

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Marlovian Residue in Jonson's *Poetaster*

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‘He killed Mr. Marlow, the Poet, on Bunhill, coming from the Green-curtain play-house’. John Aubrey.

Aubrey’s uniquely bizarre anecdote in his biographical sketch of Ben Jonson has no known provenance.¹ Yet it possesses a modicum of symbolic truth in the construction of literary histories. Scholars have long asserted that the bracing neoclassicism in poetry and drama that Jonson helped initiate in the early seventeenth century contributed to the demise of the comparatively ornate Elizabethan modes in which his forebears, including Marlowe, worked. *Poetaster* (1601–02), they argue, constituted a type of manifesto for the purpose, ‘one of the most powerful statements of an Augustan literary programme in English’, as Tom Cain, the play’s best editor and probably its most perceptive critic, wrote.² Those who preceded him in producing a modernised, annotated text such as Herbert S. Mallory and Josiah H. Penniman anticipated this observation in identifying and analysing the characters said to approximate Jonson’s rivals in the Jacobean theatre, part of the critical site devoted to the ‘terrible Poetomachia’, the alleged War of the Theatres. Crispinus and Demetrius may represent John Marston and Thomas Dekker, and in what some might describe as a characteristically self-aggrandising touch, Horace,

¹ *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, ed. by Oliver Lawson Dick (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 178.

² Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*, ed. by Tom Cain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 1. All subsequent references to the play follow the lineation of this edition. All other references to Jonson’s works follow *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52). References to Marlowe’s works follow the lineation of *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: Dent, 1999) and *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Mark Thornton Burnett (London: Dent, 2000).

the ideal writer representative of the new aesthetic that would dominate English poetry and drama for the next two centuries, stands for Jonson himself.³

The role of Ovid in the play signifies an entirely different matter. Commentators have read this infrequently appearing yet key figure as a surrogate for the outmoded 1590s poetical dispensation, an amalgam of the sonneteers and writers of erotic epyllia in the sixteenth century. Most have wisely refrained from making correspondences between this jovial, romantic young Naso and any specific contemporary, though Marston, Donne, and Shakespeare have been unconvincingly proposed. Cain implied that *Poetaster*, in repudiating the old Ovidianism, disclaimed Marlowe, its most notable practitioner, just as George A. E. Parfitt had stated explicitly before him.⁴ Yet he expressed reservations about such a parallel, following the argument of James D. Mulvihill, who cautioned that Jonson tempered his view of the Roman poet ‘by an acute and sensitive understanding of the various currents of opinion which surrounded the renaissance Ovid and which inform the satiric vision’ of this curious and theatrically unloved artifact. Accordingly, it would be just as unwise to argue that Jonson used the satirical comedy to renounce the poet and playwright who had died almost a decade previously. Various elements in *Poetaster*, including Ovid as author and abstraction, suggest Marlowe and his poetics, and comprise a type of homage to them. Jonson owed him far too much to repudiate him, and knew it.

I

The relatively modest critical interest in the play’s representation of Ovid has included Marlowe infrequently at best, though Ovid and Marlowe have been long associated in early modern studies.⁵ Mid-twentieth-century scholarship generally regarded Jonson’s portrayal of his antique literary character as unflattering. Unsurprisingly, such a perspective echoed the critics’ implicitly negative appraisals of the Roman poet because of his eroticism. Therefore, they considered the *Poetaster* Ovid to be debauched, and,

³ See *Poetaster*, ed. by Herbert S. Mallory, Yale Studies in English 27 (New York: Henry Holt, 1905); ‘*Poetaster*’, by Ben Jonson and ‘*Satiromastix*’, by Thomas Dekker, ed. by Josiah H. Penniman (Boston, Mass: D. C. Heath, 1913); and James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴ According to Cain, ‘The Ovid being rejected is as much the Ovid of the 1590s in England as the historical Ovid of Augustan Rome’ (p. 23). See also George A. E. Parfitt, ‘Compromise Classicism: Language and Rhythm in Ben Jonson’s Poetry’, *Studies in English Literature 1500–1700*, 11 (1971), 109–23; and James D. Mulvihill, ‘Jonson’s *Poetaster* and the Ovidian Debate’, *Studies in English Literature 1500–1700*, 22 (1982), 239–55 (p. 240).

⁵ See Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe’s Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), and M. L. Stapleton, *Marlowe’s Ovid: The ‘Elegies’ in the Marlowe Canon* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

by extension, unmanly. To O. J. Campbell, he and Julia ‘are overwhelmed . . . by a moral weakness which poisons their entire natures’. Eugene M. Waith condemned him similarly: ‘He shows himself a moral weakling, dominated by his passion,’ one who behaves in a ‘ridiculous fashion.’ This reading of Jonson as rigidly straitlaced informed Jonas A. Barish’s contention that the dramatist fails by ‘imperfectly trying to imitate an alien spirit’ in *Epicoene* and *Poetaster*, works designed, according to Frank Kermode, ‘to establish that Ovid desecrates poetry and truth.’⁶ Yet several commentators have approached the issue differently, beginning with E. W. Talbert. Contrary to the trends of his time, he was probably the first to observe the nuances of this ethical problem in the comedy. He argued that Augustus’s condemnation and banishment of the poet, while historically grounded, should not be regarded as a Jonsonian programmatic statement, given the maliciousness of the characters Lupus and Histrio toward Ovid as they malevolently expose his merrymaking to the emperor. Additionally, the benevolence of the surrogate Horace toward this Marlovian Naso should be considered. Voices as diverse as Ralph Nash, Karl F. Zender, Joan Carr, Anne Righter Barton, John Sweeney, and Julian Koslow have essentially concurred with Talbert, extended his ideas, and, along with Mulvihill and Cain, developed the theories that the pioneering critic promulgated regarding the controversy.⁷ Marlowe receives more mention in the latter studies.

Although the likely Marlovian presence in the *Poetaster* Ovid has hitherto comprised an ancillary critical topic, it deserves more inquiry, given Jonson’s interest in his predecessor and his influence on him. T. S. Eliot famously observed, ‘Jonson is the legitimate heir of Marlowe’, and examined various correlations between them as makers of dramatic speech.⁸ Barton noted the remarkable number of instances in which *Poetaster* and other works mention or parody *Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Hero and*

⁶ O. J. Campbell, *Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare’s ‘Troilus and Cressida’* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1938), p. 127; Eugene M. Waith, ‘The Poet’s Morals in Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 12 (1951), 13–19 (p. 15); Jonas A. Barish, ‘Ovid, Juvenal and the Silent Woman’, *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 213–24 (p. 222); Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 102.

⁷ Respectively: E. W. Talbert, ‘The Purpose and Technique of Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 225–52; Ralph Nash, ‘The Parting Scene in Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952), 54–62; Karl F. Zender, ‘The Function of Propertius in Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, *Papers on Language and Literature*, 11 (1977), 308–12; Joan Carr, ‘Jonson and the Classics: The Ovid-Plot in *Poetaster*’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 8 (1978), 296–311; Anne Righter Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); John Sweeney, *Jonson and the Psychology of Public Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37–45; Julian Koslow, ‘Humanist Schooling and Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, *English Literary History*, 73 (2006), 119–59. Mulvihill views Ovid as contradictory in the play, the dichotomy between spirituality and sensuality most operative. He is not ‘a dramatically realized character so much as an embodiment of the renaissance Ovidian temper’ (Mulvihill, p. 252).

⁸ T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 103.

Leander.⁹ James A. Riddell and Russ McDonald both concluded that parody in this case constituted homage, as it so often does. Likewise, Victoria Moul traced correspondences in the comedy between *Dido, Queene of Carthage* and Marlowe's Ovidianism and considered it tribute. Syrithe Pugh explained how Marlowe's 'strain of counter-classical irreverence' influenced Jonson's poetics so that he engaged with his literary culture in a similarly subversive, somewhat antagonistic fashion, a concept usefully applicable to *Poetaster*.¹⁰

Yet one should not equate 'irreverence' with the anachronistic conception known as 'anti-classicism', one that sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers such as Jonson would not have recognised in the same way that twentieth and twenty-first-century critics have. The study of the literature of antiquity completely informed the humanism of the educators who developed the concept of *imitatio* for the schoolroom, one that the poets and playwrights that this institution produced easily applied to their reading and emulation of their immediate predecessors. Hence there does not seem to have been any 'anxiety of influence' distracting the eminently pragmatic Jonson from gleaning what he needed from Marlowe, nor did he wish to destroy the Elizabethan Ovidianism that his predecessor was alleged to have transmitted to posterity. His ingrained Horatian notion of *dulce et utile* would not have allowed any of these disagreeable things to have occurred. They would have interfered with his ambition to fashion himself as a poet-playwright as Marlowe had before him.¹¹

Therefore, I argue that Marlovian residue in the play, much more substantial than previously noted, deserves further exploration and detection. It approximates a type of literary reception, here by one of the three greatest playwrights in the early modern period for another. Typically, Jonson provides a method of decoding his methodology

⁹ See Barton, pp. 146, 208, 222.

¹⁰ Respectively: James A. Riddell, 'Ben Jonson and "Marlowes mighty line"', in *A Poet and a filthy Play-maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Kenneth Freidenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kuriyama (New York: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 37–48; Russ McDonald, 'Marlowe and Style', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 55–69; Victoria Moul, 'Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*: Classical Translation and the Location of Cultural Authority', *Translation and Literature*, 15 (2006), 21–46; Syrithe Pugh, 'Marlowe and Classical Literature', in *Christopher Marlowe in Context*, ed. by Emily Bartels and Emma Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 80–89. Cain writes that Jonson was 'making a powerful assertion of the need to break from the fashionable Ovidian poetry and drama' of the 1590's. His audience was 'invited' to equate the Ovid of *Poetaster* and Marlowe. 'If a new English Augustanism is to be established through the imitation of the great poets of classical Rome, the one who has been the most influential for the previous decade has to be excluded as a model' (*Poetaster*, ed. Cain, p. 23).

¹¹ The famous phrase is from the lines 'omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo' (*Ars poetica* 343–44) [He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader]. See Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929).

indirectly, frequently in one of his pronouncements devoted to a different matter. In *Discoveries* (1640), he translates, imitates, or emulates Pontanus's Horatian-Senecan *Poeticae Institutiones* (1594) in this magisterial statement:

The third requisite in our *Poet*, or *Maker*, is *Imitation*, to bee able to convert the substance, or Riches of an other *Poet*, to his owne use. To make choise of one excellent man above the rest, and so to follow him, till he grow very *Hee*: or, so like him, as the Copie may be mistaken for the Principall.¹²

Though one may find this standard statement on Renaissance *imitatio* in the works of virtually any humanist from Petrarch onward, its particulars apply to Jonson's Marlovianism in *Poetaster*. He channels his precursor's sensuality through sound in his Ovid's 'crooked sickles crop the ripened ear' (1.1.54). In a typically Marlovian touch, Jonson's alliteration, 'p,' 'cr' and 'k' in this example, doubles the central consonantal cluster of the word signifying the deadly instrument itself and evocative of the cutting sound it makes while doing its destructive work, a mimetic method profoundly observable in *Lucans First Booke* (1600), the translation of the opening section of the *Pharsalia*. His risible couplet in *Poetaster*, 'Whilst slaves be false, fathers hard, and bawds be whorish, / Whilst harlots flatter, shall Menander flourish' (1.1.59–60), imitates Marlowe's same technique in *Hero*, its cacophonous double rhyme joining the two words that define the concept at its root. Some statements that various characters make to Ovid appear thematic, such as Luscus's definitive observations: 'you are not Castalian mad, lunatic, frantic, desperate?' and 'I'll leave you to your poetical fancies and furies' (1.1.36, 38–39). Diction of this sort uncannily anticipates Michael Drayton's tribute to Marlowe published in 1627, almost thirty years after *Poetaster*. He possessed 'those brave translunary things' so that his

raptures were

All ayre, and fire, which made his verses cleere,
For that fine madnes still he did retaine,
Which rightly should possesse a Poets braine.

¹² Cited from Herford and Simpson, VIII, 638–39 in Cain (p. 10), and in Richard S. Peterson, *Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), p. 4. Peterson discusses Pontanus along with Johannes Buchler's 1607 condensation of the material (p. 29, n. 7).

This was Marlowe's reputation from a few years after his death into the final decades of Jonson's lifetime. The *Poetaster Ovid's* extravagant language sounds like Marlowe's, and praises rather than lampoons it.¹³

Jonson and Marlowe share deeper connections that extend to subtler matters such as allusion and diction. In the manner of most early modern writers with their humanist schooling, they favoured Latin sententiae as a strategy to buttress their authority. Some tags and word choices in common may be more than coincidental, as the ensuing three examples attest. In the first, Barabas in dissembling soliloquy ironically quotes Terence's *Andria* (636), 'Ego mihi met sum semper proximus' [I am always nearest to myself] in *The Jew of Malta* (1.1.187), that infamous and influential precursor to city comedy.¹⁴ The line, like the play itself, so struck the younger author that he translated and subsequently deployed it twice in two instances of extreme selfishness: Cupid's 'as euery one is neerest to himselfe' to help define natural affection in a non-altruistic way (*Cynthia's Revels* 5.7.29); and Macro, pointedly like his Marlovian antecedent, justifies his treachery against Sejanus in his morally compromised reverie, 'the thoughts borne nearest / Vnto our selves, move swiftest still, and dearest' (*Sejanus* 4.2.9–10).¹⁵ In the second, as Barabas enlists Ithamore to poison the nuns, the stooge agrees to the task 'with a powder' (*The Jew of Malta* 3.4.115), an adverbial phrase that means 'violently' and 'hastily', a definition since adopted by *OED* (powder, *n.2*). Jonson's cobbler Juniper expresses himself in the same nonce idiom to his friend Onion in *The Case Is Altered* (1.1.42–43).¹⁶ In the third, during the Second World War, Arthur H. King devoted a monograph to the sociostylistic analysis of the language that satirised characters in *Poetaster* speak. In the process, he uncovered a striking number of Marlowe-Jonson correspondences in the inclusion of odd words and in the unusually frequent use of more standard verbiage, e.g., 'princely', 'gusts', 'eternal', 'excellent well', 'pretty', 'sweet', 'quotha', and 'attired in sadness'. The *miles gloriosus* Tucca utters that extravagant first word of 2 *Tamburlaine*, 'egregious', twice (*Poetaster* 3.4.359; 5.3.418). It can be gleaned from King's efforts that some of Ovid's more

¹³ For Drayton, see 'To . . . Henry Reynolds,' in *The Battaile of Agincourt* (London: Printed for William Lee, 1627), p. 206. Mulvihill observes that Jonson's Ovid 'seems almost as much a victim of his imitators as his historical counterpart' (p. 244).

¹⁴ For a discussion of the issue, see Sarah K. Scott, 'The Jew of Malta and the Development of City Comedy: "The Mean Passage of a History"', in *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman*, ed. by Sarah K. Scott and M. L. Stapleton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 91–108.

¹⁵ Terence's line reads, 'proximus sum egomet mihi.' See *P. Terenti Afri Comoediae*, ed. by Robert Kauer and Wallace M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon, [1926]), n.p. M. P. Tilley and James K. Ray, 'Proverbs and Proverbial Allusions in Marlowe', *Modern Language Notes*, 50 (1935), 347–55, cites parallels from Cato and Abraham Fraunce. Thomas Nashe's *Have with You to Saffron Walden* contains the phrase, 'I hold vnusque proximus ipse sibi, euery man is the best Frend to himself'. See *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, 5 vols, ed. by R. B. McKerrow, rev. by F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), III, p. 71.

¹⁶ Hazelton Spencer was the first to note the similar usage by Jonson and Marlowe in this way. See 'Marlowe's Rice "With a Powder"', *Modern Language Notes*, (1932), 35.

hyperbolic expressions to Julia in *Poetaster* take up pointedly Marlovian diction that appears in *All Ovids Elegies* (c. 1598–1602), his rendition of the *Amores* into English couplets published posthumously. The line ‘Julia, the gem and jewel of my soul’ (*Poetaster* 1.3.38) and the epithet ‘fair goddess’ (4.9.82) feature two words that appear almost exclusively in that banned text. This suggests that Jonson was more than a casual reader of the translation beyond his version of the poem on Envy (*Amores* 1.15) at the play’s beginning, and that he may have based his characterisation of Ovid on the Marlovian incarnation of its speaker, the *desultor Amoris*.¹⁷

James Shapiro argued that Marlowe’s advances in theatrical conception stimulated his successors to emulate and outdistance him, which created a paradoxical phenomenon. The successes of Shakespeare and his fellows, though they ‘returned and recalled’ their predecessor’s revolutionary style and dramaturgy, inadvertently made him appear dated and obsolete.¹⁸ This indirect form of literary evolution accounts for Jonson’s debt to Marlowe in another area. William Bowman Piper credited him with the first significant use of the heroic couplet in the *Elegies* and in *Hero*, based on the study and translinguistic imitation of Latin elegiacs. In its ideal state, the distich features ‘the regular hierarchy of pauses, and the rhetorical practices of inversion — as English could achieve it — balance, and parallelism; the impulse, in short, toward clarity and neatness, toward conciseness and compression of statement.’¹⁹ From such foundations arose Jonson’s closed couplet that he favoured above all other poetical forms. His elegy for Shakespeare in the First Folio could not better exemplify Piper’s definition, most markedly in its opening section recommending the moderation of praise to avoid sabotaging the subject by appearing unctuous, insincere, or prone to overstatement. Jonson’s Induction to his manifesto-like *Poetaster* includes mimetic couplets that embody the good sense and craftsmanship they recommend:

Such full-blown vanity he more doth loathe
Than base dejection: there’s a mean ’twixt both,
Which with a constant firmness he pursues,
As one that knows the strength of his own Muse. (Ind.82–85)

This practical pronouncement embodies Marlowe’s ideals as a writer. Regardless of his fabled taste for bombast, his blank verse for the stage represents precisely such ‘a mean

¹⁷ See King, *The Language of Satirized Characters in ‘Poëtaster’: A Sociostylistic Analysis, 1597–1602* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1941).

¹⁸ James Shapiro, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 126.

¹⁹ William Bowman Piper, ‘The Inception of the Closed Heroic Couplet’, *Modern Philology*, 66 (1969), 306–21 (p. 317).

'twixt' extremes, one that Jonson would endorse and embody in his measured pre-Augustan poetics. The 'constant firmness' of his couplets and of Marlowe's exemplifies the *aurea mediocritas* that they pursue, secure in the knowledge of their strengths as poet-playwrights.

II

Some might dispute the idea of Jonson's literary kinship with Marlowe because of his allegedly harsh comments about his forerunner's works and his often-expressed aversion to poetry of an erotic tenor. It must be admitted that his distaste for the amorous mode occasionally approaches the visceral. The fleeringly named Sir Amorous La Foole in *Epicoene* satirises those chronically inept in gallantry and, by implication, the moniker indicts men ridiculous enough to allow the love of women to influence their actions. Jonson titled his opening lyric to *The Forrest* 'Why I write not of Loue', and translated a pungent epigram from the *Satyricon* on the subject, 'Foeda est in coitu et brevis voluptas', as 'Doing, a filthy pleasure is', in *Under-woods* (1640). At the same time, a reader might regard virulence of this sort as suspect, since obsessive condemnation of something frequently indicates the opposite stance: latent love or desire for a person or object.

Yet Jonson characteristically adopted the forms and styles that he disdained elsewhere. This represents not hypocrisy but fair-mindedness, a variation on the *recusatio* convention in which a poet claims that he cannot write in a certain genre but then works in it nevertheless.²⁰ Early modern contemporaries noted such discrepancies. In *2 Return to Parnassus*, the character Kempe exclaims to Burbage, 'Few of the university pen plaies well, they smell too much of that writer *Ovid*, and that writer *Metamorphosis*, and talke too much of *Proserpina* and *Juppiter*' (4.3.16). Along with Marston, Dekker, and Nashe, he means Marlowe — and Jonson, who was fond of writing neo-Ovidian elegies in closed pentameter couplets. *Under-woods* includes three examples: 'That Love's a bitter sweet', 'Since you must goe', and the celebrated 'Let me be what I am, as *Virgil* cold'. Transference would be a natural outcome, as King hinted when he wrote that the *Poetaster* Ovid may 'speak Jonson' from time to time.²¹

Jonson's poetry that appears to repudiate various forms of love may, on closer inspection, be perpetrating no such thing. His moving final line of 'On His First Sonne',

²⁰ See Cain, p. 12.

²¹ Respectively: *The Return from Parnassus or The Scourge of Simony*, ed. by Oliphant Smeaton (London: Dent, 1905), p. 78; and King, p. 64.

his epitaph for Ben Junior, 'As what he loves may never like too much' does not say that he cannot, or will not love again. It hints at another motivation entirely, unspeakable grief, for this assumed avoidance of emotional turbulence and its attendant vulnerability. In an example of an entirely different sort, his Petronius translation, 'Doing', puckishly states that foreplay in its anticipatory nature surpasses actual coitus and its anticlimactic aftermath:

Let us together closely lie, and kisse,
There is no labour, nor no shame in this;
This hath pleas'd, doth please, and long will please; never
Can this decay, but is beginning ever.

(*Under-woods*, 90)

At the same time, the traditional purpose of this preliminary activity generally heightens the anticipation for what often follows. Jonson and Petronius do not say that there will not be any sexual congress, merely that matters should proceed in good time. Doing cannot be described as such a filthy pleasure after all. This represents a semi-Ovidian perspective, one that Jonson would appear to extoll in *Epicoene* in the figure of True-wit. Two sections of that play's first scene paraphrase the *Ars amatoria* (1.1.103–11, 113–26). Much of 4.1 translates Book 3 of that poem, and its pedagogical dynamic continues throughout the act, the *praeceptor* or teacher satirically correcting the novice:

TRUE-WIT: Whether were you going?

LA-FOOLE: Down into the court, to make water.

TRUE-WIT: By no means, sir, you shall rather tempt your breeches.

(*Epicoene* 4.5.150–52)

Compared with the idiocy of Sir Amorous, whose foolish pronouncements on love anticipate the fop of the Restoration stage or the country booby of the eighteenth-century novel, True-wit's more worldly comments on the same subject, tempered by Clerimont, foretell that ambiguous hero of Wycherley, Etherege, and Congreve, the rake.²² If *Poetaster* tends toward literary allegory, with Neoclassicism displacing Elizabethan Gothic, the generosity of its Horace to its Ovid echoes Jonson's to

²² Joseph A. Dane argues that True-wit's lines in *Epicoene* frequently paraphrase the *Ars amatoria*. The play is 'itself a metamorphosis of Ovid's texts: it contains all the varied tones and ambiguities found in those texts that we can still refer to as a coherent unit under the single name of their author. . . . Ovid's poetry itself is a synthesis and compendium of classical traditions and it is difficult to view such an Ovid as alien to Ben Jonson'. These ideas apply nicely to *Poetaster*. See 'The Ovids of Ben Jonson in *Poetaster* and in *Epicoene*', in *Drama in the Renaissance: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1986), pp. 103–15 (p. 113).

Marlowe. The demonstration of admiration begins almost immediately in the play, when the description of the snakes around Envy, sensuous and deadly, recall Marlowe at his most Ovidian: ‘cast you round in soft and amorous folds / Till I do bid uncurl’ (Ind.7–8). Jonson’s *recusatio* could be applied, by analogy, to his opinion of Ovid, which would probably not differ much from that of Sir Thomas Elyot (1531) and Jonson’s (and Marlowe’s) theatrical colleague, Thomas Nashe (1589).²³ He was neither hostile to him nor to his adherents from the previous century.

One comment of a somewhat anti-Marlovian tenor has been credibly attributed to Jonson. Still, it cannot be classified as *ad hominem*. His criticism of dramatic speech in *Timber* (1640) urged the ‘true artificer’ to avoid language whose unnatural rhetoric imitates ‘the *Tamerlanes*, and Tamer-Chams of the late Age, which had nothing in them but the *scenicall* strutting, and furious vociferation, to warrant them to the ignorant.’²⁴ Critics have tended to focus on the ‘*Tamerlanes*’ as an indictment of Marlowe while ignoring the name with equal weight in the clause, ‘Tamer-Chams’. The plural forms of these titles may signify generic classifications, much as a phrase mentioning ‘Macbeths’ or ‘Volpones’ could be associated not with the creators of these plays but with their imitators. If the implied jab at *Tamburlaine* endured as an indictment of its author, it must not have survived for long. By midcentury, a certain W. C. (1651) praised the obscure poet William Bosworth for the ‘strength’ of his subject’s ‘fancy, and the shadowing of it in words he takes from Mr. Marlow in his *Hero and Leander*, whose mighty lines Mr. Benjamin Jonson (a man sensible enough of his own abilities) was often heard to say, that they were Examples fitter for admiration than for parallel’. This may be more tribute than glancing criticism, and suggests that Jonson’s admirers well knew his affection for Marlowe. At the end of the eighteenth century, the literary historian Joseph Warton (1781) re-quoted W.C.’s editorial observation, then added: ‘Marlowe was a favorite with Jonson.’²⁵ In the same mode, Eliot wrote of the rechanneling of quasi-Marlovian ‘scenical strutting’ in *Volpone*: ‘the consistent maintenance of this manner conveys in the end an effect not of verbosity, but of bold,

²³ Elyot: ‘*Ouidius*, that semeth to be mooste of all poetes lasciuious, in his mooste wanton bokes hath right commendable and noble sentences’. See *The Boke Named the Governour* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531), sig. 48^v. Nashe: ‘I woulde not hue any man imagine, that in praying of Poetry, I endeuour to approue *Virgils* vnchast *Priapus*, or *Ouids* obscenitie. I commend their witte, not their wantonnes, their learning, not their lust: yet euen as the Bee out of the bitterest flowers, and sharpest thistles gathers honey, so out of the filthiest Fables, may profitable knowledge be sucked and selected’, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (London: Printed by I. Charlewood for Thomas Hackett, 1589), sig. Ciii.

²⁴ See Herford and Simpson, VIII, p. 587.

²⁵ Respectively, W. C., *The Chast and Lost Lovers* (London: Printed by F. L. for Laurence Blaiklock, 1651), sig. A4; Joseph Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols (London: J. Dodsley, 1774), III, p. 436, n. These sources are cited in Riddell, p. 45.

even shocking and terrifying directness'. The second adjective sounds most apt.²⁶ Though Barton expressed surprise that Drummond records no disagreeable Jonsonian remarks aimed at Marlowe, she observed that one poet-playwright humanised the other. Shapiro describes their inter-epochal relationship well, which to him 'often resembles that of a son to his father: first emulating, then rejecting, then coming to terms with and succeeding the parental figure.'²⁷

In another faint but intriguing connection, a notorious phrase applied to Marlowe a quarter-century after his death may have begun somehow with Jonson. Thomas Beard's *Thunderbolt of God's Wrath against Hard-hearted and Stiffe-necked Sinners* (1618), notable for its fearless indifference to understatement, was the source for 'a Poet, and a filthy Play-maker'. This epithet, the climax of a ferocious indictment of Marlowe, suggests that the polemicist was conversant with the blasphemies recorded in the Baines Note and the manner of death in Deptford. As it happens, *OED* records that Beard's choice of compound for a literary profession entered the language with contemptuous connotations as early as Palsgrave's *Lesclarissement* (1530): 'Playe maker, facteur, factiste' (n.1). When Sidney a half-century later offered his critique of England's lowbrow drama in the *Apologie*, the term had worsened: 'Perchance it is the Comick, whom naughtie Play-makers and Stage-keepers, haue iustly made odious.'²⁸ Jonson uses it in *Poetaster* to describe his Marlovian Ovid, but with a twist. He does not consider its utterer, the ancient poet's father, to be a paragon of credibility: 'Ovid, whom I thought to see the pleader, become Ovid the playmaker?' (1.2.9–10). Surely the professional dramatist Jonson did not find the concept of 'play-maker' objectionable as his aristocratic forebear or future moralists did. And criticism from a philistine, one might observe, could be construed as a compliment by his literate target. So Jonson's deployment of the term resonates nicely with historical irony.

III

If Jonson meant to repudiate or satirise Marlovian poetics and aesthetics in *Poetaster*, he failed. His play, like other works in his canon, obsessively rechannels his predecessor's characters, themes, imagery, and rhetoric. The phenomenon suggests

²⁶ See Eliot, p. 105. According to Parfitt, Jonson avoids the 'dominant Elizabethan manner' of Marlowe, in which 'little or no attempt is made to stay close to prose syntax' or order. Inversions and the dislocation of syntax 'often have no local significance' and are merely stylistic, not integral, as with Jonson, who violates his plain style only for effect. See Parfitt, p. 117–18.

²⁷ See Barton, IV, p. 218, and Shapiro, p. 41.

²⁸ See Thomas Beard, *The Thunder-bolt of Gods wrath against hard-hearted sinners* (London: Adam Islip, 1618), p. 29, and Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: James Roberts for Henry Olney), sig. F3.

instead a subtle form of tribute rather than the limiting concept of mere parody.. Brittle and simplistic moral interpretations of the literary allegory implied in the characters such as Ovid do not obtain, and Marlowe's role in the *cursus* has been seriously underestimated and misunderstood. Sir Epicure Mammon and Volpone would not be themselves without Faustus and Barabas. True, the puppet-show reconfiguration of *Hero and Leander* in *Bartholomew Fair* may border on caricature. Yet Jonson understood that the epyllion in the voices of its narrator snickered at its characters in much the same fashion, a sophisticated kind of reanimation that one might expect in this most self-consciously literary of plays. Though some commentators claim that the 'mighty line' reference in the First Folio elegy pokes fun at Marlowe's tendency toward overstatement, it could still be observed that it celebrates his achievement in the standardisation of the pentameter unit for drama.²⁹

Again, Jonson owed Marlowe too much to repudiate him, as McDonald, Barton, and others have implied. That he resuscitated *Hero and Leander* in puppet-show mode in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) sixteen years after Edward Blount printed the first edition of that poem (1598) shows that he could assume his audience's familiarity with it. Spectators could then detect the well-named Littlewit's necessarily unconscious travesty of the work at the Fair. Since Jonson helped write scenes that echoed *Faustus* for a revival of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the former remained in his mind, surfacing in *The Devil Is an Ass* and in *The Alchemist*, in which Surly describes Marlowe's protagonist as one who 'casteth figures and can conjure' (4.6.46–47). And *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), performed by the Children of the Chapel, features Cupid attempting to conquer the chaste goddess's nymphs by piercing them with his arrows. This might have reminded some viewers of the episode in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, when the little god in his Ascanius guise infects the heroine with his amorous pestilence by touching her breast with the point of one of his missiles.³⁰ And in the Induction to *Poetaster*, Envy delivers the *Faustus*-like line, 'Now if you be good devils, fly me not' (Ind.41).

The innovations of *Tamburlaine* inspired those of later dramatists such as Jonson. Some critics say that its challenge to convention influenced him the most strongly, i.e., the

²⁹ Riddell suggests that 'mighty' in 'mighty line' can mean of huge proportions, massive, bulky, overgrown, cumbersome (p. 45). Barton reminds us that Jonson's compliment about Marlowe's mighty line nevertheless stresses Shakespeare's superiority (p. 258). McDonald: 'Jonson's reference to 'Marlowe's mighty line' is usually taken favourably, although some regard it as a critique of his predecessor's weakness for bombast. However we choose to read the adjective, Jonson got the noun right: Marlowe is the poet of the line' (p. 62).

³⁰ McDonald: 'Marlowe's devotion to words and his skill at manipulating them were acknowledged immediately, most pointedly in the frequency with which other dramatists parodied his style' (p. 58). Barton analyzes the homage-parody of Marlowe in *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Devil Is an Ass* (pp., 21, 140, 213, 215, 222). For the *Cynthia's Revels* sendup of *Dido*, see W. David Kay, 'Ben Jonson and Elizabethan Dramatic Convention', *Modern Philology*, 76 (1978), 18–28 (p. 19).

abjuration of enforcing traditional morality in its dénouement, the punishment of vice and rewarding of virtue. The outcomes of *Alchemist* and other comedies appear to serve as evidence of this theory.³¹ Eliot, always hypersensitive about the rhetoric of poetry, intuited the presence of Marlowe's two-part tragical history with its terrifying directness in the speeches of Volpone. I argue that *Poetaster* fulfills this paradigm just as forcefully. Jonson's Induction invokes the warlike atmosphere of the Scourge of God and *The Massacre at Paris*: 'If any muse why I salute the stage / An armèd Prologue, know, 'tis a dangerous age' (*Poetaster* Ind.66–67). His Ovid utters lines that evoke one of Marlowe's most celebrated passages:

would men learn but to distinguish spirits,
And set true difference 'twixt those jaded wits
That run a broken pace for common hire,
And the high raptures of a happy Muse,
Born on the wings of her immortal thought.
(1.2.241–45)

Here readers may detect Tamburlainean overstatement and the play's famous prologue that announces a new age of drama:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war
(*ITam* Pr.1–3).

Poetaster develops this theme intricately when Tucca derides Crispinus. Jonson may be evoking Marlowe and those like him: 'he pens high, lofty, in a new stalking strain, bigger than half the rhymers i'the town again. He was born to fill thy mouth, Minotaurus, he was: he will teach thee to tear and rant, rascal: to him, cherish his Muse, go!' (3.4.165–69). *Poetaster* contains several passages that mention prolixity, which may remind some observers of the *Tamburlaine* plays and their hero, one of many 'long-winded monsters' (3.1.202). And 'jaded' may recall a more notorious line from Marlowe's sequel: 'Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia' (*2Tam* 4.3.1).

Jonson may have read even more deeply in the Marlowe canon than commentators have previously supposed. Within twelve months of the composition and production of *Poetaster*, Peter Short printed *Lucans First Booke* (1600), the dead playwright's

³¹ Barton implies that *Tamburlaine* affected *The Alchemist* in the sense that Jonson plays with audience's natural expectations of a judicious conclusion in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished (p. 146).

translation of the opening section of the *Pharsalia*, the year that he published *Every Man out of His Humour* in the William Holmes second quarto edition.³² In its unique poetics, Marlowe's poem recalls the native English alliterative tradition, with its heavy medial caesura and its flinty, jagged consonants hardening around its strong broad vowels to mimic the harsh sounds of battle, though delivered in measured and even Elizabethan blank verse. Some of the intensely visual description borders on the grotesque:

young men left their beds;
And snacht armes neer their houshold gods hung vp
Such as peace yeelds; wormeaten leatherne targets,
Through which the wood peer'd, headles darts, olde swords
With vgly teeth of black rust fouly scarr'd.

(*Luc Ci* / 241–5)

Youthful warriors rush to their task with hopelessly decomposed armaments. Marlowe's expertly employed diction featuring liquid consonants, coupled with 'e' and 'oo', accentuates the idea of swiftness, which amplifies the urgency of the moment ('left,' 'armes', 'neer', 'yeelds', 'Through'). Enjambment contributes to the pace, propelling the verse forward so that the caesura nimbly insinuates itself in a different locale in each line. However, these very 'l' and 'r' sounds, in tandem with the slowness and thickness of the flat vowels, underscore the inability of these green shock troops to respond to the emergency satisfactorily because of the inadequate weaponry ('wormeaten leatherne targets', 'peer'd, headles darts', 'vgly', 'black rust fouly scarr'd'). Such effects, conjoined with the intensity of the passage in its detail, obviously struck Jonson, the war veteran of Flanders. Perhaps with passages like this in mind, he provided equally effective consonants, meter, verse structure, and imagery in Envy's call for aid in damning the author of *Poetaster*:

Here, take my snakes among you, come and eat,
And while the squeezed juice flows in your black jaws,
Help me to damn the Author. Spit it forth
Upon his lines, and show your rusty teeth
At every word or accent.

(Ind.44–48)

³² See Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, ed. by Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. xvi.

Envy and her crew exemplify their reptilian evil with slithering and hissing sibilants ('snakes', 'squeezed juice flows', 'jaws', 'Spit', 'his lines', 'rusty', 'accent'). Jonson has transmogrified Marlowe's 'teeth of black rust' into the 'rusty teeth' of the devilish minions, whom the malicious goddess has commanded to desecrate poetry nevertheless superior to their venomous excretions. Here, the liquids with their vowels accompany the sibilants and usefully evoke the idea of rapidity, entirely appropriate under the circumstances ('while', 'flows', 'black', 'Help', 'Author', 'forth', 'your rusty', 'every word'). As with *Lucan*, the enjambment in the passage allows the caesura to break the lines in diverse places. Jonson might have learned from Marlowe's poem how supple and subtle the prosody of blank verse could be, its freedom from rhyme allowing for other types of experiment with sound.

Poetaster occasionally hints at Jonson's familiarity with the *Elegies* beyond the shared translation of *Amores* 1.15 to Envy, which answers the ravings of that entity in the Induction. Ovid's comment to Luscus about Tuca, 'I may with safety enough read over my elegy before he come' (1.1.33–34), mentions the actual term associated with Marlowe's rendition and the ancient poetical form itself. Crispinus's 'I'll bribe his porter' (3.1.266) recalls the convention of the young lover attempting to manipulate the household guard, sometimes a eunuch, to allow access to Corinna, as in *Amores* 1.6, which Marlowe translated. Cytheris counsels Chloe, 'wise women choose not husbands for the eye, merit, or birth, but wealth and sovereignty' (*Poetaster* 2.2.13–14), which resembles Dipsas's cynical advice to Corinna (*Am.* 1.8). In parallel, the *Poetaster* Ovid's 'The time was once when wit drowned wealth: but now / Your only barbarism is t'have wit, and want' (1.2.254–55) consciously alludes to the complaint in *Elegies* 3.7 or *Amores* 3.8.3–4 about the voraciousness, greed, and vapidness of a society that worships money but hates literature and culture. Jonson uses a word well known because of his First Folio poem for Shakespeare, 'to hear thy buskin tread / And shake a stage' (36–37), which Ovid utters in his play: 'hast thou buskins on, Luscus, that thou swear'st so tragically and high?' (1.1.19–20). As it happens, Marlowe's poetry indicates a fondness for this English term for the *cothurnus*, the boot that some characters in classical tragedy wore. He describes an attribute of Hero, somewhat puzzlingly 'buskins of shells, all silver'd, used she' (*Hero and Leander* 31). More tellingly, the speaker in the *Elegies* says it three times, twice in the first elegy: 'Love laughed at my cloak and buskins, painted'; 'Love triumpheth o'er his buskin'd poet' (2.18.18). It appears that the term was associated with Marlowe, as Judicio's judgment delivered to Ingenio in 2 *Return from Parnassus* implies: 'Marlowe was happy in his buskined muse, / Alas! unhappy in his life and end' (1.2.175–76).³³ Therefore, Jonson, not known as a writer of

³³ Smeaton, ed., p. 15.

tragedy, may have gleaned one of his most effective terms from Marlowe, who was celebrated for his skill in this genre.

IV

Marlovianism permeates *Poetaster*, most apparently in those sections featuring Jonson's classical surrogate for his fellow playwright: the first scene, and then the banquet episode farewell exchange between Ovid and Julia concluding Act 4. Commentators have haggled slightly over how much Marlowe's rendition of *Amores* 1.15 in *All Ovids Elegies* on Envy influenced Jonson's version that follows in that surreptitiously-printed text and that he uses to begin the play.³⁴ This elegy in soliloquy form, begun near its end, interrupted, and then taken up again (*Poetaster* 1.1.1–3, 43–84), comprises an ersatz prologue after the stylised allegorical induction that features the spiteful goddess herself. Critics generally agree that Jonson, by including his same translation of the poem in his comedy, engages his predecessor in some fashion. Yet they are not in accord as to what this engagement signifies: criticism, homage, emulation, parody. Cain saw it as a valedictory gesture, 'a graceful if double-edged tribute' that gently repudiates the Ovidian poetics that Marlowe allegedly represented to Jonson and his time, which he considered a wrongheaded aesthetic valorizing of the individual over social good.³⁵ Still, Ovid's defence of his art in *Poetaster* following his confrontation with his father, 'O sacred Poesy' (1.1.232–57), echoes the critique of philistinism and greed in *Amores* 3.8.³⁶ So this Marlovian proxy essentially speaks Jonsonian verse in his second soliloquy in the scene. That he utters approximately 289 of the play's 3350-odd lines does not signify, as Talbert argued, the character's relative lack of importance.³⁷ *Poetaster* begins and ends with this hybrid of ancient and modern, and makes frequent reference to the ideas and poetics of the two writers. Jonson in this fashion honors them profoundly.

Early eminent readers questioned the authorship of the two translations in *All Ovids Elegies*. Some argued that Jonson wrote Marlowe's version included in that text preceding his. William Gifford, in his landmark edition of Jonson, was the first to advance this curious thesis. The poems were so similar that he had to have authored the pair: 'I give this poem to Jonson, because he is well known to be incapable of taking

³⁴ *All Ovids Elegies*, n.p., n.d., sig. B6^v–B7^v.

³⁵ *Poetaster*, ed. Cain, p. 19.

³⁶ Cain argues that this defense appears 'unequivocally Jonsonian' (pp. 19–20). Koslow observes that although some think Jonson judges Ovid as irresponsible to poetry at this moment, they miss Ovid's Jonsonian perspective on its necessary public function, and provided twice in the first act, at that (p. 140).

³⁷ Talbert, p. 227.

credit for the talents of another; and it certainly affords a curious instance of the laxity of literary morality in those days, when a scholar could assert his title to a poem of forty-two lines, of which thirty at least are literally borrowed, and the remainder only varied for the worse'. That Jonson could have consciously echoed Marlowe did not occur to Gifford, as it did to Edmund Malone (c. 1790), whose penciled annotations in a Bodleian copy of *Poetaster* made the opposite case: 'Jonson's impudence in printing this translation as his own, is perhaps unparalleled. It was done by Marlowe; and he has merely altered a word here & there, generally for the worse.'³⁸ For worse or better, the anonymous editor of the *Elegies* thought of Jonson as an emulator and admirer of Marlowe's in setting the two renditions consecutively. By anticipating what readers might have expected or desired to see, his editorial act constitutes a type of reception and analysis.

If Jonson approved the inclusion of his translation in *All Ovids Elegies*, he, like the editor of the translation, wanted audiences and readers to perceive his relationship with his predecessor. The publication was considered most notoriously Marlovian. Bishops Bancroft and Whitgift censored an earlier edition, *Certaine of Ovids Elegies*, under the aegis of their Ban (1599), then commanded it to be burned by the common hangman.³⁹ Given Jonson's predilections for writing Ovidian verse himself and the worldliness about erotic matters that his works demonstrate, Ovid's subject matter or his apocryphal affair with Augustus's granddaughter Julia would not have bothered him to the extent that some critics have surmised. So his conscious association of his poetics with Marlowe's, or refusal to disassociate himself from them, implies a type of imprimatur. Riddell observed that since Jonson's retranslation of Marlowe's effort approximates his theory of authorial progress, he must have believed that his forerunner's poetics needed improvement.⁴⁰ Fair enough, one might say. I would observe, however, that Jonson enjoyed the immense advantage of having Marlowe's effort before him as he worked, an elegy by an ancient master rendered into their native language by a great poet of the previous generation. Lines in an un-Jonsonian mode such as the otherworldly 'beats at heaven gates with her bright hooves' suggest Marlowe's influence throughout *Poetaster*

³⁸ For Gifford, see *The Works of Ben Jonson*, 9 vols, ed. by William Gifford (London: Printed for G. and W. Nichol, et al., 1816), II, pp. 397–98, n. 8. Joan Carr makes roughly the same point in 'Jonson and the Classics: The Ovid-Plot in *Poetaster*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 8 (1978), 296–311 (p. 298). For the Malone annotations, see Cain, p. 80, n. 43–84. Dane holds the same view. The translation of 1.15 'is not Jonson's own; it is Marlowe's which Jonson only slightly modifies' (p. 107).

³⁹ For an authoritative account of the Bishops' Ban, see Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 198–217.

⁴⁰ Riddell: Jonson's translation was 'so close to' Marlowe's 'that no one who knew the earlier version could mistake the allusion. And no one who knew the earlier version *well* could fail to understand that Jonson had improved it.' Since he consciously associated himself with Marlowe by the inclusion of the elegy, the appraisal of Ovid is 'close to' his judgment of Marlowe (pp. 40–41). Cain offers similar analysis (p. 20).

(1.2.247). And Jonson constantly demonstrates an awareness in his works that he, and not simply his peers, must improve as a writer.

Some recent critics such as Koslow and Pugh usefully perceived Jonson's awareness of what they believed to be Marlowe's contentious engagement with classical traditions in the translation.⁴¹ His decision to begin and end the initial appearance of Ovid in *Poetaster* with the final couplet of his version of the apostrophe to the malignant goddess of spite supports this argument: 'when this body falls in funeral fire, / My name shall live, and my best part aspire' (1.1.1–2; 83–84). He recast the Latin of the *auctor* and Marlowe's improvisations in his attempt at the same conclusion: 'ergo etiam cum me supremus adederit ignis, / vivam, parsque mei multa superstes erit' (*Am.* 1.15.41–42); 'though death rakes my bones in funerall fire, / Ile liue, and he puls me down mount higher' (*AOE B7* / 1.15.41–42). To overgo them and himself, Jonson uses *Poetaster* Ovid to revise his revision: 'Thy scope is mortal; mine, eternal fame, / Which through the world shall ever chant my name' (1.1.49–50). However, his poetical gesture may represent the idea of accommodation just as much as competition, encoded in the earlier-cited phrase 'very *Hee*' describing the master into which a writer should transform himself for successful humanist imitation before the inevitable creation of distance. That he presents his Marlovian Ovid in the act of extempore composition of this work in progress demonstrates yet more respect for him. A dramatist pays tribute to another by giving him a soliloquy in his play that dramatises the active *ars poetica* that they mutually pursue. To Jonson, this is what Marlowe sounded like, what he did, and what he was: a writer writing.

In *Poetaster*, Jonson understands Ovid as a Marlovian poet, and he either echoes or alludes to his predecessor's works repeatedly in the play. His version of the concluding couplet of the Envy elegy could be describing the end of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, since its protagonist 'falls in funeral fire' for her exit. The malapropism-prone city-wife Chloe's 'Good Jove, what a pretty, foolish thing it is to be a poet!' (*Poetaster* 4.2.48–49) directly echoes the snail-brained and inept monarch Mycetes, soon to be overrun by his brother and then the Scythian menace himself in *Tamburlaine*, and deservedly so: 'And 'tis a pretty toy to be a poet' (*ITam* 2.2.54). It could be noted that poetry, the medium that they ironically dismiss, created the two characters in the first place. They

⁴¹ According to Koslow, that Ovid opens the play proper in compositional mode 'highlights the use of theatrical embodiment as a way to reinforce what it means to revivify an ancient text' (p. 136). Pugh observes that Jonson's act of quoting Ovid and Marlowe in *Poetaster* 'defiantly shows that their verse survives them. This figure on stage even has a body, reintroducing the uncanny physicality with which Marlowe imbued the lines.' If indeed Ovid is Marlowe in the play, 'Jonson identifies a strain of counter-classical irreverence expressed in Marlowe's Ovidian poems, but also in his Lucan translation and adaptation of Virgil. Rewriting classical literature entails an often antagonistic engagement with ideas and values central to Augustan and to Elizabethan society' (pp. 80–81).

would not exist without it. That one so empty-headed from a literary comedy would use nearly the exact words of one equally benighted, in a groundbreaking historical pageant with tragic overtones, suggests the happy applicability of Marlowe's lines to diverse dramatic situations rather than a criticism of the poet-playwright and his aesthetic.

Jonson, who knew his classical biography, consciously decided to make his Ovid much younger in his play than his reported fifty-one years when exiled to the Black Sea. Much of his character's speech veers toward the youthfully histrionic, an approximation of how he believed Marlowe would have presented himself. When the poet converses with Tibullus, conveniently alive in the play though long dead at the historical time Jonson tries to evoke, he confesses that he cannot remember where he should meet Julia: 'I have forgot; my passion so transports me' (*Poetaster* 1.3.27–28). Much of his appropriately celestial imagery for she who 'takes her honours from the golden sky' imagines her as a sun:

Heaven she is,
Praised in herself above all praise: and he
Which hears her speak would swear the tuneful orbs
Turned in his zenith only.

(1.3.39, 43–46)

Those who know Marlowe's works fairly well may remember a number of passages of this type. His queen of Carthage says of Aeneas: 'Heaven, envious of our joys, is waxen pale, / And when we whisper, then the stars fall down / To be partakers of our honey talk' (*Dido* 4.4.52–54). Most notoriously, the Scythian conqueror reflects on the considerable charms of Zenocrate at the same time the virgins he has condemned to death because their town fathers failed to capitulate speedily enough to him are experiencing their slow deaths from impalement. Beauty itself writes commentaries on her eyes,

that when Ebena steps to heaven
In silence of thy solemn evening's walk,
Making the mantle of the richest night,
The moon, the planets, and the meteors light.

(*ITam* 5.1.145–50)

When Tibullus warns Ovid that 'thou'lt lose thyself' in his labyrinthine encomium for Julia, he retorts: 'in no labyrinth can I safelier err, / Than when I lose myself in praising her' (*Poetaster* 1.3.47–48). He could be described as something of a romantic fellow,

not much like the historical Ovid in his assumed humor of hardboiled sexual cynic. Jonson had no interest in what some would mischaracterise as realism any more than the author of *Faustus* did. This Ovid speaks Marlowe in the hyperbolic language of his characters in love. His ‘passion’ line whirls itself here and there, in the manner of the apocryphal bit of Ovid from his lost *Medea*, itself paraphrased from an equally apocryphal line of Vergil: ‘feror huc illuc, vae, plena deo’. [I am hurled here and there, alas, full of the god].⁴²

V

Critics have interpreted the paired scenes in Act 4 that feature Ovid — the bacchanalian banquet and Augustus’s condemnation of it (*Poetaster* 4.5, 4.6), and the poet’s soliloquy and his farewell from Julia (4.9, 4.10) — as Jonson’s symbolic renunciation of his poetics and those of his latter-day adherents such as Marlowe. This trans-epochal similitude argues the opposite, that Jonson in no way condemns the *magister Amoris*. His mind was more supple and capacious than this, and he greatly admired the author of *Hero and Leander*. Hence Caesar’s deceptively authoritative conclusion ought not to be wholly embraced: ‘Whosoever can / And will not cherish virtue is no man’ (*Poetaster* 5.1.66–67). Half a century ago, Waith cited the formula from the preface to *Volpone* as a parallel: ‘For, if men will impartially, and not a-squint, look toward the offices and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselves, the impossibility of any man’s being the good Poet, without first being a good man’. Yet the poets of whom the emperor approves, like him not always virtuous, show considerably more generosity to Marlovian Ovid, whose presence literally frames the play.⁴³

Although the *Poetaster* Horace served as a type of Jonsonian surrogate, Robert B. Pierce reminded us that the dramatist was not so self-deluded as to believe that he was the embodiment of the poet himself. His contemporaries uniformly accounted him a

⁴² Seneca, *Suasoriae*, 3.7, in *The Elder Seneca*, 2 vols, trans. by Michael Winterbottom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), II, p. 544.

⁴³ For Waith’s quotation of the *Volpone* preface, see ‘The Poet’s Morals’, p. 14. Barton was equally moralistic in her approach to the issue. Though she noted that Horace does not condemn Ovid in *Poetaster*, to her he strongly resembles Lorenzo Junior in *Every Man In His Humour*, a ‘true artist’ who is not a good person, which ‘vitiates his great natural gifts’. His ‘clandestine passion’ for Julia ‘annihilates him both personally and as a poet’ so that he can only ‘defile his high calling.’ Moreover, he ‘distorts the proper function of art’ with the blasphemous gods banquet (p. 82). Mulvihill thought the banquet was intended as ‘an ironic depiction of this subtle subversion of morality’ and that the scene was merely ‘a replica of the Ovidian mythological poem which was so much in vogue during the 1590’s’, a simulacrum of Marlowe’s ‘mocking reduction of the gods’ in *Hero*. Like Talbert, he thought the possible toxicity of the banquet was contradicted by the circumstances and its ‘light and witty revelry’, regardless of Augustus’s angry condemnation of the proceedings, his daughter, and the poet Mulvihill, pp. 244–45, 251).

passionate and troubled man, and if Drummond's celebrated reporting of his conversation was accurate, he tended to express himself vehemently while riding waves of intense feeling. Besides fashioning himself as a poet-playwright like Shakespeare and Marlowe, he was an oppressed Catholic, a homicidal duellist, and a sometimes jailbird. For such reasons, theorised Pierce, since Jonson's 'unruly nature needed restraint', he idealised Horace as a paragon of discipline and moderation.⁴⁴ Though true in some sense, I would observe that in *Poetaster*, this idol cannot be described as prudish or ascetic or obsessed with appearances: 'I drink as I would write, / In flowing measure, filled with flame and sprite' (3.1.11–12). This self-definition describes Ovid, Marlowe, and for that matter, Jonson, who grasped this kinship between the four of them. His Horace defends Ovid, though he does not witness the fatal gathering that leads to his exile. He condemns the self-interested spies who undo his fellow poet instead:

this wolfish train,
 To prey upon the life of innocent mirth
 And harmless pleasures, bred of noble wit
 (4.7.11–13)

Noble wit breeds harmless pleasures and innocent mirth. Various aspects of the banquet scene (4.5) evoke Marlowe's plays and poetry at their most Ovidian, without any sense that Jonson meant to batter either writer with simplistic morality. Tucca's grudging tribute to the artistry of the arranger of the dinner-tableau, the phrase 'ocular temptation' (4.5.76), could be describing *Hero and Leander*. The necessarily festive nature of this episode in *Poetaster* may remind some readers of the opening of *Dido*, with Jupiter, Ganymede, and Venus, with Ovid as ersatz playwright or masque-maker directing the action from its opening line: 'Gods and goddesses, take your several seats' (*Poetaster* 4.5.1). The director takes the role of Jupiter: 'Fill us a bowl of nectar, Ganymede' (4.5.59). Slightly earlier, the horrible Lupus, aptly named for his treacherously lupine nature, remarks of such activity as he gets wind of it, 'Will nothing but our gods serve these poets to profane?' (4.4.16). Moralists accused Marlowe and Ovid of perpetrating exactly this. Prior to this arguably thematic declaration, Chloe assures Cytheris, a character whose name recalls a moniker for the goddess of love, Cytherea, that a poet functions as a maker who can help metamorphose the human into the divine. The joking reference to Ovid's ability to transform them into faux goddesses for the imminent feast predicts Lupus's wrongheaded disapproval: 'Who knows not, Cytheris, that the sacred breath of a true poet can blow any virtuous humanity up to deity?' (4.2.33–34). Tibullus's bemusement at her adept gulling of Crispinus recalls Bellamira's similar

⁴⁴ Robert B. Pierce, 'Ben Jonson's Horace and Horace's Ben Jonson', *Studies in Philology*, 78 (1981), 20–31 (pp. 29–30).

carrying on with Ithamore in *The Jew of Malta*, with Barabas disguised as a fiddler: ‘A most subtle wench! How she hath baited him with a viol yonder, for a song’ (*Poetaster* 4.3.60–61). The temptations that Ovid-Marlowe proffers at the banquet in the form of this tune, ‘Wake, our mirth begins to die’ (4.5.176–99), transcend the merely sight-oriented, so that all five senses receive their due:

Here is beauty for the eye
For the ear, sweet melody;
Ambrosiac odors for the smell;
Delicious nectar for the taste;
For the touch, a lady’s waist,
Which doth all the rest excell!

(4.5.194–99)

Marlowe’s plays are not known for their abundance of musical interludes, and ‘Come live with me’ was his only sustained use of tetrameter, but one may detect the synesthesian detail from his pointed, lovingly-crafted description of Leander’s body and its effect on those who enjoyed gazing upon it in that poem Jonson knew so well: ‘Even as delicious meat is to the taste, / So was his neck in touching’ (*Hero and Leander* 63–64).

To those who consider Augustus’s perspective authoritative, Jonson’s virtuous Vergil serves as antidote to the ‘debased, albeit eloquent sensuality’ of Ovid.⁴⁵ Yet Horace’s tribute to the official poet of the Empire could easily encompass his untraditional doppelganger:

for his poesy, ’tis so rammed with life
That it shall gather strength of life with being,
And live hereafter more admired than now’

(*Poetaster* 5.2.136–38).

Some might observe that this kinetic description fits the *Metamorphoses* better than the *Aeneid*. If Ovid serves as Marlovian surrogate, the encomium has proven prophetic for the afterlife of *Doctor Faustus* and *Hero and Leander*. Vergil’s condemnation of Lupus for his bad-faith attempt to curry favour with Caesar by informing on Naso echoes in still another way:

⁴⁵ Moul, p. 38.

the sinister application
 Of the malicious ignorant and base
 Interpreter, who will distort and strain
 The general scope and purpose of an author
 To his particular and private spleen.

(*Poetaster* 5.3.136–39)

In what could be characterised as irony, students of classical literature may recognise the putative theme of Ovid's *Tristia*, one of his two collections of elegies from exile on the Black Sea. By ignorance or crafty malice, treacherous readers misread an author's works as a means of condemning him as a person, misunderstanding the work and the man. Its ultimate declaration, 'vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea' (*Tristia* 2.354), was well known enough in Jonson's time for the pointed use by his disciple, Robert Herrick, at the end of his collection *Hesperides* (1648): 'Jocund his Muse was; but his Life was chast.'⁴⁶ Ovid reminds Augustus in *Tristia* that Vergil in his epic depicts the physical love affair of the unwed Dido and Aeneas, its most celebrated part: 'nec legitur pars ulla magis de corpore toto, / quam non legitimo foedere iunctus amor' [no part of the whole work is more read than that union of illicit love] (2.533–36).⁴⁷ Surely, said Ovid, this sanctioned tale could not be described as morally superior to the sexual adventures in the *Ars amatoria*. Another concept may have occurred to Jonson about his play as it has struck more modern readers. That Marlowe wrote frankly about sex in his translation of the *Amores* and in his erotically-charged reading of the *Aeneid* in his *Dido, Queene of Carthage* suggests a double kinship with two of the ancient masters portrayed in *Poetaster*. He made himself a re-animator of the work of the *magister Amoris* who likewise cast himself as an Ovidian reviser of Vergil's epic.

Marlowe informs Ovid's final appearance in *Poetaster*, his anguished soliloquy upon banishment and then his farewell to Julia, some lines recalling *Faustus*:

As in a circle, a magician then
 Is safe against the spirit he excites;
 But, out of it, is subject to his rage,
 And loseth all the virtue of his art

(*Poetaster* 4.9.10–13).

⁴⁶ *Hesperides: Or, the Works Both Humane and Divine of Robert Herrick Esq.* (London: Printed for John Williams, 1648), p. 398.

⁴⁷ See Ovid, *Tristia [and] Ex Ponto*, ed. by Arthur Leslie Wheeler, rev. by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 80–81, 94–95. See also Bruce Gibson, 'Ovid on Reading Ovid: Reception in Ovid *Tristia* II', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 89 (1999), 19–37.

This could be read as an allegory not just of exile but of the dangers of *aemulatio* that Jonson, Marlowe, and Ovid practiced. Overwhelmed by the source text, the unwise emulator-magus violates the parameters of his *ars* and loses himself as he tries to reanimate his master. Because the rhetoric in these scenes differs greatly from the speech patterns in the rest of the play, it has puzzled readers since the work's earliest reception. It could be observed that this puzzlement has masked profound critical discomfiture at this farewell between a man and a woman ensconced in an ardently sexual relationship. An appalled Gifford, whose sheer embarrassment must have prevented him from reading the exchange with any care, wrote: 'I am afraid that this ridiculous love scene will not strike the reader as much in the manner of Ovid: there is neither pathos, nor passion, nor interest in it, but a kind of metaphysical hurly-burly, of which it is not easy to discover the purport or end'. A century later, the equally scandalised C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson expressed similar eyes-averted indignation: 'uninteresting', 'grotesque', 'mere disturbing incongruity'. As previously mentioned, Campbell and Waith criticised the lovers as moral weaklings. None of these commentators provides any analysis of the text to justify these reactions so devoid of empathy. More recent essays by Moul and Koslow characterise the parting as verbally excessive and hypocritical, respectively, minus the unenlightened hand-wringing.⁴⁸ Although the encounter between Ovid and Julia may strike the reader as more hyperbolic and mannered than Baroque opera, I argue that here Jonson challenged himself to imagine, design, and construct a love scene as Marlowe might have composed, deploying what he later characterises as his predecessor's 'mighty line'. That the soon-to-be separated lovers imply the heat of their ardour for one another in the fashion Faustus, Edward, and Dido exhibit toward Helen, Gaveston, and Aeneas has surely contributed to the critical unease, with notable exceptions.⁴⁹

Cain, with typical shrewdness, observed that Ovid's final words in *Poetaster* recall Marlowe and Chapman: 'The truest wisdom silly men can have / Is dotage on the follies of their flesh' (*Poetaster* 4.10.108–09).⁵⁰ I would add that these heartbroken, self-deprecating lines evoke Marlowe the Ovidian, specifically in his Anna's 'I know too well the sour of love' (*Dido* 3.1.60). This fine phrase could be described as a keynote of sorts for the historical Ovid, Marlowe, and Jonson and the approach to *amor* in their works. Virtually no intimate relationship, human or divine, turns out well in the

⁴⁸ Respectively: Gifford, I, p. 497, n. 7; Herford and Simpson, IV, pp. 430–31, Campbell, p. 127; Waith, p. 15; Moul, p. 40; Koslow, p. 140.

⁴⁹ Barton observed that the lovers, though 'clearly flawed and misguided', are 'neither farcical nor wholly unsympathetic' (pp. 83–84). To Ralph Nash, Ovid and Julia are 'sincere and serious, not mere libertines'. See 'The Parting Scene in Jonson's *Poetaster*', *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952), 54–62 (p. 60). Cain saw the interlude as parody, and noted how critics ignored or were ignorant of obvious echoes of Ovid's *Tristia* elegies devoted to his wife, and of Chapman's *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* (p. 204, n. 1).

⁵⁰ Cain, p. 23.

Metamorphoses. The *Amores* recount multiple failures of this sort since the *desultor Amoris* follows the exceedingly benighted advice that the *magister Amoris* proffers to prospective lovers in the *Ars amatoria*. Though Marlowe had his peculiar view on these matters, his early immersion in Ovid's erotic poetry while translating and transforming it into the *Elegies* must have colored his perspective significantly. Amorous matters are highly fraught in every play he wrote: the Duchess of Guise's dangerous attraction to the faithless Mugeroun; Isabella and Mortimer Junior scheming as they fornicate; Edward and Gaveston; Tamburlaine's bizarrely selfish poetical aria at the death of Zenocrate.

Jonson perceived that Marlowe's characters demonstrate no less earnestness about their beloved objects than Ovid's Orpheus, Venus, and Apollo in his epic of changes, his deserted heroines of the *Heroides*, or his elegiac *desultor* pursuing Corinna and her sisters. In *Dido*, the heroine's eloquent sincerity, not undermined by her creating playwright, manifests itself in simple language uncharacteristic of him or his alleged collaborator, Thomas Nashe. That she senses Aeneas will soon be gone from her does not occasion rhetorical excess: 'If thou wilt stay, / Leap in mine armes, mine armes are open wide: / If not, turne from me, and Ile turn from thee' (*Dido* 5.1.179–81). She describes the lover's two states, desired erotic congress or hellish rejection and solitude, in twenty-three succinct words, twenty-two of them monosyllables. In *Poetaster*, Julia uses a similar dichotomy to describe her parting from her newly-exiled poet-lover, which recalls Marlowe's Carthaginian queen: 'Both one, and yet divided, as opposed!' (*Poetaster* 4.10.3). One passage could easily be describing the other. He appears to have admired Marlowe's underrated play and such as this extract that Shakespeare obviously read and ingested in imagining his Cleopatra and Antony:

O that the clouds were here wherein thou fleest,
That thou and I unseen might sport ourselves!
Heaven, envious of our joys, is waxen pale,
And when we whisper, then the stars fall down,
To be partakers of our honey talk.

(*Dido* 4.4.50–54)

Jonson's Julia and Ovid demonstrate similar romantic earnestness in their final, fatal interview. His observation need not be read as bitter satire:

No life hath love in such sweet state as this;
No essence is so dear to moody sense
As flesh and blood, whose quintessence is sense

(*Poetaster* 4.10.36–38)

It may be true that the final clause may echo or anticipate Donne's comment on dull sublunary lovers in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning', as Cain had it.⁵¹ It may be equally valid to suggest that the doomed poet's 'there is no stay in amorous pleasures; if both stay, both die' (*Poetaster* 4.10.95–96) might lose itself unduly in a maze of puns on 'stay' and 'die'. If they remain or restrain themselves, they may perish. If they support or continue to gratify each other sexually, they might enjoy the little death yet suffer the penalty of the enraged emperor for their fornication. However, this does not signify that Jonson held his erotically entwined historical figures up for scorn. His Ovid represents not his repudiation of but his tribute to Marlowe. The three writers knew well the glories of the flesh and the transcendence of passion, beautifully realised in a line of Julia's, which anticipates a great observation of Emily Dickinson's: 'lovers ere they part will meet in hell' (4.10.76).

⁵¹ Cain, p. 207, n. 38.