‘To strike the ear of time’: Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster* and the temporality of art

The first scene of Ben Jonson’s play *Poetaster or The Arraignment*, first performed in 1601 and published in quarto in 1602, begins with a writer reading aloud to himself the final lines of an elegy he has just finished composing: ‘“Then, when this body falls in funeral fire, / My name shall live, and my best part aspire.” / It shall go so’.[1] The writer is the great erotic poet of Augustan Rome, Ovid. The lines are the last two of the elegy that concludes Book 1 of his *Amores* and represent the culmination of its reflections upon the ability of poetry to grant immortality to poets. These lines appear, however, in a version based on a translation by Christopher Marlowe who had died eight years before the play was performed. The classical poet is, in effect, quoting his Elizabethan descendant. And yet the lines are not entirely Marlowe’s either: Jonson has subtly revised Marlowe’s translation. That revision draws out the poem’s relevance to Jonson’s situation as a writer attempting to leave his writing to posterity too. This is, then, a jarring opening. It signals the play’s self-reflexive concern with temporality and its use of anachronism as a creative strategy. *Poetaster* is able not only to bring ancient Rome onto the Renaissance stage but also to export the Elizabethan present into the classical past. More specifically, the opening highlights *Poetaster*’s interest in exploring the varying relations among writers within and across different eras. What constitutes the ‘time’ of the writer becomes, in this play, a complex question.

Set in Augustan Rome, *Poetaster* features Horace and Virgil as well as Ovid among its cast of characters. It also gives us two poetasters: the self-proclaimed scholar and satirist Crispinus and the ‘play-dresser’ Demetrius (a ‘Poetaster’ is ‘an inferior poet; a writer of poor or trashy verse; a mere versifier’ and the *OED* credits Jonson’s *Cynthia’s Revels* (1601) with its first usage). The play culminates in Augustus Caesar honouring Horace and Virgil, and presiding over the trial and punishment of the two poetasters. The events and characters bear

obvious similarities to situations and individuals in late Elizabethan London. With Crispinus and Demetrius evoking John Marston and Thomas Dekker, the play was in part a contribution to the so-called 'war of the theatres'.[2] Among subsequent commentators its literary significance has often been seen in relation to this specific cultural context. The 'serious purpose' of the play's classicism was for a long time seen as separate from, even at odds with, this combative engagement with rival playwrights. More recent critics have tended to accept the view articulated by Tom Cain in his 1995 edition that these aspects are 'interdependent'.[3] Yet studies of the play have still tended to fall into two groups: those more concerned with the play's engagement with the classical past and those more concerned with its engagement with the Elizabethan present.[4]

Poetaster is, however, intrinsically concerned with the relationship between the past and the present, with what understandings of that relationship mean for contemporary drama, and with the very terms in which Jonson's authorial identity might be articulated. As Stephen Guy-Bray has recently highlighted, other plays of this period too set up an explicit dialogue between a source or sources from an earlier period and their own reworking of that material. He puts *Poetaster* alongside Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and Shakespeare and George Wilkins's *Pericles* as works that 'make the question of source material and how it is adapted for a play into a major feature of their theatre'. Yet Jonson's approach to such thematised adaptation is distinctive: as Guy-Bray acknowledges, *Poetaster* has no direct source; its source is 'Latin poetry and the social context in which it was written'.[5] The play's self-conscious exploration of literary adaptation is only part of its consideration of the relationship between past and present people, and past and present times. By reflecting on how both writers and rulers respond to literary sources *Poetaster* raises wider ethical, social, and political questions about how the present does or should engage with the past.

Moreover, in exploring how the Elizabethan world relates to the classical, *Poetaster* implicitly addresses the question – which, as is well-recognised, was vital to Jonson – of how future readers will respond to his work and remember him as a writer.[6] Guy-Bray maintains that *Poetaster*, along with *Dido* and *Pericles*, 'foregrounds the differences between the relatively low status genre of drama and the higher status genre of poetry'.[7] Joseph Loewenstein has suggested that Jonson's career is characterised by the 'enormous tension between the popular playwright and the coterie neoclassicist', having taken as its model 'the polarities of Marlowe's career'.[8] Patrick Cheney has further explored the model of the 'poet-playwright' in relation to Marlowe and Shakespeare.[9] Yet *Poetaster* highlights how Jonson himself attempted to resolve these tensions, using Ovid and building on Marlowe not to claim the dual identity of 'poet-playwright' but to challenge some of the distinctions between neoclassical poetry and the kind of drama he was writing. In this way, Jonson sought to raise drama's status and to suggest that the (good) writer of plays *is* a poet.[10]

The present article argues, then, that this undervalued play reveals a sophisticated conception of the temporality of art, which was central to Jonson's self-construction as a writer, and which has been occluded by critical tendencies to see his works only in terms of a backward-looking classicism or a timebound topicality. We begin by considering how various aspects of the play's dramaturgy destabilise any simple understanding of the classical past's distance from the Elizabethan present, unsettling the audience and establishing a framework for the more complicated ideas about time and art it goes on to present. The next section centres on how Jonson uses Ovid's elegy to explore the relations between poets across time, to begin to write himself into his play, and to challenge some of the distinctions between poetry and drama. The article then considers in more detail how *Poetaster* self-reflexively treats different kinds of adaptation and reception of literary sources – translation, imitation, plagiarism, and even censorship – as metaphors for wider questions about the

present's engagement with the past. Finally, the article draws out the significant insights that the play gives us into Jonson's understanding of his own relationship to posterity. *Poetaster* was, as we shall see, key in helping to establish the idea that the popular dramatist might be a serious *author*, or even *poet*, engaging in dialogue with the great writers of the past, and creating *art* that would illuminate the present and last into the future.

'The present state': *Poetaster* in its Elizabethan moment

Poetaster's status as a piece of theatre and manner of engagement with its contemporary moment is signalled – and problematised – from the start. The play begins with an Induction in which Envy appears on stage and tells the audience that she hopes

> To blast your pleasures and destroy your sports
> With wrestings, comments, applications,
> Spy-like suggestions, privy whisperings,
> And thousand such promoting sleights as these. (23-6)

Envy is a figure for the audience member who would make dangerous report of libellous material in the play.[11] She is, however, horrified to discover that the play is set in Rome, asking herself in despair 'How might I force this to the present state?' (34). The implication is that the temporal and geographical distance separates the play from the political present of Jonson and his audience. The further implication is that any spectator accusing the play of direct topical comment is distorting it to serve his or her own purposes. Jonson is here, as elsewhere, invoking a familiar distinction between libel – accusations of which he is attempting to pre-empt – and satire, which the play celebrates as a literary form.[12] Near the end Jonson has the elevated figure of Virgil endorse the view of satire that the play as a

whole upholds. It is not satire that hurts the state, Virgil explains as he defends Horace, 'But the sinister application/Of the malicious, ignorant, and base/Interpreter' (5.3.120-2).

This warning against 'application' is, of course, to some extent disingenuous in the context of this play. As other critics have explored, *Poetaster* resonates with current debates, not least about satire, censorship, and free speech.[13] It is also open to being interpreted as commenting on the trial of the Earl of Essex, which had taken place in February 1601; whether or how far Jonson deliberately courts such interpretation remains a matter of critical disagreement.[14] Moreover, the identification of Crispinus and Demetrius with Jonson's rival playwrights is made obvious. Crispinus is even made to speak words from Marston's works. One of his first lines in the play, for example, is the rather absurd 'I am most strenuously well' (2.1.11), the first recorded appearance of 'strenuous' being in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, first performed shortly before *Poetaster*.[15] In Act five Jonson's play stages a reading of a poem by Crispinus full of such words (5.3.232-50) and then a 'purge' in which many of them are vomited up (5.3.413-64). Crispinus and Demetrius also wear distinctive costumes, commented upon in the dialogue: Crispinus has an 'embroidered hat' with an 'ash coloured feather' (3.3.1-2) and Demetrius a cloak covering a 'decayed' doublet (3.4.258-60). These costumes seem designed to make the two even more readily recognisable as Jonson's rival playwrights.

Yet these pointedly Elizabethan details of language and dress in a Roman play would also elicit what Cain terms 'a powerful synchronic effect'.[16] Other Roman plays in this period may also have been performed in an anachronistic mixture of Roman and early modern dress, but the reasons for doing so may have been practical rather than conceptual or thematic.[17] *Poetaster* is unusual in how it draws attention to the Elizabethan garments of its characters – and not only Crispinus and Demetrius. In the first scene Ovid is told to put on his 'gown and cap' (1.1.5), the attire of an English, not a Roman, student.[18] These foregrounded modern

costumes, like the emphatically modern language spoken by Crispinus, carefully create the effect not just of synchronicity but of temporal instability. That effect may have been heightened by the fact that the early performances took place at the Blackfriars, not an outdoor playhouse such as the Globe with its echoes of the Roman amphitheatre. Moreover, the players were a children's company (the Children of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel) creating an obvious disjunction between actors and characters. All of these features – the incorporation into the dialogue of words that must have struck early audiences as novel, the anachronistic and in some cases personalised costumes, and the incongruous playing space and performers – continually confront the audience with a collision between the Roman and the Elizabethan, unsettling any secure sense of distance and proximity.

This is the dramatic context within which Ovid appears on stage and reads aloud an elegy addressed to the figure we met in the Induction: 'Envy, why twitt'st thou me my time's spent ill' (1.1.37). That character had appeared to be part of the play's moment of production, a fictionalised member of its Elizabethan audience. Now Ovid, from his study in Augustan Rome, seems to respond to this figure. For Loewenstein, the poem thus 're-enacts the play's preliminaries'.[19] More than a re-enactment, however, this is a structural and temporal disruption that allows Ovid to speak back – or rather forward – to the Elizabethan theatre audience represented by Envy in the Induction and, through this elegy, aligned with its precursors in Rome. This disruption establishes an idea key to the play: as we remember and interpret the past so the past anticipates and addresses us.

Moreover, while Ovid in effect quotes himself, other Augustan characters draw on later Roman poets, particularly Juvenal and Martial (both of whom were born in the middle of the first century A.D., after the deaths of all of the play's major characters). As he agrees with Virgil's defence of satire in the final scene, for example, Caesar states that he considers it 'A most dishonest practice in that man / Will seem too witty in another's work' (5.3.126-7).

This is one of several usages in the play of Martial's preface to his epigrams; here the corresponding lines are 'improbe facit qui in alieno libro ingeniosus est [it is a shameless business when anyone exercises his ingenuity on another man's book]').[20] The effect that Jonson creates is of Caesar quoting Martial, as though he has read the preface and recognised its wisdom. Of course Jonson uses poetic licence in his handling of historical chronology – most notably, Ovid's banishment, depicted in Act four, actually took place after the deaths of Virgil and Horace. But the choice to have Augustan characters allude to later Roman poets is more than simply an expedient one: it suggests the perpetual currency of those poets and it points to the shaping presence of Jonson, giving new life in different times to the words of his predecessors.

While *Poetaster* is far from unique among early modern plays in being set in one time and reflecting allegorically upon another, it is thus distinctive in the kinds of temporal disruptions it creates.[21] It does not privilege either the literal or the allegorical level and does not keep the two levels distinct. Rather it repeatedly has one disturb or disrupt the other as it self-consciously explores the multiple ways in which different times intersect. These are, Jonson implies, connections that have been recognised and revealed by the discriminating writer not 'force[d]' in the way that the Induction warns against. Cynthia Bowers has written that the play 'employs Rome as a backdrop or set upon which to comment safely on English society'. This is clearly part of the function of Rome in early modern drama, but far from its sole function.[22] In the case of *Poetaster* we might object first that Jonson's practice in this play was not 'safe'; he and the players were in trouble with the authorities after the early performances and his 'Apology' for the play was censored.[23] More fundamentally, Rome was not a mere 'backdrop'. This is a play concerned not just with contemporary 'English society', not just with the classical past, but with how the complex set of relations between the two may be illuminated by a writer such as Jonson.

‘My name shall live’: the currency of poetry

The importance to the play of the elegy that Ovid reads aloud in the first scene goes far beyond its role in establishing a two-way relationship between the classical and Elizabethan worlds. The poem itself is centrally concerned with the figure of the poet and his (the poets invoked are all male) relationship to time. It not only emphasises how poetry confers immortality on poets and those they praise but also enacts that process by echoing earlier works by Greek and Roman poets, including Theognis, Ennius, and Horace.[24] As Julian Koslow observes, Ovid’s poem is given ‘an extra charge’ here by the fact that the play has in effect brought him back to life on the stage.[25] Lusus interrupts Ovid’s work, warns him to put his poetry away and pretend to be studying law before his father arrives, and then exits in despair. Left alone again, Ovid reads back over the whole of the elegy he has just finished. Jonson himself advocated patient revision and self-editing; he is here imagining Ovid working as he claimed he worked.[26] This opening gives us, then, a kind of primal scene of poetic creation and highlights the play’s concern with how classical texts, values, and traditions have been transmitted and continue to resonate.

By staging Ovid’s verse in a version based on Marlowe’s translation, Jonson intensifies the sense of anachronism and further complicates the ideas about the timelessness of poetry that the elegy presents. For at the opening of the scene Ovid speaks before being named by Lusus, giving the audience a moment to try to identify the speaker from the verse and, potentially, to decide whether they are hearing a Roman poet or an English one, Ovid or Marlowe.[27] Given that the latter had died in 1593, this opening might be interpreted as an homage to him, the claim that ‘when this body falls in funeral fire,/My name shall live, and my best part aspire’ (1.1.1-2) affirming that Marlowe’s name and his ‘best part’ – his poetry as well as his spirit – survive his death. That tribute is made even more poignant and pointed

by the fact that the translation is from an edition of Marlowe's works that had been proscribed and publicly burnt in 1599. In this context, the 'body' consumed by fire may also be seen as the physical book (as distinct from the writing it contains); this play, in a further challenge to censorship, is both testifying to and contributing to the remembering of that writing.[28] Marlowe is not named in the play and in the printed text Jonson supplies a reference in the margin to Ovid only. The allusion to Marlowe nevertheless seems likely, given the contemporary currency of his works, to have been recognisable to some of the play's early spectators and readers.[29]

Yet another voice is audible in this opening, however, for Jonson's revision of Marlowe's translation is thorough and purposeful, making it more literal but also introducing some pointed emphases.[30] For example, the final lines of the elegy, quoted above in Jonson's version, are rendered by Marlowe as 'Then though death rakes my bones in funerall fire, / Ile live, and as he puls me downe mount higher'. Jonson's changes introduce an emphasis on the name of the poet and enable the equation of the physical body with the material book. Such changes mean that in the performance of the elegy the audience is simultaneously hearing not only Ovid and Marlowe but also Jonson himself. It seems unlikely that many spectators would know the different versions well enough to discern these layers.[31] Jonson may, however, have hoped that at least some readers of the play would consider the relations among the Latin original, Marlowe's translation and Jonson's revision. For the point that he is making here is important: the three writers are linked in a single trajectory and continue the symbiotic process initiated within Ovid's original elegy, whereby the words of earlier poets both inspire and live on in the words of those who follow. This emphasis on how poets help to keep each other's works alive suggests along the way the futility of attempts to silence them; Ovid was banished from Rome, Marlowe's work was censored, and Jonson's play anticipates accusations of libel, but all three speak in this moment. The effect of this linking

is, however, an ambiguous one: Jonson may be seen as outdoing the other two. The palimpsestic nature of the elegy as staged also helps to establish the complex idea that the words of poets are not timebound: they may be present not only in *their* present but in the present of their predecessors and successors.

Where Jonson differs from Ovid and Marlowe at this point in his career, however, is in whether he can even lay claim to the title *poet*. The Induction refers to ‘the author’ and ‘our author’ (46, 76), and ‘the Author’ appears as a character in the ‘Apologetical Dialogue’ at the end. Such usages of the term *author* are themselves significant. Jonson had first applied it to himself on the title page of *Every Man Out Of His Humour* (1600), which was also the first time that the title page of any English play had referred to its *author*.[32] Calling himself an author was, then, a bold and serious move, and one he would continue to make in later works. And it was as bold as he could be at this point: still lacking court connections, he could not align himself with the model of the laureate poet represented by Virgil and nor could he present himself as a gentleman poet like Ovid.[33] Nevertheless, *Poetaster* begins to establish the idea that plays may be poems. Notably, Ovid is presented as referring to his play *Medea* (which is lost) as a ‘poem’ (1.2.54). The play thus not only upholds Jonson as a serious author – it also engages with the poetry of the classical past as a means of re-vivifying the drama of the present *as* poetry. It thereby paves the way for Jonson explicitly to present himself in later plays as a poet and to insist that his works, like those of earlier poets, transcend the ‘present state’.

Jonson’s strategy includes highlighting how classical poetry itself, in something like its original form, might belong on the early modern stage. For by having Ovid read the elegy aloud Jonson is not simply, as Loewenstein puts it, ‘displacing theatrical display with a non-spectacular scribal event’, or, as in Guy-Bray’s contrasting view, subordinating the elegy to its theatrical presentation.[34] He is exploiting the auditory as well as the visual dimensions of

theatre to heighten appreciation of the verse, presenting these different aspects as complementary rather than, as Loewenstein and Guy-Bray both assume, in competition. Thus Ovid tells himself that his *ear* will 'judge / The hasty errors of our morning muse' (1.1.35-6) and the audience are given the opportunity to *hear* the elegy in its entirety. The emphasis on listening to poetry returns in the final act when Virgil presents a manuscript to Caesar who returns it saying 'Read, read thyself, dear Virgil' (5.2.21).

This second staged reading takes place in the palace with the doors guarded, Horace also in attendance, and Virgil, at Caesar's insistence, sitting in a raised chair (5.2.24-7). The spectacle directs our attention to words: the silent attentiveness of the onstage audience during the reading encourages the actual audience to listen just as carefully. Indeed, the scene recalls the notion, which Jonson recorded in *Discoveries*, that 'The poet is the nearest borderer upon the orator' (1795), a comparison that suggests a faith in the capacity of poets such as Virgil to enthral and move an audience. Moreover, the passage chosen for Virgil's reading, from *The Aeneid*, book IV, continues the play's concern with reputation and renown, but in the form of malicious rumour and false report: 'Fame' is here 'a fleet evil, than which is swifter none' and 'covetous… of tales and lies' (5.2.75, 96).[35] The reading is interrupted, but in such a way as to confirm its relevance to present circumstances: as Virgil refers to 'Fame' as 'This monster…', Lupus, Tucca, Crispinus and Demetrius burst onto the stage to accuse Horace and others of treason. As with Ovid's reading, then, Virgil's reinforces and is reinforced by its dramatic context. These explicit attempts to make theatre out of poetry draw attention to the subtler ways in which Jonson, as we shall consider further in the next section, transforms poetic sources into dialogue and dramatic action.

Ovid's elegy also supports this wider endeavour by introducing to the play the broader category of 'art'. Telling us that Callimachus, a learned poet and critic whose poetry was a source for Ovid's, 'Shall still be sung, since he in art doth flow' (1.1.50), the elegy

associates 'art' with literary immortality. In the early modern period, the term 'art' commonly meant skill (*OED*, 1) or craft (*OED*, 3b) and these notions remained important to Jonson.[36] It was also beginning to mean 'Skill in an activity regarded as governed by aesthetic as well as organizational principles' (*OED*, 6; first cited usage 1563) and 'Any of various pursuits or occupations in which creative or imaginative skill is applied according to aesthetic principles' or, in plural with *the*, 'the various branches of creative activity' (*OED*, 7; only one usage cited before the 1590s). *Poetaster* brings *art* in these various senses onto the stage: we see Ovid's craft as he polishes his verses; his elegy and Virgil's *Aeneid* are presented as works of art; and Horace's writings, including his treatise *Ars Poetica*, inform the whole play.[37] This era's association with the *arts* is made explicit, the Author affirming in the Apologetical Dialogue that he chose 'Augustus Caesar's times,/When wit and arts were at their height in Rome' (88-89). But the usefulness of the term for Jonson goes beyond its association with the lasting achievements of classical poets; it is also a term that does not discriminate between different kinds of creative activity. The developing concept of art thus frames Jonson's attempt in this play to collapse some of the distinctions between neoclassical poetry and the kind of theatre that he is writing, and to suggest that his plays, by self-consciously building on classical foundations, will likewise endure.

'The substance or riches of another poet': translation, imitation, and plagiarism

Creating this intricate picture of the classical literary world, the Elizabethan literary world, and their interrelationship, allows Jonson to examine in some detail the range of ways in which writers can make use of 'the substance or riches' of their predecessors and contemporaries.[38] The play explores the different processes, current in the contemporary literary marketplace, of translation, imitation, and plagiarism. The final act mirrors the first in including a translation but Virgil, as noted above, reads his work aloud in public. This time

the passage is translated by Jonson himself (and, like his revision of Marlowe, Jonson's translation suggests a concern with literalism).[39] There is, then, symmetry between the first and final acts but also a suggestion of progression: the implication is that translating Virgil, as Jonson does at the play's close, is a greater act than translating Ovid as Marlowe had done. As Cain and others have observed, by displacing Ovid in this way Jonson asserts the need for his contemporaries to move beyond the fashionable Ovidianism of the 1590s, within which Marlowe had been a key figure.[40] *Poetaster* does not, however, wholly reject either Ovid or Marlowe; both have a place among the poets that the play explores rather than being cast down among the poetasters. It is suggestive that Horace defends the banquet of the gods, which leads to Ovid's banishment, as 'innocent mirth' and 'harmless pleasures' (4.7.37-8). 'Pleasure' is half, but only half, of the 'pleasure and profit' combination that Jonson, following Horace, upheld as a requisite of art.[41] Being 'harmless' is better than being 'harmful' – and again Jonson is here defending art against censorship – but not as good as being 'profitable', as is not only Virgil's epic poetry but also Horace's satire, and, implicitly, this play. (It is typical of *Poetaster*'s ethical complexity that Ovid's father, an unwise enemy of poetry, may be right, at least about some of his son's literary endeavours, when he refers to them as 'unprofitable by-courses' (1.2.61), just not in the narrowly economic sense he intends.)

By framing the play with translations Jonson not only implicitly compares himself to Marlowe but also foregrounds translation as a literary practice. 'To translate' means not only to turn from one language into another but also 'To bear, convey, or remove from one person, place or condition to another; to transfer, transport' (*OED*, 1a).[42] The play's deployment of translation in the first sense draws our attention to its broader endeavour of transferring ideas and types across time. The play turns Romans into Elizabethans and Elizabethans into Romans, performing a kind of double translation, analogous to the classroom exercise of

translating from Greek to Latin and then back to Greek.[43] By showcasing his ability to translate between languages, Jonson self-consciously authorises the imaginative act of translation that underlies the play's conception. Yet the play also, as we shall see, explores how 'translation' may be confused with theft or plagiarism.

The complexity of the term 'translation' in the play has led some critics to argue that Jonson presents 'inter-linguistic translation as a kind of leading case for a whole range of imitative practices'.[44] Yet, as Neil Rhodes has recently pointed out, translation in the period is understood not only 'as part of a continuum that includes imitation, paraphrase, and commonplacing, as well as what we might consider to be original composition' but also as the distinct category of 'a literary work which the author has converted from one language into another'.[45] *Poetaster* differentiates imitation from translation in its practice and in its deployment of that practice as a metaphor for considering how the present relates or should relate to the past. For 'imitation', in the Renaissance sense of making new use of existing materials, suggests not merely transporting the past into the present but reshaping selected parts of the past to serve present purposes. As Jonson notes in *Discoveries*, in one of several comments on the subject which themselves draw on multiple classical sources, 'The third requisite in our poet or maker [the first two being 'natural wit' and 'exercise'] is imitation, to be able to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use' (ll. 1752-3).[46] For Loewenstein this passage, which goes on to use a digestive metaphor, presents imitation – which is 'value-laden' and can be 'dangerous' – as incorporation, Jonson 'insisting that the modern poet fully internalizes, decomposes, and transforms the ancient'.[47] Yet what *Poetaster* highlights is the importance to Jonson of the relationship between imitation and imitated remaining visible and scrutinisable, at least by the learned. For Jonson where imitation poses aesthetic and ethical problems is where it descends into mere copying or, in a pejorative term he favours, 'aping' (as in, for example, the epigram 'On Poet-Ape'); does not

even recognise itself (imitation, unlike translation, may be unconscious); or actively seeks to conceal its traces.

The play foregrounds its concern with these different forms of imitation at its midpoint. The third act opens with Horace walking the streets of Rome and being pestered by the foolish Crispinus who accosts him 'Sweet Horace, Minerva and the muses stand auspicious to thy designs! How far'st thou, sweet man? Frolic? Rich? Gallant? Ha?' (3.1.10-11). Horace shows patience and forbearance – what he refers to as 'tame modesty' (3.1.93) – but Crispinus will nevertheless go on to malign him and his writings. The whole sequence in the street (3.1-3) is an imitation and expansion of one of Horace's own verse satires, Satire 9 of Book 1 (on which Donne's Satire 4 is also based). Here, then, we have a depiction of Horace which is also an imitation of Horace, within which Crispinus's doomed attempts to engage with the great Roman poet are the butt of the joke. In a recent article on Jonson's classicism, Brian Vickers finds this imitation and expansion to be unsuccessful, suggesting that 'the material is too superficial to engage the reader' and that the 'asides are dramatically clumsy'. His concern, however, is with focusing on Jonson's 'borrowings in the immediate dramatic context, in order to judge whether or not they are well integrated'.[48] It seems to me that this is the wrong question, or at least only one way of assessing how successful Jonson's imitation is. For at such moments the play is inviting the reader to consider the relationship between the source and the imitation, the classical and the Elizabethan, the poetic and the theatrical; audience members and readers are asked to consider not simply the immediate dramatic context but the powerful sense of synchronicity that is generated.

The sequence addresses Horace's relationship to his contemporaries but it also allegorically depicts Jonson's relationship with Marston. The implication is that Marston, like Crispinus with Horace, sought Jonson's friendship and favour before turning against him.[49] Jonson further implies that he, like Horace, has shown restraint in the face of attack. (He

maintains the same stance in the 'Apologetical Dialogue', the Author observing that to 'pursue' those who slander him were 'far beneath the dignity of a man' (165-6). In fact, Jonson had retaliated and was retaliating again in this play.[50]) The sequence also exemplifies the play's tendency to cut across the literal and allegorical levels of meaning: the encounter in the street is about the relationship of Horace and Marston too. Crispinus insists that he is a 'new turned poet… and a satirist, too' and is not only literally following Horace in the street but also claiming to follow him in his writings; 'I write just in thy vein, I', he proclaims (3.1.17-18).[51] Horace's comic asides and attempts to escape the exchange, as well as, more subtly, his adherence to the formal 'you' despite Crispinus's adoption of 'thou' from his opening greeting (quoted above) all signal how unwelcome the latter's attempts to assume intimacy are to him. The sequence is invoking Marston as both a hostile Elizabethan playwright and a would-be satirist trying and failing to do as Jonson does and write in Horace's 'vein'. At the same time, it does cast Marston as a kind of imitator: Crispinus was a stoic teacher, several times mentioned by Horace as a bad and prolific poet, and Laberius, the middle name given to the character, was a writer of mimes whom Horace also mentions.[52] Crispinus is not just a figure for Marston; Marston is identified as unwittingly and destructively an imitator of poetasters from classical times. Jonson's theatrical reworking thus expands the reach of Horace's satire, showing how it may speak not only to Horace's time but also to Jonson's, and turning the pursuit it depicts into a metaphor for an aggressive and unwelcome kind of literary imitation.

Crispinus's failure to follow Horace culminates in a kind of theft. In 4.3 he reads aloud a poem which Tibullus recognises as 'borrowed' from Horace, eliciting Jonson's usage of the new term 'plagiary', meaning 'plagiarist' (82-3). Yet the poem is self-evidently terrible and, as Cain points out, it 'bears no resemblance to anything by Horace'.[53] Is this, then, an act

of plagiarism? The early modern understanding of plagiarism was of course different from ours, as Janet Clare helpfully summarises:

> The false claim to the work of one author by another… rather than the appropriation of ideas or expression, is the dominant idea of early modern plagiarism. At the same time, the interfaces between borrowing and imitation and creativity were sites not only of productivity but also of anxiety.… Charges of slavish imitation, mere translation, or borrowing were accusations to be levelled at opponents or rivals.[54]

Even so, one might have expected Jonson to make Crispinus's 'borrowing' more literal. A clue to how the play conceptualises the supposed crime may be found in the fact that the poem comically attributes to the mistress addressed the name 'Canidia', which is, as Gallus points out, 'the name of Horace his witch' (4.3.78-81). Crispinus is a 'plagiary', not a translator or imitator, because he misunderstands and mangles his source texts, and fails to show due respect to their creator.

Jonson further complicates his exploration of the relationship of plagiarism to translation and imitation by having Crispinus and Demetrius be found guilty of having falsely accused Horace of 'filching by translation' (5.3.193-4). The crime of which they accuse Horace might appear to be an analogous one to their own. Yet 'translation' in this play suggests far greater fidelity to the source text than is found in Crispinus's 'borrowing' from Horace (and we might remember here how concerned with literalism Jonson's revision of Marlowe's translation and translation of Virgil are). The failure of the two poetasters to appreciate the value of such sources is suggested by their implied use of the verb 'filching', which means 'To steal, *esp.* things of small value; to pilfer' (*OED*, 1a). And that lack of appreciation is the result of a lack of understanding: Demetrius admits, in the inept verses

read aloud by Tibullus in 5.3, 'I know the authors from whence he has stole, / And could trace him, too, but that I understand 'em not full and whole' (268-9). This admission undermines his accusation but it also takes us back to Crispinus's misuse of the detail 'Canidia': unlike Horace, these two would-be poets struggle to understand the authors that they read in their entireties and so are liable to plagiarise rather than to create legitimate translations or imitations.

By depicting the false accusations against Horace Jonson is also implicitly defending his own practice as a translator and imitator. *Poetaster*'s use of multiple classical sources, particularly the works of Horace himself, is extensive. Jonson calls attention to his sources in marginal notes in the printed text but only for the set-pieces of Ovid's reading from the *Amores* (1.1), the extended imitation of Horace's Satire 9 (3.1), and Virgil's reading from *The Aeneid* (5.2). These are moments that, as we have seen, work to thematise translation and imitation rather than simply deploy them as part of the play's texture. Otherwise, Jonson seems to have expected his contemporaries to reach their own conclusions about his use of his sources. Gabriele Bernhard Jackson writes that 'Multiplying sources is in part a Lucianic game played with the Blackfriars audience, especially its Inns of Court men.… Since many of Jonson's extracts were from either popular literature or school texts, his audience was well equipped to enjoy playing the *Poetaster* game'.[55] Insofar as the play is involving the audience in such a 'game' – which is itself an imitation of Lucian – Jonson cannot be seen as a plagiarist trying to conceal his thefts. Perhaps, however, Bernhard Jackson overestimates the abilities of the Blackfriars audience. The learned no doubt were able to appreciate Jonson's skilful adaptation of his sources.[56] But perhaps Jonson was well aware that other audience members might recognise the sources without understanding them well enough to see how they are being used, and may therefore think that it is merely borrowing or even plagiarism,

while others again might miss the presence of classical sources altogether. The play may be putting its spectators as well as its characters on trial.

Satirising rival playwrights as plagiarists who make false accusations of plagiarism in such a complexly imitative play is a risky strategy. The use of Horace in particular is so pervasive that Victoria Moul has suggested that he effectively ‘scripts’ many of the other characters’ speeches. ‘[W]here is Jonson’, she asks, ‘if so much of this is Horace?’ [57] Yet, as Moul also explores, Jonson carefully reworks and modifies the classical material that he utilises. More fundamentally, the play is self-consciously concerned with the question of how far poetry can ‘script’ or direct its consumers; it is staging a debate rather than, as Moul implies here, simply engaging in a process. This concern has been recognised in other studies of the play. Julian Koslow explores how, especially through its depiction of Virgil, *Poetaster* suggests that ‘The poet becomes a moral and ethical teacher through his ability to script social life as he would a group of actors performing a play’. Yet, as Koslow acknowledges, Jonson’s attitude to his own readers is complex and ambivalent. His texts do not in fact require passivity but ‘the highest level of linguistic and ethical alertness’ while ‘over the course of his career, [he] became all too keenly aware of the limitations on the poet’s power’.[58]

Some of that awareness is already evident in *Poetaster*: Ovid is unable to save himself from being banished, Horace cannot prevent Crispinus and Demetrius from maligning him, and even Virgil’s reading cannot continue after the enemies of poetry enter. Yet, while the play considers the power of the poet and its limitations, it seems rather more concerned with the responses that poetry elicits. Some of the characters are capable of being enlightened. This is most notably the case with Caesar, whose judgements in the final act indicate that he has internalised some of the wise words of Horace and Virgil. Indeed, Caesar opens the final act with the line ‘We that have conquered still to save the conquered’, which is an allusion to

The Aeneid, 6.851-3 (5.1.1 and note). He also acts in accordance with Virgil's comments on satire when he refuses to censor Horace's supposed 'libel'– an incomplete and variously interpretable emblem – and instead punishes the person who interpreted it as such (5.3.1-114). But others are resistant to such enlightenment. Crispinus, in particular, may be 'scripted' by Horace in the sense that the sequence in the street is based on one of Horace's satires, but he markedly refuses to be 'scripted' by the poet in that within this scene as it plays out on stage he fails to follow Horace's hints and suggestions. Poetry in this case serves not to teach but to expose, revealing through the resistance that it elicits the true nature of the character; poetry here reads its readers. The play does not, however, give up on Crispinus: after his 'purge', Virgil prescribes to him a diet of reading (5.3.468-499).

Given this emphasis on how literary texts reveal the true character of their readers, Jonson may actually have been rather gratified by Dekker's counter-attack in *Satiromastix* (1602). Here Dekker lampoons Jonson's identification with Horace: the character 'Horace' is accused of various crimes, including 'bitter *Satirisme*', '*Arrogance*', '*Selfe-love*', '*Detraction*' and '*Insolence*', but is ultimately exposed as 'a counterfeit Jugler that steales the name of *Horace*'. Dekker thereby frees the historical Horace from the taint of the criticisms levelled at Jonson and mocks the pretension of Jonson's apparent self-identification with the great poet.[59] Within the terms of the debate that Jonson constructs, however, Dekker's charge that Jonson has stolen from Horace reveals Dekker's true character. For such a line of attack further bears out precisely the accusation made in *Poetaster*: Dekker and Marston, Jonson suggests, do not understand the difference between translation or deliberate imitation and theft.

Plagiarism thus conceived, like translation and imitation, serves not only as a thematic concern in *Poetaster* but as a metaphor for a mode of engaging with the past. As the act of plagiarism committed by Crispinus and Demetrius is understood as a failure to respect

Horace and the integrity of his works so it metaphorically suggests a failure to comprehend the past, an erroneous assumption that matter can be entirely divorced from its original context, an attempt to conceal the true nature of the relationship between then and now. In this sense, plagiarism is the literary corollary of the political act of censorship, which Caesar wisely refuses to perform; the censor, like the plagiarist, tries to keep from others what he has (mis)read and thus, metaphorically, to deny the past. Jonson insists that the relationship between past and present, like the relationship between source and reworking, should be considered not obscured. This scrutiny is, as we have seen, enabled by the play's various temporal disruptions, which work to keep past and present simultaneously in view.

'A fresh applause in every age': reading Jonson

The exploration of the temporality of art within *Poetaster* also makes claims for this play's future and, by extension, for that of all of Jonson's writings. As classical texts are shown to continue to reverberate in Jonson's present so, the implication goes, his work has the potential to speak to future ages. In other words, when the Induction warns spectators and readers not to 'force [the play] to the present state' the point is not only about not forcing but also about not limiting to the here and now. Crispinus, for example, might call to mind Marston in late Elizabethan London but he might invoke poetasters in other ages too; in accordance with classical conceptions of satire, he is a type not a single individual. Similarly, the depiction of a public trial may have led some contemporaries to think of the treatment of Essex but the workings of state power are a perennial concern. At the same time, *Poetaster* suggests, particularly through the depiction of Horace's travails, that poetry has never been fully understood and appreciated by all. The play implies that there will always be those who fail to learn from art and artists will always be vulnerable to their detractors and successors. And that recognition is vital to *Poetaster*'s implicit claim for ongoing relevance: were there

to be no more poetasters, plagiarists, or poor readers, the play would no longer be able to fulfil its satiric purpose.

Jonson realises some of this forward-looking potential by republishing *Poetaster* in his monumental folio edition of *Workes* (1616). By this time the play had acquired new and additional resonances. The fantasy it explores via Horace of Jonson triumphing over his rivals and gaining privileged access to the ruler had at least partially come true; this was the year in which Jonson received a pension from King James. Moreover, in the context of the folio *Poetaster* could be read in relation to his subsequent works, particularly the other Roman plays, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*.[60] Through publication and republication, Jonson encourages each successive reader of the play to consider the relations among the time in which the reading takes place, the time in which the play was written, and the time in which it is set. For Jonson, then, 'good literature' is intrinsically and gloriously anachronistic, or, to put it in different terms, has a persistent currency. The ambitious writer must therefore 'strike the ear' – demand the attention – not only of his or her time but 'of time' itself as the test of all things ('Apologetical Dialogue', 216).[61]

The irony, however, is that Jonson revised *Poetaster* to accommodate it to the new context of the 1616 folio. The most substantial of the revisions is the addition of 3.5, a free translation and expansion of another of Horace's satires (Book 2, Satire 1). Here Jonson extends the play's defence of satire as distinct from libel and presents Horace as determined to 'write satires still, in spite of fear' (3.5.100). The folio text also includes the 'Apologetical Dialogue', which may be a revision of the proscribed stage version.[62] The note introduces it as 'all the answer I ever gave to sundry impotent libels then cast out … against me and this play' (3-4). By printing and commenting upon the 'Apologetical Dialogue' Jonson both defies and draws attention to the censorship to which his play had been subjected.[63] Clearly he is appealing to future readers, observing that he takes 'no pleasure to revive the times, but

that posterity may make a difference between their manners that provoked me then and mine that neglected them ever' ('To The Reader', 5-7). Yet by revising his play he inadvertently acknowledges the difficulty of ensuring that readers will continue to appreciate the play's value once the author is no longer there to smooth its entry into new contexts.

Moreover, as Jonson revised his own play to accommodate it to his folio *Workes* so he had changed Marlowe's translation of Ovid to accommodate it to the concerns of the play. The version of the elegy that appears in *Poetaster* affirms that the poets Ennius and Accius 'A fresh applause in every age shall gain' (1.1.55-6). Marlowe had translated this line as 'Are both in fames eternall legend writt'.[64] Jonson amended the line to fit it to the context; 'fresh applause' specifically suggests a desire for the continuing success of his plays in the theatre. That act of revision underlines the sense that *Poetaster* is attempting to reclaim drama as poetry and to establish Jonson as a poet whose plays shall be celebrated 'in every age'. The revision also, however, calls into question the claim for the longevity and durability of the words of poets that the elegy makes. The survival and continuing relevance of poetry is in fact, Jonson's handling of Marlowe and of *Poetaster* itself would suggest, dependent upon an ongoing process of revision, from minor rewording to expansion and substantial reworking. That raises the question of how far Jonson was willing for his works to be revised by others in turn once he was no longer around to do it, and even translated and imitated as he translated and imitated his predecessors.

Certainly, the play suggests that writers bear some responsibility for the use that others make of their work. Virgil remains relatively aloof throughout the play, allegorically suggesting his dominance in a literary genre others have rarely attempted.[65] Horace and Ovid both interact much more with the other characters, but in tellingly different ways. Horace is, as Demetrius accurately but with misplaced contempt describes him, an observer: 'He is a mere sponge, nothing but humours and observation; he goes up and down sucking from every

society, and when he comes home, squeezes himself dry again' (4.3.89-91). Ovid, by contrast, participates in the folly and vice that poets should only observe: as Julia protests at the banquet, turning 'the king of good fellows … makes our poets, that know our profaneness, live as profane as we' (4.5.85-6). Worse still, where Horace tries to escape Crispinus, Ovid dines with him. At the banquet Crispinus is given the role of Mercury, the messenger, while Ovid plays Jupiter. As part of the fiction, Ovid even invites Crispinus to speak on his behalf: 'Now, Mercury… in Jupiter's name command silence'; 'Mercury, go forward and proclaim after Phoebus our high pleasure' (4.5.2-3, 8-9).

These contrasting behaviours of Horace and Ovid have very different consequences and implications. Able to remain untainted by the society in which he lives, Horace may be 'plagiarised' by Crispinus but the crime is obvious and ultimately does Horace no discredit. A participant in the debauchery of the banqueting scene, Ovid is banished and it is difficult for the audience to maintain full sympathy with him.[66] The Ovid of this scene may be the Ovid of later tradition rather than the historical figure; one of the sources for the scene is George Chapman's 1595 poem *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*.[67] In this sense, the satire may be directed more at Ovid's imitators than at the poet himself. But the scene's depiction of Ovid willingly keeping bad company and inviting the poetaster Crispinus to speak for him functions allegorically, suggesting that his poetry encouraged the kind of imitation that debases and displaces the original. This sense that Ovid was not only insufficiently concerned with his writings being 'profitable' but also too open to such imitation is at the heart of the play's ambivalent portrayal of him. By the same logic, of course, being plagiarised – as Horace is in the play and as Jonson claimed in his epigrams and elsewhere to be – is a sign of being a great poet because it is a sign of being difficult for inferior poets successfully to imitate. One might deduce that Jonson would have professed himself willing for his writings to be translated or imitated; but only by a *poet* he considered his equal or better.

Conclusion

Poetaster offers, then, a far-reaching defence of art as uniquely capable of transcending specific times and, therefore, of illuminating how different times relate to each other. Cain summarises the wider literary and political implications of the play's concern with imitation as follows: 'the new world imitates the old, but those who comprehend the past imitate it deliberately and discriminatingly, as poets, statesmen or even monarchs. Those who do not, imitate it only by unwittingly repeating its follies and vices'.[68] More than this, *Poetaster* suggests that comprehending the past is inseparable from comprehending the present and that true art, which keeps both in view, facilitates this kind of double vision. More specifically, this play, through its use of temporal disruption and anachronism, allows spectators and readers simultaneously to reflect on the past as though it were present and the present as though it were past. It self-consciously demonstrates art's capacity to represent any time in a way that combines immediacy with critical distance and thereby encourages judgement. *Poetaster* presents the relationship between past and present as two-way, mutually constitutive, and comprehensible in terms of literal and metaphorical translation, deliberate and unwitting imitation, creative and dishonest appropriation, receptivity and denial. It suggests above all that this complex and dynamic relationship can only be rendered fully visible by the true poet.

Jonson's own claim to be such a *poet*, creating lasting *art* in the form of plays, would be made more explicitly in subsequent works. By the time that his next play, *Sejanus*, went into print (1605), he felt able to echo Ovid who, as we saw above, in *Poetaster* is presented as referring to *Medea* as a *poem*; Jonson writes of this new play that 'It is a poem' (*Sejanus*, Dedication, 2). Just a year later he dared to include in *Volpone* an Epistle discussing at length what makes a 'good poet' in the context of drama (17). Jonson's situation had changed – in

the early Jacobean period he had begun to write for the court – but *Poetaster* had also provided a conceptual basis for the shift in his self-presentation. By the time that *Volpone* appeared in print Jonson had evidently also succeeded in convincing some of his contemporaries that 'art' was the appropriate term for his dramatic writing. One of the commendatory verses is addressed 'To the True Master in His Art, B. Jonson' and begins 'Forgive thy friends: they would, but cannot, praise/Enough the wit, art, language of thy plays'.[69] Jonson would continue to defend his own writing in such terms. The claim that he makes in the Epilogue to *The New Inn* (1629) towards the end of his career for his work as outliving his body – 'Whene'er the carcass dies, this art will live' (20) – is particularly reminiscent of his version of the final lines of Ovid's elegy with which we began.

Yet *Poetaster* not only helps to establish the claim that even popular drama may aspire to outlast its own age.[70] Through its complex temporal structure and self-reflexivity it also reveals Jonson's understanding of *how* art lives: through a two-way dialogue among poets and between poets and readers. Borges proposes that 'every writer *creates* his own precursors'.[71] Jonson would seem to give us an extreme example of that phenomenon: this play attempts to create Marlowe, Marston, Dekker, Horace, Ovid, and Virgil. It invites us to read Jonson in relation to his reimagining of these other writers but it also incites us to return to them for ourselves and compare source and reworking. And it goes further. Horace is not impressed by his encounter with Crispinus/Marston. The new labels that the play applies to Crispinus/Marston and Demetrius/Dekker – 'plagiary' and 'poetaster' – are borrowings from Latin and the former is an 'imitative appropriation' from Martial.[72] Virgil's declaration of Horace's innocence (5.3.299-332), on the other hand, suggests through the implicit identification of Horace with Jonson that the latter is also guiltless. In all of these ways, the play suggests how classical poets would judge those trying to write in the Elizabethan age. Again, the play is making the wider point that poets read their readers – and that wise readers

will appreciate and benefit from the insights into their own age which past works can thus provide. The further implication is that for Jonson's works to 'live' is not for them merely to be preserved as historical artefacts. It is for them to be understood as providing an ethical and linguistic framework through which succeeding times may be judged. This is a function that, paradoxically, may require readers to consider a text's circumstances of composition, hence Jonson providing such details about *Poetaster* when he revised it for his *Workes*, and – as such revision inadvertently admits – the ongoing modification of that text. And it is, Jonson may also have hoped, for them to serve as a source for the great poets of succeeding generations to translate and imitate with such respect that his 'name shall live' in their works as the names of Horace and others live in his.

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[1] Gabriele Bernhard Jackson (ed.), *Poetaster,* in David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (gen. eds), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), II, 1.1.1-3. All subsequent references to Jonson's works are to this edition unless otherwise specified.

[2] For discussion of this 'war' see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Matthew Steggle, *Wars of the Theaters: The Poetics of Personation in the Age of Jonson* (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, 1998).

[3] Tom Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), Introduction, p. 3.

[4] For an example of an important study in the first group see Victoria Moul, 'Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*: Classical Translation and the Location of Cultural Authority', *Translation and Literature*, 15 (2006), 21-46; and, in the second, see Cynthia Bowers, '"I will write satires

still, in spite of fear": History, Satire, and Free Speech in *Poetaster* and *Sejanus*', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 14 (2007), 153-72. For an essay that does consider the interdependence of the play's classicism and topicality see Julian Koslow, 'Humanist Schooling and Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*', *English Literary History*, 73 (2006), 119-59. Koslow explores 'the relation between [Jonson's] humanist classicism and his participation in the world of the theater' (p. 123).

[5] Stephen Guy-Bray, 'Source', in Henry S. Turner (ed.), *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 133-50 (pp. 134, 133).

[6] Ian Donaldson's biography, for example, characterises Jonson as 'a writer who looked persistently to the future' (*Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 429).

[7] Guy-Bray, 'Source', p. 149.

[8] Joseph F. Loewenstein, 'Personal Material: Jonson and Book-burning' in Martin Butler (ed.), *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 93-113 (p. 106).

[9] See Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) and *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Cheney highlights Ovid's significance as 'a primary classical model for the new early modern author who pens both plays and poems' (*Shakespeare*, p. 30).

[10] The present article uses 'poet' in this emerging Jonsonian sense of 'good' or 'true' writer in any literary genre. I am grateful to Martin Butler for stimulating discussion of these issues.

[11] On Jonson's concern across his career with envy see Lynn S. Meskill, *Ben Jonson and Envy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[12] Janet Clare observes that 'The appeals, explicit and implicit, to classical antecedents were an attempt to afford [Jonson's] experiments in comical satire cultural authority at a time when other forms of comedy predominated' ('Jonson's "Comical Satires" and the Art of Courtly Compliment', in Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgzoy and Susan Wiseman (eds), *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian Canon* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 28-47 (p. 45)). On early modern English satire, particularly how various satirists 'denied personal satire even as they engaged in it' see also Eric D. Vivier, 'Judging Jonson: Ben Jonson's Satirical Self-Defense in *Poetaster*', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 24 (2017), 1-21 (pp. 16-17).

[13] Disagreement over whether satire is corrective, as Jonson maintained, or destructive was current and widespread when he wrote *Poetaster* (see Bernhard Jackson (ed.), *Poetaster*, Introduction, pp. 14-15). For a discussion of how this play's concern with censorship and free speech connects it to *Sejanus* (1603, 1605) see Bowers, '"I will write satires still"'.

[14] For example, Donaldson proposes that the subtitle, by which the play was known in early performances, 'is bound inevitably' to have suggested the trial of Essex (*Ben Jonson*, p.170, citing Tom Cain, '"Satyres, That Girde and Fart at the Time": *Poetaster* and the Essex Rebellion' in Sanders, Chedgzoy and Wiseman (eds), *Refashioning Ben Jonson*, pp. 48-70) whereas Bernhard Jackson emphasises that the play does not make any obvious topical allusion to this event (*Poetaster*, Introduction, pp. 16-17).

[15] The ghost of Andrugio claims that 'The fist of strenuous Vengeance is clutched' (W. Reavley Gair (ed.), *Antonio's Revenge*, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 5.1.3). For a discussion of the dating of this play see the introduction to this edition, pp. 12-15. According to William Drummond, Jonson affirmed that he wrote *Poetaster* on Marston (*Informations*, l. 217).

[16] Cain makes this point with reference only to the costumes. He suggests that the Augustan characters may have been in Roman dress but that it is more likely that all of the characters were in Elizabethan clothes, and that this 'synchronic effect' is created in either case (*Poetaster*, Introduction, p. 9). See also for a more detailed discussion of the recognisability of the costumes of Crispinus and Demetrius.

[17] The famous 'Peacham drawing' of *Titus Andronicus* shows a combination of Roman and Elizabethan costumes, which are not commented upon in the play (see Jonathan Bate (ed.), *Titus Andronicus*, Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Introduction, pp. 38-43).

[18] That such references to Elizabethan clothes in the script are purposeful, and not merely a matter of contemporary stage practice, is further suggested by the different approach that Jonson took in *Sejanus*: as part of creating a Roman setting for that play, he consulted an antiquarian study of Roman dress (see Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, note to 1.1.5-6).

[19] Loewenstein, 'Personal Material', p. 111.

[20] Martial, *Epigrams,* trans. by Walter C. A. Ker, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1920), I, p. 29, Epistle to Book 1.

[21] *Macbeth*, to take a well-known example of an early modern play with such a double vision, is set in the medieval past but touches on the Jacobean present and has characters who 'feel now / The future in the instant' (A. R. Braunmuller (ed.), *Macbeth*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.5.55-6). In her discussion of Shakespeare's tragedies, Philippa Berry finds *Macbeth* to be 'the most detailed dramatic exploration of time's multilayered character and ambiguous directionality… a curious temporal palimpsest' (*Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 119).

[22] Bowers, '"I will write satires still"', p. 157. For a recent discussion of the rich variety of ways in which early modern dramatists use Rome see Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[23] Richard Martin intervened on Jonson's behalf and the play was allowed to proceed, but the quarto omits the 'Apology', which, according to the note 'To the Reader' supplied at the end of the printed text, was performed only once. The 'Apology' appears (as an 'Apologetical Dialogue') in Jonson's folio *Workes* (1616). For further discussion of the censorship and textual history of the play see Bernhard Jackson (ed.), *Poetaster*, Introduction, pp. 4-6.

[24] Brian Vickers, 'Ben Jonson's Classicism Revisited', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 21 (2014), 153-202 (p. 164).

[25] Koslow, 'Humanist Schooling', p. 132.

[26] See, for example, the following advice: 'First mind it well, then pen it, then examine it, then amend it, and you may be in the better hope of doing reasonably well' (*Discoveries*, ll. 1600-1).

[27] Loewenstein notes that there is no way 'to know whether Marlowe's text had circulated widely enough to be recognized by the audience' but also points out that the exposure of Matthew's plagiarism of Marlowe in *Every Man In His Humour* three years earlier must have been more than an in-joke ('Personal Material', p. 110).

[28] See also Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, Introduction, p. 19. On the censorship of 1599 see Richard McCabe, 'Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban of 1599', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 11 (1981), 188-93. Marlowe's translation had been published in the 1590s and was the first full English translation.

[29] On how widely quoted Marlowe was in the literature of the late 1590s see Georgia E. Brown, 'Gender and Voice in *Hero and Leander*', in J. A. Downie and J. T. Parnell (eds), *Constructing Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.

148-63, and, more recently, Laetitia Sansonetti, '*Hero and Leander*: The Making of an Author', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 23 (2014), 1-18. The question of when, how, and to what effect Jonson acknowledges his sources will be considered further below.

[30] Here I would disagree with Guy-Bray who describes Jonson's treatment of Marlowe's version as 'minor tinkering' ('Source', p. 142). For a list of Jonson's changes see C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds), *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), IX, 539-40. Subsequent quotations from Marlowe's version are from this list. Herford and Simpson record 32 changes, most of them substantive, and note that most are 'in the direction of literalism' (p. 538). On Jonson's revisions to Marlowe see also Loewenstein, 'Personal Material', pp. 108-10.

[31] See, however, Guy-Bray who suggests that 'The educated members of the audience might well have had [these different versions] in mind' ('Source', p. 142).

[32] See *Every Man Out*, p. 249 note. Marston may be mocking Jonson's sensitivity over matters of terminology when in *What You Will* (c. 1600-1601) he has Doricus refer indifferently to 'the author, the composer, the *What You Will*' (A. H. Bullen (ed.), *The Works of John Marston*, 3 vols (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), II, Induction, 78). In considering how *Poetaster* helps to constitute the author function, Alan Sinfield makes the succinct observation that it is 'a complex intervention in a confused situation' ('*Poetaster*, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production', *Renaissance Drama*, 27 (1996), 3-18 (p. 11)).

[33] On the laureate and the amateur, represented by Virgil and Ovid respectively, as 'the two prime models of a poetic career' see Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983) (quotation p. 111). For a broader exploration of ancient Roman literary careers and their reception in later European literature see Philip Hardie and Helen

Moore (eds), *Classical Literary Careers and Their Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[34] Loewenstein, ‘Personal Material’, p. 111; Guy-Bray, ‘Source’, p. 142.

[35] On the significance of the choice of passage see also Moul, ‘Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, pp. 37-8, and Guy-Bray, ‘Source’, p. 143. On Virgil’s personification of *Fama* in this passage as ‘the central emblem of *fama* in the Western tradition’ see Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 3 (quotation p. 45). As Hardie points out, by including both this passage and Ovid’s elegy the play explores the idea that *fama* may be good or bad (p. 524).

[36] For a still suggestive discussion of how ‘pride in the craft of poetry’ helped Jonson to find ‘an independent poetic identity’ see Richmond Barbour, ‘Jonson and the Motives of Print’, *Criticism*, 40 (1998), 499-528 (p. 505).

[37] As Colin Burrow puts it in his introduction to Jonson’s translation of the *Ars Poetica*, this treatise was ‘foundational to Jonson’s poetics from the very start of his career’ (*Horace, Of the Art of Poetry*, p. 3). This translation was not printed until after Jonson’s death but it was composed much earlier, Jonson referring to it in the preface to *Sejanus* in 1605. Jonson’s use of Horace in the play is considered further below.

[38] The phrase comes from *Discoveries*, l. 1753, and is considered further below.

[39] Moul also notes the closeness of Jonson’s translation of Virgil to the original (‘Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster*’, p. 37). Guy-Bray views Jonson’s translation as ‘an unmitigated disaster’ (‘Source’, p. 144). As Burrow points out, however, Jonson’s classical translations try to achieve something different from later examples, which might be more to modern tastes: he is ‘a translator who chisels English into a form that implicitly values density and Latinity above elegance’ (*Horace, Of the Art of Poetry*, Introduction, p. 7).

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[40] See Cain (ed.), *Poetaster,* Introduction, p. 23. Ovid and Marlowe themselves may not have entirely disagreed with Jonson. In the *Amores* Ovid projects a literary career that culminates in epic, a progression reflected in the praise of Virgil in the elegy quoted in this play (1.1.61), and Marlowe may also have been attracted to this model (see Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession*, ch. 1). For further discussion of how many writers at this time found in Ovidianism a means through which to compete with each other and to establish their own credentials see Daniel Moss, *The Ovidian Vogue: Literary Fashion and Imitative Practice in Late Elizabethan England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

[41] In *The Masque of Queens* (1609), for example, Jonson explains his observance of Horace's rule '*to suffer no object of delight to pass without his mixture of profit and example*' (ll. 5-6).

[42] In this sense translation is closely related to metaphor and in *Discoveries* Jonson at times uses the two words interchangeably (see, for example, l. 1345).

[43] The practice of double translation was advocated in such teaching manuals as Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570).

[44] Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 121-2; see also Moul who suggests that 'translation' is a 'pervasive presence' in the play and includes '"imitation" and "appropriation"' ('Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*', p. 23).

[45] Neil Rhodes, Gordon Kendal and Louise Wilson (eds), *English Renaissance Translation Theory*, MHRA Tudor and Stuart Translations (London: MHRA, 2013), Introduction, pp. 1-2.

[46] The classic study of different kinds of, and views of, imitation in the period remains Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); see, in particular, chapter 3, 'Imitation and

Anachronism'. Greene considers anachronism as a challenge to be overcome not as a creative strategy to be deployed.

[47] Joseph Loewenstein, 'The Jonsonian Corpulence, or the Poet as Mouthpiece', *ELH,* 53 (1986), 491-518 (pp. 510-11).

[48] Vickers, 'Ben Jonson's Classicism Revisited', pp. 165, 170.

[49] While many of the details of Jonson's volatile relationship with Marston are unknown, the two probably collaborated on the lost play *Robert II* in 1599 but had many 'quarrels', which began, Jonson reportedly claimed, when 'Marston represented him in the stage' (*Informations*, 216-18). See Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, pp. 172-3.

[50] Marston has been seen as caricaturing Jonson in *Histriomastix* (c. 1599), *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1599-1600), and *What You Will* (c. 1600-1601), Jonson as first responding in *Every Man Out* (1599 and later revised) and *Cynthia's Revels* (1600). For discussion of the relations among these plays see Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, chs 3, 5, and 6. For an opposing account, which argues that Marston was concerned less to attack Jonson than to 'emphasize the similarities between himself and his colleague', see Rebecca Yearling, 'The Poets' War Revisited', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 23 (2016), 231-45 (quotation p. 240).

[51] Jonson places greater emphasis on the literary pretensions of Crispinus than Horace does on those of his assailant who asserts only that 'No one can write as many verses as I can – / and in so short a time' (Book 1, Satire 9, lines 23-4, quoted from Niall Rudd (ed.), *The Satires of Horace and Persius* (London: Penguin, 1973). Marston had published *Certaine Satyres* and *The Scourge of Villainy* in 1598. These verse satires actually draw more on Persius and Juvenal than on Horace, and were burned in the same act of censorship as Marlowe's elegies (see Susanna Braund, 'Complaint, Epigram, and Satire' in Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie (eds), *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 2 (1558-1660)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 345-72).

[52] Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, p. 65 note.

[53] Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, note to 4.3.96-7. Jonson's usage of the new term 'plagiary' is considered further below.

[54] Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 8. See also Paulina Kewes (ed.), *Plagiarism in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), esp. chs 2-5 on early modern conceptions of plagiarism and ch 8 on how Jonson, as both accuser and accused, is a central figure in the history of plagiarism in England.

[55] Bernhard Jackson (ed.), *Poetaster*, Introduction, p. 10. See pp. 9-10 for an overview of Jonson's sources in the play.

[56] Such learned appreciation of Jonson's use of his classical sources among his contemporaries is exemplified by the annotations in a seventeenth-century hand in a copy of *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: William Stansby, 1616) at the Huntington Library (shelfmark 499968). James Riddell has noted that nearly 250 source identifications are made in this copy ('Seventeenth-Century Identifications of Jonson's Sources in the Classics', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975), 204-18). In *Poetaster* fifteen are made, including six from Martial, four from Horace, and four from Juvenal. No contemporary sources are identified anywhere in the copy, further suggesting that Jonson's decision to acknowledge Ovid but not Marlowe in the first scene was in keeping with the expectations and assumptions of his readers.

[57] Moul, 'Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*', p. 21. A version of Moul's article appears in her *Jonson, Horace, and the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which explores Jonson's intertextual relationship with Horace across a range of texts and genres.

[58] Koslow, 'Humanist Schooling', pp. 147-8.

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[59] Thomas Dekker, *Satiromastix* in Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-61), I, 5.2.220-2, 244-5. Bednarz describes Dekker's play as 'a weak response to Jonson' but also suggests that it 'contains such a thorough caricature of Jonson that it continues to shape all biographical accounts of his early career' (*Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, pp. 224, 216).

[60] I explore how early readers engaged with Jonson's plays in the context of this collection in a forthcoming essay on 'Seventeenth-Century Readers of Jonson's 1616 *Works*'.

[61] 'Time tries all things' was proverbial (Dent T336). Cf. the opening words of Time in *The Winter's Tale*: 'I that please some, try all' (Stephen Orgel (ed.), *The Winter's Tale*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.1.1). Guy-Bray also notes *Poetaster*'s interest in 'the judgement of literary time' but presents Jonson as more humble: the play 'sets up an implicit comparison between its source, as a text that has stood the test of time, and itself, as a text that might not pass this test' ('Source', pp. 144, 149).

[62] The textual history of these sections is unclear: Bernhard Jackson suggests that the concern of 3.5 with libel law indicates a composition date around the time of *Poetaster*'s legal troubles (*Poetaster*, note to 3.5), but it could have been composed or at least revised later. She notes that the two interlocutors of the Author in the 'Apologetical Dialogue', Nasutus and Polyposus, may be later additions (note to 0.1-2). Again it is difficult to be sure of the extent or timing of the revision as no earlier version survives.

[63] See also Cain, '"Satyres, That Girde and Fart at the Time"', p. 50.

[64] Herford and Simpson (eds), *Ben Jonson*, IX, 539.

[65] On Jonson's portrayal of Virgil as ambivalent rather than simply idealising and as highlighting a conflict between laureate and satirist that remained central to Jonson's work see Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*, esp. pp. 113-16, 143-4.

[66] As Moss observes in *The Ovidian Vogue* and as continuing critical debate reflects, it is unclear in the play how we are meant to view Ovid's fall. In a forthcoming study of Ovid, Heather James argues that Jonson treats the poet's exile as a subject for moral debate and puts himself on the side of the defence (*Ovid and the Liberty of Speech in Shakespeare's England* (forthcoming)). I am grateful for the opportunity to see this work before publication.

[67] See Bernhard Jackson (ed.), *Poetaster*, note to 4.5, note to 4.5.165-72.

[68] Cain (ed.), *Poetaster*, Introduction, p. 8.

[69] This poem is possibly by John Florio but more likely by John Fletcher (see *Volpone*, p. 38, note).

[70] Jonson's now most well-known iteration of such a claim was in the verses that he contributed to Shakespeare's First Folio and ironically, as many commentators have noted, it has served Shakespeare's reputation much better than his own. See, for example, Ian Donaldson, '"Not of an Age": Jonson, Shakespeare, and the Verdicts of Posterity', in *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 180-97.

[71] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Kafka and his Precursors', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 201.

[72] Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship*, p. 120. The term 'plagiary' had appeared as an adjective in Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiarum. The three last Bookes. Of byting Satyres* in 1598 (Book 4, Satire 2), but Jonson, who uses it as a noun, seems to be following Martial rather than Hall.