in *Classic and Cavalier* and the last that will be discussed here is Richard Newton's "Jonson and the (Re-)Invention of the Book," which argues that it is with the work of Ben Jonson "that we first see the impact of printing on [English] literature coherently assimilated. In Jonson's work we first find a poet appearing in texts which are decisively made for print—in texts proclaiming their own completeness, aware of their

own permanence, and creative of their own context" in that they not only declare themselves as objects for criticism but impose "from within" their own "rules for reading" designed to confer upon them the authority previously belonging only to classical texts (p. 34), or, perhaps we might add, to Scriptural texts and commentaries. It is not that Jonson cannot be read in ways his own texts fail to authorize—Newton acknowledges that—but that he has been remarkably successful at getting his readers to accede to his own terms for reading.

Newton's model is excessively authoritarian: Jonson was not altogether comfortable with his own most dogmatic self and, as we noticed above in considering his poems to Donne, often subverted the authority of his own authorial voice through strategies of self-deprecation. Being a Jonsonian "Understander," even on Jonson's own terms, is a more complex activity than Newton makes it out to be (Stanley Fish's "Authors-Readers: Jonson's Community of the Same," *Representations*, 7 [1984], 26-58, delves further into the matter). But Newton's description of how Jonson's texts generate communities of assenting readers can help us analyse how Jonson matters in the 1980s. Not only was Jonson the first English writer for whom books were valuable in much the same way they are to members of the academic profession at present, he helped to create us—a modern caste of professional scholar-critics. Jonson's overt professionalism was not without its costs: he, more than any previous English writer, acknowledged that books had become commodities, that authorship required participation in a commercial corporate enterprise. He was forced to confront issues of value that earlier writers had evaded because they did not write explicitly and openly for publication. Jonson was, in short, bedevilled by some of the same conflicts that have beset our discipline of late as we try to balance the competing claims of disinterested devotion to ideas and the financial exigencies of the academic marketplace. Most of us, like Jonson, are paid professionals who like to assert our independence from the meanness of money. In revering Jonson's authority, his autonomy, we are symbolically preserving our own, heroicizing the struggle to maintain credibility in the midst of erosive commercialism. *Classic and Cavalier* therefore has something beyond Jonson to celebrate; it as a whole would benefit from a more radical skepticism about the nature of our collective enterprise.

Within the past two years there have been at least four new books on Jonson: Katharine Eisaman Maus's *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, John Gordon Sweeney III's *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater: To Coin the Spirit, Spend the Soul,*

Anne Barton's *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, and Don E. Wayne's *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History*. All of these address some dimension of the problem of Jonsonian professionalism, with Maus and Sweeney offering a restated version of the Peterson-Leggatt antithesis and Barton and Wayne undermining it through the application of historicist methodologies.

Katharine Maus's book is one of the most stunningly original studies to appear in decades in that she undertakes to explicate Jonson's classicism from *within* what she calls a Roman "Frame of Mind." She begins by pointing out that Jonson's favored Roman authors were men whose careers paralleled his own: Seneca, Tacitus, Horace, Cicero, Juvenal, and Quintilian were all self-made men, or liked to think of themselves that way, outsiders who earned positions of "politico-cultural centrality" through their own talent and hard work (p. 10). To deny that one's own life and achievements have been fundamentally dependent on larger social or economic forces is one of the hallmarks of the self-made man: we find the same emphasis on individual autonomy, the same rugged insistence on one's imperviousness to history, in the Roman authors and in Jonson. Maus offers a broad collective portrait of the Roman "Frame of Mind" that differs from more traditional versions in its greater attention to gaps and discontinuities. The Roman tradition is "blatant about its paradoxes" (p. 46) and those are reflected in Jonson.

Maus's analysis of the materialism of Roman moralists helps make sense of the "flatness" of Jonson's humor characters, who cannot, by definition, possess hidden depth. But Roman materialism, and Jonson's, is selective: when it comes to virtue they "conceive the body not as the mind's expressive vehicle, but as its antagonist" (p. 28) and this asymmetry within classical thought becomes of increasing interest to Jonson as he matures as a dramatist. Plays like *Volpone* and *Epicene* do not renounce the Romanness of the humor plays but move past the simple materialism of vice to consider the greater complexities of virtue. Maus discusses Jonson's dramatic treatment of the stoic personality, inherently undramatic because of its detachment, and, in one of the book's most convincing sections, Jonson's inheritance of a "principled unpredictability" central to Roman rhetorical thought. In Jonson, as in his intellectual forebears, there are abrupt shifts between the protean Roman "provisional self" and the immovable stoic personality (p. 45). Maus sees Jonson's "resistance to sublimation," which makes his work so accessible to psychoanalytic

interpretation, as similarly grounded in Roman moral thinking: "Instead of trying to classify Jonson's neuroses . . . it might be more interesting to ask why he makes things so obvious. By assuming that the body and its functions are the sole possible source and object of desire, Jonson has in a sense already performed the psychoanalyst's task for him, has already reduced appetite to its most energetically primitive, egoistic, inchoate forms. What to a Freudian seems to be a case of arrested or perverted development is for the Roman moralist a form of honesty" (p. 87). There are other psychoanalytic viewpoints from which this reductiveness could be viewed—but more of that when we discuss John Sweeney's book. Like the refusal of sublimation, Jonson's aggression takes a different shape from a Roman perspective. As the trial, not the wedding, is the fundamental Roman social ritual, so, frequently, it is the center of Jonson's plays (p. 127). The trial always involves contempt for vice: Jonson's savagery toward the uncomprehending is, in Roman terms, a demonstration of his probity.

The most fascinating aspect of Maus's discussion throughout is also its major limitation: as a critic she replicates the Roman moral psychology she is studying. Having set the discussion initially in familiar post-Marxist terms with her description of the "self-made man," she abandons the causal implications of that analytic mode, preferring to view ideas as self-generating. For Maus, Jonson's artistic choices are the "inseparable consequences of an inherited frame of mind" (p. 21). Over and over in the book—maddeningly unless we recognize the nature of Maus's critical project—Jonson's participation in the Roman Frame of Mind is offered as sufficient explanation for problematic choices. For example, she asserts that "Jonson rejects romantic comedy because the Roman moral philosophy he finds so attractive would lead him to regard as untenable the erotic dynamic it celebrates" (p. 80). Such "explanations" seem overly rigid and circular unless we enter imaginatively into Maus's Roman Frame of Mind and its view of moral agency. Unfortunately, Maus never explicitly acknowledges her own debt as a critic to the ethical system she is studying: as a result her book is likely to be radically misunderstood. She cannot deal convincingly with the Jonson of the masques, in which sublimation is a major vehicle for self-transformation, or with the Christian Jonson, capable of at least fleeting sympathy for human frailty, mere "flesh and blood"; she cannot make much sense of Jonson's final works. Maus offers us a stoic's view of Jonson, neglecting the "principled unpredictability" upon which she herself insists in her

discussion of the Romans. She therefore underestimates Jonson's mercurial capacity to accommodate himself to shifting circumstances and artistic requirements. But within its own implicit limits, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* is a remarkable achievement of *mimesis*, pushing us into a mental world we thought we understood but did not, forcing us to suspend ingrained assumptions about the roots of art and human action and to consider the works of Ben Jonson rather as a Horace or a Martial might have approached them.

In John Sweeney III's *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater* we are on more familiar ground. Sweeney interprets the shifts in Jonson's attitudes toward his audiences from the initial comical satires through *Bartholomew Fair* in Oedipal terms as shifts in the management of aggression. Jonson's hostility as a playwright replicates his personal struggles with authority figures, particularly with his despised step-father and his absent father. In the course of his dramatic career, he sought to recover his natural father by "writing himself out" of his plays in increasing identification with the missing parent. So in the early comical satires, Jonson constructs a satirist authorized by his "repeated self-effacement," growing "fat at the feet of Cynthia, like a dog" (p. 35). In *Poetaster* that symbiosis between monarch and satirist begins to break down and *Sejanus* enacts a "crisis of fatherhood" that calls the satirist's authority into question (p. 57). In *Volpone* part of Jonson identifies with the mountebank: he manipulates his despised audience as Volpone his gulls. The satirist is freed but also compromised by his implication in stage theatrics. *The Alchemist* delves deeper into the self-serving nature of art, whether poetic or alchemical. Finally, by *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson's "masque for the multitude," the poet makes a "rare gesture of accommodation" toward his playhouse audience—he appears willing to give up his castigation for once and grant them the entertainment they want—but that is a point of stasis after which he abandons the theater. He has not so much conquered his hostility as scornfully left his audience to their own feeble devices, finally rejecting the public theater for the court masque, in which he could "celebrate the ideal audience" (p. 223). In a final chapter Sweeney uses the closely related *Staple of News* and *Neptune's Triumph* to argue that only in court theater could Jonson envision solutions to the conflict between stage and gallery: "Jonson declares that it is the presence of majesty in the theater, the power of royal authority, that completes his sense of himself as a poet and gives

full meaning to the theater" (p. 204). Once again the poet is authorized only insofar as he subsumes his identity under that of an idealized authority.

Sweeney's interpretation of Jonson's career is offered quite frankly as theory, not fact; the book lacks credibility despite its wonderful flashes of vision because Sweeney's own psychological thinking is too turbulent and uncontrolled to be comprehensible; his reading is idiosyncratic in the extreme. Sweeney is surely correct that Jonson tended to project unresolved personal tensions onto his audience, that his work to some extent generated the "tumultuous relationship between the stage and gallery in the playhouse" (p. 48) of which he liked to complain. Sweeney is also probably right in asserting that on some basic level Jonson did not want his plays to succeed with the public because that would mean surrendering them to his audience. But which audience are we talking about? In theory Jonson made careful distinctions between enlightened and unenlightened viewers, between spectators and readers. In Sweeney's view, the poet was incapable of sustaining these divisions. Jonson's "holy war" against his audiences crushed them into a single mass which he despised because he had cosened them. He saw the public theater, a commercial enterprise, as inherently oppressive. Either the poet victimized his audiences or they him. But the aggression of Sweeney's Jonson overflows the limits of the commercial theater of the Renaissance. Even we modern readers are Jonson's victims, forced to endure his aggressive onslaughts in order to attain what Sweeney calls "the simple, conventional pleasures of theater" (p. 222): "Jonson makes available to us an aspect of the artistic process rarely seen in its fullness, but he makes us pay for it" (p. 16). This is Leggatt's "dark" Jonson but without Leggatt's breadth and complexity. To the extent that we construct theories redeeming Jonson from the relentless deadlock, we are simply attempting to exempt ourselves from his "intense aggression." As Sweeney asserts in his conclusion, Jonson's theater is a "theater of self-interest." It follows that our only recourse as critics is to combat Jonson's hostility with our own. That is what happens in Sweeney's book.

There is little recourse against such a mode of interpretation because any defense of Jonson is automatically self-defense against Jonson. We may wish to ask, however, whose double bind we are trapped in—is it Jonson's or Sweeney's? His argument about Jonson's escape into court theater where the poet could "celebrate an ideal audience" makes no sense unless we assume that Jonson

himself had more capacity to contain his hostility than Sweeney gives him credit for. As Jonas Barish and Stephen Orgel have demonstrated, Jonson had severe misgivings about the theatricality of the masque, not only about public theater. He was also quite capable of attacking his masque audiences—implicating the court in vices requiring the "remedy" of his art and royal power. Jonson was genuinely hostile towards his public much of the time, but he was also ambivalent about royal authority and his own enmeshment as a court artist in the more sordid doings at Whitehall—that is an aspect of the poet's embattled relationships that Sweeney almost completely neglects. Jonson's basic strategy with both court and popular audiences was to try to trap them into growth: his viewers earn the right to exempt themselves from his hostility through energetic acts of moral and intellectual discrimination. For Sweeney, this is assault. But it can also be viewed as education.

Sweeney's unwillingness to grow beyond aggression toward Jonson is revealed in his choice of psychoanalytic models. *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater* almost completely ignores approaches more recent than Edmund Wilson's "Morose Ben Jonson" (1948), which Sweeney views as "essentially correct" (p. 239). In the mean time, revisions of Wilson go almost unnoticed—E. Pearlman's "Ben Jonson: An Anatomy," *ELR*, 9 (1979), 364-94, is barely mentioned; Judith Kegan Gardiner's "'A Wither'd Daffodill': Narcissism and *Cynthia's Revels*," *Literature and Psychology*, 30 (1980), 26-43, not at all. Both of these studies offer fuller and more empathic accounts of Jonson's inner workings than Sweeney does. Gardiner's interpretation of Jonson's rage and aggression, his sudden swings between grandiose self-confidence and painful sensitivity to criticism, is especially valuable in that it demonstrates the insights post-Freudian theory, particularly the new psychoanalysis of the self associated with Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg, can offer students of Ben Jonson. As Katharine Maus observed, Jonson did the Freudian analyst's work for him: the "id impulses" are available on the surface, not buried like neurotic symptoms. To the extent that they demand psychoanalytic interpretation they are most fruitfully viewed as signs of underlying tensions in the poet's fragile system for maintaining self esteem. That Sweeney chose, except for a footnote or two, to ignore psychoanalytic criticism more recent than Wilson and also the growing body of anthropological and psychohistorical work on the dynamics of theatrical experience is indicative of his unwillingness to approach Jonsonian aggression from a position of distance

and empathy. He is asking fascinationg questions and his inquiry is more fecund than mere summary suggests because Sweeney himself is clearly uncomfortable with the narrowness of his guiding thesis and breaks out of it frequently. How might sadism have functioned in a Renaissance playhouse? Can we indeed define a Renaissance Theater of Cruelty? Was Jonson's hostility aberrant in the Jacobean theater, or part of a wider collective phenomenon? For all its crochets, Sweeney's book may help lead us to answers. *Jonson and the Psychology of the Public Theater* and *Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* are antithetical studies published by the same press during consecutive years, but they do have something more basic in common—their refusal to separate subject and method. Jonson's work still has, as he claimed it had, an uncanny capacity to reveal our ruling passions, to show us ourselves.

Anne Barton's *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* is much more traditional, offering intelligent, textually sophisticated readings of all of Jonson's plays but without a single dominating thesis. One of her aims is to show us how our thinking about Jonson has been skewed by our (and Jonson's own) view of Shakespeare. Her method is to measure a Jonson play against some "well known, popular Elizabethan play" that "serves to set off and define Jonson's own, individual way of seeing" (p. 140). So *The Case Is Altered* is studied against the Plautine paradigm of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors, The Alchemist* against Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus, Bartholomew Fair* against *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Damon and Pithias, The Staple of News* against the late Elizabethan *Liberality and Prodigality*. Her method offers few startling insights but generates incisive and useful readings.

The book's most stimulating sections are the first and the last, both about Jonson's relationship with the Elizabethans. Barton speculates about the "lost" Jonson, the very early works he suppressed, which may have lacked the qualities we consider Jonsonian. She suggests that Jonson did have a hand in revising *The Spanish Tragedy* despite its marked stylistic difference from his known production. The argument is inconclusive but its major premise is highly persuasive: we have limited Jonson, underestimated his proven capacity for successful imitation of widely disparate styles, in our desire to differentiate him from Shakespeare. That insight opens wide vistas. Barton is less persuasive in her defense of the psychological verisimilitude of Jonson's characters

on stage. Following John Creaser, she makes a case for the complexity of the characters in Jonson's mature comedy: "His imaginary people are far less self-aware than most of Shakespeare's. They do not fully understand, let alone find themselves able to articulate, why they act as they do. Shakespeare works through a kind of super-realism, allowing characters insight into their own motives, and an ability to externalize complex states of mind . . . rarely met with in life as it is. Jonson's method is different, and in many ways truer to normal experience" (p. 108). The observation is wonderfully just, but does not quite rescue Jonson since it merely shifts the terms of comparison from what we consider "real" or "normal" in actual life to what *appears* real on stage. Maus is helpful here: Jonson tended to think of mimesis more abstractly as a mirroring of moral impulses and paradigmatic social situations.

The most valuable portion of Barton's book and the only one with extensive historical documentation is the final section on Caroline "Harking back to Elizabeth" and Jonson's final plays. Here again Barton shows how we have underestimated Jonson's artistic range, still tending to suppose that Jonson's most "Elizabethan" works—*A Tale of a Tub* and *The Sad Shepherd*—must be early plays hastily revised by the poet near the end of his life. Barton lays that view to rest for good. Not only are there no compelling textual reasons for regarding these plays as early, there is overwhelming evidence that they were late, deliberate revivals of a long-vanished comic mode as part of a broad wave of Caroline nostalgia for times perceived as simpler and more wholesome. Barton offers the best reading of *A Tale of a Tub* to date, pointing out the play's obsession with antiquarianism and local history, its "insistence on retaining contact with times past" (p. 328). Because she sees Caroline nostalgia as specifically for the age of Elizabeth, she takes pains to argue that the play is set in the early years of that reign. However, the "Queen" *Tale of a Tub* refers to is just as likely to be Mary: depending on the political and ecclesiastical orientation of the writer, Caroline antiquarianism harked back to pre-Reformation England with as much enthusiasm as to the Age of Elizabeth. But Barton's claim for the value of Jonson's "dotages" carries weight because she offers new tools for their interpretation. The book has charming eccentricities such as a "chapter interloping" on Camden's *Remains* and Jonson's shifting attitudes toward revelatory naming. Not all of

its whims are so endearing. It should have been considerably shorter and tighter. When she is at her best, however, Barton shows how much traditional historicist methodology still has to offer students of Jonson.

In turning finally to Don Wayne's *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History* we move from the old to the "new historicism." Wayne's study is much more than a book about a poem—it is a pioneering synthesis of formalist structuralist analysis and the recent "poetics of culture" associated with Stephen Greenblatt and others. Wayne's title ought not to deter readers put off by structuralist and post-structuralist approaches. The book is methodologically lucid, its author possessing, in addition to a fine theoretical mind, a talent for making theory accessible. What Wayne undertakes is a demonstration of the homology of different modes of construction: Jonson's creation of "To Penshurst," the Sidney family's building of the estate, the construction of the seventeenth-century upperclass family and of ideological strategies that fortified its class status. For Wayne, Jonson's poetry is no more serene and detached than the rest of his artistic production. His praise of Penshurst, like the architectural features of the estate itself, is designed both to make the "experience of fundamental historical changes intelligible" and to "occlude the basis of these changes" (p. 27). "To Penshurst" first establishes an opposition between Nature and Culture, setting off the Sidneys' "better markes" of soil, air, wood, water, and "countrey stone" against the artifice of contemporary prodigy houses. But then the boundary between Nature and Culture is undermined and the status of the house becomes ambiguous: Jonson's initial opposition masks the "contradiction between a concept of history as synchronic (connoted by the epithets 'ancient' in line 5 and 'reverenc'd' in line 6) and an actual historical change which has brought the Sidneys [who were *arrivistes*, not members of an ancient aristocracy] to their present position of social status and power" (pp. 57-58). The poem moves from the depiction of a "cultured Nature" on the grounds of the estate to a "natural Culture" in the description of the house, simultaneously affirming and denying that what is outside the walls is different from what is within. When we enter the great hall (line 48), description gives way to narration, but again opposing terms coalesce: history and myth become indistinguishable, with the poet, who both creates and chronicles the estate he claims to be visiting, simultaneously

legitimizing the Sidney family and calling his readers' attention to the fact that this is an artistic strategy he is performing. "Thus, what appears to be a commentary by Jonson on an already existing text and its readers—the 'book of Sidney' as it were—is at the same time a very significant part of what produces that text" (pp. 79-80).

Bald summary cannot do justice to the intricacy of Wayne's reading of the poem. But perhaps more fascinating than that is his reading of Penshurst itself. In Chapter 4 he discusses the visual rhetoric of the Sidney family's "renovations" of the estate. They introduced deliberate architectural anachronisms like decorative crenellations that serve as "visual connectives" between the various periods of the house's construction, asserting continuity with the original fourteenth-century owners, but also establishing difference and underlining the individual identity of the Sidneys through such devices as clearly legible dates betraying the newness of the construction. Like the verbal strategies of Jonson's poem, the architecture and garden design of the estate both assert timeless continuity and restate the distinctions they mystify.

From the house, Wayne moves on to the family—the presence that translates the Sidney "house" into a "home," a haven for and expression of nascent individualism. Like Raymond Williams, Wayne is interested in the poem's excision of work: "We are made witness simultaneously to a magical Nature which bestows itself freely upon an Edenic 'lord' and 'lady,' and a real Nature that the poem legitimates as the property of an actual ruling family. But the contradiction becomes evident only when we add what the poem omits: that is, that the real Nature is available for its owners' consumption solely through the transforming power of human labor" (p. 127). The persistent failure of modern critics to notice this mystification can be attributed to our own involvement in the poem's ideology of family and property. But Jonson, unlike most modern readers of the poem, calls the ideology into question even as he promulgates it. Wayne's delving into the ambiguities of "To Penshurst" leads him finally to that most central issue in Jonson studies at present, the meaning of Jonson's classicism.

Like Maus, Wayne is interested in the ways Jonson's classicism gave him autonomy and legitimacy despite his low social status. But Wayne takes up where Maus left off, exploring the ideological implications of the elevation of the poet "as an independent subject." Classicism was for Jonson much what Penshurst was for the Sidneys—a domain that gave him a place in an ancient continuum, but that he could claim simultaneously to have earned,

"dated" and stamped with his own mark, through the exercise of his personal abilities. More than any other recent student of Jonson, Wayne is able to probe into the rhetorical dynamism of the poet's classicism (and perhaps of classicism in general). The key paragraph is worth quoting in full:

> My point here is that seen from within, that is, in terms of its avowed premises, classicism appears as Lovejoy described it, anti-historicist and uniformitarian. But viewed in the context of a more inclusive historical frame, these very characteristics of classicism at its inception become their own opposites. They are recognized as strategies for confronting and contesting an older, outmoded structure of behavior and belief, and for enunciating a new conception of the subject. It is ironic, though hardly paradoxical, that classicism's reliance on a uniform, static notion of Nature was an inherently historical gesture; it marked the introduction of a potential difference (if not of diversity in the more modern, liberal conception) into the prevailing sense of quality that depended on inherited titles and property and on revealed rather than rationally derived doctrines. (p. 149)

This paragraph should be outlined in red and prescribed thrice daily for readers who still insist on Jonson's formalism. We must restructure our traditional image of Jonson the arch-conservative, not only in "To Penshurst" but in his work as a whole. Wayne is willing to go even further: not only was Jonson's self-presentation as a fearless classicist incipiently egalitarian at least to the extent that such a stance conferred value upon individuals outside of a received hierarchical system, it simultaneously allowed him almost preternatural insight into weaknesses of the new individualist order that was only then coming into being. "Jonson's poems succeed both in exposing the arbitrary, if not irrational, basis of the traditional doctrines according to which a man of quality was identified, and, at the same time, in providing a disturbing glimpse of the consequences attendant upon the loss of such intrinsic and spontaneously recognized criteria for nobility and honor" (p. 162). To make such a claim is to read a great deal into Jonson. But Wayne's insight may help account for Jonson's astonishing modernity, the

fact that for many readers at present his work radically subverts methods and ideals upon which it (and we) continue to depend.

Don Wayne's bold experiment in reading strategies for the shaping of cultural myth out of stylistic asymmetries is not without its weak points. The diversity of his materials, his seemingly disjunctive method of interpretation, will make his book hard going, despite its essential clarity, for readers accustomed to more familiar (and safer) modes of exposition. In fact, the study would have been more rhetorically effective if it had been differently organized. Then too, like virtually all of those who explicate a "poetics of culture," he is more interested in congruence than variation. But the dissonances between levels of his analysis are taken into account and he is aware, even painfully so, of the limitations imposed by his methodology. Wayne's is the first of what we can expect to be a significant number of single-author books on Jonson from a structuralist or post-structuralist perspective. (There have been important shorter treatments in Jonathan Goldberg's *James I and the Politics of Literature* and Richard Helgerson's *Self-Crowned Laureates*).

What, then, are the most promising directions in Jonson studies at present? Rather than choosing among methodologies, I will summarize by emphasizing the value of particularity—what Peterson has termed the "exquisite specificity" of Jonson's artistic achievement—whether we arrive at it through the study of his classical sources, or of his historical and cultural situation, or of his minute strategies for negotiating such areas of interest within a given text. In particular, Jonson's classicism needs to be thoroughly historicized: we need to apply the same methodological sophistication to our view of Roman and Greek writers and to Jonson's use of them as we do to Jonson himself. But that is only one of many ways of arriving at Jonsonian specificity. He was a great tun of a man, bombastic, prone to the violent assertion of absolutes. But we are learning to resist his dogmatism and discover beyond it his astonishing artistic range, his meticulousness combined with flexibility, his capacity for an almost limitless reshaping that his dogmatism never managed to contain. To return to Richard Newton's formulation, we are learning to read Jonson's work anew by reinterpreting what he meant when he insisted on its status as a text. His demand for "understanding" readers does not hedge either his or our own license for radical questioning of what appears on the surface unquestionable.

University of Wisconsin, Madison