

STOICISM AND PLAIN STYLE IN BEN JONSON: AN ANALYSIS OF SOME OF HIS VERSE EPISTLES



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Ben Jonson has been called the first thoroughly classical poet in English literature. The aim of this paper is to show the sources of his classicism and determine the influence that his classical reading exerted on his ideas concerning style and poetry in general. Jonson's poetics will be traced back to the first theorists of the classical plain style and their followers among the European humanists. The tradition of the English plain style will be taken into consideration, as well as the relationship between plain style and the Stoic revival of the sixteenth century. The final part of this paper will consist of an analysis of some of his poems which in part reflect the theories and ideas studied in the previous sections.

1. JONSON'S RHETORIC: ITS SOURCES

It is commonplace in textbooks to say that today Jonson's plays tend to overshadow his nondramatic poetry in spite of the fact that he considered the latter the most important of his creative undertakings. The genres he favored -epigram, satire, verse epistle, among others-reveal a rupture with the Elizabethan tradition, and although some of these genres had already been used during the sixteenth century, he would be the first author to develop them completely as common poetic forms. This rejection of the courtly Petrarchan sonnet tradition shows his predilection for the plain style as opposed to the high style, usually favored by the English sonneteers. The influence of some very specific classical authors, as well as a deep concern and sympathy for some contemporary rhetorical and humanist trends, is clear in this choice. They influenced the form, the subject matter and the tone of his poetry. He expresses his opinions about the common Renaissance ideas of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* in *Discoveries*, the miscellaneous work where he echoes many of the contemporary and classical trends in language and style, among other related subjects. He inherited the idea of using ancient models as inspiration for new creative and original poetic undertakings from Cicero through Seneca, Quintilian and Vives (see Maus 1984, 18):

I know nothing can conduce more to letters, then to examine the writings of the Ancients, and not to rest in their sole Authoritie, or take all upon trust from them... For to all the observations of the Ancients, wee have our owne experience: which, if wee will use, and apply, wee have better meanes to pronounce. It is true they opened the gates, and made the way, that went before us; but as Guides, not Commanders: Non Domini nostri, sed Duces fuere. (*Discoveries*, 129-139)¹

The influence of Horace, Seneca, Martial and Lipsius determined not only his style but also his concern with morality and truth:

¹ All quotations are from volume 8 of the Herford and Simpson edition, 1947.

Wisdom without Honesty is mere craft, and coosinage. And therefore the reputation of Honesty must first be gotten; which cannot be, but by living well. A good life is a maine Argument. (*Discoveries*, 89-92)

The concern for poetic forms and their appropriate subject matter are two important issues which many contemporary scholars were intensely debating. At the same time, this debate was a reflection, in modern terms and with modern needs and perspectives, of a controversy which had its origin in ancient Greece. According to the rhetorical tradition, there are three kinds of styles: the high, the middle and the plain, whose functions were respectively to move (*movere*), to delight (*delectare*) and to teach (*docere*). Plato advocated the use of the plain style for dialectic, the purpose of which was to discover and to teach the truth:

The conflict between *dialectic* and *rhetoric*, which Plato discusses in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, encouraged, in the most general terms, a split between *meaning* and *expression*, between the *philosopher* and the *orator*, and between *teaching* and *persuasion*. (Trimpi 1962, 5-6)

Renaissance humanists echoed this controversy in terms of what is usually called Senecanism and anti-Ciceronianism. These movements explicitly rejected the elaborate and embellished style and emphasized content. It was thought that language had gone astray and the relationship between knowledge and its verbal expression had to be viewed under new perspectives.¹ Jonson endorses this opinion in *Discoveries*:

Of the two (if either were to be wisht) I would rather have a plaine downe-right wisdom, than a foolish and affected eloquence. For what is so furious, and Bethl'em-like, as a vaine sound of chosen and excellent words, without any subject or sentence, or science mix'd? (*Discoveries*, 574)

This does not mean, however, an absolute rejection of any kind of rhetorical device in favor of blunt and careless language. What the anti-Ciceronians were trying to do, in the opinion of Wesley Trimpi, was to put an end to the separation of rhetoric and dialectic as opposite or isolated disciplines. These scholars wanted to harmonize the pursuit of truth and its teaching with a proper and persuasive form. This new kind of language would have to be free from all the emotional and distracting attributes of figurative speech. Solving this dichotomy also implied the fusion of private, individual speech with public persuasion. The truth that was to be transmitted through this kind of language was felt to be in the individual's mind and experience. The transmission of this kind of knowledge had become essential in that time of intense intellectual activity.

The humanist Juan Luis Vives, an important link in the chain of authors that contributed to the transmission of classical doctrines to Jonson, defended what Trimpi calls a "styleless style". This style had to be free from all the connotative, emotional commitments of persuasive public rhetoric to become a clear, virtually transparent medium for the author's ideas. Vives' notion of this kind of style is very similar to Cicero's description of the Attic orator as expressed in sections 75 to 90 of his *Orator*. Cicero, in turn, might have found the source for his ideas about Attic style in the kind of language that the Socratic method advocated to investigate individual experience, the so-called *sermo* (Trimpi 1962, 41, 53;

¹ Richard Waswo holds that for some Renaissance scholars like Lorenzo Valla the duality between signified and signifier was no longer relevant. From this perspective language does not represent reality but constitutes one. See R. Waswo 1979, 247 and 1987, *passim*, for a detailed discussion of this complex issue.

Tinkler 1987, 285-6). Through Vives, and through other direct and indirect sources, this doctrine reached Jonson.

On the other hand, his constant emphasis on individual experience and an adequate neutral medium for its transmission are all concerns of the stoic movement that had been witnessing a revival since the sixteenth century. Thus stoicism and plain style go hand in hand in Jonson. The ideal of stoicism was the virtuous individual who had attained a thorough knowledge of his mind and ethos as well as a full control of his passions. This self-restraint enabled him to rely completely on his own capacities to face the changes in fortune without being affected by them. This serene character and self-controlled personality is best expressed by the equally balanced plain style, which shuns all extreme passions embodied in far-fetched metaphors or figurative language in general. The stoic individual ideal is present in the epigram "To Sir Thomas Roe":

Thou hast begun well, Roe, which stand well too,
 And I know nothing more thou hast to doo.
 He that is round within himselfe, and streight,
 Need seek no other strength, no other height;
 Fortune upon him breakes herselfe, if ill,
 And what would hurt his vertue makes it still. (lines 1-6, p. 63)

Lipsius, the scholar, historiographer and political thinker, was perhaps the most prominent figure in the neo-stoic philosophical movement of the European Renaissance. Jonson and Lipsius had in common a concern for ethical conduct in the world of politics. This is evident in Jonson's numerous poems to eminent public figures and aristocrats, including the king. In these poems, Jonson's praise has a double function. On one hand he makes a panegyric to his patron, but probably most important is the fact that by doing so he is also constructing in his poem a model not only of the ideal person and his behavior both as an individual and as a social being, but also of the ideal ruler, a public figure with power over the rest of society:

How like a colunne, Radcliffe, left alone
 For the great marke of vertue, those being gone
 Who did, alike with thee, thy house up-bear,
 Stand'st thou, to shew the times what you all were? ("To Sir John Radcliffe", VIII, p. 60)

Apart from Lipsius, Jonson had other sources for his stoicism. As one of the most prominent classicists of the English Renaissance, he knew extensively the works of Seneca, Horace, Cicero, Juvenal, Quintilian and Tacitus. These authors were included in the orthodox canon of classical writers taught at schools in his time. He also found inspiration in later authors such as Petrarch --though he was not a Petrarchist in the Elizabethan sense-- and contemporaries like Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, Daniel Heinsius, and his master William Caudem. Though his tastes were orthodox, he did not seem to favor authors like Ovid and Virgil, or at least he did not seem to hold them in such a high esteem as Spenser, Marlowe or Shakespeare did. Katharine E. Maus (1984) points out that his favorite authors cover a wide range of styles, from the flowing periods and smooth transitions of Cicero to the blunt and aphoristic Seneca, but they all seem to express or imply the same attitude as writers. They defend temperance, self-reliance, fortitude, a deep concern with public life and the common good as something above the individual's desires and passions; in short, they express an ethical view of life in their work.

One of the aspects that all of these authors had in common with Jonson and other Renaissance writers was their position as intellectuals at the service of the powerful. Many of them depended on their patrons for their daily living, and for some, the loss of their patron's favor even meant death, as was Seneca's case. This typically unstable situation

was aggravated in Renaissance Europe by religious and political strife that often degenerated into war. From this point of view, the stoic ideal of self-sufficiency and the self as the main source of stability against the wavering ways of the world proved a very useful ethical standpoint for the humanists.

Jonson also endorses another aspect present in some of his classical authors: the idea of the poet as the public servant. For him, as for some intellectuals today, the role of an author in society was to provide useful examples of ethical behavior and to criticize those who perniciously affect the common good. Hence his preference for genres that deal with social issues or relations: the epigram, the epistle, comedy and masque.

Therefore an ethical view of all the aspects of human life and a deep concern about friendship as the most perfect bond between virtuous men are part of Jonson's ideal. The notion of true friendship is present in "An Epistle to a Friend", where he contrasts genuine friendship with the kind that only seeks personal profit. The mention to the epistolary communication between friends is also remarkable. The language appropriate to the civilized exchange between educated citizens was considered to be the urbane plain style, of which this poem is an obvious instance:

Sir, I am thankful, first, to heaven, for you;
Next to your selfe, for making your love true:
Then to your love, and gift. And all's but due.

You have unto my Store added a booke,
On which with profit, I shall never looke,
But must confesse from whom what gift I tooke.

Not like your Countrie-neighbours, that commit
Their vice of loving for a Christmasse fit;
Which is indeed but friendship of the spit:

But as a friend, which name your selfe receive,
And which you (being the worthier) gave me leave
In letters, that mixe spirits, thus to weave. (lines 1-12, p. 189)

Letter writing, in Jonson's words, "*mixes spirits*", and this is at the core of both the stoic ideal of sincerity and virtue and its formal embodiment in a proper discourse. The correspondence between the self and its mode of expression is also a central concern in *Discoveries*. Language and truth are the necessary complement to the honest life:

Language most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech. Nay, it is likened to a man; and as we consider feature, and composition in a man; so words in language: in the greatness, aptnesse, sound, structure, and harmony of it. (*Discoveries*, 2031-2038)

In this same section of *Discoveries* Jonson goes on to compare linguistic style and man. First he mentions *language high and great*, which corresponds to big and tall men; low and poor language is like a dwarf. In his attempt to express the union between language and man, language and character, he goes back to his stoic ideal, favoring the temperate kind of language and ethos:

The middle are of a just stature. There the Language is plaine, and pleasing: even without stopping, round without swelling; all well-torn'd, compos'd, elegant, and accurate. (*Discoveries*, 2045-47).

Thus for Jonson ethos, the self, and its language are something that should correspond closely, being all of them in the service of truth. The next step is the adequacy of ethos and language applied to a specific situation, the concept of *decorum*:

And according to their Subject, these stiles vary, and lose their names: For that which is high and lofty, declaring excellent matter, becomes vast and tumorous, speaking of petty and inferiour things: so that which was even, and apt in a meane and plaine subject, will appeare most poore and humble in a high Argument. (*Discoveries*, 2051-2056)

Morality, aesthetic and social values are for Jonson different aspects of the same thing, expressions of the ideal self, individual and social (see Maus 1984, 134).

2. PLAIN STYLE: THOUGHT ABOVE WORDS

Jonson's rejection of the sonnet was part of his rupture with the Elizabethan petrarchists and their *aureate* diction. His strict rules concerning meter were typical of this new notion of the form and function of poetry. The fact that Donne and Shakespeare were his most admired contemporary poets did not deter him from criticizing the former for being too careless in his metrics, and the latter for not checking his wild fantasy with the proper reins of reason. This is very revealing about the nature of his poetic technique:

[Shakespeare] had an excellent Phantsie: brave notions, and gentle expressions: wherein he flow'd with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stop'd ... His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had beene so too. (*Discoveries*, 656-671)

This criticism, of course, has its origin in Jonson's poetics of the plain style. Nevertheless, Jonson's rejection of the previous tradition is not systematic, as the preceding passage indicates, since there is also what Trimpi (1962, 115) calls the English native tradition of the plain style; the two most important representatives of which are Wyatt and Gascoigne. The former was in fact the first poet to write satires in English, in which he mixed the Chaucerian medieval language --for instance in the fable of the country mouse- with more modern, classically inspired trends in satire. Thus Jonson's reaction is more against the native high and middle styles than the plain one.

The specific terms in which this new plain style was formulated can be traced back to Cicero's description of the Attic orator, as has already been mentioned above. This is the source that both Vives and Lipsius use for their rhetorical doctrines as expressed in the former's *De Ratione Dicendi* and *De Conscribendis Epistolis* and the latter's *Institutio Epistolica*. Trimpi (1962, 73-4) suggests that Bacon was Jonson's third contemporary authority in this matter (1986, p. 1683). The title of some of these treatises speak for themselves about what was considered to be the most suitable genre for this sort of language: the familiar letter. In the case of a poet the obvious choice was the verse epistle.

There were four genres which used the plain style: comedy, satire, and epigram were concerned with revealing the actions of others, whereas the function of the epistle was to explore the self, the individual's own character. That is the reason why the stylistic traits of the plain discourse are so appropriate for it. The clearness, directness and purity of diction allow for a straightforward transmission of the main ideas, and the balanced, simple but controlled disposition of the phrases grant the clear understanding of the author's experience as transmitted through his mental processes. These characteristics are in perfect accordance with the idea of the individual that these authors wanted to construct.

The five characteristics of the traditional epistolary style are simplicity, grace, appropriateness, brevity and perspicuity. Most of these are already present in Cicero's *Orator*. In the first place, rhythm must not be dominant, the syntax will be loose but controlled,

avoiding long periodic stretches; the mention to the preference of thought above words is also in accordance with the general notion of plain style:

First, then, let us release him from, let us say, the bonds of rhythm... It should be loose but not rambling... He should also avoid, so to speak, cementing his words together too smoothly, for the hiatus and clash of vowels has something agreeable about it and shows a not unpleasant carelessness on the part of a man who is paying more attention to thought than to words. But his very freedom from periodic structure and cementing his words together will make it necessary for him to look to the other requisites. For the short and concise clauses must not be handled carelessly, but there is such a thing even as a careful negligence. (1942, sections 77-78)

Embellishments and figurative language are to be eschewed, and one of the main features must be propriety. Cicero's remarks about Latin can be equally applied to English, of course:

Also all noticeable ornament, pearls as it were, will be excluded; not even curling-irons will be used; all cosmetics, artificial white and red, will be rejected; only elegance and neatness will remain. The language will be pure Latin, plain and clear; propriety will always be the chief aim. Only one quality will be lacking, which Theophrastus mentions fourth among the qualities of style --the charm and richness of figurative ornament. (78-79)

Archaisms are to be avoided, as well as the coining of new words. Metaphor can be used only within the limits of its regular usage in every day language:

Consequently the orator of the plain style, provided he is elegant and finished, will not be bold in coining words, and in metaphor will be modest, sparing in the use of archaisms, and somewhat subdued in using the other embellishments of language and of thought. Metaphor he may possibly employ more frequently because it is of the commonest occurrence in the language of townsman and rustic alike. (81)

Restraint is a constant requirement, and although figures of speech are to be used, and symmetry may be pursued, all these ornaments must not be too evident. It is very significant how this controlled and moderate elegance is compared to that which is appropriate for a social occasion such as a banquet. This remark emphasizes the public character of this sort of speaker and his inherent social dimension:

This unaffected orator... will also use the symmetry that enlivens a group of words with the embellishments that the Greeks call *schémata*, figures as it were, of speech... He will, however, be somewhat sparing in using these. For as in the appointments of a banquet he will avoid extravagant display, and desire to appear thrifty, but also in good taste, and will choose what he is going to use. There are, as a matter of fact, a good many ornaments suited to the frugality of this very orator I am describing. For this shrewd orator must avoid all the figures that I described above, such as clauses of equal length, with similar endings, or identical cadences, and the studied charm produced by the change of a letter, lest the elaborate symmetry and a certain grasping after a pleasant effect be too obvious. Likewise, if repetition of words requires some emphasis and a raising of the voice, it will be foreign to this plain style of oratory. (84-85)

This restrained style served the purpose of expressing -or rather constituting- the character of the self-sufficient stoic individual. Jonson's concern with morality, friendship and the common good also corresponds closely with the temperate style he employed in his verse epistles, as an analysis of some of them will show.

3. JONSON'S PLAIN STYLE: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE VERSE EPISTLES.

Jonson employed the couplet in most of his poems. This kind of meter adapts perfectly to his emphasis on content over form, since it is a very flexible kind of stanza that, unlike the sonnet, does not constrain or determine the extent of the poem or the distribution of ideas and phrases within it. Yet it is a kind of stanzaic pattern, the simplest one possible, which provides Jonson with the perfect form to attain flexibility and freedom in his poems combined with the moderate restraint he seeks in his poetic doctrine. Jonson availed himself of the "open" couplet as opposed to the "closed" one. The "closed" couplet, also called heroic couplet, is made up of two end-stopped lines, in which the syntax entirely coincide with meter in each line, that is, both lines contain a complete major syntactic unit; this is the kind of verse used for gnomic, aphoristic verse. Of course, this was too strict for Jonson's purposes and therefore he chose the "open" kind, which was marked by rhyme as well, but offered a more flexible frame allowing him to develop epistles of the desired length without the monotonous repetition of closed couplets.

There are a few basic stylistic features related to the couplet that will be found in the verse epistles analyzed here. One is the predominance of syntax over meter --this does not mean, however, that the meter is rambling or even nonexistent, but that the syntax, and in general the linguistic pattern of the poems, is not overdetermined by having to shape or constitute a metrical pattern. This aspect shows Jonson's wish for content to predominate over form. The kind of syntax that he uses is made up of short phrases that in some cases may develop into long periods, though short ones are the most frequently found. Within the predominance of short phrases --or *commas*, the traditional rhetorical term-- a variety of lengths is to be found. This diversity has a function within the metrical scheme, since the pauses along the lines vary significantly from one line to another. This avoids monotony. The use of the caesura or internal pause constitutes an important technical aspect in producing the rhythm of a verse, and consequently it also determines its aesthetic effect on the reader or listener. Caesuras usually coincide with orthographic commas, but they are always in that part of the line where there is a boundary between phrases, that is, the syntactic units that are midway between the word and the clause or sentence. If the caesura takes place after the same syllable in a great number of lines, the rhythm may become marked and repetitive. Not infrequently Jonson disrupts the meter by placing several pauses in a single line, i.e., by breaking it up into short syntactic units. To attain a balance between repetition and variety, Jonson also uses enjambment carefully. This allows the reader to perceive an underlying pattern, so that the mere aesthetic perception does not interfere with the information that is being conveyed in the poem. A regular pattern of end-stopped lines without enjambment would make the form too evident, but a constant flow of one line over the other may destroy the perception of a recurrent configuration. Thus Jonson places some enjambments in his poems to produce a smooth flow without losing control of the recurrent pace of the lines. Finally, the diction consists for the most part of plain words, and figurative language is not frequently found.

In general, the effect is a systematically sought-after balance. All of these stylistic traits are attained by carefully controlling the tendencies that would take the style to extremes. Thus, sometimes an exception can be found, or a modest excess, just to be counterbalanced sooner or later by another in the opposite direction.

In "Inviting a Friend to Supper" (p. 64), there is a wide variety of short periods. There is only one which occupies as many as six lines:

Yet shall you haue, to rectifie your palate,
An oliue, capers, or some better sallade
Vshring the mutton; with a short-leg'd hen,

If we can get her, full of eggs, and then,
Lemons, and wine for sauce: to these, a coney
Is not to be despair'd of, for our money (9-14)

But in spite of being the longest period in the poem, the syntax is loose and, since this passage consists mainly of an enumeration of different foods with some short parenthetical remarks, juxtaposition is the most frequent kind of syntactic relation between the phrases.

Other long periods can be subdivided into units which are midway between the period and the phrase, like the one in lines 28 through 32:

But that, which most doth take my Muse, and mee,
Is a pure cup of rich Canary-wine,
Which is the Mermaids, now, but shall be mine:
Of which had HORACE, or ANACREON tasted,
Their lives, as doe their lines, till now had lasted.

Here the syntactic links are not logical connectors, that is, explicit conjunctions that provide a firm grip between the different subordinated parts of the period. On the contrary, the relations between the major parts of the paragraph are fulfilled by means of relative clauses, three of which are present in this passage.

There are several remarkable enjambments. The one between lines 1 and 2 separates a subject from its verb:

To night, graue sir, both my poore house and I
Doe equally desire your companie:

Lines 5 and 6 separate a verb from the subject complement:

whose grace may make that seeme
Something, which, else, could hope for no esteeme

Lines 7 and 8 separate a verb from its object. This one is, incidentally, a self-contained couplet. There is a complete major syntactic unit contained in these two verses; the enjambment keeps it from becoming a closed couplet:

It is the fair acceptance, Sir, creates
The entertainment perfect: not the cates.

Lines 10-11 separate a subject from an impersonal form; this is somewhat smoother than the others: *or some better sallade/Vshring the mutton*. Lines 13-14 separate a subject from its verb: *to these, a coney/Is not to be despair'd of*; this is the same case in lines 18-19: *of which some/May yet be there*, and also in lines 20-21: *my man/Shall reade a piece*. In lines 38-39, a very disruptive enjambment can be found, since the conjunction is separated from the clause it introduces: *as when/We innocently met*. Finally the two concluding lines 41-42 split a verb and a direct object: *or affright/The libertie*. Again, a pattern of variety with some repetition can be perceived in the distribution of the enjambments and their intensity, which is obviously related to the sort of syntactic units they draw apart.

Within the major units of the periods, the length and distribution of the phrases is varied, which also accounts for the variety in the placement of caesuras in the lines. Many of these phrases are very short, as can be expected from a non-periodic poem. This produces lines with more than one caesura. Thus line one has four different parts with three caesuras after even syllables, which means that the pauses do not occur between two syllables that make up a traditional metric foot. The second line has just one, of a syntactic kind, between the verb and the direct object, that is, after the sixth syllable. This means that there is a variation from the former line, where none of the three pauses occurred in this position. All

of these pauses placed in different positions, as well as the enjambment explain the poem's colloquial and urbane tone.

In lines 7-8, varying the pauses and the enjambment is a technique which again produces the effect of ease and a casual tone, in spite of the fact that this is a gnomic kind of couplet.

The diction is simple and not at all aureate, being composed, for the most part, of names referring to animals or different types of food. This is especially evident in the rhyming words, which are in prominent positions and hence stand out from the rest. Thus *coney-money* in 13-14 or *clarkes-larkes* in 15-16.

The lack of symmetry, the avoidance of embellishment, the use of periods of different extension, the enjambments and the plain diction all respond to the ideal of the plain style as expressed in Cicero's *Orator*. The theme of the poem equally responds to the stoic ideal of friendship, proper urbane behavior and avoidance of extremes, without forgetting to mention some classical authors. This is truly one part of a conversation between two educated persons.

Many of the features found in "Inviting a Friend to Supper" can be found again in "An Epistle to Master John Selden" (p. 158). There are periods of different lengths, as well as various types of enjambments. But its most remarkable feature is probably compression, which Jonson declares in the opening lines:

I know to whom I write. Here, I am sure,
Though I am short, I cannot be obscure:
Lesse shall I for the Art or dressing care,
Truth and the Graces best, when naked are. (1-4)

This is at the same time a declaration of intentions and in part a fulfillment of them, especially in the compressed fourth line. But its compression is most intense in the central part of the poem, where Jonson utters a long series of enthusiastic exclamations about Selden. This compression sometimes provokes obscurity and is a characteristic of the plain style, as a result of its determination to be blunt and straightforward.

Again short phrases can be found with great variation in the position of the pauses along the line. Against the shortness of the phrases and their compression, Jonson counterpoints verse paragraphs. A verse paragraph is a group of lines whose beginning and ending coincide with major syntactic boundaries, and they are usually characteristic of poetry with long periods. However, Jonson uses the short phrases, the ellipsis, and some enjambments to create some short verse paragraphs, like the one between lines 49-52:

How are Traditions there examin'd: how
Conjectures retri'd! And a Story now
And then of times (besides the bare Conduct
Of what it tells us) weav'd in to instruct

In the central part of the poem, the syntax tends to dominate the meter, as Jonson acknowledges in lines 61-62: *the matter of your praise/Flowes in upon me*. It is the content that determines the form here. But soon after this somewhat extreme case of unbridled poetic passion, Jonson checks himself and goes back to the casually controlled urbane tone in the rest of the poem.

In relation to the use of the verse paragraph, there is a remarkably long period of twelve lines in the poem "To Clement Edmonds" (p. 71):

Not CAESARS deeds, nor all his honors wonne,
In these west-parts, nor when that warre was done,
The name of POMPEY for an enemy,

CATO'S to boote, Rome, and her libertie,
 All yeelding to his fortune, nor, the while,
 To haue engrau'd these acts, with his owne stile,
 And that so strong and deepe, as't might be thought,
 He wrote, with the same spirit that he fought,
 Nor that his worke liu'd in the hands of foes,
 Un-argued then, and yet hath fame from those;
 Not all these, EDMONDS, or what else put too,
 Can so speake CAESAR, as thy labours doe. (1-12)

In spite of this unusually long period, the syntax here is again made up of short, loosely linked phrases. Most of them are coordinated by “*nor*” or “*not*”, which appear six times in these twelve lines, and constitute the mortar that gives cohesion to the different members of this period. These conjunctions put together a series of noun phrases that constitute the subject of the verb “*can*” in line 12. The period is further extended by appositions to the noun phrases and parenthetical phrases that fill the 12 lines. There are few outstanding enjambments in these 12 lines, probably to compensate for the unruly extension of this syntactic period. All the line-ends coincide with the end of a phrase. Significantly, all of them have a comma or a semicolon at the end. There is still variation in the position of the caesura, but a slightly higher frequency of traditional iambic caesuras can be found here: there is a pause after the fourth syllable in lines 1, 2, 4 and 10. In the rest of this 12-line passage, caesuras can be found in the fifth, sixth, seventh syllables and other positions. Because the lines are somewhat end-stopped, this variation in the pauses is needed to avoid monotony. Thus, there is again a certain balance in this poem between the extended period and the austere phrasing and meter. The long passage is counteracted by the short phrases that make it up and the end-stopped lines keep them in their place. On the other hand, the monotony is avoided once more by the variety in length of these phrases and the resulting change in the position of the pauses. It must also be said that these pauses are slightly less frequent in this poem than in the ones analyzed above. Here most of the lines have only one. There is then a certain sense of controlled style that gives the poem a somewhat less casual tone than the two epistles mentioned before, providing it with a more serious tone appropriate to this apparently more formal occasion.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The plain style as one of Jonson's stylistic choices --since the rest of his non-dramatic poetry as well as his comedies display a wider range of registers-- is aptly exemplified by these three poems. In these verse epistles the confluence of different trends can be observed. First, the implicit rejection of the Elizabethan sonneteers, and then the continuation of the native plain style tradition under the view provided by two new tendencies. The new stoic school represented by Lipsius accounts for some of his moral concerns. Finally, the tradition of the *sermo* as the expression of personal experiences leads him to adopt the classical doctrines of the plain style that had come from ancient Greece and Rome via Renaissance humanist authors, of which he can be said to be a worthy representative in English literature.

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