BEN JONSON

It Was a Beauty That I Saw

It was a beauty that I saw,
So pure, so perfect, as the frame
Of all the universe was lame
To that one figure, could I draw
Or give least line of it a law.

A skein of silk without a knot,
A fair march made without a halt,
A curious form without a fault,
A printed book without a blot:
All beauty, and without a spot.

1629

An Elegy

Though beauty be the mark of praise,
And yours of whom I sing be such
As not the world can praise too much,
Yet is ’t your virtue now I raise.

A virtue, like allay, so gone
Throughout your form as, though that move
And draw and conquer all men’s love,
This subjects you to love of one.

Wherein you triumph yet; because
’Tis of yourself, and that you use
The noblest freedom, not to choose
Against or faith or honor’s laws.

But who should less expect from you,
In whom alone Love lives again?
By whom he is restored to men,
And kept, and bred, and brought up true.

His falling temples you have reared,
The withered garlands ta’en away;
His altars kept from the decay
That envy wished, and nature feared;

1. In The New Inn 4.4, this song is sung by Lovel.
2. Elaborate.
3. Alloy. The thought is that her beauty makes her loved by all, while her virtue confines her to a single lover (her husband?). Jonson here is in an unusually metaphysical mood.
And on them burn so chaste a flame,
With so much loyalties’ expense,
As Love, t’ acquit such excellence,
Is gone himself into your name.¹

And you are he; the deity
To whom all lovers are designed
That would their better objects find;
Among which faithful troop am I.

Who, as an offspring² at your shrine,
Have sung this hymn, and here entreat
One spark of your diviner heat
To light upon a love of mine.

Which, if it kindle not, but scant
Appear, and that to shortest view,
Yet give me leave t’ adore in you
What I in her am grieved to want.⁴

Gypsy Songs¹

1
The faery beam upon you,
The stars to glister on you;
A moon of light
In the noon of night,
Till the fire-drake² hath o’ergone you!
The wheel of fortune guide you,
The boy with the bow³ beside you;
Run ay in the way
Till the bird of day,
And the luckier lot betide you!

2
To the old, long life and treasure!
To the young, all health and pleasure!
To the fair, their face
With eternal grace
And the soul to be loved at leisure!

2. To repay the lady’s devotion, Love himself has entered her name; from these lines it has been conjectured that the poem was addressed to Lady Covell.
3. Perhaps “descendant,” more likely a wandering offshoot of the “faithful troop.”
4. Can Jonson possibly be saying here that his own mistress is a poor copy of the lady to whom this poem is addressed? This hardly seems complimentary to either lady, though it is in the Donne tradition of bold, witty truth-telling.
1. From one of Jonson’s masques, The Gypsies Metamorphosed.
2. I.e., till the will-o’-the-wisp has passed you by.
3. Cupid.
To the witty, all clear mirrors;
To the foolish, their dark errors;
To the loving sprite,
A secure delight;
To the jealous, his own false terrors!

The Vision of Delight

Presented at Court in Christmas, 1617

The scene—A Street in Perspective of Fair Building Discovered.

Delight is seen to come as afar off, accompanied with grace, love, harmony, revel, sport, laughter. Wonder following.

Delight spake in song (stilo recitativo):
Let us play, and dance, and sing,
Let us now turn every sort
Of the pleasures of the spring
To the graces of a court.

From air, from cloud, from dreams, from toys,
To sounds, to sense, to love, to joys;
Let your shows be new, as strange,
Let them oft and sweetly vary;
Let them haste so to their change,
As the seers may not tarry;
Too long to expect the pleasingest sight
Doth take away from the delight.

Here the first antimasque entered.
A she-monster delivered of six burratines, that dance with six pantaloons; which done,

Delight spoke again:
Yet hear what your Delight doth pray:
All sour and sullen looks away;
That are the servants of the day;

1. The sort of extravagant allegorical entertainment represented by The Vision of Delight was enormously popular at the court of James I. The parts were taken by courtiers, there was usually only a single representation of each masque, and enormous sums of money were expended on the décor. The three traditional elements of the masque are spectacle, allegory, and compliment; it is of the essence that the mythological-allegorical world of the masque should finally be converted into the “actual” world of the court, just as Delight promises to do in the first four lines of her first speech.

Jonson’s stage directions, being partly descriptive (for the reader), partly instructive (for the performer), are rather casual about observing consistency of tense. The chief actor in The Vision of Delight was George Villiers, newly created Marquis of Buckingham; among the audience was an American visitor, Pocahontas.

2. Trifles.
3. Displays.
4. The “good” characters—Delight and her following—are the “masque”; the “antimasque” comprises grotesques who threaten and oppose them. “Burratines” are puppet-figures; “pantaloons” are clowns. Both names come from the Italian, and there is a possibility that Jonson modeled this masque in its entirety on an Italian original.
Our sports are of the humorous\textsuperscript{5} Night,  
    Who feeds the stars that give her light,  
    And useth (than her wont) more bright,\textsuperscript{6}  
    To help the vision of delight.

*Here the night rises, and took her chariot bespangled with stars.*  
*Delight proceeds:*

\begin{quote}
20 See, see her scepter and her crown  
    Are all of flame, and from her gown  
    A train of light comes waving down.  
This night in dew she will not steep  
    The brain, nor lock the sense in sleep;  
25 But all awake with Phantoms keep,  
    And those to make delight more deep.
\end{quote}

*By this time the night and moon being both risen,* NIGHT, hovering over the place, sang:

\begin{quote}
Break, Fancy, from thy cave of cloud,  
    And spread thy purple wings;  
    Now all thy figures are allowed,  
    And various shapes of things;  
    Create of airy forms a stream;  
    It must have blood, and naught of fleam,\textsuperscript{7}  
    And though it be a waking dream;  
    THE CHOIR: Yet let it like an odor rise  
    To all the senses here,  
    And fall like sleep upon their eyes,  
    Or music in their ear.
\end{quote}

*The scene here changed to cloud, and fancy, breaking forth, spake:*\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{quote}
Bright Night, I obey thee, and am come at thy call,  
    But it is no one dream that can please these all;  
40 Wherefore I would know what dreams would delight 'em;  
    For never was Fancy more loath to affright 'em.  
    And Fancy, I tell you, has dreams that have wings,  
    And dreams that have honey, and dreams that have stings;  
    Dreams of the maker, and dreams of the teller,  
    Dreams of the kitchen, and dreams of the cellar:  
    Some that are tall, and some that are dwarfs,  
    Some that are haltered, and some that wear scarfs;  
    Some that are proper, and signify o' thing,  
    And some another, and some that are nothing:  
45 For say the French verdingale and the French hood  
    Were here to dispute; must it be understood,  
    A feather, for a wisp, were a fit moderator?\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Whimsical.
\textsuperscript{6} I.e., and remains (is accustomed to be, “useth”) brighter than usual.
\textsuperscript{7} Phlegm, the dull, muddy humor. Fancy (fantasy) must be of a hot, sanguine humor (“must have blood”) to present lively pictures.
\textsuperscript{8} Fancy’s speech is almost a parody of metaphysical poetry, a series of glaring, brilliant metaphors, jumbled together without making much sense.
\textsuperscript{9} I.e., the vast hooped petticoat and the full French hood would overwhelm a wispy feather which tried to mediate their quarrel.
Your ostrich, believe it, is no faithful translator
Of perfect Utopian; and then, 'twere an odd piece
To see the conclusion peep forth at a codpiece.1

The political pudding hath still his two ends,
Though the bellows and the bagpipe were ne'er so good friends,
And who can report what offense it would be
For the squirrel to see a dog climb a tree?

If a dream should come in now, to make you afeard,
With a windmill on 's head, and bells at his beard,
Would you straight wear your spectacles here at your toes,
And your boots on your brows, and your spurs on your nose?2

But the maker o' the mouse-trap is he that hath skill.
And the nature of the onion is to draw tears,
As well as the mustard; peace, pitchers have ears,
And shuttlecocks wings; these things, do not mind 'em.
If the bell have any sides, the clapper will find 'em;

There's twice so much music in beating the tabor
As in the stockfish,3 and somewhat less labor.
Yet all this while, no proportion is boasted
'Twixt an egg and an ox, though both have been roasted,
For grant the most barbers can play o' the cittern,4

You will say now, the morris-bells5 were but bribes
To make the heel forget that ever it had kibes;6
I say, let the wine make never so good jelly,
The conscience of the bottle is much in the belly.

For why? do but take common council in your way,
And tell me who'll then set a bottle of hay
Before the old usurer, and to his horse
A slice of salt-butter, perverting the course
Of civil society?7 Open that gap,

And out skip your fleas, four and twenty at a clap,
With a chain and a trundle-bed following at the heels,
And will they not cry then, the world runs a wheels:
As for example, a belly and no face,

The haunches of a drum, with the feet of a pot,
And the tail of a Kentishman to it; why not?
Yet would I take the stars to be cruel,
If the crab and the ropemaker ever fight duel,8

But mum; a thread may be drawn out too long.

1. A flap, often ornamented, concealing an opening in the front of men's breeches; fashionable in the 15th and 16th centuries.
2. Fancy's mind runs on dreams with fantastic consequences, dreams which might scare an audience "out of its wits."
3. Dried codfish, which had to be pounded into a pulp before it was edible. "Tabor": drum. The logic of Fancy is purposely erratic and obscure.
4. Zither. "Gittern" (in the next line) is a guitar.
5. Bells worn by morris-dancers.
7. Fancy's argument has vaguely to do with the proper uses of things; if it weren't for the arrangements of civil society, everything would be topsyturvy, and we would get all sorts of monstrous combinations.
8. A bird with a wide, flat beak.
9. A crab is a tool used by ropemakers to twist yarn; the point is that no man should fall out with the tools of his trade.
Here the second antimasque of fantasms came forth, which danced.

Fancy proceeded:
Why, this, you will say, was fantastical now,
As the cock and the bull, the whale and the cow;
But vanish away, I have change to present you,
And such as (I hope) will more truly content you:
Behold the gold-haired Hour\(^1\) descending here,
That keeps the gate of heaven, and turns the year,
Already with her sight, how she doth cheer,
And makes another face of things appear.

Here one of the hours descending, the whole scene changed to the Bower of Zephyrus, whilst peace sang, as followeth:

Why look you so, and all turn dumb
To see the opener of the New Year come?
My presence rather should invite
And aid and urge and call to your delight.
The many pleasures that I bring
Are all of youth, of heat, of life, of spring,
And were prepared to warm your blood,
Not fix it thus, as if you statues stood.

**THE CHORUS:** We see, we hear, we feel, we taste,
We smell the change in every flower,
We only wish that all could last,
And be as new still as the hour.

The song ended, wonder spake:

Wonder must speak or break. What is this? Grows
The wealth of Nature here, or Art? It shows
As if Favonius,\(^2\) father of the spring,
Who, in the verdant meads, doth reign sole king,
Had roused him here, and shook his feathers, wet
With purple-swelling nectar; and had let
The sweet and fruitful dew fall on the ground
To force out all the flowers that might be found.
Or a Minerva with her needle had

Th’ enamoured earth with all her riches clad,
And made the downy Zephyr as he flew
Still to be followed with the spring’s best hue.\(^3\)
The gaudy peacock boasts not in his train
So many lights and shadows, nor the rain-

Resolving Iris,\(^4\) when the sun doth court her,
Nor purple pheasant while his aunt\(^5\) doth sport her

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1. Fancy has shown, as in dreams, that decay and disintegration of things which takes places under the aegis of Night and the old year; the Hour now brings forth spring, dawn, and a new era for everyone.
2. Sometimes called Zephyrus, a god of the west wind and hence of spring.
3. Athena or Minerva, though often represented with spear and shield, was a famous needlewoman (witness the story of Arachne), and is here imagined as embroidering the spring.
4. I.e., the rainbow.
5. Doxy mistress; a term from thieve’s slang.
To hear him crow; and with a perched\textsuperscript{6} pride
Wave his discolored neck and purple side.

\begin{quote}
I have not seen the place could more surprise;
\end{quote}

It looks (methinks) like one of nature’s eyes,
Or her whole body set in art. Behold!

\begin{quote}
How the blue bind-weed doth itself enfold
With honeysuckle, and both these entwine
\end{quote}

Themselves with bryony\textsuperscript{7} and jessamine

\begin{quote}
To cast a kind and odoriferous shade!
\end{quote}

\textbf{FANCY:}

How better than they are are all things made
By wonder\textsuperscript{8}! But a while refresh thine eye,
I’ll put thee to thy oftener What and Why?

\textit{Here (to a loud music) the Bower opens, and the masquers discovered, as the glories of the spring.}

\textbf{WONDER again spake:}

Thou wilt indeed; what better change appears?
Whence is it that the air so sudden clears
And all things in a moment turn so mild?
Whose breath or beams have got proud earth with child
Of all the treasures that great Nature’s worth,
And makes her every minute to bring forth?

How comes it winter is so quite forced hence,
And locked up under ground? that every sense
Hath several objects? trees have got their heads,
The fields their coats? that now the shining meads
Do boast the paunce,\textsuperscript{1} the lily, and the rose;

And every flower doth laugh as Zephyr blows?
That seas are now more even than the land?
The rivers run as smoothèd by his hand;
Only their heads are crispèd\textsuperscript{2} by his stroke.

How plays the yearling with his brow scarce broke\textsuperscript{3}
Now in the open grass? and frisking lambs
Make wanton salts\textsuperscript{4} about their dry-sucked dams,
Who to repair their bags do rob the fields?

How is ’t each bough a several\textsuperscript{5} music yields?
The lusty thrrostle, early nightingale

Accord in tune, though vary in their tale?
The chirping swallow, called forth by the sun,
And crested lark doth his division run?
The yellow bees the air with murmur fill?
The finches carol, and the turtles bill?
Whose power is this? What God?

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Lofty.
\item \textsuperscript{7} A wild vine, often credited with magic powers.
\item \textsuperscript{8} The allegorical meaning of Jonson’s characters comes out in a speech like this, which at the same time paves the way for the masque’s climactic compliment.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Unmasked.
\item 1. Pansy.
\item 2. Curled.
\item 3. By budding horns.
\item 4. Leaps.
\item 5. Separate.
\end{itemize}
Behold a king
Whose presence maketh this perpetual spring,
The glories of which spring grow in that bower,
And are the marks and beauties of his power.

To which the choir answered:

'Tis he, 'tis he, and no power else,
That makes all this what Fancy tells;
The founts, the flowers, the birds, the bees,
The herds, the flocks, the grass, the trees,
Do all confess him; but most these
Who call him lord of the four seas,
King of the less and greater isles,6
And all those happy when he smiles.

Advance, his favor calls you to advance,
And do your (this night’s) homage in a dance.

Here they danced their entry, after which they sung again:

Again, again; you cannot be
Of such a true delight too free,
Which who once saw would ever sea;
And if they could the object prize,
Would while it lasts not think to rise,
But wish their bodies were all eyes.

They danced their main dance, after which they sung:

In curious knots and mazes so
The spring at first was taught to go;
And Zephyr when he came to woo
His Flora had their motions too,
And thence did Venus learn to lead
Th’ Idalian brawls,7 and so to tread,
As if the wind, not she, did walk;
Nor pressed a flower, nor bowed a stalk.

They danced with ladies, and the whole revels8 followed; after which aurora appeared (the night and moon descended) and this epilogue followed:

I was not wearier where I lay
By frozen Tithon’s side tonight9

6. James was king of Ireland (“the less”) and England (“the greater isle and laid claim to sovereignty over the “four seas” surrounding England.
7. The dances of Venus on Mt. Ida were legendary in antiquity. “Brawls” had a less rowdy connotation in the 17th century than the word bears today.
8. Procession of masquers.
9. Aurora was the unwilling bride of chilly old Tithonus (who was granted eternal life without the privilege of eternal youth); hence she was eager to come to the morning’s entertainment, and now is reluctant to leave it.
200 Than I am willing now to stay
And be a part of your delight.
   But I am urgéd by the day,
Against my will, to bid you come away.

THE CHOIR:
   They yield to Time, and so must all.
205 As Night to sport, Day doth to action call,
   Which they the rather do obey,
Because the Morn with roses strews the way.

   Here they danced their going off, and ended.

An Ode

   High-spirited friend,
I send nor balms nor cor’sives\(^1\) to your wound,
   Your fate hath found
A gentler and more agile hand to tend
5   The cure of that, which is but corporal;
   And doubtful days (which were named “critical”)
   Have made their fairest flight,
   And now are out of sight.
   Yet doth some wholesome physic for the mind
   Wrapped in this paper lie,\(^2\)
   Which in the taking if you mis-apply,
   You are unkind.

   Your covetous hand,
   Happy in that fair honor it hath gained,
10   Must now be reined.
   True valor doth her own renown command
   In one full action; nor have you now more
   To do, than be a husband\(^3\) of that store.
   Think but how dear you bought
   This same which you have caught,
15   Such thoughts will make you more in love with truth.
   ’Tis wisdom, and that high,
   For men to use their fortune reverently,
   Even in youth.

1640

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1. Balms would be soothing, as “cor’sives” (corrosives) would be irritating medications.
2. The situation is that the friend has been wounded in a duel. Now that the critical days are past, the lady over whom it was fought (“a gentler and more agile hand”) will cure the wounded warrior’s body. Jonson has a medication (“physic”) for his mind.
To William Camden

Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe
All that I am in arts, all that I know
(How nothing’s that!), to whom my country owes
The great renown and name wherewith she goes;²
Than thee the age sees not that thing more grave,
More high, more holy, that she more would crave.
What name, what skill, what faith hast thou in things!
What sight in searching the most antique springs!
What weight and what authority in thy speech!
Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach.³
Pardon free truth and let thy modesty,
Which conquers all, be once o’ercome by thee.
Many of thine⁴ this better could than I;
But for their powers, accept my piety.

1616

On Don Surly

Don Surly, to aspire¹ the glorious name
Of a great man, and to be thought the same,
Makes serious use of all great trade² he knows.
He speaks to men with a Rhinocerotes’ nose,²
Which he thinks great; and so reads verses too,
And that is done as he saw great men do.
He has timpanies³ of business in his face,
And can forget men’s names with a great grace.
He will both argue and discourse in oaths,
Both which are great; and laugh at ill-made clothes—
That’s greater yet—to cry his own up neat.
He doth, at meals, alone his pheasant eat,
Which is main greatness; and at his still board⁴
He drinks to no man; that’s, too, like a lord.
He keeps another’s wife, which is a spice⁵
Of solemn greatness. And he dares, at dice,
Blaspheme God greatly, or some poor hind⁶ beat
That breathes in his dog’s way; and this is great.
Nay more, for greatness’ sake, he will be one
May hear my epigrams, but like of none.
Surly, use other arts; these only can
Style thee a most great fool, but no great man.

1616

1. Camden, a distinguished scholar, had been Jonson’s teacher at Westminster School.
2. Camden’s antiquarian studies of his native land in Britannia (1586) and Remains of a Greater Work Concerning Britain (1605) ran into several editions and were translated abroad.
3. I.e., man can scarcely ask a question to which you don’t know the answer.
1. Attain. “Don” is a Spanish title, and the Spanish were thought to have pompous manners.
2. I.e., with his nose tilted up like a rhinoceros.
3. Swellings, tumors—a figure for pride.
4. I.e., his solitary dinner table.
In the Person of Womankind
(In Defense of their Inconstancy)

Hang up those dull and envious fools
That talk abroad of woman’s change;
We were not bred to sit on stools,
Our proper virtue is to range:
Take that away, you take our lives,
We are no women then, but wives.

Such as in valor would excel
Do change, though man, and often fight,
Which we in love must do as well
If ever we will love aright.

The frequent varying of the deed
Is that which doth perfection breed.

Nor is ’t inconstancy to change
For what is better, or to make
(By searching) what before was strange
Familiar for the use’s sake.
The good from bad is not descried
But as ’tis often vexed and tried.

And this profession of a store
In love doth not alone help forth
Our pleasure, but preserves us more
From being forsaken than doth worth:
For were the worthiest woman cursed
To love one man, he’d leave her first.

1640–41

Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
Yet slower, yet, O faintly, gentle springs!
List to the heavy part the music bears:
Woe weeps out her division, when she sings.

Droop herbs and flowers;
Fall grief in showers;
Our beauties are not ours.
O, I could still,
Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
Drop, drop, drop, drop,
Since nature’s pride is now a withered daffodil.

1600

1. Examined severely.
2. Not only contribute to. “Store”: abundance.

1. From the satiric comedy Cynthia’s Revels. The play deals with the sin of self-love, and this lyric is a lament sung by Echo for Narcissus, who was entranced by his own reflection and ultimately transformed into a flower.
2. Grief at parting, but also a rapid melodic passage of music.
Epitaph on Elizabeth, L. H.¹

Wouldst thou hear what man can say
In a little? Reader, stay.
Underneath this stone doth lie
As much beauty as could die;
Which in life did harbor give
To more virtue than doth live.
If at all she had a fault,
Leave it buried in this vault.
One name was Elizabeth;
Th’ other, let it sleep with death:
Fitter, where it died, to tell,
Than that it lived at all. Farewell!

A Celebration of Charis in Ten Lyric Pieces¹

5. His Discourse with Cupid

Noblest Charis, you that are
Both my fortune and my star,
And do govern more my blood
Than the various² moon the flood!
Hear what late discourse of you
Love and I have had, and true.
'Mongst my Muses finding me,
Where he chanced your name to see
Set, and to this softer strain,
"Sure," said he, "if I have brain,
This, here sung, can be no other
By description but my mother!³
So hath Homer praised her hair;
So Anacreon drawn the air
Of her face, and made to rise,
Just above her sparkling eyes,
Both her brows, bent like my bow.
By her looks I do her know,
Which you call my shafts. And see!
Such my mother’s blushes be,
As the bath your verse discloses
In her cheeks, of milk and roses,
Such as oft I wanton in!
And, above her even chin,
Have you placed the bank of kisses,

¹ The subject of this epitaph has not been identified; her full name (though we can guess that the "L." probably stood for “Lady”) has slept with death.
² The Greek word charis, from which Jonson’s lady takes her name, means “grace” or “loveliness”; the three Graces are Charites.
³ The mother of Cupid is generally called Aphrodite or Venus, but as the wife of Hephaestus, she is named Charis in Iliad 18.
Where, you say, men gather blisses,
    Ripened with a breath more sweet
Than when flowers and west winds meet.
    Nay, her white and polished neck,
With the lace that doth it deck,
    Is my mother's! Hearts of slain
Lovers made into a chain!
And between each rising breast,
    Lies the valley called my nest,
Where I sit and proyn4 my wings
After flight, and put new stings
To my shafts! Her very name
    With my mother's is the same."
"I confess all," I replied,
"And the glass hangs by her side,
    And the girdle 'bout her waist,
All is Venus, save unchaste.5
But alas, thou seest the least
Of her good, who is the best
Of her sex; but could'st thou, Love,
Call to mind the forms that strove
For the apple, and those three
Make in one, the same were she,6
For this beauty yet doth hide
Something more than thou hast spied;
    Outward grace weak love beguiles.
She is Venus when she smiles,
But she's Juno when she walks,
And Minerva when she talks."

6. Claiming a Second Kiss by Desert

Charis, guess, and do not miss,
Since I drew a morning kiss
From your lips, and sucked an air
Thence, as sweet as you are fair,
    What my Muse and I have done:
Whether we have lost or won,
If by us the odds were laid
That the bride (allowed a maid)
Looked not half so fresh and fair,
    With th' advantage of her hair
And her jewels, to the view
Of th'assembly, as did you!
    Or that, did you sit or walk,
You were more the eye and talk
Of the court today, than all

4. Preen.
5. I.e., the modern mistress is like Venus, but chaste. Venus's famous girdle (cestus) made its wearer irresistible.
6. Paris had to choose which of three goddesses—of love, marriage, and wisdom—should be awarded a golden apple inscribed “To the fairest”; but in Charis he could have had all three in a single person.
Else that glistered in Whitehall;
So as those that had your sight?
Wished the bride were changed tonight,
And did think such rites were due
To no other Grace but you!
    Or, if you did move tonight
In the dances, with what spite
Of your peers you were beheld,
That at every motion swelled
So to see a lady tread
As might all the Graces lead,
And was worthy, being so seen,
To be envied of the queen.
Or if you would yet have stayed,
Whether any would upbraid
To himself his loss of time;
Or have charged his sight of crime,
To have left all sight for you.
    Guess of these, which is the true;
And if such a verse as this
May not claim another kiss.

1640–41

Though I Am Young¹

Though I am young and cannot tell
    Either what Death or Love is well,
Yet I have heard they both bear darts,
    And both do aim at human hearts.
And then again, I have been told
    Love wounds with heat, as Death with cold;
So that I fear they do but bring
    Extremes to touch, and mean one thing.

As in a ruin we it call
    One thing to be blown up or fall;
Or to our end like way may have
    By a flash of lightning or a wave;
So Love’s inflamed shaft or brand
    May kill as soon as Death’s cold hand;
Except² Love’s fires the virtue have
    To fright the frost out of the grave.

1640–41

1. This song is sung in The Sad Shepherd, by Karolin; the pastoral simplicity of his character is caught in the naive monosyllables of the poem.
2. Unless.
Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue

In the opening pages of his famous study, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), Jacob Burckhardt eloquently describes the many pageants, tourneys, triumphs, and festal displays that were a striking feature of courtly and urban life in those days. England too, and as late as the first third of the seventeenth century, fostered these semidramatic ceremonials, under the title of masques. In its whole social and literary structure the masque stood quite apart from the stage play. It was performed by noble amateurs, not professional actors, and performed, as a rule, only once, perhaps as the climax of “revels” that were tied strictly to a calendar date. The aim of the masque was not to make money, but to lose it, in great quantities and with maximum splendor. The masque did not try to create or maintain an intact illusion by separating the audience sharply from the action; rather, it mingled the audience offstage with the performers onstage, either inviting the audience to join the dance (as in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*) or leading the players off the stage in an act of homage or deference to the chief person in the audience (as in Milton’s *Comus*). The masque had many elements of an audience-participation game. Especially when produced at court, it made use of elaborate and expensive “machinery”—sets far more intricate than any the playhouses could afford. It involved many musicians, special dancers, and extravagant costumes; it jumbled the heraldic and mythical figures together in strange profusion; it was both comic and serious, and anything but realistic. The three constant elements of the masque were rich spectacle (with both song and dance), moral allegory, and courtly compliment. In weaving these traditional ingredients together, Jonson, with his special gifts of learning, fantasy, and lucid eloquence, showed particular mastery. He wrote nearly thirty masques in all, of which *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* may be taken as typical.

The reader should not look for too much narrative logic in Jonson’s masque, which shifts scenes and characters not according to the sequences of a story but to provide good “production numbers.” *Comus* appears at the beginning of the masque, but only to sing a song and do a wild dance with his “crew.” Hercules is present, because he once had to make a hard choice between pleasure and virtue; but as this choice is no longer necessary, he soon fades into the role of a spectator. There is another grotesque dance (an “antimasque” or “antic masque”) of pygmies. This comic dance serves to prepare for, and contrast with, the elegant and polished dances performed by the gentry at the end of the masque; its specific form in Jonson’s masque was probably determined by the presence of some dwarfs among the court jesters who wanted a part in the action. Finally, the true masquers take possession of the stage; they are a group of court lords, led by Prince Charles, richly dressed and wearing masks, but obviously recognizable in their own persons. They perform a series of intricate figures, descend into the audience to invite forth their ladies, and perform one other formal dance before the festivities become general.

These last dances of the masque are all under the guidance of Daedalus, the master craftsman of ancient Greece, who is shown to be capable of reconciling pleasure with virtue, life with artifice, and the court with its own fantastic mirror image in the masque. If Hercules in the masque reminds us of Jonson himself (teased by spiteful, but impotent, pygmies), the figure of Daedalus can scarcely fail to suggest Jonson’s partner in masque making, Inigo Jones. Jones was a student of Continental art and architecture, a practicing architect under the special influence of Palladio, the Italian master, and an adviser to many aristocratic art collectors; in his own line, he was quite as remarkable and influential a man as Jonson himself. The two men quarreled violently and permanently in later years; but Jones was far and away the most sophisticated stage designer and deviser of stage effects in his time. We know he was responsible for the pro-
duction of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, and Jonson would have enjoyed pay-
ing this elegant tribute to him as Daedalus, the fabulous artificer.

**Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue**

A MASQUE. AS IT WAS PRESENTED AT COURT BEFORE KING JAMES. 1618.

The scene was the mountain Atlas, who had his top ending in the figure of an old
man, his head and beard all hoary and frost as if his shoulders were covered with
snow; the rest wood and rock. A grove of ivy at his feet, out of which, to a wild
music of cymbals, flutes, and tabors, is brought forth Comus,¹ the god of cheer, or
the belly, riding in triumph, his head crowned with roses and other flowers, his hair
curled; they that wait upon him crowned with ivy, their javelins done about with
it; one of them going with Hercules his bowl bare before him, while the rest
presented him with this

**HYMN**

Room, room! make room for the bouncing belly,
First father of sauce, and deviser of jelly;
Prime master of arts, and the giver of wit,
That found out the excellent engine, the spit,
The plow and the flail, the mill and the hopper,
The hutch and the bolter, the furnace and copper,
The oven, the bavin, the mawkin, the peel,
The hearth and the range, the dog and the wheel.²
He, he first invented the hogshead and tun,
The gimlet and vice, too, and taught them to run.
And since, with the funnel, an Hippocras bag
He’s made of himself, that now he cries swag.³
Which shows, though the pleasure be but of four inches,
Yet he is a weasel, the gullet that pinches,
Of any delight, and not spares from the back
Whatever to make of the belly a sack.⁴
Hail, hail, plump paunch! O the founder of taste
For fresh meats, or powdered, or pickle, or paste;
Devourer of broiled, baked, roasted, or sod,⁵
And emptier of cups, be they even or odd;
All which have now made thee so wide i’ the waist
As scarce with no pudding thou art to be laced;
But eating and drinking until thou dost nod,
Thou breakst all thy girdles, and breakst forth a god.

1. Comus is the traditional classical and Renais-
sance figure of sensual indulgence; many of his
properties here (ivy, wild music, and the flowing
bowl) suggest his kinship with Dionysus. The bowl
of Hercules (below), given him by the Sun-god,
was so big that the hero sailed across the ocean in
it. At the root of the masque is the ancient story
that early in his life Hercules had to choose
between a life of easy pleasure and one of strenu-
ous virtue. But now, under King James, the two
principles are at last going to be reconciled.
2. A dog harnessed to a wheel served to keep a
roasting spit turning. “Mill,” “hopper,” and “hutch”
(bin) were used in grinding grain. “Bavin,”
“mawkin,” and “peel” are different sorts of appara-
tus used in a bake shop.
3. To “cry swag” is to reveal a drooping, pendulous
belly. “Gimlet” and “vice” are tools for tapping a
keg. A “Hippocras bag” is a cloth filter for clearing
wine.
4. The gullet, though only four inches long, is a
harsh master; it imposes the belly’s great weight on
the back.
5. Boiled.
To this, the Bowl-bearer.

Do you hear, my friends? to whom did you sing all this now? Pardon me only that I ask you, for I do not look for an answer; I'll answer myself. I know it is now such a time as the Saturnals\(^6\) for all the world, that every man stands under the eaves of his own hat and sings what pleases him; that's the right and the liberty of it. Now you sing of god Comus here, the Belly-god. I say it is well, and I say it is not well. It is well as it is a ballad, and the belly worthy of it, I must needs say, an 'twere forty yards of ballad more—as much ballad as tripe. But when the belly is not edified by it, it is not well; for where did you ever read or hear that the belly had any ears? Come, never pump for an answer, for you are defeated. Our fellow Hunger there, that was as ancient a retainer to the belly as any of us, was turned away for being unseasonable—not unreasonable, but unseasonable—and now is he (poor thin-gut) fain to get his living with teaching of starlings magpies, parrots, and jackdaws, those things he would have taught the belly. Beware of dealing with the belly; the belly will not be talked to, especially when he is full. Then there is no venturing upon Venter;\(^7\) he will blow you all up; he will thunder indeed, ha: some in derision call him the father of farts. But I say he was the first inventor of great ordnance, and taught us to discharge them on festival days. Would we had a fit feast for him, 'faith, to show his activity: I would have something now fetched in to please his five senses, the throat; or the two sense, the eyes. Pardon me for my two senses; for I that carry Hercules' bowl in the service may see double by my place, for I have drunk like a frog today. I would have a tun\(^8\) now brought in to dance, and so many bottles about him. Ha! You look as if you would make a problem of this. Do you see? Do you see? a problem: why bottles? and why a tun? and why a tun and why bottles to dance? I say that men that drink hard and serve the belly in any place of quality (as The Jovial Tinkers, or The Lusty Kindred\(^9\)) are living measures of drink, and can transform themselves, and do every day, to bottles or tuns when they please; and when they have done all they can, they are, as I say again (for I think I said somewhat like it afore) but moving measures of drink; and there is a piece in the cellar can hold more than all they. This will I make good if it please our new god but to give a nod; for the belly does all by signs, and I am all for the belly, the truest clock in the world to go by.

Here the first antimasque\(^1\) [danced by men in the shape of bottles, tuns, etc.], after which,

\(^{6}\) The Roman Saturnalia, which came about the end of the year, were a time of license; Jonson compares them with the Twelfth Night festivities in the English court, at which this masque was produced.

\(^{7}\) Belly, in Latin.

\(^{8}\) Barrel.

\(^{9}\) These seem to be names of taverns.

1. A group of dancers, grotesquely or comically dressed, who served to contrast with the main group of masquers.

2. Abundance. Antaeus, an earth-born giant whom Hercules destroyed in the course of his labors. As his favored sport was wrestling, and he grew stronger every time he touched the ground, Hercules had to kill him by holding him in the air until he died.
To work an expiation first? and then
(Help, Virtue!) these are sponges and not men.
Bottles? mere vessels? half a tun of paunch?
How? and the other half thrust forth in haunch?
Whose feast? the belly’s! Comus’! and my cup
Brought in to fill the drunken orgies up
And here abused! that was the crowned reward
Of thirsty heroes after labor hard!
Burdens and shames of nature, perish, die;
For yet you never lived, but in the sty
Of vice have wallowed, and in that swine’s strife
Been buried under the offense of life.
Go, reel and fall under the load you make,
Till your swoll’n bowels burst with what you take.
Can this be pleasure, to extinguish man?
Or so quite change him in his figure? Can
The belly love his pain, and be content
With no delight but what’s a punishment?
These monsters plague themselves, and fitly, too,
For they do suffer what and all they do.
But here must be no shelter, nor no shroud
For such: sink grove, or vanish into cloud!

At this the whole grove vanished, and the whole music was discovered, sitting at the foot of the mountain, with Pleasure and Virtue seated above them. The choir invited Hercules to rest with this

**SONG**

Great friend and servant of the good,
Let cool awhile thy heated blood,
And from thy mighty labor cease.

Lie down, lie down,
And give thy troubled spirits peace,
Whilst Virtue, for whose sake
Thou dost this godlike travail take,

May of the choicest herbage make,
Here on this mountain bred,
A crown, a crown
For thy immortal head.

**Here Hercules being laid down at their feet, the second antimasque, which was of pygmies, appeared.**

1st pygmy. Antaeus dead and Hercules yet live!

Where is this Hercules? What would I give
To meet him now? Meet him? nay three such other,
If they had hand in murder of our brother!
With three? with four, with ten, nay, with as many

---

3. I.e., has earth, to compensate for the inhumanity of her monstrous son Antaeus, produced other monsters, but this time of indulgence (Comus and his companions)?
As the name yields! Pray anger there be any
Whereon to feed my just revenge, and soon!
How shall I kill him? Hurl him against the moon,
And break him in small portions! Give to Greece
His brain, and every tract of earth a piece!

2nd Pygmy. He is yonder.
1st Pygmy. Where?
3rd Pygmy. At the hill foot, asleep.
1st Pygmy. Let one go steal his club.
2nd Pygmy. My charge; I'll creep.
4th Pygmy. He's ours.
1st Pygmy. Yes, peace.
3rd Pygmy. Triumph, we have him, boy.
4th Pygmy. Sure, sure, he's sure.
1st Pygmy. Come, let us dance for joy.

At the end of their dance they thought to surprise him, when suddenly, being
awaked by the music, he roused himself, and they all ran into holes.

SONG

Choir. Wake, Hercules, awake: but heave up thy black eye,
'Tis only asked from thee to look and these will die,
Or fly.
Already they are fled,
Whom scorn had else left dead.

At which Mercury descended from the hill with a garland of poplar to crown him.

Mercury. Rest still, thou active friend of Virtue: these
Should not disturb the peace of Hercules.
Earth's worms and honor's dwarfs, at too great odds,
Prove or provoke the issue of the gods.
See here a crown the aged hill hath sent thee,
My grandsire Atlas, he that did present thee
With the best sheep that in his fold were found,
Or golden fruit in the Hesperian ground,
For rescuing his fair daughters, then the prey
Of a rude pirate, as thou cam'st this way;
And taught thee all the learning of the sphere,
And how, like him, thou might'st the heavens up-bear,
As that thy labor's virtuous recompense.6
He, though a mountain now, hath yet the sense
Of thanking thee for more, thou being still
Constant to goodness, guardian of the hill;
Antaeus, by thee suffocated here,

5. Pygmies and giants, minimals and maximals,
are disproportioned offspring of earth, therefore
brothers to one another. The pygmies don't know
how many Hercules-figures there are, because so
many tales were told about the hero that even Re-
naissance mythographers were forced to think
there must have been several persons of that name.

6. When Hercules was seeking the golden apples
of the Hesperides, he took for a while Atlas's job of
holding up the heavens, so the giant could wade
out in the ocean and get the apples. Atlas himself
was originally an astronomer and thus knew “all
the learning of the sphere.”
And the voluptuous Comus, god of cheer,
Beat from his grove, and that defaced. But now
The time's arrived that Atlas told thee of: how
By unaltered law, and working of the stars,
There should be a cessation of all jars.
'Twixt Virtue and her noted opposite,
Pleasure; that both should meet here in the sight
Of Hesperus, the glory of the west,
The brightest star, that from his burning crest
Lights all on this side the Atlantic seas
As far as to thy pillars, Hercules.
See where he shines, Justice and Wisdom placed
About his throne, and those with Honor graced,
Beauty and Love! It is not with his brother
Bearing the world, but ruling such another
Is his renown. Pleasure, for his delight
Is reconciled to Virtue, and this night
Virtue brings forth twelve princes have been bred
In this rough mountain and near Atlas’ head,
The hill of knowledge; one and chief of whom
Of the bright race of Hesperus is come,
Who shall in time the same that he is be,
And now is only a less light than he.
These now she trusts with Pleasure, and to these
She gives an entrance to the Hesperides,
Fair Beauty’s garden; neither can she fear
They should grow soft or wax effeminate here,
Since in her sight and by her charge all’s done,
Pleasure the servant, Virtue looking on.

Here the whole choir of music called the twelve masquers forth from the lap of the mountain, which then opened with this

SONG
Ope, agèd Atlas, open then thy lap,
And from thy beamy bosom strike a light,
That men may read in thy mysterious map
All lines
And signs
Of royal education and the right.
See how they come and show,
That are but born to know.
Descend,
Descend,

7. Quarrels.
8. Jonson followed the mythographers in making Hesperus a brother of Atlas; as the evening star and guardian of the western isles, he identifies easily with King James.
9. The “pillars of Hercules” are the Strait of Gibraltar.
1. As Hesperus, King James does not hold up the sky, like his brother Atlas, but rules over a special
world of his own, England.
2. Tradition has it that Prince Charles was one of the masquers; he was just eighteen at the time, and it was his first masque.
3. Having grown up inside Atlas itself, so that virtue comes naturally to them, the masquers can now be allowed to mingle freely with the daughters of Hesperus, in pursuit of pleasure.
Though pleasure lead,
Fear not to follow:
They who are bred
Within the hill
Of skill
May safely tread
What path they will,
No ground of good is hollow.

In their descent from the hill Daedalus came down before them, of whom Hercules questioned Mercury.

HERCULES. But Hermes, stay a little, let me pause:
Who’s this that leads?

MERCURY. A guide that gives them laws
To all their motions: Daedalus the wise.

HERCULES. And doth in sacred harmony comprise
His precepts?

MERCURY. Yes.
HERCULES. They may securely prove, Then, any labyrinth, though it be of love.

Here, while they put themselves in form, Daedalus had his first

SONG
Come on, come on! and where you go,
So interweave the curious knot
As ev’n th’ observer scarce may know
Which lines are Pleasure’s and which not.

First, figure out the doubtful way
At which awhile all youth should stay,
Where she and Virtue did contend
Which should have Hercules to friend.

Then, as all actions of mankind
Are but a labyrinth or maze,
So let your dances be entwined,
Yet not perplex men unto gaze;

But measured, and so numerous too,
As men may read each act you do,
And when they see the graces meet,
Admire the wisdom of your feet.

4. Daedalus, the mythical Greek maker of mazes, acts here as master of the intricate dance steps that interweave pleasure with virtue under the guidance of art. Hercules questions Mercury to identify for the audience a personage whom they might not recognize.

5. Experience.

6. The dancers are to “figure out” the doubtful moment of Hercules’ choice in the sense of illustrating it; they are beyond the occasion of making it themselves, having already reconciled pleasure with virtue.
For dancing is an exercise  
Not only shows the mover’s wit,  
But maketh the beholder wise,  
As he hath power to rise to it.

The first dance.

After which Daedalus again.

song 2

O more, and more! this was so well  
As praise wants half his voice to tell;  
Again yourselves compose;  
And now put all the aptness on  
Of figure, that proportion  
Or color can disclose.

That if those silent arts were lost,  
Design and picture, they might boast  
From you a newer ground;  
Instructed to the height’ning sense  
Of dignity and reverence  
In your true motions found:

Begin, begin; for look, the fair  
Do longing listen to what air  
You form your second touch;  
That they may vent their murmuring hymns  
Just to the tune you move your limbs,  
And wish their own were such.  
Make haste, make haste, for this  
The labyrinth of beauty is.

The second dance.

That ended, Daedalus.

song 3

It follows now you are to prove  
The subtlest maze of all, that’s love,  
And if you stay too long,  
The fair will think you do ’em wrong.

Go choose among—but with a mind  
As gentle as the stroking wind  
Runs o’er the gentler flowers.

7. Put on the “aptness of figure,” i.e., significance of expression, of which art (proportion or color) is capable; thus, if design and picture (the silent arts) were lost, they could be rebuilt out of the dance alone.
8. Perhaps “set of figures.” The three dances were performed to three different tunes; but Daedalus is addressing the dancers, not the musicians.
And so let all your actions smile
As if they meant not to beguile
The ladies, but the hours.

Grace, laughter, and discourse may meet,
And yet the beauty not go less:
For what is noble should be sweet,
But not dissolved in wantonness.

Will you that I give the law
To all your sport, and sum it?
It should be such should envy draw,
But ever overcome it.

Here they danced with the ladies, and the whole revels followed; which ended, Mercury called to Daedalus in this following speech, which was after repeated in song by two trebles, two tenors, a bass, and the whole chorus.

SONG 4

An eye of looking back were well,
Or any murmur that would tell
Your thoughts, how you were sent
And went,
To walk with Pleasure, not to dwell.

These, these are hours by Virtue spared
Herself, she being her own reward,
But she will have you know
That though
Her sports be soft, her life is hard.

You must return unto the hill,
And there advance
With labor, and inhabit still
That height and crown
From whence you ever may look down
Upon triumphant Chance.

She, she it is, in darkness shines.
'Tis she that still herself refines
By her own light, to every eye
More seen, more known when Vice stands by.
And though a stranger here on earth,
In heaven she hath her right of birth.
There, there is Virtue's seat,
Strive to keep her your own;
'Tis only she can make you great,
Though place1 here make you known.

9. Group of onlookers and courtiers.
1. High rank or position.
After which, they danced their last dance, and returned into the scene, which closed and was a mountain again as before.

The End.

This pleased the king so well, as he would see it again; when it was presented with these additions.²

¹618 ¹640–41

² The “additions” were another short masque, For the Honor of Wales. Masques were not usually repeated; in this instance, the second showing seems to have been an effort to get it right.