

CHAPTER VII

The Concept of the Poet in the aesthetics of Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson

It is for the first time in the period of Renaissance that English criticism develops itself, if not with entire independence yet with sufficient conformity to its own needs. And for the beginnings of modern literary criticism one has to look to Italy of the 14th and the 15th centuries, to that formative period of Renaissance which had drawn its inspiration from the Revival of learning and the renewed study of the classical literature of ancient Greek and Rome. Sidney occupies an enviable position in the history of English criticism. He is indeed the father of English criticism just as Chaucer is the father of English poetry. *The Apology* is the first important landmark in the history of literary criticism in England and an epitome of whatever was significant in the medieval tradition as well as in the contemporary critical thoughts in Italy. Deeply coloured though it is with the eclectic temper of the age and its didactic bias, its intrinsic and lasting value as the first piece of English criticism cannot go unaccounted.

The doctrines that Sidney has discussed have received very similar treatment from the Italians for over half a century. This period is still creative in its relation to Antiquity and does not grow the directly imitative attitude of the Neoclassical period. What one must notice is that despite the emphatic charm of the pagan classics, the Christian attitude remains with a conspicuous elegance. The Renaissance theorists justify the 'morals' in art and endorse the Horatian principle of *utile dulci*. Sidney carries this strain emphatically, imbibing simultaneously the idealising strain in Renaissance literary thinking.

It is suggested that the *Apology* was written as a retort to Gosson's attack though Gosson or *The School of Abuse* was never mentioned by name. *The School of Abuse* was produced in August 1579, followed soon after by the second part of *An Apology of*

The School of Abuse. This tract, however, though contains general reflections on poets, is mainly concerned with the dramatic poets and the corruption of the theatres. Though Sidney does not mention Gosson by name, his main purpose in writing the *Apology* was to explain to an age, confused and perplexed, what poetry really was, and what it stood for in the life of the community. He was concerned to defend poetry – by which term, as we meant imaginative literature in general – against the charge brought against it by the Puritans that it was immoral, debilitating, lying, and provocative of debauchery.

For Sidney the poet is the ‘first light-giver to ignorance’ (Chatterjee 1975:12), the deliverers of knowledge, the fathers of learning, the first bringer-in of civility, the right popular philosopher, and monarch of all learning (17). The Poet is also a teacher of virtue, the kindler of courage and is envisaged to play a role in the religious life of a nation. He is gifted with an extraordinary ability without forgetting to look ‘in an unflattering glass of reason’. (35). He refuses to cherish an immodestly inflated notion of the poet. Poetry, as Sidney maintains throughout the *Apology*, is a human, non-divine art. He defines poetry as

“an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight.” (7) (emphases mine)

Thus Sidney transforms the concept of imitation into one of creation or ideal imitation according to which, the poet imitates not the actualities but the *ideal reality* behind the actual. The poet repudiates the idea of a shackled earth-boundness. He declares with an unmistakably Puritan emphasis on the responsible individual mind, that making poetry is essentially the discipline of an enlightened intellect, which seeks to overcome earth-bound thoughts and inclinations in an attempt to recover something of the true and perfect knowledge lost since ‘the first accursed fall’(6). Imaginative treatment of life provides the apposite recipe for ‘right’ poetry where mimesis is not a mere imitation of the world as is seen by our imperfect eyes, but a ‘figuring forth’(7) of

the 'nature' of higher order and recreating in his imaginative mind the world as it may have existed in the Creator's mind. The poet in his flight 'borrow nothing of what is, hath been or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be'(8). It is a world present in the mind of the creator which is distorted by the phenomena of nature but well manifested by the creative endeavours of the poet. The concept of *creation*, here, is not to be interpreted in the sixteenth century sense of the word – not *effingere* but *creare*. What matters to him is the power of the *creative imagination*.

Only the poet disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up by the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like. (6)

'Invention' is the distinguishing character of the poet; he creates new things by drawing on his own wit. Zuccaro, in his book *L'Idée de' pittori, scultori et architetti*, points out that the artist is bestowed with the ability to produce an infinite number of artefacts that resembles the objects of nature and in his production he makes a new paradise appear on earth. The artist forms many ideas in himself and his representations are varied as well. (Panofsky 1924:108) In fact Sidney's use of the terms 'Idea or fore-conceit' or 'another nature' or 'golden' point to what Zuccaro refers as the new paradise.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; *her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden*. (6) (Chatterjee 1975:6)

Sidney is here making an interesting, though not an original, point. He expatiates that the world invented or created by the poet is a better world than the real one. It is not

the mere exercise of his imagination, but the exercise of his imagination in order to create this better world is what justifies the poet. This has obvious reference to the admiration of Zelmane (*Arcadia*) at Amphialus for the abilities of a 'maker'. The higher level of ideal imitation is the 'other nature' or Pamela's 'right heavenly nature' or 'unnatures Nature'. The poet's reason can discern the innate reason within universal nature, providing a representation that is more perfect, dearer, and agreeable than anything in nature. He ranges himself freely 'within the zodiac of his own wit'.(6) The lovers in fiction are 'truer' than those of the real life, the friends are more 'constant', the warriors are more 'valiant', the princess is more 'right' and the heroes are more 'excellent' in every way. Sidney proceeds to develop a theory of ideal imitation – the notion that the poet imitates not the mere appearances of actuality but the hidden reality behind them. Without much respect to the principle of divine fury which is associated with poetic creation (as exemplified in Giordano Bruno's *De Gl' Heroici Furori*), Sidney believes that the poet's 'other nature' is the product of a vigorous activity that cannot do away with judgement and right reason. The poet deals with, as Aristotle puts it, *katholou* (the universal) and not merely with *kathékaston* (particular). This is a testimony of the substantial nature of the poet's creation as he manifests the immutable traits of human life and thought. So as Sidney's poet arrives intuitively at glimpses of an ideal world, far removed from bare transcript of life, the poet for Aristotle, arrives at the universal through the particular. His primary motive force in composition is in response to a 'light of nature'. His art is an active discovery by the employment of an interminable skill which is akin to the ability of Pamela in *Arcadia* as she works her stitches into an embroidery. The poet chooses verse, which for Sidney is not the essence but an inseparable element of poetry. This is his 'fittest raiment' (Chatterjee1975:9) to express the dignity of his subject and invariably evade the 'table-talk fashion' (ibid) of communication. Sidney deviates from the elocutionary ideal as it was taught for instance in the medieval arts of poetry. He repudiates the notion of a poem as a bright and patterned self-supporting construction where the brightness and pattern are painted on with words. His poetics gravitates towards the Augustinian ideal which would regard a poem as the setting out of a direct communication of a certain vision of truth.

It may be observed that the Florentine Academy of Marsilio Ficino which launched

Platonism as the preponderating philosophical influence, misread the irony in Plato's *Ion* and *Phaedrus* about the divine frenzy. So the idea of the poet as the 'possessed' creator riding the crest of a divine afflatus, passed into Renaissance orthodoxy. With this notion as the primary strand in his creative matrix, Sidney outmanoeuvres the entire issue of truth. The poet's utterance cannot be brought under the overarching value judgment of good or bad: 'for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth'.(27) Here we can spare a glance at Harington, who similarly like Sidney, answers back Agrippa's polemics against poetry. The poets are charged of being 'liars'. Harington in answering to that accusation points out that the poets, on the contrary, convey truth in manifold forms. He supports his proposition with the instance of the ancient poets who encompassed myriad sense and mysteries in their poetry. With strong allegiance to the patristic and the post classical theory, Harington explains that the poet conceals the mysterious truths of poetry to protect them from profanity that comes from abuse and misuse. The verse as part of their art is meant for the weaker capacities, the moral sense is directed to stronger stomachs and the allegory is meant for the conceited and the imaginative minds. He hails the mystical way of writing for the poet. The poet's art is *eikastike* or the art of making good likenesses and not *phantastike* or the art of making false appearances. To charge the poet's art as fictive would be incorrect for Harington emphasises the oblique method of teaching by reference to Demosthenes's success in persuading the Athenians and the biblical use of many parables. He denies outright that poetry breeds error and if one admits that poetry pleased fools, Harington hastens to add that it made the fools wise by presenting them with 'tales able to keep a child from play and old man from the chimney corner'.(18) So all forms of poetry may be read with pleasure and profit. This brings us to another important area of Sidney's concept of the poet.

Now the ideal world of the poet is of importance because of its didactic power, and the poet by presenting an ideal world, aims at *instructing* and *delighting* the reader. Here Aristotle undergoes a Horatian metamorphosis under the critical eye of Sidney. The tilt was towards the 'instruction'. Tasso, the Italian poet, wrote that the goal of epic and indeed all poetry is 'to profit by delighting, that is, delight is the cause why no one

fails to obtain benefit, because delight induces him to read the more gladly'. (Bloom 1986: 403) For Sidney, in an inversion of the principles which is peculiarly his very own, the poet *delights* and *instructs*.

But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. (Chatterjee 1975:9)

The delight is real and substantial, but not without the discipline. It has its own usefulness. It recognises harmony, perfection, goodness, and success, appealing to the principles of judgement and understanding. So delight gives to instruction the power to move. The poet is a greater teacher than the philosopher because he can *move* the reader. Philosophy, Sidney explains, is scornful of pleasure and sternly abjures all emotional appeals; whereas poetry attracts and holds the attention of all by its manifold delight. It provides both precepts and examples, something that Horace points out in his *Epistles* (II.i.128-31)

Now doth the peerless poet perform both; for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in some one, by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. (Chatterjee 1975:12)

At variance with the moral philosopher who deals with abstractions, the poet depicts facts and situations in such a way that they conform to the law of probability or necessity. Truth is accessible only in terms of 'probabilities' or 'conjectured likelihood'. (15) The imaginative truth is said to triumph over historical truth. In this context Tagore writes:

Here comes in the difference between the truth of nature and the truth of literature. On the one hand, a mother's grief is so obvious, its circumstances of pose and gestures, of voice and tears, of surroundings

and concomitant events, are so convincing, that our sympathy is evoked without further ado. On the other hand, the bereaved mother in real life is neither in a fit state, nor has she power, to express her feelings in their fullness. So the mother does not weep in literature as she weeps in nature, but that does not make her grief in the former case any less true. (Chaudhury 1965:29)

So the truth of literature is said to be higher than the truth of actuality. Artistic truth scores over the naturalistic truth in its aesthetic delight that is not ordinary pleasure but something much finer and disinterested. Tagore mentions in his poem "Balmiki" that the poet's imagination is truer than Ayodhya (here Ayodhya is representative of external reality). The poet, for Sidney, has shown things as they ought to be rather than as they are. Daiches points out that 'Sidney has changed Aristotle's probable "should" to moral "should".' (1998:65) Sidney deviates from Aristotle's "should" of probability to the 'oughtness' of a world that is fundamentally moral in character and thus more edifying than the real world. Also, the poet must set up role models, patterns of desirable behaviour. The moral philosopher or theologian can teach virtue only in the abstract, but the poet paints images of ideal characters, and makes virtue appear attractive by example. It is with the poet that we get the poetic justice. The poet's feignings serve the purpose of moral instruction far better than the facts of the historian.

For indeed Poetry ever setteth virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her....And, of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out...so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them.

(Chatterjee 1975:16)

The poet as the sub-creator is divinely inspired and metes out morally apposite comeuppance by using his own proper judgement that is virtuous and true. In fact Sidney's concept of the poet has the idealising strain with its foundation in Renaissance

Platonism. Turning the tables on Plato, it focuses on the poet's access to the ideal with the thumping obliteration of the negative potential of role-models.

However, with Ben Jonson the study of the *art of poetry* became an inseparable guide to creation; and it is this element of self-conscious art, guided by the rules of criticism, which distinguishes him from his predecessors. In his discussion of poetry, Jonson adopts the Hellenistic three fold category of *poema*, *poesis* and *poeta*. It is on *poeta* that he enlarges his views, which helps in the conceptualisation of the poet. Jonson follows Sidney in his definition of the poet as a maker or feigner and of poetry as fiction or the art of feigning.

A poet is that, which by the Greeks is called *Kap'ezokhen*, *Poietes*, a *Maker*, or a *fainer*: His Art, an Art of imitation, or *faining*; expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to Aristotle: From the word *poiein* which signifies to make or *fayne*. Hence, hee is call'd a *Poet*, not hee which writeth in measure only; but that *fayneth* and *formeth* a *fable*, and writes things like the Truth. For, the *Fable* and *Fiction* is (as it were) the forme and Soule of any *Poeticall worke*, or *Poeme*. (Das, Mohanty 1985: 1-2)

Again like Sidney, Jonson believes that poetry is the Queen of Arts which had her origin from heaven, flowed down to the Hebrew, had in prime estimation with the Greeks, got transmitted to the Latins and all nations that professed civility. However, it would be worthwhile to dwell on Horace who can provide the essential comparative angle to our understanding of Jonson's concept of the poet. In his *Ars Poetica*, Horace advises the well instructed imitator to take his model from life and customs. But a mere imitation of life, it is true, does not appear to him to be the whole nature of poetry. For a poet often uses fiction and mingles facts with fancy, and thus, pulls in something of his own. But lest there should be too much of the latter, Horace, adds the proviso, that fiction composed to please should be very near to the truth. In thus stating the nature of poetry, Horace, is not, perhaps, materially different from

Aristotle, who had also recognised the poet's right to imitate life not in the manner of history but in his own creative way, which allows for that purpose even a judicious resort to the *believable false* in preference to the *unbelievable true*. Horace's practical sense, combining with his aesthetic experience, enables him to evolve a synthesis between the contradictory approaches of Plato and Aristotle. Poets, he points out, desire either to improve or to please, or to unite the agreeable and the profitable. Horace believes that in the past the poets were respected for the service they rendered to society, for teaching men their duty to the family and to the state, restraining them from unlawful pursuits, helping to build cities and propagate laws, infusing valour in war, relieving toil, and making life's path, otherwise, easy and smooth. In this light Jonson writes:

The Study of it (if wee will trust Aristotle) offers to mankind a certain rule, and Patterne of living well, and happily; disposing us to all Civill offices of Society. If wee will believe *Tully*, it nourisheth, and instructeth our Youth: delights our Age: adornes our prosperity; comforts our Adversity; entertaines us at home; keeps us company abroad, travailes with us; watches; divided the times of our earnest, and sports; shares in our Country recesses, and recreations; insomuch as the wisest and best learned have thought her the absolute Mistresse of manners, and nearest of kin to Vertue. And, whereas they entitle *Philosophy* to bee a rigid, and austere *Poesie* : they have (on the contrary) stiled *Poesy*, a dulcet and gentle *Philosophy*, which leads on, and guides us by the hand to Action, with a ravishing delight, and incredible Sweetness. But, before wee handle the kindes of *Poems*, with their speciall differences: or make court to the Art it selfe, as a Mistresse, I would lead you to the knowledge of our *Poet*, by a perfect Information, what he is or should bee by exercise, by imitation, by Studie; and so bring him downe through the disciplines of *Grammar*, *Logicke*, *Rhetoricke*, and the *Ethicks*, adding somewhat, out of all, peculiar to himselfe, and worthy of your Admittance, or reception. (2)

In fact, both Horace and Jonson do not lose sight of the nature and property of poetry, which is to charm the mind. And this charm consists not in mere beauty of form but in the poet's power to *move* the reader's heart and soul. Jonson says that Arts and precepts avail nothing unless Nature is beneficial and assisting. A dull disposition does not dictate the composition much in the same way the barren soil behaves unfruitfully to the rules of husbandry. So first, we require in the poet a goodness of natural wit. For, whereas all other arts consist of doctrine and precepts, the poet must be able by nature and instinct to pour out the treasure of his mind. The poet for Jonson, as also for Horace, is the Imitator who is able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use. 'Not to imitate servilely, as Horace saith, and catch at vices for vertue' (4) It is the Poet's vocation to draw forth the best and the choicest flowers like the bee and turn all into honey, working it into one savour and relish. However, the conception of imitation is not strictly Aristotelean in the sense that Jonson's poet indulges less in a fanciful transcript of life and more with the virtues of verisimilitude. Here Jonson's position resembles, to an extent, Bacon's theory of poetry. For Bacon, poetry as a product of imagination adds nothing else but *feigned* history. The poet, by the use of his imagination, can merely create some shadow of satisfaction to the mind when reason can provide more 'exact goodness' and more 'absolute variety' that can be found in the nature of things. Poetry with its own licence can represent deeds that are greater and heroical, rarer and surprising, and actions that work out in accordance with *poetic justice*. For Bacon, the poetic process, notwithstanding the element of distortion, conduces to magnanimity, morality and delectation that have the uplifting effect. Jonson's ethical aesthetics agrees to this point. However, what we are instructed to notice is that *feigned* history does not have any correspondence with the *truth* of things. This is out of tune with what Chapman felt. To him, the poet's art is not merely the outcome of labour and art; one cannot ignore the divine infusion. It brings to our mind what Shakespeare emphasises in *Timon of Athens* as poetry born out of an unforced inspiration.

Is as a gum which oozes
From whence 'tis nourish'd ; the fire i' the flint

In aesthetics of Shakespeare the poet's art is *something* more than a matter of rules and happy chance is an integral part of his creative domain. He thoroughly castigates art that is tongue-tied by authority. In contrast, Jonson's poet would tread consciously on the ground that does not support *enthusiasm*. When Bacon says that the poet's imaginative art merely palliates man's dissatisfaction with life, it would be justified to add that Jonson did not limit himself within such premises. Poetry is not the bold rhyme of every impudent braggart; for Chapman, as with Jonson, it can be the manifestation of wisdom. The poet's art is no mere licence, gleefully misused and abused. In this regard Jonson's poet does not believe in borrowing indiscriminately what is good or raw or undigested; like the bee he gathers honey from the flower; he chooses to be the best and the fairest. So imitation first prescribed by Isocrates and inculcated later by Cicero, Horace, and Quintilian finds favour with Jonson as he conceptualises the poet as no mere imitator but as the artist who re-creates and attains originality by creating something *new*.

Jonson believes that the poet should observe how the best writers have imitated and make sure that he follows them. This, however, does not mean servile genuflexion before the ancients. 'Like his ancients models Horace and Martial, Jonson had a stern sense of indignation at the kind of literary imitation which may be called robbery.' (Wimsatt Brooks 1957:179) It is true that the ancients have opened the gates, and made the way that went before us; but as guides, not commanders. The poet's liberty is not within the narrow limits of laws, which either the grammarians or the philosophers prescribe. The poet's adoration of the classics should not shut the windows of his own mind. For to many things a man should owe but a temporary belief, and a suspension of his own judgement, not an absolute resignation of himself, or a perpetual captivity. In tune with the prescription of the Horacian aesthetics, the poet must choose a theme that is simple and uniform and suited to his power. By simple theme, Horace means one from familiar material, or from 'life and customs' to which grace can be imparted by the power of 'order' and 'connection'. It has to be uniform or one whole, with nothing extraneous or irrelevant to the 'matter' in hand. The suitability of the theme to the

author's capacity is such an obvious condition of the poetic art that it hardly needs saying; but there seems to be a reason for the stress Horace lays upon it in the contemporary craze for indiscriminate writing. Jonsonian aesthetics has obvious resemblance to this argument.

Horace examines too the vexed question of the place of genius and art in the success of a poem. It is the dialectic between natural endowment and training in literary art. To Aristotle the world owes the principle of the art of writing for, out of many men's perfection in science he formed his ideas on art. So he taught us how we ought to judge rightly of others, and what we ought to imitate specially in ourselves. But all this Aristotle believes is in vain without having in the main the natural wit and a poetical nature. It will be seen here that while Jonson gives the first place to natural endowment, he is distrustful of it without the necessary discipline in the art of writing. In this attitude he is more with Horace than with Aristotle, in whom natural endowment is only indirectly hinted, as when he believes Homer's merit to be the result of either art or natural genius. It is interesting to observe that most of the neoclassical critics of England wrongly appreciated Horace as to have considered poetry as a mere matter of rules with genius omitted altogether. It is true that he attacks Democritus for believing that genius is more successful than wretched art, but this is not because he considers art, conversely, more successful than genius, but because, he states later, he considers the two to be indivisible. This inference is warranted by Horace's happy gift of compromise, which had earlier enabled him to reconcile the conflicting claims of profit and pleasure as the poet's object in writing. This is not a weak compromise. *Grai*, the ideal poets, achieved a unity of content and form, talent and art. So here *prodesse* (poetic instruction) and *delectare* (poetic fiction) are joined in an ideal unity. We can hope for further illumination if the focus is shifted on Quintilian. Quintilian never considered the poet's art to be purely a gift of nature - the unstudied expression that has not been perfected by art. Here, Horace, Quintilian and Jonson stand on common ground. What is but ill-formed or half developed in its natural state, is raised by art to its full stature by processes discovered in nature itself after a long and careful study. So the concept of the poet can veer around no hymn to *spontaneity* or to what today we think of as the creative imagination. It included no statement even remotely parallel to

that of Sidney about the free range of wit within its zodiac. The two extremes, *Ingenium* and *Ars*, are juggled in a dialectical play, with *ars* continually summoned, and *ingenium* providing the counterpoise whenever the emphasis on *studium* engenders a flaccid direction. Even a river flows with its maximum force when its natural and uneven bed is cleared of all impediments. It should be mentioned that Jonson discounted the principle of narrowing down the poet's liberty with the petrifying laws of the grammarians and philosophers. Imbibing the views of Heinsius, he cites the instances of the Greeks who could wrench themselves free from the throttling rigours of petty rules. However, accepting Aristotle as the greatest philosopher the world ever had, he warns the artist to judge others rightly and understand what one ought to imitate specially in himself. To give the study a better cohesion, here, we need to quote Jonson's passage on Shakespeare.

I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to *Shakespeare*, that in his writing, (whatsoever he pennd) hee never blotted out (a) line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine owne candor, (for I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on his side Idolatry) as much as any.) Hee was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature: 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: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as *Augustus* said of *Haterius*. His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too.
(Das, Mohanty 1985:1)

Jonson with due regard to the natural wit, is not blind to the purely native excellences of Shakespeare; his unschooled genius and the free flow of fancy or imagination come under scrutiny within the parameters of Jonsonian aesthetics. The

expression, *Sufflaminandus erat*, means 'one who needs restraint'. This is the Baconian prescription as well, in *Advancement of Learning* where poetry is an expression in words and the measure of words. The extreme liberty to imagination can conceal the true nature of things.

Importantly for Jonson, a rhymers and a poet are two things. He writes:

It is said of the incomparable *Virgil* that he brought forth his verses like a Beare and after form'd them with licking. *Scaliger*, the Father, writes it of him, that he made a quantitie of verses in the morning, which afore night hee reduced to a lesse number. But, that which *Valerius Maximus* hath left recorded of *Euripides*, the tragicke Poet, his answer to *Alcestis*, an other Poet, is as memorable, as modest: who when it was told to *Alcestis*, an other Poet, is as memorable, as modest: who, when it was told to *Alcestis*, that *Euripides* had in three daies brought forth but three verses, and those with some difficultie, and throwes; *Alcestis*, glorying hee could with ease have sent forth a hundred in the space: *Euripides* roundly repli'd, Like enough. But, there is the difference; thy verses will last those three daies; mine will to all time. (3-4)

The poet needs to have an exactness of study and multiplicity of reading not just to enable him to know the history or argument of a poet and to report it, but his interests should be to master the matter and style so that he can confidently demonstrate his ability to handle, place or dispose with elegance whenever there is the need. So Jonson believes that one should not think that 'hee can leape forth suddainely a Poet, by dream hee hath in Parnassus, or having washt his lipps (as they say) in Helicon. There goes more to his making, then so. For to Nature, Exercise, Imitation and Studie, Art must bee added, to make all these perfect And, through these challenge to themselves much, in the making up of our Maker, it is Art only can lead him to perfection, and leave him there in possession as planted by her hand...' (4-5)

In such a context the concept of the poet is out of tune with the 'excess' lest,

...surfeiting

The appetite may sicken, and so die.

(*Twelfth Night*, I.i. 2-3)

He recommends the curb of his 'noble censoriousness'. For Jonson's poet, language owes its life to thought. It bears the same relation to it as the body to the soul. The Jonsonian poet is provided with the recipe - read the best authors, observe the best speakers and exercise one's own style with a careful study of the masters. With the accent on *labour*, Jonson prescribes that a poet should neither be content with the first word that offers itself nor with the first arrangement in composition. The best poets imposed upon themselves care and industry for, ready writing make not good writing but good writing brings on ready writing. This is what Walter Raleigh in a much later age points out when he underscores the endless and painful vigilance needed for the 'avoidance of the unfit and the untuneful phrase'. He emphasises 'how meaning must be tossed from expression to expression, mutilated and deceived, ere it can find rest in words'. (1898:16) So Jonson's poet is the meticulous and the introspective artist, pairing his fingernails to beautify the whole poetic tissue (*Kavya Sarira*, as it is called in the Sanskrit aesthetics). Here Dionysius's emphasis on *electio* (choice of words) in the proper rendition of *compositio* comes to our mind. In a *collocatio* (composition) along with *indicium* (selection) and *dispositio* (arrangement) comes *electio*. Following Horace, Jonson says that custom is the most certain mistress of language. But by custom he means not the usage of the vulgar but the consent of the learned - what Quintilian would ascribe as the agreed practice of educated men. While ancient words, he points out following Quintilian, lend a kind of distinctiveness to the poetic style, it also provides the concomitant delight. The poet must use it with due regard to their intelligibility having as their chief attribute the perspicuity in 'usage' - the eldest of the present, and the newest of the poetic language is the best, for both satisfy the test of familiarity. So his poet would have a taste for 'choiceness' of phrase, round and clean composition of sentence, weight of matter, worth of subject, soundness of argument, life of invention and depth of judgement.

Jonson, the autodidact, thus, sends out strong radiation of his version of Neoclassicism. A creative writer himself, neither did he lay down absolute standards

nor did he aspire to challenge or outthink the prevalent general theory, making generous allowance for individual exceptions. However, standing on the Jonsonian platform, the gusty breeze of Neoclassical poetics can be unavoidably experienced.