

Love in *The Forest* :

Ben Jonson's Progress from Eros to Agape

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It is curious that Ben Jonson's *The Forest* begins with "Why I Write Not of Love," for most of the fifteen poems in this collection explicitly refer to love. Furthermore, two of the three that circumvent the word still center on the subject.¹ "Song That Women Are but Men's Shadows" is a summary assessment of the nature of courtship, while the second "Song to Celia" ("Drink to me only with thine eyes") is one of the most famous love poems in the English language. This incongruity between the author's announced intention and his apparent performance is even more noteworthy when one remembers that Jonson himself indirectly described *The Forest* as "works of diverse nature and matter congested."² In much that same vein, his most respected modern editors, C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, speak of "epistles, songs, odes . . . thrust promiscuously together under the colourless rubric *The Forrest*."³ Nevertheless, I will argue that, although the individual poems may differ in form and subject matter, there is still a common theme or motif which binds them together. Something more than promiscuous chance operates in a book that begins with the poet's wish "Some act of Love's bound to rehearse" and then ends with a poem that, addressed to God, describes the most boundless love, the "love of thee."⁴

The apparent contradiction between the opening poem and the rest of the verse in *The Forest* is largely obviated if we view "Why I Write Not of Love" as, basically, a repudiation of the poetry of sexual love. "Love," in this poem, is represented by Cupid, a fact conventional enough. Jonson, however, individualizes Cupid by emphasizing his pedigree. The son takes his nature from his mother, who shows hers through her misadventure with Mars. But winged, Cupid will not be caught as was his adulterous mother and consequently "could ne're be got/ By any art" (9-10) into Jonson's verse. Poets such as Donne can celebrate the specifically erotic; Jonson will not.

Jonson will not even describe the affair between Mars and Venus. Other writers have already done so, catching, as much as did Vulcan, Cupid asserts, "Mars and my mother in their net" (6). But neither prude nor pornographer, Jonson simply has no desire to portray lust in action. Furthermore, he knows that lust in action is fleeting, its most characteristic action is to pass away. Thus the ending of the poem: "Then wonder not / That since [Cupid refused to be bound], my numbers are so cold, / When Love is fled, and I grow old (10-12). Erotic love cannot be sustained. Neither can beauty that feeds the fires of passion, nor youth that burns with hot desire. Yet, Jonson suggests, such "losses" of the necessarily ephemeral are actually a definite

gain.⁵ Because his “numbers” are “so cold,” he can assess love philosophically, abstractly. The paradoxical consequence of this “dispassion” informs *The Forest*. Love, in its basic varieties, can be discussed. Only the “act of love” is ruled out.

That same point is made more explicitly later in *The Forest*. The tenth poem, untitled, begins, “And must I sing? What subject shall I choose?” but then goes on to exclude traditional topics. Among these Jonson includes licentious love, which, he here suggests, easily descends to perverted love. “Go, cramp dull Mars, light Venus, when he snorts, / Or with thy tribade trine [lesbian trinity] invent new sports” (16-17). Cupid, for most of the world, may “ply his old task”; for Jonson, “His absence in my verse is all I ask” (19 and 21). Yet this poem concludes with only the promise of another poem, “an epode to deep ears,” and Jonson does not answer the question with which he began the tenth poem until the “Proludium” with which he begins the eleventh. His subject, it here turns out, is love, but not love as erotically conceived. While “light brains” in “lust’s wild forest love to range, / Only pursuing constancy in change” (9-10), he will follow a more rewarding course:

Let these in wanton feet dance out their souls.
A farther fury my raised spirit controls,
Which raps me up to the true heaven of love,
And conjures all my faculties to approve
The glories of it. (11-15)

The dance of spiritual death—the love that leads to hell—is here pointedly contrasted to another love which elevates its proponents to a heaven achieved through and characterized by love.⁶

In the “Epode” that follows the “Proludium,” Jonson further develops the opposition between debasing and ennobling love. He assesses the former first:

The thing they here call love is blind desire,
Armed with bow, shafts and fire;
Inconstant like the sea, of whence ‘tis born,
Rough, swelling, like a storm;
With whom who sails, rides on the surge of fear. (37-41)

“Blind desire,” called love, is really counterfeit love. It is armed, like Cupid, to disarm incautious men. It, more than any passion, slips past the sleeping “sentinel” of the mind to “strike our reason blind” (30). Erotic “love” is therefore particularly “prone to move / Most frequent tumults, horror and unrests / In our inflamed breasts” (32-34). Such love must bring chaos into life and into poetry, which is another reason why Jonson exiles Cupid from his verse. The balance necessary for the successful classical poem would be immediately overthrown by Eros.

In contrast to blind desire:

. . . true love
No such effects doth prove ;
That is an essence far more gentle, fine,
Pure, perfect, nay divine. (43-46)

This “golden chain let down from heaven” (47) is similar to Plato’s *philia* in that it is the love which gives meaning and purpose to human society.⁷ It binds man to man and man to God. “True love,” for Jonson :

. . . bears no brands nor darts
To murder different hearts,
But in a calm and god-like unity
Preserves community. (51-54)

It preserves order against the chaotic workings of a Cupid, against the insidious claims of some “vicious fool” who wilfully will not perceive its existence. The poem, in fact, ends with a moral lecture addressed to that same fool which contrasts his lust with two varieties of love that are themselves contrasts and mark out love’s limits. On the lowest level, even “savage brute affection” (108) would refrain from betraying the love of a noble lady. But much preferable to reluctant faithfulness is the complete fidelity of a “noble and right generous mind” (111). Such a one :

. . . knows the weight of guilt ; he will refrain
From thoughts of such a strain,
And to his sense object this sentence ever :
Man may securely sin, but safely, never.
(113-116, italics in the original)

By ending the poem with this complex “embattling” (his own term for the disposition of competing moral qualities in his poetry⁸), Jonson complicates the moral dichotomy with which he began :

Not to know vice at all, and keep true state,
Is virtue, and not fate ;
Next to that virtue, is to know vice well
And her black spite expel. (1-4)

Finally, however, the most virtuous do not achieve their virtue automatically. Moral loving is apparently more problematic than moral living. Consequently, by what men love, and how, we may best know them.

“Epode” didactically argues specific premises about love. Other poems in *The Forest* more generally illustrate the “effects” of “true love” and the consequences of its absence. “To Penshurst,” for example, beautifully describes the harmony and

grace which result from *philia* in action. As G. A. E. Parfitt observes, Penshurst represents a "firmly realized ideal."⁹ From Lady Lisle, who bears her husband virtuous children; to the peasant girls who come bearing gifts; to the gifts of nature that practically offer themselves; all, in appropriate actions, "express their love" (57). The result is the "golden chain let down from heaven" described in "Epode." It is a Great Chain of Being infused with love at every link. Because every link is honored, Robert Sidney can entertain "the farmer and the clown" (48), the poet, or the King with equal hospitality and graciousness.¹⁰ The chain is "golden," not iron; it does not confine but secures. What would otherwise be isolated individuals and disconnected classes are all linked through love into a harmonious whole. Because of this love and its consequent order, we are not offended by the final comparison of Penshurst to the Christian tabernacle. In a world in which this Chain of Being operates (if only in the microcosm of the poem), Lord Sidney can "correspond" to the Lord without profanation or even hyperbole.¹¹

In the subsequent poem, "To Sir Robert Wroth," peace and harmony prevail at another country home. Both poems celebrate "How blest are [those that] canst love the country" (to quote from the first line of "To Sir Robert Wroth") and have been seen as "companion pieces."¹² But there are essential differences. Robert Wroth must be encouraged to keep that which Robert Sidney would never dream of abandoning. The poet needs to remind Wroth to "live long innocent" and to "love the country." As in the later poem, "Ode To Sir William Sidney, on his Birthday," the praise offered in "To Sir Robert Wroth" is tempered by some doubts about the person addressed. When the poet explicitly details the advantages of leading a virtuous life, we must suspect that such advocacy is necessary. Virtue at Penshurst was an unquestionable fact and thus could be simply described. But "To Sir Robert Wroth" suggests that Wroth does not love nature, innocence, security, proportion, and peace quite enough. The poet must remind him of the life which is not based on *philia*:

Let others watch in guilty arms, and stand
 The fury of a rash command,

 To blow up orphans, widows, and their states,
 And think [their] power doth equal fate's. (67-80)

Repeatedly, love and harmony are contrasted with war and chaos. The other dialectic is between love and death. The poet reminds Wroth that death is not fearful when "thy peace is made" (93). He with a sound mind may rightly "think life a thing but lent" (106). Love of God, which—for Jonson—is the proper love of life, allows man to reconcile himself to the natural processes of life. Death, as the logical conclusion to all natural process and the beginning of one's supranatural life, thus loses its fearsome aspect. True love allows a peace which transcends time. Through gentle criticism, Wroth is encouraged to seek that peace. In much that same vein but on a lower level, in "Ode to Sir William Sidney, on His Birthday," "the initial description

of the hearth and the festivities . . . provide a content and an occasion for Jonson's praise and advice," and, as Trimpi also points out, "the Sidney ode ends with a comparison of the fire in the hearth to the love with which the tenant should live his life."¹³

In vivid contrast to these poems, the first "Song To Celia" portrays a mad race against inexorable time which "severs" life—and the "sports of love"—from men. The *carpe diem* theme is here utilized ironically, satirically. Originally placed in *Volpone* as a calculated affront to the heavenly Celia, the poem divorced from the play still retains its tone of pervasive cynicism and cannot be regarded as a serious attempt at seduction.¹⁴ "Song to Celia" is also pervaded by fear—fear of death and fear of discovery. The speaker dubiously attempts to rationalize that latter fear away. In contrast to the concluding aphorism in "Epode," "Man may securely sin, but safely, never" (116), the promiscuous would-be lover in "To Celia" promises a "safe love," not at all endangered by "the eyes / Of a few poor household spies" (11-12). Even the threat of being apprehended represents no real danger since "fame and rumour are but toys" (10) and, as such, need not be taken seriously. Licentious love itself, this sophist claims, is not immoral:

'Tis no sin loves fruit to steal,
But the sweet theft to reveal:
To be taken, to be seen,
These have crimes accounted been. (15-19)

Of course, even on his own limited erotic level, this speaker is mistaken.¹⁵ If sin lies only in the exposure, there can still be "sin." In illegitimate pregnancy or the outward consequences of venereal disease so graphically described in "To Sickness," these lovers well might find that their private "theft" has become public "crime." But the speaker is even more wrong on the larger level of *agape*, which here relates to his implicit fear of death. "Spend not then his gifts in vain" (5), he says of time: Continuing to borrow from Catullus, he claims:

Suns that set may rise again
But if once we lose this light,
'Tis with us perpetual night. (6-8)

The covert references to Christian theology in this direct translation from a Classical poem are inescapable. A sun other than the one Catullus knew has risen again. The light of day is not the only light that can be lost. Spending God's gifts in a vain pursuit of sensual pleasure, the speaker will soon discover that the night awaiting him is both darker and more enduring than the mere extinction that he anticipated. He is, to alter William V. Spanos' title, a lascivious toad in a Christian garden—a perfect example of the "resonance" Jonson achieves by merging the Classical and the contemporary.¹⁶

"To Celia" is also partly refuted in a poem which precedes it, "To the World: A Farewell for a Gentlewoman, Virtuous and Noble." Like a refrain, the key words, "I know," are repeated throughout this almost "medieval complaint."¹⁷ The speaker knows her world. She knows it is a place

Where nothing is examined, weighed,
But, as 'tis rumoured, so believed;
Where every freedom is betrayed,
And every goodness taxed or grieved. (49-52)

That false world assails with devious arguments designed, like those of the speaker's in "To Celia," to mislead: "I know thy forms are studied arts, / Thy subtle ways be narrow straits" (9-10). The seeming goods of this world are "nets" (9), "traps and snares" (18), a "noose" (27), a "cage" (30). They promise "false relief." In such a world, blind to the possibilities of *philia*, men "blow away their lives / . . . / Enamoured of their golden gyves" (22-24). The golden chain of "To Penshurst" has been replaced by another. But the speaker will not be fettered by that false chain. She knows that it is naive to expect happiness:

. . . I do know that I was born
To age, misfortune, sickness, grief;
But I will bear these with that scorn
As shall not need thy [the world's] false relief. (61-64)

Certainly the country bliss of the Sidneys or of Robert Wroth is preferable to the lady's stoic solitude. But where real love is absent, solitude is still preferable to such "false relief" as is offered in this poem or in "To Celia."

"To Sickness," however, especially refutes "To Celia" and, in doing so, also demonstrates the full consequences of a life devoid of love. In a world given over to lust even disease must be warned of the consequences of excess: "Take heed, sickness, what you do: / I shall fear you'll surfeit too" (7-8). Disease should therefore confine its attentions to the deserving—to those:

That, to make all pleasure theirs,
Will by coach and water go,
Every stew in town to know;
Dare entail their loves on any,
Bald or blind or ne'er so many;
And for thee, at common game
Play away health, wealth and fame. (36-42)

If only the pure are safe, the poet is content to give the spiritually sick over to physical sickness. That fate is not too severe a punishment for the profligate, for

profligacy is itself a fatal disease.

There is no love between man and woman in "To the World"; such love is debased in "To Celia"; it is debauched in "To Sickness." But it is not excluded from *The Forest*. "Epode," as earlier observed, ends with a magnificent tribute to faithful heterosexual love. Not all physical love is a product of violence and lust. Love is not necessarily the "trap" described in "To the World." And neither is the fickle game of mate-catching portrayed in "Song That Women Are but Men's Shadows" the only form of courtship. The second "Song to Celia" ("Drink to me only"), "Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland," and "Epistle To Katherine, Lady Aubigny" each present idealized views of love and courtship which merit consideration.

"Drink to me Only" is, with "To Penshurst," one of the few poems from *The Forest* that has been extensively assessed. It has been so, however, mainly because of the semantic ambiguity in lines 7 and 8:¹⁸

But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

As Judith Gardiner points out: "The critical 'but' . . . may mean either 'even if' or 'only if.'"¹⁹ Love's nectar might be preferable to Jove's or Jove's to love's. But however the line is read, there has been a remarkable change between the first "Song to Celia" and the second one. Now Celia is asked only to exchange glances, to transfer a kiss by way of a cup, and to breathe on a wreath. The "sports of love," even the numberless stolen kisses of "To the Same," are completely forgotten. Bestowing honor is more important now than seizing pleasure. Yet more is at issue than honoring the virtues of one loved. "The thirst that from the soul doth rise / Doth ask a drink divine" (5-6). To satisfy that thirst, Celia is seen as almost divine. She brings the dead wreath back to life again by breathing on it. By imbuing it with the scent of her breath, she also gives it qualities beyond what nature allows.²⁰ The lines describing these two faith-sustaining miracles are, of course, for the reader, hyperbole of the highest order. Nevertheless, what is important is that the lovers can *feel* immortal. In the "pledge" of this love is the promise—symbolized by the resurrected wreath—that it will not "withered be" but will, instead, bestow life. The unchaste lovers race desperately against time and towards only "perpetuall night;" the chaste lovers overcome time and death.

"Epistle to Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland" and "Epistle to Katherine, Lady Aubigny" are both more moderate in their treatment of love. The first of these contrasts the value of gold, which "makes love last a day / or perhaps less" (17-18), with the qualities of poetry. Not surprisingly, the poet determines that poetry is the appropriate gift for a true gentlewoman, for it endures. Enduring, it appropriately celebrates the human qualities that will also endure. The "beauty," "blood," and "riches" which are, for Jonson, in that order, the world's goods all decay and "lie lost in their forgotten dust" (40):

It is the muse alone can raise to heaven,
And, at her strong arm's end, hold up and even
The souls she loves. (41-43)

In this love poem to poetry, Jonson thus doubly associates poetry and virtue. Both defeat time. But equally important, because real virtue is itself timeless, a virtuous woman or a faithful wife is one of the most appropriate subjects for a poem.

This point is made even more clearly in "Epistle To Katherine, Lady Aubigny," the poem in *The Forest* that especially celebrates married love. The poet, initially identified as one "in love / with every virtue" (7-8), ostensibly writes to "mirror" the virtues of Lady Aubigny. Her independent mind, unswayed by fashion or the conventions of society, is praised, as is her beauty which is "perfect, proper, pure and natural" (32). But she is most praised as a wife. She is:

. . . truly that rare wife
Other great wives may blush at, when they see
What your tried manners are, what theirs should be. (110-112)

As such a wife, Katherine will bear children who are "pledges of chaste love" (96), who will "give the fame / To Clifton's [her father's and thus her own] blood, that is denied their name" (97-98). Only from such a virtuous, loving wife can the "fair tree" of a family grow. The future is made secure by physical love; the physical love is made secure by the transcendent spiritual union of the lovers. In language reminiscent of Donne, their "souls conspire, as they were gone / Each into other, and had now made one" (119-20). On that note the poem concludes:

Live that one still; and as long years do pass,
Madam, be bold to use this truest glass,
Wherein your form you still the same shall find,
Because nor it can change, nor such a mind. (121-24)

Again, through love, poetry and virtue transcend time.

Love and death are, in *The Forest*, antithetical. Without love, death and therefore time become obsessions. In a mad rush to defeat time through hedonistic pleasures, time-bound man reduces life to chaos. So the polarity between love and death is essentially the same as that between virtue and vice or order (divine and human) and disorder. These oppositions, as previously indicated, run through *The Forest*. The "lord" of Penshurst "dwells" in his harmonious world; peace is what "God wisheth"; the love which rises from the soul "doth ask a drink divine"; true love is "perfect, nay divine" and creates a "god-like unity." The poet himself is a "priest" of the "divine muse" and celebrates the virtues which raise man "up to the true heaven of love." In contrast, Cupid is an "old boy," son of "light Venus" and associated with the "tribade trine." As a god, his only power of creation is to "turn the stale pro-

logue to some painted masque" (X. 20).²¹ He represents imposture, delusion, and appropriately leads on those "light brains" who "in wanton feet dance out their souls."

The contrast between base human desire and love inspired by the divine is best seen when we compare the first poem of *The Forest* to the last one. The opening poem asks if love is a fit subject for poetry. In "To Heaven," however, love is considered as a proper inspiration for prayer. The two types of love are dramatically different. Erotic, licentious love, Jonson has argued, must be rejected. It is too base for poetry and too uncontrollable. But is *agape* any more manageable? Is it sacrilege to make a prayer a poem, or a poem a prayer? Cupid is the product of violence and lust, two subjects which defy the balance, order, and control that Jonson desires in his poetry. But God is eternal and boundless, which also raises definite problems for the poet. Can God be limited to the confines of a poem, and, conversely, can the poem which, of necessity, is narrowly defined address His infinite majesty?

The basic question asked in the final poem is the question of whether the poem/prayer will be accepted as an act of "my faith, my hope, my love" (11) or whether it will be seen as motivated only by despair and discontent. Curiously, the same doubt which plagues the poet when he writes of the base (blind desire) reoccurs when he attempts to write of a subject so lofty. This poem might also be entitled "Why I Write Not Love" and half justify that title. It might also half justify Winters' criticism that Jonson is seldom devout since he always "excludes the mysterious."²² But here the mysterious seems to be consciously excluded. The poet who could soar to the heavens in his "human" poetry (such as the second "Song to Celia") is humble in the realm of the divine:

Where have I been this while exiled from thee?
And wither rapt, now thou but stoop'st to me? (13-14)

These questions cannot be answered conclusively. The poet cannot "judge" the actions of God. He cannot even judge himself and so asks God to "judge me after, if I dare pretend / To aught but grace, or aim at other end" (7-8). The wish is noble; the expression of the wish is almost blasphemous. Such controlled tension justifies Trimp's claim that "Jonson's 'To Heaven' . . . is one of the finest religious poems of the seventeenth century."²³ Yet that tension is not the product of the poem; rather it produces the poem.

The poet's sense of his humanity conflicts with his desire to compose a prayer which is free from even the "holy" vice of religious hyperbole. His rigorous examination of different individuals and classes in his society is extended, finally, to himself. The whole poem embodies "the 'personal' note" which Jonson frequently employs to make "intimate what was distanced by formal and stylistic convention."²⁴ His motives are analyzed and re-analyzed. In the prospect of God, he seems a hopeless sinner:

I know my state, both full of shame and scorn,

Conceived in sin, and unto labour born,
 Standing with fear, and must with horror fall,
 And destined unto judgement, after all.
 I feel my griefs too, and there scarce is ground
 Upon my flesh to inflict another wound. (17-22)

Nevertheless, in the face of possible despair, the logical extension of despair, a hatred for all humanity and especially of the self, cannot be considered either. "Lest it be thought the breath / Of discontent" (24-25), the poet cannot feel what his previous self-examinations might lead him to feel. Lest God find his prayers written "for weariness of life, not love of thee" (26), he cannot yield to self-pity.

The crucial difference between the first and the last poem is that winged Cupid can flee and can be exiled, while God, "being everywhere," must also be always "ever here." Although "To Heaven" ends on a note of doubt as to the efficacy or even propriety of the prayer/poem, it still concludes by affirming a "love of thee," whereas the first poem ends "when love is fled, and I grow old." The more complex love remains and it is this love alone which allows the poet to tentatively answer the questions implicit in his prayer/poem. Because of love, he can address God and can also hope that such address might be heeded.²⁵

The Forest is, finally, about love but not the type of love generally celebrated in other loosely related poems of the time, the sonnet sequences composed by various of Jonson's contemporaries.²⁶ Rather, we are shown a love of more complexity and greater variety. The successive poems explore different aspects of this love and different ways in which it might be conceived. By starting *The Forest* with an address to Cupid and ending with an address to God, Jonson sets up the tension of opposites (*pietas docta*) which finally yields a vision of a poetic mean that is personified in Sidney and exemplified by Penshurst. Every possible act or aspect of love throughout *The Forest* is measured against this mean. Most are found wanting. The mean, moreover, is only the mean—and a means. The end, in several senses, is the love of God. It is with that end in view that Jonson concludes *The Forest*. The result is a book of poetry that, although perhaps "promiscuously growing," still charts out a path which Jonson would have the discerning reader follow.²⁷

NOTES

1. As will be discussed later in the text, the third poem that avoids any direct reference to love, "And must I sing," is, as much as "Why I Write Not of Love," a renunciation of love as a subject and yet it introduces the subsequent poem, "Epode," which is very much about love.
2. In his dedication "To the Reader," with which he begins *The Underwood*. See Ben Jonson, *Poems*, ed. Ian Donaldson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 123.
3. Ben Jonson, *The Man and his Works*, Vol. II, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 343. This judgement has been accepted by more modern critics. See, for example, J. G. Nichols, *The Poetry of Ben Jonson* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 98, or Judith Kegan Gardiner, *Craftsmanship in*

- Context: The Development of Ben Jonson's Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 54-55. And Arthur F. Marotti, in "All About Jonson's Poetry," *ELH*, 39 (1972), 208, has even argued that "Jonson's poetry and imagination are broader and more various than most contemporary discussions indicate."
4. The two brief passages quoted, the first words and the last in *The Forest*, are from p. 87 and p. 118 in Donaldson's recent edition of Jonson's *Poems*. Subsequent line number citations from this readily available and excellently annotated edition will be made parenthetically in the text.
 5. Wesley Trimpi, in his *Ben Jonson's Poems* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 209, makes essentially this same point in a slightly different fashion. He observes that Jonson, with this poem, "places the experience of love in the context of his experience as a whole."
 6. The "heaven of love," of course, is made so by God's love. For a fuller description of the nature of that love, see the three "Poems of Devotion" which begin *The Underwood* (Donaldson, pp. 125-28). For an excellent assessment of these poems, consult Paul M. Cubeta, "Ben Jonson's Religious Lyrics," *JEGP*, 62 (1963), 96-110.
 7. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, Vol. II (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), pp. 174-75.
 8. See *Discoveries* in Herford and Simpson, Vol. VIII, p. 595.
 9. A. E. Parfitt, "The Poetry of Ben Jonson," *EIC*, 18 (1968), 29.
 10. As Alastair Fowler, in "The 'Better Marks' of Jonson's *To Penshurst*," *The Review of English Studies*, 24 (1973), 274, rightly observes: "The political links of the Great Chain appear . . . in an ascending series of visitors." And so do the religious implications: "As Sidney holds Penshurst in fee from James, so James is a steward, responsible for his kingdom to the divine lord, whose coming he expects" (Fowler p. 275). For another assessment of the religious implications of this poem, see Gayle Edward Wilson, "Jonson's Use of the Bible and the Great Chain of Being in 'To Penshurst'" *Studies in English Literature* 8 (1968), pp. 77-90.
 11. Paul M. Cubeta, "A Jonsonian Ideal: 'To Penshurst,'" *PQ*, 42 (1963), 19. Wilson (p. 85) even postulates a parallel between the meal at Penshurst and the Lord's Supper.
 12. Cubeta, "A Jonsonian Ideal," p. 15.
 13. Trimpi, pp. 195 and 197.
 14. F. W. Bradbrook, "Ben Jonson's Poetry," *From Donne to Marvell*, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore: Penguin, 1956), p. 135; and Joseph H. Summers, *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 84.
 15. The speaker in this poem clearly foreshadows the "viscious fool" who is chided with the moral lecture that concludes "Epode."
 16. William V. Spanos, "The Real Toad in the Jonsonian Garden: Resonance in the Nondramatic Poetry," *JEGP*, 68 (1969), 1-23. The reading I am suggesting should counter Nichols' claim that "Jonson's poems are inferior to Catullus's" in that they have lost the "intensity" of the originals and gained only "an urbanity which is not in Catullus and is not intended to be" (pp. 22-26). They have gained a subtle Christian morality that is not in Catullus and is not intended to be.
 17. Trimpi, p. 118, notes that the poem "is in the form of the medieval complaint to fortune, or in this case the world."
 18. For early discussions of this question see Marshall Van Deusen, "Criticism and Ben Jonson's 'To Celia,'" *Essays in Criticism*, 7 (1957), 95-103, or A. D. Fitton Brown, "Drink to me, Celia," *MLR*, 54 (1959), 554-57. More recently, Gardiner (pp. 59-60) has largely resolved the question of whether the speaker would or would not prefer Jove's nectar to Celia's by observing: "It can hardly matter which is the slightly

superior of these two fictive liquids. The point, of course, is that the lover has thought to make the comparison.”

19. Gardiner, p. 59.
20. J. Burke-Severs, “Drink to Me Only . . . ,” *N & O*, 197 (1952), p. 262.
21. Cupid is not flattered by this theatrical trope. See Jonas A. Barish, “Jonson and the Loathèd Stage,” in *A Celebration of Ben Jonson* ed. William Blissett et al. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 27-54.
22. Yvor Winters, “The Sixteenth-Century Lyric in England, Part III,” *Poetry*, 54 (1939), 42.
23. Trimpi, p. 205.
24. Spanos, p. 10.
25. Yet Judith K. Gardiner, in “‘To Heaven,’” *Concerning Poetry*, 6, No. 2 (Fall, 1973), 33, sees the poet succumbing to “individual despondency” at the close of his prayer. She, however, seems to slight the psychological complexity of the poem, as does Cubeta, who, in “Religious Lyrics,” p. 110, simplifies in the opposite direction and maintains that “the despairing sinner” finally has “his confidence firmly restored.” For still another reading, see William Kerrigan, “Ben Jonson Full of Shame and Scorn,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6 (1973), 199-217.
26. Paula Johnson, in a recent essay, “Ben Jonson’s Amorous Alternative,” *CEA Critic*, 39, No. 2 (Jan., 1977), 20-24, discusses the ways in which Jonson “offers an alternative . . . to the still dominant petrarchan system” of his time (p. 20).
27. Jonson, of course, has not commonly been considered a religious writer. Thus Cubeta begins his essay on “Ben Jonson’s Religious Lyrics” (p. 96) by observing: “Ben Jonson wrote little religious verse because unlike such contemporaries as Donne and Herbert, he was not greatly concerned with problems of the spirit.” A more accurate assessment, however, might be L. C. Knight’s claim, in “Ben Jonson: Public Attitudes and Social Poetry,” p. 175, in *A Celebration of Ben Jonson*, that Jonson “is not ‘a religious poet,’ like Herbert or Hopkins,” yet “an ideal of attitude and behaviour that is both humanist and Christian” pervades his poetry. It particularly pervades, I have argued, *The Forest*. Yet, as Marotti rightly emphasizes, considering the contradictions in the man and his work, “one must be extremely hesitant about offering schematic frameworks for or pat generalizations about Jonson’s poetry” (p. 237).

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Love in *The Forest* :
Ben Jonson's Progress from Eros to Agape

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Ben Jonson's *The Forest* has long been regarded as a miscellaneous collection, an impression originally fostered by Jonson himself who described the fifteen poems that constitute *The Forest* as "works of diverse nature and matter congested." Jonson further misleads us by titling the first poem in this collection, "Why I Write Not of Love." But despite these disclaimers, Jonson does write of love and the separate poems do cohere together to give us a thematically unified work. Indeed, most of the poems in *The Forest* deal explicitly with love, and one of them, the second "Song to Celia" ["Drink to me only with thine eyes"], has even become one of the most famous love poems in the English language.

Jonson, however, does adhere to the promise that he makes in the first poem. When he renounces love as a poetic subject, he is only renouncing a certain type of love, transitory sexual desire and especially the physical "act of love" or, more accurately, the "act of lust." In contrast to such a debasing love, he celebrates different forms of ennobling love. Thus the duplicitous seduction argument in the first "Song to Celia" is subtly undermined and then this poem itself is superseded by the second "Song to Celia" and the spiritual love therein expressed. Virtuous matrimonial love, family love, is also praised. "To Penhurst" portrays a social idea of *philia* in action. But most of all, the whole collection moves towards the final poem, "To Heaven," which is a complex examination of the highest and most lasting love of all, the love of God.