

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

# Ben Jonson AND THE Cavalier Poets



SELECTED AND  
EDITED BY HUGH MACLEAN

AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS  
CRITICISM

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning  
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AUTHORITATIVE TEXT  
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Edited by*

MARGARET REYNOLDS  
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# Preface

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The primary aim of this Critical Edition is to make available to modern readers full and appropriately varied selections from a body of seventeenth-century poetry that has not received its critical due. Ben Jonson (to quote Douglas Bush) "gave poetry a new charter through his dynamic assimilation of the main tradition of the past"; if the charm of Cavalier poetry goes without saying, its special quality resides rather in an eminently Jonsonian combination of strength and wit, one that finds its most felicitous expression in celebrating "the mysteries of manners, arms, and arts." Over the years, however, the tides of literary taste have taken their toll. Jonson considered that Donne's poetry "for not being understood would perish"; he directed his own nondramatic verse chiefly to those who cared to understand it, and for those readers alone he reserved his trust. By a curious irony, it was Jonson's poetry that fell gradually into disrepute and relative obscurity. His reputation as a dramatist remained high, but the poems (save for a few isolated pieces) have been savagely neglected until quite recent times. By consequence, as Joseph Summers remarks, modern readers "are likely to miss a good deal of Jonson's range and strength and art." The poetry of Jonson's heirs and followers has also been seriously underrated: generations of readers, dazzled by Donne's fireworks and the curiously wrought fancies of metaphysical poetry, have scarcely noticed the witty variety of Cavalier verse, not to mention its moving reflection of a once confident society grown desperate under the pressures of time and change. The poems collected in this volume comprise an especially copious and representative sampling of Jonson's nondramatic verse and that of the Cavalier poets; they enable modern readers once again distinctly to perceive the vital character of Jonson's contribution in this kind, and to relish the challenging wit and art of Cavalier verse.

The strength and scope of Jonson's poetry are fully represented here. A wide selection from the *Epigrams* includes satiric and commendatory poems, together with the mock epic, "On the Famous Voyage." *The Forest* is here complete; its fifteen diversified poems provide an intriguing microcosm of Jonson's larger achievement. From *Underwood*, such well-known pieces as "A Celebration of Charis" and the Cary-Morison ode are included among the selections; I have drawn attention to less familiar but equally significant aspects of Jonson's verse by the inclusion of "An Execra-

tion Upon Vulcan" and, in particular, the "Epithalamion" on the Weston-Stuart nuptials, a poem that repays comparison with Spenser's marriage ode and with Herrick's "A Nuptial Song," also given in this volume. The earliest of Jonson's three odes to himself is here, as well as that which marks the poet's furious reaction to the failure of *The New Inn* in 1629; a group of the more delightful songs from the plays and masques makes up the tally. These selections will permit judicious readers to recognize that, if the wit of Jonson's poetry may well be described (by F. J. Warnke) as "the ability to give terse and memorable expression to generally acknowledged truths," it is conditioned (even, perhaps, defined) by Jonson's consistent attention to the criterion of a larger decorum.

Almost everyone can agree that Suckling, Lovelace, and (probably) Carew may appropriately be termed "Cavalier poets"; but that rubric need not be too exclusively delimited. It is evidently of some importance to be aware that "Cavalier wit" is touched and in some degree transmuted by the influence of metaphysical poetry, notably that of Donne. Carew's verse is a case in point; but the images and rhythms of verses by several poets included here more than once recall those of the metaphysical manner. In any event, my selection has been guided in the first instance by Douglas Bush's discussion of these figures in *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1962), an account that would support the inclusion, as "Jonsonian cavalier poets," of some eleven authors represented in this Critical Edition. By another reckoning, the group includes members of the "Tribe of Ben," courtly gentlemen who took the king's part during the civil war, and such figures as Waller, Denham, and Cowley, whose classical affinities enabled them to compose verses recalling the manner and (from time to time) the substance of Jonson's poetry, even as their own "sweetness and strength" prepared the way for Dryden and the Augustans. In this regard, I have included a number of poems in which the authors address themselves to Jonson or to each other: the poems to Jonson's memory, drawn from *Jonsonus Virbius*, are no less instructive than Carew's candid response to his mentor's "Ode to Himself," while Herrick's verses to Fane and Denham, and the poetical exchanges among Shirley, Stanley, and Habington, illuminate the social fabric within which these men pursued their several interests and careers. Finally, the socially oriented wit of all these men echoes their mutual concern for those values that Earl Miner identifies as the salient marks of Cavalier poetry: a consistent urge to define and explore the features of "the good life," an eager desire to cope with and neutralize the threat of time, a fascinated attention "to idealized as well as re-

alistic versions of the psychology of love," a profound (and Jonsonian) faith in the power of friendship.

The spelling and (in some degree) the punctuation of poems in this Critical Edition have been brought into accord with modern practice. The principles governing these and other alterations of the early editions are discussed in the Textual Notes. Footnotes serve primarily to gloss unfamiliar terms, to clarify the syntax of especially complex or gnomic constructions, and to explain allusions to mythological figures or episodes, and to historical personages and events. Now and again, footnotes draw attention to formally or thematically comparable passages in other poems included in this edition. Since readers may very probably not undertake to proceed steadily through this volume, from Jonson's first epigram to Stanley's "Expectation," I have exercised some discretion in explaining those mythological and classical names which appear with some frequency (e.g., Apollo, Anacreon, Orpheus, etc.). In general, for Jonson's poetry and that of Corbett, Herrick, and Carew, footnotes to often-repeated allusions refer the reader to the first such footnoted allusion in the volume; thereafter, as a rule, footnotes are omitted in these cases, or, where the allusion bears a rather distinct emphasis, footnotes briefly explain such allusions in terms that draw attention to that emphasis.

The selection of appropriate critical materials for this volume has presented some problems. Until quite recent times, informed and detailed criticism of Jonson's nondramatic verse can scarcely be said to have flourished; typically, those critics who discuss Jonson's art lavish attention on the plays, but slight or altogether ignore the poems. As for the other figures represented here (Dr. Johnson's *Lives* excepted), "criticism" before the modern era consists chiefly in scattered, almost random asides. Nevertheless, it has seemed reasonable to arrange these materials chronologically, if only to indicate the great gap of time that yawns between the perception of Jonson's own critical pronouncements and the renewed interest in his nondramatic verse and that of the Cavaliers which in our own day springs up on every hand. Among the modern essays collected here, Patrick Cruttwell's provides the larger context within which the Jonsonian tradition develops. Joseph Summers considers Jonson's verse in relation to the contrasting manner of Donne, while Earl Miner shows how Jonson's poetry reflects a significant Cavalier ideal. Five other scholars discuss particular aspects of Jonson's art. It has not been possible to include critical essays that deal directly with each one of the Cavaliers whose work is represented here, but the six remaining essays raise issues which are by no means relevant only to the poet with whom each critic

deals. The Textual Notes provide lists of chiefly substantive variants. In this regard, I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to the full critical apparatus provided by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson in their definitive edition of Jonson's works (11 vols., Oxford, 1925-1952), and by the modern editors of the poetry of other authors represented in this edition; these scholars are individually identified in the Textual Notes. A Selected Bibliography includes those books and articles that the present editor has found especially useful.

For various kinds of assistance in the preparation of this volume, I am deeply grateful to a number of persons and institutions. Chief among these are the librarian and the staff of the Cambridge University Library, and of Christ's College, Trinity College, and Emmanuel College in Cambridge University, for making available to me the early editions on which the texts of a majority of the poems in this Critical Edition are based. I wish also to thank the librarians of the Newberry Library and of the University of Illinois Library for providing me with microfilm copies of early editions of poems by Corbett, Fane, Vaughan, and Stanley. I must further acknowledge the willing and co-operative assistance over a long period rendered by the librarian and the staff of the Library of the State University of New York at Albany. Among my colleagues at this university, Townsend Rich and Walter Knotts have been steadfast in their support; I am particularly grateful for the cheerful aid and comfort provided by Edward Le Comte, Frank Sypher, and Donald Prakken. Let me not forget, at last, two generous scholar-teachers from whom I have learned much, and whose characters exemplify the virtues of the period they have made their own: Norman Endicott and Arthur Barker.

HUGH MACLEAN

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