

Poetry and Place in Drayton and Jonson

Canice J. Egan, S. J.

“Local poetry”, Johnson called it in the magisterial manner he employed to sum-up a literary situation, “a species of composition of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape, to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation”.^① Local poetry was a comparative latecomer to the English literary scene, but it was not as late as Johnson suggests when he describes Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill*, published in its final form in 1655, as the first poem of its kind. Drayton and Jonson had both preceded Denham by some thirty to forty years and it is to the consideration of the content, style and general merits of their poems, *Poly-Olbion* and *To Penshurst* that this essay is devoted.

Michael Drayton is a poet who deserves a more detailed study than he has yet received from scholars of the Elizabethan-Jacobean Age-- a study greatly facilitated by the modern Hebel edition of his works^② which provides a corrective to the inevitable deficiencies of Oliver Elton’s sympathetic study published in 1905.^③ Drayton’s long life - born a year before Shakespeare, he died within a few months of Donne and of the birth of Dryden - spanned the most fruitful period of English literary endeavour. But this is not all; for the writing to which he devoted himself so assiduously contains samples of nearly all the different types of verse popular in his age, pastoral eclogues, a sonnet sequence, lyrics, historical narratives, elegies, and even stage-plays in whole or part. If in nothing great - except, perhaps, in the ingenious and

charming sonnet, "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part" - he was in most things competent and pleasing, and his contemporaries liked the man and appreciated the writer: "Michael Drayton, *quem toties honoris et amoris causa nomino*" as Francis Meres writes of his friend;^④ and it is agreeable to know that the name of this companionable man is linked for all time with those of Jonson and Shakespeare in the story, whether apocryphal or true, of Shakespeare's last "night out". He was generally a follower of fashion rather than its leader and it was only in the case of *Poly-Olbion* that he broke away from the poetic patterns of his time. In another important instance, too, he refused to follow one of the currents of contemporary taste; he never seems to have had any sympathy with the "metaphysical" or "strong-line" poets. Indeed, he showed, as we shall see, a rather bitter animosity towards them.

If we were to call *Poly-Olbion* an "estate poem", then the "estate" that Drayton described, admired and loved was the land of Britain with its adjoining islands stretching from the Channel to the Scottish border. Not that Drayton had anything against the Scots; he had intended to continue his journey

Till through the sleepy Maine to Thuly I have gone,
And seene the frozen Iles, the cold Ducalidon,
Amongst whose iron rockes grym Saturne yet remaines,
Bound in those gloomie Caves with Adamantine chaines.

But it took him so long to cover the ground that nearly a quarter of a century passed between the beginning of the poem about 1598 and the publication of the second part in 1622; and by that time Drayton was so discouraged at the poor reception given to the first part (and the consequent difficulty of finding a publisher for Part II) that he decided to call a halt at the border and end there what he calls, in the last line of the work, "this strange Herculean toyle".

We say "cover the ground"; but in fact there seems to be no way of

knowing whether or not Drayton actually did travel through the counties of England and Wales that he describes in such detail. He had the help of Camden's *Britannia* and, as Professor Hebel's notes show, drew heavily on it; he also had the fruit of Christopher Saxton's labours; between 1570 and 1596 this energetic man had surveyed and mapped every county in Britain. But it is very doubtful if these sources, or any others he may have used, would account for the intimate knowledge he shows of the English and Welsh countryside; and it seems more reasonable to suppose, with his latest editor, John Buxton, that "he relied on his own intimate personal observation for much that is best in the poem".^⑥ We may also add that he relied frequently on his own imaginative powers to give colour to his narrative; he makes his attitude clear in the sixth song:

Heere then I cannot chuse but bitterlie exclame
Against those fooles that all antiquitie defame,
Because they have found out, some credulous ages layd,
Slight fictions with the truth, whilst truth on rumor stayd

He will, then lend his poem what he thinks "might appetite procure/To man, whose mind doth still variatie pursue". Consequently the reader of the poem is regaled with myth, legend, folktales, local lore and verifiable history all dove-tailed together with the sharp edges so smoothed out that it is difficult to say where fact ends and fiction begins. Drayton does not say so, but Spenser's great poem which had appeared in 1596, with its similarly varied amalgam of materials, may well have inspired his muse; and it is certainly in character that the ambitious and hard-working Drayton would seek fame in a parallel enterprise. But things went against him; the expected favour of the new King James didn't materialise and he had to leave the poem aside for long periods while he supported himself by hack-work for Philip Henslowe's players. Only in 1612 did he get the first eighteen songs into the hands of the printer and the final twelve songs didn't appear until 1622. Drayton

gives us the main points of the story in his two introductions where he speaks with an uncharacteristic bitterness that indicates the disappointment of high hopes. What went wrong, of course, was that he produced an Elizabethan poem in the Jacobean age; the days of *Arcadia* and the *Faerie Queene* had passed away. For once Drayton had not kept up with the changing fashion.

The dominating sentiment of the poem is the love that Drayton has for his country and everything that pertains to it, and his fondest wish is to inspire a similar affection in his readers. To this end he etherealizes all that he sees and, as he promises in his foreword, will introduce us to

The Tempe and Feeldes of the Muses, where through most delightfull Groves the Angellique harmony of Birds shall steale thee to the top of an easie hill . . . from whose height thou mai'st behold both the old and later times, as in thy prospect, lying farre under thee; then conveying thee downe by a soule-pleasing Descent through delicate embrodered Meadowes, often veined with gentle gliding brooks; in which thou maist fully view the dainty Nymphes in their simple naked bewties, bathing them in Crystalline streames; which shall lead thee, to most pleasant Downes, where harmlesse Shepheards are, some exercising their pipes, some singing roundelaies, to their gazing flocks

No true Elizabethan could ask for more; and Drayton is as good as his word; here, for example, is the "Angellique harmony of Birds":

Then from her burnisht gate the goodly glittering East
Guilds every lofty top, which late the humorous Night
Bespangled and with pearle, to please the Mornings sight:
On which the mirthfull Quires, with their cleere open throats,
Unto the joyfull Morne so straine their warbling notes,
That Hills and Valleys ring, and even the ecchoing Ayre,
Seemes all composed of sounds, about them every where.

After the chorus come the soloists, "throstell, woosell, merle, linet, wren" and the other songsters of an English spring; then the chorus again:

The Softer with the Shrill (some hid among the leaves,
 Some in the taller trees, some in the lower greaves)
 Thus sing away the Morne, untill the mounting Sunne,
 Through thicke exhaled fogs, his golden head hath runne.
 And through the twisted tops of our close Covert creeps
 To kisse the gentle Shade, this while that sweetly sleeps.

Except for the awkward inversion in the last line, this is a smoothly-moving passage in the best Spenserian style and tone; the conceit of the Sun kissing the sleeping Shade (a parallel to the Moon and Endymion?) is pleasing; and the steady beat of the Alexandrines is not so intrusive here because of the run-on lines. Whether Drayton was wise in writing his 15,000-line poem in Alexandrines at all is very doubtful; the example of poets from Chaucer on should have encouraged him to use iambic pentameter for long poems. The six-footer deadens the sparkle of English verse and soon becomes a monotonous jog-trot, especially with the caesura in the middle of the line - a position from which it is not easy to change it without turning the verse into prose. Drayton must have been tempted to adopt the stanza-form so successfully used by Spenser, but he may have prudently decided not to provoke the inevitable comparison. Elton, trying to rescue Drayton from undeserved obscurity, is somewhat ambiguous about the Alexandrines which "have a kind of heavy dignity like a Lord Mayor's coach".^⑦ Perhaps he guessed that his readers would mentally add: "but who would wish to travel all over Britain in such springless discomfort?"

Drayton excels at descriptions of natural beauty; they recur frequently throughout the poem like themes in a symphony. Here is a favourite Arcadian subject, dawn breaking over the plain and calling upon

The Larke to leave her Bowre, and on her trembling wing
 In climbing up towards heaven, her high-pitcht Hymnes to sing
 Unto the springing Day; when gainst the Sunnes arise

The early dawning strews the goodly Easterne skies
With roses everywhere:....

We might put a few lines from Spenser beside this:

At last the golden Oriental gate
Of greatest heaven gan to open faire,
And Phoebus, fresh as bridegrome to his mate,
Came dauncing forth, shaking his deawaie haire:
And hurld his glistring beames through gloomy aire.⑧

Spenser is more vigorous and alive, and Drayton has nothing to equal the bursting energy and joy of "came dauncing forth, shaking his deawaie haire" where "shaking", both in choice of word and in the change to the trochee, makes the line itself vibrate with life - especially when it follows the rhythmic iambics of "came dauncing forth". The last line quoted above is also very expressive and almost onomatopoeic in its careful choice of vowel sounds. Drayton's lines however, have two adjectives that would be hard to improve on: "*trembling* wing" and "*springing* day" show what distinction can be attained by simple words in the right place. "With roses everywhere", commonplace enough in itself, comes in here with a touch of pleasurable surprise; the petals of the dawn seem to unfold to disclose, not a single flower, but a rose-garden that slowly spreads its varied tints across the morning sky.

In another passage which has a Spenserian parallel Drayton describes the countryside near St. Alban's whose valleys had once, according to legend, been the bed of the Thames:

Thou saw'st great burthen' ships through these thy valleys pass,
Where now the sharp-edged Sithe sheeres up the sprying grasse:
That where the ugly Seale and Porpose u'sd to play,
The Grasshopper and Ant now lord it all the day:.

And Spenser:

And where the christall Thamis wont to slide
In silver channell, downe along the Lee,
About whose flowrie bankes on either side
A thousand Nymphes, with mirthful iollitee,
Were wont to play, from all annoyance free;
There now no rivers course is to be seene,
But moorish fennes and marshes ever greene.

There also, where the winged ships were seene
In liquid waves to cut their fomie waie;
A thousand Fishers numbred to have been,
In that wide lake looking for plenteous praie
Of fish which they with baits usde to betraie,
Is now no lake, nor anie fishers store,
Nor ever ship shall sail there anie more.⑨

Drayton's contrast between the sea-animals, "Seale" and "Porpose", and those which succeeded them, the "Grasshopper" and "Ant", is more vivid and concrete than Spenser's opposition between the "silver channell" and "moorish fennes" in the first stanza and the simple absence of ships and fishermen in the second. Drayton's lines here remind us most of Marvell in *Upon Appleton House* where the flood, scythe and grasshopper re-appear, and the unusual "sprising grasse" is echoed or recalled: Marvell moves into his "unfathomable Grass"

Where men like Grasshoppers appear
But Grasshoppers are Gyants there:
They, in there squeking Laugh, contemn
Us as we walk more low than them:
And from the Precipices tall
Of the green spir's to us do call.⑩

Marvell, during the leisurely days in Fairfax's household might well have leafed through *Poly-Olbion* and an unusual image like this would have lodged

itself in the storehouse of his subconscious mind.

One of Drayton's most useful poetical instruments is personification. His mountains and valleys, hills and plains, rivers and roads are certainly a talkative lot and carry on conversations with one another like characters in a play. Here, a mountain laments the loss of his arboreal hair which had been cut off in war; there, a stream recalls the blood which reddened it during a battle. A lively discussion takes place between the river Ver and one of the historic highways, Watling Street, when they meet outside St. Albans. As they run along side by side the two old friends have their little chat:

Ver quoth the Ancient Street,
'Tis long since thou and I first in this place did meet,
And so it is, quoth Ver, and we have lived to see
Things in farre better state than at this time they be.

Then comes a summary of English history from the time of the Romans "when", says the River, "in my prime of youth I was a gallant Flood". and he goes on to contrast olden and modern times to the disadvantage, inevitably, of the latter. When the Street has replied at some length and seems, overcome by weariness, inclined to stop, the River urges:

Right Noble Street, quoth he, thou hast liv'd fong, gone farre,
Much trafique had in peace, much travailed in warre;
On with thy former speech, I pray thee somewhat say.
For Watling, as thou are a Military Way,
Thy story of old Streets likes me so wondrous well,
That of the ancient folk I faine would heare thee tell.
With these perswasive words, smooth Ver the Watling wan:
Stroking her dusty face, when thus the Street began.

The River gets, perhaps, more than he bargained for when Watling launches out on a long and boring disquisition on the origin and significance of English

place-names. Drayton finishes the scene with an expressive couplet:

This said, the aged Street sagd sadly on alone:
And Ver upon his course, now hasted to be gone . . .

The first line gives us a graphic picture of the Street, bowed under the weight of history, limping on his way to London; and in the second, the River hastens away from an old and still loved friend who has become something of a bore.

Drayton, "the last of the Elizabethans", says Elton;^① and Dr. Bush, "the chief heir of Spenser. . . . a stout-hearted Elizabethan".^② "Stout-hearted" is well said of a man with the courage to undertake and carry through over the space of twenty-five years a task of describing poetically the

Tracts, Rivers, Mountains, Forests, and other parts of this renowned Isle of Great Britaine, with intermixture of the most Remarquable Stories, Antiquities, Wonders, Rarities, Pleasures and Commodities of the same.

As chief heir of Spenser Drayton sought to keep alive the spirit of patriotism and love of England which inspired the *Fae:ie Queene*, and the ideal of beauty, and the poet's attitude to it, summed-up in the word "Petrarchan". In company with the Fletcher brothers, Greville, Daniel and Chapman he attempted to carry into the new century the poetic ideals of the old which he saw neglected or despised by followers of more recent fashion. These he attacks frequently and bitterly:

In publishing this Essay of my poeme, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it comes out at this time, when Verses are wholly deduc't to Chambers, and nothing esteem'd in this lunatique Age, but what is kept in Cabinets, and must only pass by Transcription.

These hard words come in the first sentence of the introduction to his

magnum opus, and he goes on to castigate those who won't hear of anything that "savours of antiquity". Donne, praised later by Carew for exiling the traditional gods and goddesses and for pulling up "the pedantique weeds" of earlier ages, may be intended here - although his voluminous reading of the early Fathers of the Church would, from another point of view, free him from Drayton's censure. The attack is renewed in the body of the poem and the following passage is quoted in full as an example of a Drayton we haven't met before:

But leave these hatefull heards, and let me now declare,
In th' Helliconian Fount, who rightly christned are;
Not such as basely sooth the Humour of the Time,
And slubberlingly patch up some slight and shallow Rime,
Upon Pernassus top, that strive to be instal'd.
Yet never to that place were by the Muses called.
Nor yet our Mimick Apes, out of their bragging pride,
That faine would seeme to be, what nature them denide;
Whose Verses hobling runne, as with disjoynted bones,
And make a viler noyse, then carts upon the stones;
And these forsooth must be, the Muses onely heires,
When they but Bastards are, and foundlings none of theirs,
Inforcing things in Verse for Poesie unfit,
Mere filthy stuffe, that breakes out of the sores of wit;
What Poet reckes the praise upon such Anticks heap'd,
Or envies that their lines, in Cabinets are kept?
Though some fantasticke foole promote their ragged Rhymes,
And doe transcribe them o'r a hundred severall times,
And some fond women winnes, to think them wondrous rare,
When they lewd beggery trash, nay very gibbrish are.

If the new Dean of St. Paul's read this when it was published in 1622, he, perhaps, passed over the "hobling runne" and "disjoynted bones" with a resigned shrug; but he must have squirmed with embarrassment to be reminded of the "lewd" trash which he himself had come to regret and condemn. Drayton's reiterated jibes at the "cabinet-poets" springs from his pride as a professional who has the courage to submit his work to public criticism; he

has nothing but contempt for the secrecy - and the subject-matter - of the amateur "bastards" of the Muse.

Drayton's attitude towards his country in *Poly Olbion* is that of a lover to his lady-fair; everything about her is worthy of affection and admiration and his poem is an attempt to delineate the nobility of her origins, the glories of her history, and her present beauty. This beauty he finds in nature; the grace of the English countryside, the songbirds in the woods, the fish leaping in its rivers, are a manifestation of a hidden and nameless excellence that lies at the heart of patriotic love; and Drayton hopes by enshrining the beauties of nature in his verse to stir in the hearts of his readers a greater love for their native land.

Professor Hebel relates that, when seated in the British Museum at a desk piled high with all the available copies of *Poly-Olbion*, he was surprised to be frequently asked by an attendant if this or that copy could be spared for the use of other readers. Drayton would have been very pleased to know that his poem still lives; such foreknowledge, would have consoled him in the days when his feelings must have been similar to those of a later poet also writing in an unpropitious age:

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey truth is now her painted toy.⑬

* * * * *

Jonson's *To Penshurst* is the first of the formal English "estate" poems, local poetry written in praise of the house, grounds and household of a landed gentleman to whose hospitality the poet owes a debt of gratitude. Jonson, while he enjoyed himself thoroughly as literary dictator of the *Mermaid*, was also very glad to get away from London's smoky and narrow streets to the

quiet rural repose of a friend's country house. But he had to be comfortably lodged, generously nourished and socially appreciated. All these conditions were amply fulfilled at Penshurst, the Kent seat of the Sidney family where, in Jonson's time, Sir Robert, Philip's brother was his host.

During the latter half of the sixteenth century radical changes had begun to affect the country houses of Elizabethan gentlemen.⁽⁴⁾ The comparative peace enjoyed under Elizabeth, the newly-acquired wealth of her courtiers, and the accounts of Italian architecture brought back by travellers, combined to stimulate an interest in building which soon developed into a fashion. The medieval windowless castles which dotted the countryside were pulled down to provide stone for the new mansions; old abbeys, like that at Nun Appleton, were similarly treated. Expert masons, carpenters and decorators were in great demand and were only loaned to a friend, or superior, with extreme reluctance. Noblemen vied with one another in the magnificence of their buildings and considered the expense and trouble well repaid if the Queen, herself keenly interested in such matters, condescended to give the stamp of her approval by visiting and staying under the new roof.

Not all noblemen joined in this architectural competition; some through lack of funds, or a commonsense disinclination to squander them in such an expensive pastime, remained satisfied with the substance of what had been handed down to them by their ancestors. They might open a window here, and add a wing there, but the original house remained substantially intact. Such was Penshurst when Jonson visited it. The house had been built about the year of Chaucer's birth by a rich London woolmerchant on the site of an even more ancient building, and had come into the possession of the Sidneys in the mid-sixteenth century. A wing or two had been added in the meantime but nothing had been done to change it from its original status as an impressive, but unpretentious, country residence.

This background explains Jonson's opening lines:

Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show,
Of touch or marble; nor canst boast a row
Of polish'd pillars, or a rooffe of gold:
Thou hast no lanterne, whereof tales are told;
Or stayre, or courts; but stand'st an ancient pile
And these grudg'd at, art reverenc'd the while.

This is not one of those ostentatious edifices with their Corinthian pillars of black marble and gold-tinted roof; here there is nothing to cause envy in the Hattons, Burghleys and the rest with their enormous palaces; nor is there here any envy of them. This house has no dome, lantern-crowned to admit the light; nor has it the grand staircase of the contemporary mansion sweeping up from the hallway to the first floor. Here is a house to be revered for its antiquity and substance, not admired for its grandiose splendour.

Thus Jonson sets the tone for the poem that is to follow in lines that indicate what his standards of judgement are to be - independence, tolerance, simplicity and respect for antiquity; these he finds at Penshurst, and approves, and they provide the virtues on which he can build his admiration and his poem.

After this opening Jonson turns to the natural advantages of the estate, its soil, air, wood, water, and the opportunities for exercise and sport that it provides. He keeps the personal note with a reference to the tree planted at Sir Philip Sidney's birth which is now large-trunked enough to bear the names of Philip's poet-followers cut into its bark. (Did Lady Gregory follow this precedent when she allowed her tree at Coole Park to be similarly disfigured by famous names?) The livestock are next dealt with - not in any general way, but with particular mention of each, sheep, bullocks, cows, calves, mares

and horses; and the game, rabbit, pheasant and partridge, the fish, carp, pike and eel.

In his descriptions Jonson's specific mention of particular types of animal, bird and fish help to give his poetry its firm realistic base; he keeps his eye constantly on the object. We notice also his emphasis on the willingness of nature to surrender its richness to the people of the household; the grassy bank *yields* rabbits, the copse *provides* pheasants, the partridge *lies in every field* - waiting, as it were, to be caught; the carp *run into* the net, the pikes "officiously" (dutifully?) give themselves up, while "bright eels, that emulate them, . . . leap on land, before the fisher or into his hand". Even the fruit, "the blushing apricot and woolly peach" hang so conveniently on the orchard wall "that every child may reach". This reiterated emphasis seems to suggest the pre-lapsarian situation of Eden with its peace and order when all things were happy to serve the paragon of nature and his help-meet. This thought is continued and expanded in the following lines where Jonson describes the visits and gifts of the neighbouring country people to Sir Robert and his lady:

But all come in, the farmer, and the clowne:
And no one empty-handed to salute
The lord, and lady, though they have no sute.

Underneath the civility of the scene we see the framework of a social order which binds the community together in harmony, each person or group in an allotted place maintaining the correct relationship with those above and below.

The open-handed gift-bringers remind Jonson of Sidney's open-handed hospitality. His lines, in what they praise and implicitly condemn, provide an interesting social commentary which may have made some of Jonson's

previous hosts examine their consciences. Here

..... comes no guest, but is allow'd to eate,
Without his feare and of thy lord's owne meat:
Where the same beere, and bread, and self-same wine,
That is his Lordships, shall be also mine.
And I not faine to sit (as some this day,
At great mens tables) and yet dine away.

Jonson thus condemns the custom in some great houses where the guest is seated at a table separate from his host and served with inferior food: this denial of the hospitality and respect due to a guest is a serious breach of the good manners and decorum which Jonson so highly prized. The personal standards he set for himself as host we know from the friendly and civilized tone of *Inviting a Friend to Supper* where he begins:

To night, grave sir, both my poore house, and I
Doc equally desire your companie:
Not that we thinke us worthy of such a ghest,
But that your worth will dignifie our feast,
With those that come; whose grace may make that seeme
Something, which else, could hope for no esteeme.

Such an invitation Camden, if he be the "grave sir", would find it difficult to refuse; the guest is honoured in the invitation and the host in its acceptance, a perfect balancing of social graces. The mouth-watering menu that follows to tempt the guest would give no occasion for the complaint made by Jonson's eighteenth-century namesake: "This was a good dinner enough, to be sure; but it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to".¹⁶ These words, in their tone and sentiment might have come from Ben himself.

Finally, as if to set the royal seal on the hospitality of Penshurst, Jonson recalls the unannounced arrival of King James and his son from a hunting expedition; in spite of the absence at the time of Lady Sidney, everything

was so well ordered and prepared for unexpected guests that the King heaped praise on the absent hostess - "the just reward of her high huswifery". Renewing this compliment to the lady of the house and commending her husband ("a fortune in this age but rarely knowne") and the virtuous and religious upbringing of her children, Jonson ends where he began, with the house; it may not compare in size and grandeur with the edifices built by other noblemen, but it has the greater distinction of being a house in which its master "dwells". Jonson intends a wealth of meaning in this last word; when a gentleman-landowner, to whom tradition and position have given social responsibilities, "dwells" permanently in his country house he takes his proper place at the center of the rural society that revolves around him. Without his presence there an important constituent of the community is missing and its balance upset. So Jonson is here praising Sidney as against absentee landlords who, at least in the country, fail to perform their proper economic and social functions.

"Decorum" is the word that jumps to the mind when we think of Jonson: "that which is proper, suitable or seemly; fitness, propriety, congruity . . . comeliness". These dictionary equivalents all fit Jonson; they might have been arrived at by examining his work. Decorum for him is not merely an element of style but an attitude of mind to life, social and literary. In social life it means the right ordering of different classes to one another, the giving of every man his due according to his station. It was not misguided equality; servants should be well looked after by their master-but "below"; when above stairs, their place is to serve. Such service is not demeaning; there was nothing demeaning in the neighbours coming with some deference before Sir Robert with their gifts; nor would he have done right to forbid such tribute. They honour him as their superior in position and authority and he should accept his place in the social scheme recognising his responsibilities

as well as his privileges. The hierarchy of values which Jonson prized runs through the poem in the relationships of servants and master, tenants and landlord, host and guest, nobleman and king, wife and husband, children and parents and, at the pinnacle, man and his Creator who are brought together when "the whole household" (including, no doubt, the guests whether poet or king) kneel "each morn and even to pray".

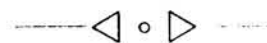
In its literary aspect decorum shows itself in the classical restraint and discipline which Jonson imposed on the over-luxuriant growth of earlier Elizabethan poetic plants. To a poverty of thought and formalised sentiment expressed in exuberant language he brought the remedy of a controlled emotion balanced by intellectual conviction and communicated in "pure and neat language . . . yet plaine and customary"¹⁶ For the intuitive psychological jumps of the "metaphysicals" he substituted a logical presentation of ideas which transferred his thought to the mind of the reader in a neat and well-ordered fashion. In this his work bears witness to the value of Camden's advice to him to write his thoughts out in prose first before turning them into poetry. His classical reading reinforced this lesson by teaching him to strive for clarity of thought and concise exactness of expression.

The qualities which Jonson learned from others he, in turn, taught by his example to those who followed him. His influence extended not only to his immediate disciples, the sons of Ben, but beyond them to the neo-classical Augustans. In celebrating the social scene and its participants "Jonson is unequalled by any English poet except, perhaps, Pope at his best"¹⁷ But would we have seen Pope at his best if Jonson had not preceded him?

Pope was, indeed, to be the man who by lending local poetry the prestige of his genius established it as one of the most popular forms of literary activity in the eighteenth century. His poem, *Windsor Forest*, set a headline that many tried to copy. "On reading Mr. Pope's *Windsor Forest*", wrote a

critic of the day, "it struck me that another poem of equal Merit might be produced so as to please the Admirers of this, which should abound with the like descriptions . . ." Unfortunately for the good name of local poetry, the same idea struck hundreds of other poetasters of the period and a flood of such poems came pouring from their pens. There were "hill-poems", "estate poems", "river-poems", "building poems", "journey poems", and even "cave-and-mine poems" (among which we may mention in passing a work entitled *News from Newcastle* or *Newcastle Coalpits*). Few of these, it is hardly necessary to say, were of "equal Merit" with Pope's or were capable of pleasing admirers of *Windsor Forest*; unless, that is, they happened to live in or near the region described, when the stirring of local loyalties might influence their discernment. It has been estimated that just under two thousand poems on every conceivable aspect of town or countryside were published in the two centuries from Drayton to Wordsworth; but only a handful such as *Grongar Hill*, *The Seasons*, *The Deserted Village*, and *Tintern Abbey* achieved distinction. The trouble was that local poems were deceptively easy to write; the subject lay at everyone's doorstep and a description with some local history and a few commonplace moral reflections made one a "poet"--who, unlike the prophet, and whatever the world at large might think, was not without honour in his own country.

Beside this prolific output of third-rate work the pioneer poems of Drayton and Jonson must take a high place -- *Poly-Olbion* for the numerous passages of melodic description and glowing love of the English countryside that occur throughout and compensate in large measure for excessive length; *To Penshurst* for the unqualified excellence which takes it out of any restricting category and puts it among the finest achievements of the main stream of English poetry.



NOTES

1. A. Napier (ed.), *Johnson's Lives of the Poets*, 1900, p. 85.
2. J. W. Hebel, *The Works of Michael Drayton*, 1961.
3. O. Elton, *Michael Drayton*, 1905.
4. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, 1598, in G. Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 1904.
5. Meres, *op. cit.*, p. 317.
6. J. Buxton, *Michael Drayton, Poems*, 1963, intro. xxxi.
7. Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
8. *Faerie Queene*, Bk. 1, Canto V, Stanza 2.
9. *Ruines of Time*, Stanzas 16, 18.
10. *Upon Appleton House*, 370-6.
11. Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 150
12. D. Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century*, 2nd. Edn., 1962, p. 76.
13. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems*, 1933, p. 7
14. J. Buxton, *Elizabethan Taste*, 1965, Ch. 2.
15. J. Boswell, *The Life of Johnson* (Everyman), 5th. August 1763.
16. B. Jonson, *Timber or Discoveries* in J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 1908, Vol. 1, p. 36.
17. W. J. Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, 1903, Vol. 3, p. 181.