

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 1

**p. 1** John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* occupies three manuscript volumes: Bodleian Library MSS Aubrey 6–8. The Life of Jonson is in the first volume, MS Aubrey 6, in a section of *Brief Lives* dedicated to the Lives of the English poets. Aubrey marked these Lives by drawing a wreath of laurel in the margin, and Jonson's has both a coat of arms (that of Robert de Ros) and a laurel wreath. These poets' Lives were mainly written in 1680 but contain a good deal of information which was told to Aubrey during his residence at Trinity College, Oxford in the 1640s, such as the reminiscences with which Aubrey begins his account. Some of this early material was written down closer to the date of collecting it, in note-books, other manuscripts and annotations to printed books, but there is no evidence that Aubrey wrote down any of the Jonson material before he began the Brief Life.

The Life was begun after 27 March 1680, as it is not among the Lives which Aubrey lists as completed in a letter to Anthony Wood of that date (Bodl. MS Ballard 14, f. 131<sup>v</sup>), but was probably written later that year, as Aubrey wrote to Wood on 7 August 1680 to ask him to make enquiries relating to Jonson's place of birth (Bodl. MS Wood F 39, f. 343, quoted and discussed below). In November Aubrey sent Izaak Walton some biographical queries of Wood's devising on Jonson and the English mathematicians and natural philosophers Henry Billingsley, Walter Warner, Thomas Harriot and Nicholas Hill. Walton's answer was received on 22 November 1680 and added to the manuscript.

After writing the Life, Aubrey came upon some further information, some of which he added to the margins. Most, however, was entered in the third volume of *Brief Lives*, MS Aubrey 8, between 1681 and 1694. One of these additions is written on the verso of a letter dated 19 July 1681 (MS Aubrey 8, f. 55). These additions have two main sources. At some time Aubrey met the actor John Lacy in a tavern and interviewed him for the Brief Life of John Ogilby and for Lacy's own life (written after Lacy's death on 17 September 1681; see MS Aubrey 8, f. 20<sup>v</sup>, MS Wood F 39, f. 421). Aubrey later told Wood that he 'tooke the minutes at the Tavern from his owne mouth'. This interview must have taken place between Ogilby's death in 1676 and Lacy's death in 1681, but the most likely date is early 1681. Lacy told him some gossip, described Jonson's appearance and clothing, and said that Jonson had taken from him a list of Yorkshire words, which Aubrey believed to have been his 'hint' for *A Tale of a Tub*. He also told him that Ogilby injured his leg while dancing in 'the Duke of Buckingham's great Masque', ie *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*. By 1 September 1681 Aubrey was collecting some additional notes on Jonson and Shakespeare from William Beeston (d. 1682), who was the son of Christopher Beeston, actor and theatre-owner, who had known Shakespeare (MS Wood F 39, f. 357). Aubrey made himself a note to ask Beeston about Shakespeare and Ben Jonson (MS Aubrey 8, f. 45<sup>v</sup>, the rough notes for f. 54, given here).

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 1

Aubrey wrote Jonson's life for its own sake, but in the expectation that it would be read by his friend and literary collaborator Anthony Wood who was preparing his second great biographical work *Athenæ Oxonienses* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1691); his earlier publication, *Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford, 1674), had included a brief entry for Jonson. The Life of Jonson in the *Athenæ* (1. 518–19) is substantially indebted to Aubrey's notes.

Aubrey clearly made copious extracts from a copy of F2 (1) (identified by Aubrey's citation of a page number from this volume in MS Aubrey 6, f. 106). He refers to this volume so frequently in his writing and spent so freely on books before his bankruptcy in 1670 that it is very likely that he owned a copy; however, if so, it has not been traced. He also knew F2 (3), as he notes in *Brief Lives* that Lady Hatton was one of the performers in 'Ben Johnsons Masque of the Gipsies', and the quarto edition of the Poems. Aubrey made extensive use of Jonson's poems as a biographical source in *Brief Lives*, noting for example that Nicholas Hill is mentioned by Jonson in 'The Famous Voyage' (*Epigr.* 133. 28), and transcribing some of Jonson's memorial verse, such as part of 'Eupheme' (*Und.* 84). He reconstructs Jonson's circle from a reading of his works and *Jonsonus Virbius* as including Sir Francis Bacon, Venetia and Sir Kenelm Digby, Thomas Egerton, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lucius Cary, Vincent Corbet, Sir Francis Stuart, Thomas Hobbes, John Selden, and Richard Martin.

In accordance with his belief (discussed below) that Jonson's characters were copied from nature and that Jonson was therefore a kind of life-writer himself, in a letter of 11 May 1682, Aubrey promised to send Anthony Wood a 'Key to Ben Johnsons Plays, as much as I can remember' (MS Wood F 39, f. 362). If he ever prepared such a list it has not survived, but probably Aubrey had in mind his identification of John Dee with 'the Alchemist' (whether Face or Subtle is not made clear), of the character Carlo Buffone from *Every Man Out of His Humour* with one Charles Chester, a companion of Raleigh's, and of Thomas Sutton with Volpone, all of which are suggested in *Brief Lives* (for the identification with Chester, see Matt Steggle, *SEL* 39 (1999), 313–26; for Sutton, see Robert C. Evans, *Jonson and the Contexts of his Time* (London and Toronto, 1994), 45–61). Such identifications were rife, but some of them may have come from Aubrey's friends John Dryden and Sir William Davenant, both of whom are alleged by Spence to have identified Morose with a real individual. See James M. Osborn, ed, Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes and Characters of Books and Men* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1966) 1. 183, no. 422, and Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (Samuel Holt Monk and A. E. Wallace Maurer, *The Works of John Dryden: Prose 1668–1691* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971), 59). Aubrey described the herald Sir Henry Saint-George as a 'spruce' man and a 'Sir Fastidious Brisk' (MS Wood F 39, f. 355), and made allowances for Sir George Ent's lack of enthusiasm for biographical

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 1

research with the reflection ‘every Man in his Humour’ (MS Wood F 39, f. 296).

The first item in *Brief Lives* is a motto from ‘Ben: Johnson in ‘his Underwoods’ which is ‘That the most worthy men have been rockked in meane Cradles’ (MS Aubrey 6, f. 1). Aubrey first used this favourite motto for his Life of the humbly-born Thomas Hobbes (Bodl. MS Aubrey 9, f. 29). It is a phrase which stuck in his mind from his reading of *Discoveries*—Aubrey regularly confuses *Underwood* with *Discoveries*—where Jonson, quoting Apuleius’s *Apologia, sive de Magia Liber*, 18, says that ‘no great worke, or worthy of praise, or memory, but came out of poore cradles’ (*Disc.* 1366-67). Aubrey’s application of this commonplace to *Brief Lives* as a whole reflects his interest in writing the lives of self-made men from ‘meane Cradles’. Aubrey saw in Jonson an icon of the advancement of learning: a brilliant man of humble birth, who had improved his lot through patronage and education, was interested in antiquarian studies and mathematics, and enjoyed warm friendships which combined profit with delight. Part of what Aubrey hoped to achieve in *Brief Lives* is a reconstruction of Caroline social relationships, encompassing friendship, patronage, and what he took to be the convivial and unconstrained sociability which in his view had been substantially altered by the civil war and for which Jonson’s circle of ‘wits’ at the Mermaid Tavern seemed to provide an ideal model.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jonson plays a significant role in Aubrey’s manuscript treatise on education, *An Idea of Education of Young Gentlemen* (Bodl. MS Aubrey 10; written 1684, but including ‘Idea Filioli seu Educatio Pueri’, a brief treatise of 1669). Aubrey alludes approvingly to Jonson’s ‘Underwoods’ (sic.) on the subject of public and private education (MS Aubrey 10, ff. 9, 27; he means *Disc.* 1664–96), and suggests that schoolboys who are studying ethics formally would benefit from spending their leisure reading the comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare as these writers ‘open’ the understandings of the young to ‘Mores Hominum; to what we call Humours, *scilicet* the Delirations from Morality, and Prudence’ (MS Aubrey 10, f. 47). He is more specific about this elsewhere in the volume where he strongly recommends that schoolboys should keep a commonplace-book in which to enter ‘Mores hominum’, ‘Rerum naturalium’, ‘poignant Sayings’ and ‘Antiquities’, to form a ‘Nest-egge’ of ‘Observation and Experience: a way as farre beyond the common way of Precept, as the Knowledge of a Traveller exceeds that *which* is gotten by a Mapped; he elaborates:

I know not where are to be seen better Specimens of this kind, than in Ben: Johnson’s Underwoods, *which* he calls *ϵυλαη*. He dayly read men, and made his Observations as he walkt along the streetes. Had he not donne thus he had never wrote so well: He haz outdonne all men (yet) in Dramatique Poetrie. Nature is the best Guide, & the best Paterne: ’tis better to copie nature than Bookes: as the the best Painters imitate nature, not copies. This will putt life & vigour into youths

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 1

of ingenious spirits, to see that by these Steppes the old Writers came by their Mastership. (MS Aubrey 10, ff. 94–95; see also f. 106 for Aubrey’s re-iteration that Jonson’s ‘Playes, are not only Dramatique Poetrie: but there are admirable Essaies, and Characters: and Mores Hominum excellently described’.)

The principle that ‘Nature is the best Guide’ is explicitly repudiated by Jonson, e.g. in his dedicatory poem printed before Shakespeare’s Folio, where he asserts that, ‘though the Poets matter, Nature be,/ His Art does give the fashion’ (‘To the Memory of My Beloved’, 55ff). Aubrey’s insistence that *Discoveries* is a commonplace-book of observations made as its author ‘walkt along the streets’ is a revealing misrepresentation of Jonson’s discoveries ‘upon men and matter: as they have flowed out of his daily reading’. Aubrey suppresses the clear evidence of Jonson’s learning and imitation of classical models and recasts him as a Baconian natural philosopher in the field of ‘Mores Hominum’ and the companion of mathematicians and virtuosos. This view was shared with others in Aubrey’s circle. As Sir William Petty told Samuel Hartlib in 1649, ‘What Verulam’s Natural History is in Philosophy the same Parallel for Ethicks or Moral Histories is most exactly couched in Ben Iohnsons works, to the Readers admiration expressing the Characters of all humours and behaiours whatsoever’ (Hartlib Papers, 28/1/28a; ‘Ephemerides 1649’). This myth of an unlearned but acutely observant Jonson perhaps derives from Fuller, who says that Jonson ‘would sit silent in learned company, and suck in (besides wine) their several humours into his observation’ (Fuller, *Worthies*, 242).

His belief in Jonson as a reliable observer led Aubrey to make extensive use of the masques as a source for popular antiquities. In his *Miscellanies*, Aubrey discusses magic practices for divining the identity of one’s future husband:

The Women have several Magical Secrets handed down to them by Tradition, for this purpose, as, on St. Agnes Night, 21 Day of January, Take a row of Pins, and pull out every one, one after another, saying a Pater Noster, or Our Father, sticking a Pin in your Sleeve, and you will Dream of him or her, you shall Marry. Ben. Johnson in one of his Masques, makes some mention of this.

And on sweet Saint Agnes Night  
Please you with the promis’d Sight,  
Some of Husbands, some of Lovers,  
Which an empty Dream discovers.

Aubrey adds a note, ‘Tis printed St. Ann’s Night, falsely.’ (*Miscellanies* (London, 1696), p. 104). In his treatise on folklore, *Remaines of Gentilisme*, Aubrey reveals that he checked these lines from *A Particular Entertainment at Althorp* with women who continued to practise this form of divination, and judged their version to be the authentic one, and Jonson guilty of a careless slip. ‘Memorandum: ’Tis on St Agnes night not St Annes night, that Dreames are given. Ben Johnson (the woemen tell me) was out as to St Anne’s night’ (BL Lansdowne MS 231, f. 131, see *Althorp*

74–7). Aubrey was particularly impressed by *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* which he said contained a ‘perfect description of Rideing at the Quintin’ and took from it details of historical costume and wedding customs for his great antiquarian work *Monumenta Britannica* (Bodl. MS Top. Gen. c 25, f. 199). He seems to have believed Jonson’s art to have chiefly consisted in the choreography of observed folk-practice, and valued it as a record of a rural culture of ancient origins destroyed by the Civil War. And when Aubrey himself wrote a very fragmentary play, *The Countrey Revell*, it shows, even in its confused state, Aubrey’s admiration for the masques; it was to include some gypsies, and characters called Squire Fitzale and Sir Eglamour (Bodl. MS Aubrey 21, f. 4).

For Wharton’s transcript of this Life, see Bodl. MS Malone 30, f. 109<sup>r-v</sup>. This was printed in Edmond Malone ed., *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* 10 vols., (London, 1790), vol. 1 part 2, pp. 170–1. In 1792, after further work on the Aubrey MSS, Malone made a transcription of the other passages relating to the Life of Jonson in Bodl. MS Eng. Misc. d 26, ff. 12<sup>v</sup>–14.

**l. 3: Poet Laureat.]** For an account of this role, see Richard Helgeron, *Self-Crowned Laureates* (1983), and E.K. Broadus, *The Laureateship* (1921).

**margin: He killed ... Shirburn** Aubrey wrote to Wood on 21 April 1691: ‘Ben. Johnson killed ... Marlow (who translated Museus) at Bunhill-fields [which is neer Moorfields] comeing from the Green-curtain-playhouse. from Mr Lacy’ (*F39*, f. 424<sup>v</sup>). Wood wrote ‘false’ above it. The actor and playwright John Lacy was one of Aubrey’s most useful sources of anecdotes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, which explains his later confusion; but Aubrey’s informant was Sir Edward Sherburne (1618–1702), Royalist and RC poet, astronomer and book-collector, an employee of the Ordnance Office. He took an active interest in the bio-bibliographical research for Wood’s *Athenæ Oxonienses* and his biographical and autobiographical letters to Wood are Bodl. MS Wood F 44, ff. 221–300; they do not mention Jonson. Sherburne was a friend of the dramatist James Shirley, and this theatrical tradition conflates the stabbing of Christopher Marlowe with Jonson’s fatal wounding of the actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel fought in Hoxton Fields beyond Shoreditch 22 September 1598. This note is later than 6 January 1682, when Sherburne was knighted.

**l. 5: Mr Ralph Bathurst** Dr Ralph Bathurst (1620–1704), Dean of Wells from 1670, who was a fellow of Trinity from 1640, and a long-standing personal friend: Aubrey had met him as an undergraduate at Trinity in 1642 and had hoped to make the Grand Tour with him in 1653. They remained in contact for the rest of Aubrey’s life. The date of ‘1646’ is not exact, for Aubrey uses a different date in a letter he wrote to Wood on 7

August 1680 to ask him to ask Bathurst ‘what Countreyman Ben. Johnson was; to my best remembrance I heard him say 1648, Warwickshire. & I have heard some say that he was of *Trinity college* Cambridge’ (MS Wood F 39, f. 343). This letter is probably written very close to the date when Aubrey wrote this life, and his ‘sed quaere’ (‘but check’) was very likely deleted when he sent Wood the letter. The date refers broadly to Aubrey’s third period of time at Oxford. He was at Trinity between May and July or August 1642, and between February and June 1643, returning in November 1646 where he stayed, ‘off & on’ until December 1648. He says he ‘was much made of by the Fellowes, had their learned conversation, lookt on bookes’ and, in short, enjoyed ‘the greatest felicity’ of his life (MS Aubrey 7, f. 3). Aubrey knew Bathurst’s library well and refers to items from it in his letters to Wood; he remembered a mathematical work and a poem in Bathurst’s ‘great Collection of Verses in *MSS*’ (MS Wood F 39, f. 221<sup>v</sup>, 252). Thus Aubrey, who owned at least two books from Jonson’s library, is very likely also to have known Jonson’s annotated copy of G. J. Vossius, *De Historicis Græcis* which Ralph Bathurst presented to Trinity in 1659; see *Jonson’s Library*, *CWBJ* 202.

**l. 6: a Warwyckshire man.** Jonson’s birthplace is unknown; it was probably in or near London.

**l. 7: his father was a Minister** See *Informations* 198–201: ‘His grandfather came from Carlisle, and he thought from Annandale to it; he served Henry VIII, and was a gentleman. His father lost all his estate under Queen Mary; having been cast in prison and forfeited, at last turned minister. So he was a minister’s son. He himself was posthumous born, a month after his fathers decease [... ]’

**ll. 7–8: Epistle ... of Every man** The revised *EMI* is prefaced in F1 by a dedication to Camden. In his additional notes on the Brief Life of Jonson, Aubrey transcribes it (see below; MS Aubrey 8, f. 55).

**ll. 10–12: His mother ... father in lawe** Cf. Fuller: ‘When a *little child* he lived in *Harts-horn-lane* near *Charing-cross*, where his Mother married a Bricklayer for her Second husband’ (*Worthies* 243). J. B. Bam- borough identified him as the bricklayer Robert Brett (d. 1609), of Hartshorn Lane (which ran between the Strand and the Thames), and argued that Jonson began to work with Brett in 1590; see *TLS* 8 April 1960. Jonson himself says that he was taken from school and ‘put to another craft’ (*Informations* 204).

**l. 12: father in lawe** step-father.

**margin: from old parson ... 1646** Richard Hill BD of Hereford, matriculated at Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1607 aged 15, and was Fellow 1614–48. From 1637 he was rector of Stretton Sugwas, Herefordshire,

whence he retired when he was ejected from his fellowship by the Parliamentary visitors in 1648. Aubrey, who made regular visits to Hereford and collected ‘remarks’ relating to the area, says that Hill and his neighbours used to meet in 1648 to toast the King’s health in cider (Aubrey, *Miscellanies* (London, 1696), 99).

**ll. 12–13: the Garden-wall of Lincolnes Inne** Cf. Thomas Fuller: ‘He helped in the building of the new structure of *Lincolnes-Inn*, when having a *Trowell* in his hand, he had a *book* in his pocket’ (*Worthies* 243). A Thomas (not Robert) Brett was employed to repair the walls of Lincoln’s Inn at this period.

**l. 17: Exhibition** financial grant.

**ll. 17–18: at Trinity College in Cambridge** There is no evidence that Jonson was an undergraduate at Trinity, and this idea may have arisen from the fact that Westminster students were often sent to Trinity. Aubrey’s marginal ‘*quaere*’ shows that Aubrey wanted to discover how long Jonson had been at Cambridge, rather than querying this information.

**l. 19: Lowe-coultreys** Jonson joined the English army stationed in the Netherlands, perhaps when the garrison was strengthened in 1591. In his *Informations* he says that he then went ‘to the Low Countries, but returning soon he betook himself to his wonted studies. In his service in the Low Countries he had, in the face of both the camps, killed an enemy and taken *opima spolia* from him’ (*Informations*, 205–8).

**l. 20: in his Epigrammes** *Epigr.* 107. ‘To true Soldiers’:

I swear by your true friend, my muse, I love  
Your great profession; which I once did prove:  
And did not shame it with my actions, then

**ll. 20–21: he came over into England** Probably in autumn 1592.

**l. 21: acted and wrote** Cf. Aubrey’s comment in the Brief Life of Shakespeare that ‘Ben Johnson was never a good Actor, but an excellent Instructor’ (MS Aubrey 6, f. 109).

**ll. 21–22: The Green Curtaine** The name should be ‘The Curtain’, in Holywell Lane, derived from an adjacent ‘curtain’ (outer wall) of an old fortification abutting on the old London Wall. Having fallen into disuse, it was destroyed in the Great Fire. Jonson was associated with the theatre later in his career, for *EMI* was acted here in 1598.

**margin: J. Greenhill** Unidentified, but John Greenhill (1644?–76), the portrait-painter, is a possibility. Like Aubrey, Greenhill was a Wiltshire man, he painted some of Aubrey’s friends (eg Seth Ward), and Aubrey was well-connected with artists. Greenhill frequented actors’ circles and corresponded with Aphra Behn; he also painted some actors’ portraits.

**ll. 22–23: Nursery or obscure Play-house** Theatre used for the training of young players, such as the one established by Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant in 1667 in Hatton Garden, London. As for the nurseries' obscurity, the Prologue of John Dover's heroic tragedy *The Roman Generalls* (London, 1667) claims that in nurseries, a writer may 'shun a Publick Censure' as 'They count Ten People There, an Audience'.

**ll. 25–26: Every man . . . good one** Jonson's earliest surviving play (performed pre-July 1599) was *Case*. See Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* where Dryden speaks of *Philaster* as the first success of Beaumont and Fletcher and adds, 'before that, they had written two or three very unsuccessfully: as the like is reported of *Ben. Johnson*, before he writt *Every Man in his Humour*' (Samuel Holt Monk and A. E. Wallace Maurer, *The Works of John Dryden: Prose 1668–1691* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971), 17. 56). The play was first performed September 1598.

**ll. 27–32: Serjeant . . . acknowledge it** In his *Life of John Hoskyns*, Aubrey says that Hoskyns's

great Witt quickly made him be taken notice of. Ben: Johnson called him Father: Sir Benet told me, that one time desiring Mr Johnson to adopt him for his sonne: "no said he I dare not. 'tis honour enough for me<sup>7</sup> to be your Brother I was your Fathers sonne; and 'twas He that polished me" (Bodl. MS. Rawlinson D. 727, f. 93<sup>v</sup>).

Jonson made extracts from Hoskyns's *Direccions For Speech and Style* in his *Discoveries*.

**p. 2 l. 1: Sir Bennet Hoskins Baronet** Sir Benedict Hoskyns, Bart., of the Middle Temple.

**margin: Anthony Wood in hist Historia . . . 273.** A summary of the content of Anthony Wood's life of Jonson in *Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (Oxford, 1674). To his manuscript miscellany of Oxford jests, Wood added this one: 'Ben. Johnson after he had been created *Master of Arts* at Oxon 1619, returned to Lond. but his freinds being scrupulous of it, would be often asking him—but are thou indeed *Master of Arts*? yes without question he would answer' (Bodl. MS Wood E 32, f. 29). Cf. *Informations* 214–15: 'He was *Master of Arts* in both the universities, by their favour, not his study'.

**l. 7: Mr Lacy** John Lacy (c. 1615–1681), actor, dancer, dramatist and choreographer. Lacy's name appears on a list of players of the 'young Company' at the Cockpit Theatre, dated 10 August 1639. His earliest known role was Ananias in *Alch*. See below.

**ll. 9–11: Canarie . . . then to studie** Under Charles, Jonson was granted a tierce of Canary wine in addition to his salary. See *Life Records* 00.000. Jonson's preference for Canary was well-known, although Aubrey

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 2

could have discovered it from Jonson's own *Epigr.* 101 'Inviting a Friend to Supper' or indeed from Suckling's 'A Sessions of the Poets' (verse 3) both of which he read. Aubrey regularly collected information about the eating and drinking habits of brilliant men, hoping to discern a connection between diet and productivity. Thus he notes that Marvell used wine to refresh his spirits, while Milton rarely drank between meals, and William Prynne sustained himself with regular snacks of bread rolls and ale at his desk, for 'tis with Invention as a flux, when once it is flowing, it runnes amaine: if it is checked, flowes but guttatiim. and the like for perspiration, check it, and 'tis spoyled' (MS Aubrey 6, f. 85<sup>v</sup>).

**ll. 12–13: his studyeing chaire, . . . drawn in** Cf. Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, *Mysteries of Love and Eloquence; or the Arts of Wooing and Complimenting* (1685) p. 174, 'Q. Why is Ben Johnson's Chair at Robert Wilson's Tipling-house in the Strand? A. To signifie that Poets in these hard times, though they should invoke the nine Muses, may still want nine pence to purchase a pint of Canary.' The 1656 edition of *Wit and Drollery* contained at p. 79 a poem, *Verses written over the Chair of Ben: Johnson, now remaining at Robert Wilsons, at the Signe of Johnson's head in the Strand*. H&S point out that in the *Noctes Atticae* (Lugd. Batavorum Apud Hieronymum de Vogel, 1644), is an engraved title-page, with Aulus Gellius composing as he sits in a chair, the hatching of which and the rolled top suggest wicker-work; but two knobs above at either end show that it is a wooden chair.

**l. 14: Bishop Skinner** Robert Skinner (1591–1670), fellow of Trinity from 1613 and Bishop of Oxford 1641, and the source of one of Aubrey's favourite anecdotes, that of Sir Henry Savile preferring the 'plodding student' to a witty one, and saying that wits were to be found in Newgate (Bodl. MS Aubrey 6, f. 84). Aubrey dates this story to 1646. For another of the Bishop's stories, see Kate Bennett, 'John Aubrey, Joseph Barnes's Print-Shop and a Sham Newsletter', *The Library*, Vol. XXI, (March, 1999), No. 1, pp. 1–9.

**ll. 17–18: in his Epigrammes . . . Epitaph** *Epigr.* 45, 'On My First Sonne'.

**ll. 18–19: my uncle Danvers . . . him** Aubrey's uncle Sir John Danvers (1588?–1655), of Chelsea, the regicide and husband of Magdalen Herbert. Danvers gave Aubrey some of his earliest biographical material, such as accounts of Bacon and Sir Thomas More, Sir Edward Coke, Venetia Digby, Thomas Egerton, and members of the Herbert family. For Aubrey's account of Danvers's Italianate gardens at Chelsea and Lavington, see *The Naturall Historie of Wiltshire* (Bodl. MS Aubrey 2, ff. 53–9).

**ll. 19–20: temple Barre . . . Castle** Temple Bar was a medieval gate, with a prison above it, on Fleet Street near the Middle and Inner Temples,

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 2

which marked the western limits of the City. Its site is now marked by a memorial opposite the law courts. The Elephant and Castle occupied its current position in SE1, then, as now, a downmarket area.

**II. 21–23: he lived . . . Palace** Izaak Walton also testifies that Jonson died near Westminster Abbey; there seems little reason to doubt this tradition.

**I. 25: Scutcheon** tricked in the margin: argent, three water-bougets gules. The escutcheon in the north aisle is partly hidden by the nineteenth-century memorial to Thomas Banks under which the inscribed pavement-square was set into the wall in 1821. In its original place there is now a modern copy. Aubrey wrote, then deleted, the memorandum ‘is just opposite Robertus de Ros’ against Jonson’s name in the index to the third volume of *Brief Lives*, MS Aubrey 8, which is dated 1 July 1681, but contains many later additions.

**I. 27: O RARE BENN: IONSON** By the eighteenth century, this inscription had gained a new tradition; William Oldys, in his annotation on his copy of Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (BL C.45.d.15, p. 287) is the earliest to cite this story: ‘old Mr. Clud told me of the Inscription on his Tomb-stone arising from the popular applause of this Play after his solemn Catiline had been coldly received by the Audience’. Gifford, in his notes to *Bartholomew Fair*, refers to a tradition that this ‘epiphonema’ was first raised over the success of that play.

**I. 28: Jack Young** Wood, who made substantial use of Aubrey’s account for his Life of Jonson in *Athenæ Oxonienses* 1. 519, says there that this was ‘Jack Young of Great Milton in Oxfordshire, (afterwards a Knight by the favour of K. Ch. 2.)’. This Sir John Young (1601–70) was the eldest son of John Young of Ascott (or ‘Escot’), Great Milton, Oxfordshire. His father was the son of John Yong, Bishop of Rochester, and his mother the daughter of Dr Robert Hoveden, Warden of All Souls College, Oxford. It is not known when Young was knighted. (See J. B. Whitmore, ‘Four Knights’, *Notes and Queries* 192 (1947), 442–45 and Anthony Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford* ed. Andrew Clark 3 vols. (Oxford Historical Society, 1889–99), 3. 235). It seems likely that Wood’s authority for this identification was Aubrey, but we have no firm evidence that this was so. This Jack Young seems to be the one who features in the Brief Life of Sir John Suckling, where Aubrey relates a story told him by Sir William Davenant about a Jack Young who travelled to Bath in ‘the venison season’ (July or August) 1637 with Suckling and Davenant, and was the victim of a practical joke played on him by his friends (MS Aubrey 6, ff. 109<sup>v</sup>–110<sup>v</sup>). In his Brief Life of Sir William Davenant, Aubrey says that Davenant was made poet laureate on Jonson’s death and that Davenant’s grave in Westminster Abbey was marked by ‘a paving-stone of marble’ on which ‘is writt

COMMENTARY ON PAGE 3

in imitation of that on Ben: Johnson, o rare Sir Will: Davenant' (MS Aubrey 6, ff. 46, 47<sup>v</sup>). It is thus tempting to ascribe the Jack Young story to Davenant. It is not accurate in detail, and has been shaped by the tradition of Jonson's alleged death in lonely poverty. If this was the same Jack Young, he was in the West Country, and not in Westminster Abbey, when 'the grave was covering' on 9 August. However, when plans to build an elaborate monument to Jonson fell through, it might perhaps have been Young who arranged the witty and simple alternative.

**p. 3 l. 4: Tanquam Explorator** For the motto from Seneca, *Epistles* 2. 5, see *Jonson's Library*. Aubrey is known to have owned two books from Jonson's library. The first is Thomas Digges, *A Geometrical, Practical Treatise Named Pantometria* which Aubrey gave to Gloucester Hall. It is now Worcester College, Oxford, II. 11. 2. Jonson wrote on the title-page 'Tanquam Explorator'—scored-out in another ink but still legible—and 'Sum Ben: Johnson Liber ex dono Amicissimi sui *Dudleii* Digges Authoris filij' also scored-out. On the verso of the two back endpapers there are calculations in Aubrey's hand. The other book is John Selden's *De Dijs Syris* (Leiden 1629), now Rosenbach Library shelfmark EL1. S464i. Aubrey's signature is on the front endpaper, and the book has Jonson's signature and motto. (I am indebted to Mark Bland for the latter information.)

**ll. 5–7: a Favourite ... favour.** e. g., 'To Thomas Lord Chancellor' in *Epigr.* 74. Aubrey alludes to two (not 'one') epigrams to Egerton (as Baron Ellesmere), in which he pleads for his interest in the cause of a poor man *Und.* 31 and 32. See the notes on Egerton in CWBJ.

**l. 8: my Lady Hoskins** Either the wife of Sir Bennet Hoskins or the wife of Sir John Hoskins (1634–1705). It seems Lady Hoskins had read Jonson's poem 'Why I write not of love' (*Forest*, 1), but it is a fair comment on the plays.

**ll. 14–15: Thomas Shadwell ... of Newcastle** William Cavendish (1592–1676), duke of Newcastle, had been Jonson's patron, and was subsequently the patron of the playwright and champion of Jonson, Thomas Shadwell (1640 or 1642–92). On the duke's death in 1676 his son and heir Henry, duke of Newcastle, inherited the role of patron (see Francis Needham, 'A Letter of Shadwell's', *TLS* (23 Oct. 1630), 866). Aubrey first mentions Shadwell in a letter of 26 Oct. 1671 when he says he is writing a satirical play for him (MS Wood F 39, f. 141<sup>v</sup>), presumably intending that Shadwell should finish it and bring it to the stage; the fact that Aubrey mentions Shadwell's participation in Butler's funeral in 1680 and his death in 1692 (see Bodl. MS Tanner 456a, f. 41) suggests he was in some kind of contact with him after that date. These notes are not known to exist, and it is not certain that they ever did. Cavendish may have written the notes on his own account, but it is quite as likely that Aubrey asked Shadwell

to write brief biographical notes of Jonson, derived from his conversations with his patron, in which case Shadwell may not have obliged.

**ll. 15–16: *quaere Thomas Henshawe*** See S. Pasmore, ‘Thomas Henshaw, FRS (1618–1700)’ *Notes and Records of the Royal Society*, xxxvi (1982), 177–88. Aubrey wished to ask Henshaw about ‘stones in Ireland’; he notes Henshaw’s natural-philosophical comments in several manuscripts, and this is probably an enquiry about mineral specimens, as Henshaw brought stones to the Royal Society’s meetings on several occasions. In addition, there are two subjects on which Aubrey may have wished to question Henshaw. First, Aubrey intended to ask Henshaw for his reminiscences of the Globe Theatre, of which, Aubrey says, Henshaw had clear memories (Bodl. MS Aubrey 4, f. 104). The immediate use of this material would have been to improve Aubrey’s account of the Bankside in his *Perambulation of Surrey*, but he may have hoped for memories of playwrights too. Second, Aubrey wanted to question Henshaw about Nicholas Hill, whom Jonson mentions in ‘A Famous Voyage’, Aubrey having drawn a blank on this subject with Izaak Walton. Aubrey’s Brief Life of Hill, initially written before 7 August 1680, is MS Aubrey 6, f. 38<sup>v</sup>. On 28 June 1681, Aubrey promised Wood half a sheet of paper, written on both sides, about Hill from Henshaw (MS Wood F 39, f. 395<sup>v</sup>). However it was not until July 1689 that Aubrey explained to Wood that Henshaw had visited Hill’s widow in Bow Lane, London, and bought some of his books, including one of his manuscripts (MS Wood F 39, f. 389). Some time after November 1689, Wood finally received Henshaw’s transcription of the manuscript and biographical account of Nicholas Hill. It is now Bodl. MS Wood F 42, f. 174–76.

**ll. 16–17: *vide his Execration against Vulcan Und. 43.*** Aubrey was possibly interested in ‘An Execration Upon Vulcan’ as it showed that some of Jonson’s manuscripts had been destroyed, but he also used the poem to recover some information about Bess Broughton, of Canon Pyon, Herefordshire, who had a reputation as a particularly expensive courtesan (‘second Thais’). In the Brief Life of Bess Broughton (MS Aubrey 6, f. 101), he quotes: ‘In Ben: Johnsons Execrations against Vulcan, he concludes thus.

“Pox take thee Vulcan, may Pandora’s pox  
And all the Ills that flew out of her Box  
Light on thee, and if those plagues will not doe  
Thy Wives Pox take thee, and Bess: Broughtons too.”

He comments that ‘in the first Edition in 8°. her name is thus at Length’, and his inaccurate transcription seems to be from Benson’s duodecimo or his quarto of Jonson’s *Poems* (1640); there is no octavo edition. F1 has ‘B Bs’ for ‘Bess Broughton’s’. Aubrey adds information about Broughton’s father’s use of the by-product of soap manufacture as fertiliser, some details of her alleged sexual career and a popular song about her

‘buttoned smock’.

**I. 17: my Lord Clifford** Richard Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, brother of Aubrey’s patron, the Earl of Thanet.

**II. 17–19: of the Gentleman . . . Juvenal** A less pithy version is told by Aubrey’s friend Robert Boyle:

*Ben. Jonson* passionately complaining to a learned Acquaintance of mine, that a Man of the long Robe, whom his Wit had raised to great Dignities and Power, had Refus’d to grant him some very valuable thing he had Begg’d of him, concluded with saying with an upbrading Tone and Gesture to my Friend; *Why the ungratefull Wretch knows very well, that before he came to Preferment, I was the Man that made him Relish* Horace (*Some Considerations Touching the Style of the H. Scriptures* (1661), sig. a3).

**I. 21: Sir W. Wiseman** The allegation is that Jonson was bribed to keep Wiseman from being sheriff. There is a Jacobean candidate, Sir Thomas (not William) Wiseman, sheriff of Essex in 1611, who was succeeded by Henry Lee in 1612. No sheriff served for more than a year. Another candidate was suggested by Anthony Powell, *John Aubrey and his Friends* (London, 1988), 70 who offers Sir William Wiseman of Canfield Hall, Essex, baronet, who served as sheriff for Essex in 1639, the year after Jonson’s death. He suggests that Sir William may have been a relative of Mary Wiseman of Westminster, with whom Aubrey fell in love in 1651. Neither candidate confirms the story. See Public Record Office Lists and Indexes ‘List of Sheriffs for England and Wales’ (London, 1898), 46.

**p. 4 I. 1: None-such-Charles** Sir Balthazar Gerbier’s anonymously published *The None-such Charles his Character* (London, 1651), 170:

Now men may see, how much reason *Ben. Jonson* had, when as, lying sicke in his bed, very poore, and that after much importunity of Courtiers, ten pounds were sent to him by the King, after the receipt of which, *Ben.* threw them through the glasse windowes, saying, *this mans soule was not fitt to live in an alley.*

Frances Teague, in ‘Ben Jonson’s Poverty’, *Biography* 2 (1979), discusses the afterlife of this story of Jonson’s death in poverty and concludes that it has no basis in fact. Compare Jonson’s own story of Spenser’s death, *Informations* 143–7.

**II. 5–6: Ben. Johnson . . . bigger** In Jonson’s portrait, after Abraham van Blyenberch, the right eye appears to be slightly lower and bigger than the left.

**I. 6: Clun the Player** Walter Clun, or Clunne, like Lacy, was a member of the Red Bull acting troupe, and subsequently of the King’s Men. He may have been a boy actor at the Blackfriars. He was killed in 1664. Pepys particularly admired his performance as Subtle in *Alch.* (Pepys, *Diary* 5. 232).

**ll. 6–9: He tooke . . . Tale of a Tub** In the Brief Life of John Lacy, who was born in Doncaster, Aubrey says that Jonson ‘tooke a note of’ Lacy’s ‘Yorkshire words’ and ‘proverbs’ for *Tub*, instancing ‘servant Gad kettlepins’ (MS Aubrey 8, f. 20<sup>v</sup>). These words do not seem especially characteristic of Yorkshire dialect; ‘servant’ and ‘Gad’ are not dialectical, and ‘kettlepins’ are nine-pins, a notoriously rustic amusement to the Restoration taste, but not one confined to Yorkshire. What is surely central to this anecdote is Lacy’s pride in his particular skill, for which he was greatly admired, namely his talent in ‘clowning’ roles in which he displayed a brilliant mimicry of ‘low’ regional accents. His performances as the uncouth comic Scotsman in his own play *Sauny the Scot*, and as the Irishman Teague, in *The Committee*, were fêted; but he also played several Frenchmen and mimicked John Dryden in *The Rehearsal*. The story thus rings true for both Lacy and Jonson, but the question of which of Jonson’s plays might have benefited from Lacy’s contribution has been debated. Although *Tub* is certainly a dialect play, its clowns speak a Middlesex dialect. The only extant play that a northern glossary could have been used for is *Sad Shep.* where the rustics speak a dialect that is supposed to be that of the Nottinghamshire-Leicestershire border, but is actually much too northern in character to have been spoken in that area.

Aubrey himself made a practice of collecting dialect and obsolete words or ‘gothicisms’; see eg *Villare Anglicanum* (Bodl. MS Aubrey 5, f. 91), and hoped to include authentic Chester dialect words in his unfinished play *The Countrey Revell*.

**ll. 19–27: A Grace . . . Raph.** See *Poems* for this text and other witnesses. The story was well-known in the late seventeenth century; the actor George Powell refers to it in ‘The Epistle Dedicatory to the Patentees, and Sharers of their Majesties Theatre’ prefixed to *The Treacherous Brothers* (London, 1690): ‘The time has been when [...] old *Ben* ended his Grace with God bless me and God bless *Ralph*, viz. the honest Drawer that drew him good Sack.’ *Ralph* is commemorated in *A Search after Wit [...] By an Vnder-Drawer at the —’s Head-Tavern in —Gate-Street* (London, 1691), in which Jonson is asked to ‘look down for a moment’ out of love for ‘our Progenitor *Ralph*’, glossed as ‘A Drawer that Ben Jonson used to remember in his Prayers’. See also Robert Whitehall, *The English Rechabite* (London, 1691), 16.

p. 5 **ll. 11–12: his . . . Clarenceaux** Aubrey mentions this dedication in the ‘Brief Life’, and in these additional notes he transcribes it.

**ll. 18–27: Ben: Johnson . . . should be remembered.** This anecdote is found in Aubrey’s *A Perambulation of Surrey* in the section ‘Paralipomena’ (supplementary material, with a collection of Surrey dialect words). This work was first begun in 1673 and completed in 1692. See *Poems*.

COMMENTARY ON PAGES 6–7

**p. 6 Izaak Walton's letter to Aubrey of 22 November 1680** This letter is tipped into the Lives manuscript before the Life of Jonson. It was in its current position by 1792; for Malone describes it as 'subjoined' to the account of Jonson's Life (Bodl. MS Eng. Misc. d 26, f. 12<sup>v</sup>). It is in answer to a letter of Aubrey's containing a list of queries posed by Anthony Wood in relation to the Lives of Jonson and the English mathematicians Nicholas Hill, Sir Henry Billingsley, Walter Warner and Thomas Harriot. Aubrey wrote Brief Lives of all of these men. Anthony Wood has marked the margins in several places.

**l. 8: my ... Winton** George Morley, d. 1684. He was twenty-five years younger than Jonson and was not at school with him; they met in the late 1620s.

**l. 9: he was in the 6<sup>o</sup>** This does not fit in with the record, as far as it can be ascertained, of Jonson's schooldays.

**ll. 10–11: his father dyed** Jonson's father died 1572, before Jonson was born.

**ll. 13–15: Camden ... traulls** Camden got Jonson the tutorship of Walter Raleigh (b. 1593) in 1612 (*Informations* 268–9).

**ll. 20–22: he got in time ... gentry** On 1 February 1616, James granted Jonson an annual pension of 100 marks, which Charles increased to £100 p.a. and a tierce of Canary wine in March 1630 (see *Life Records* 00,00, and *Und.* 76. He also received 100 nobles p. a. from the City when appointed City Chronologer on 2 September 1628 (although payment was suspended on 10 November 1631 for non-performance and restored 1634; see *Life Records* 00.000). In addition, he received £20 every year from Pembroke (*Informations* 252) and other payments from patrons.

**p. 7 l. 3: a woman** H&S comment: 'Some quite untrustworthy anecdotes of Jonson preserved in Bodley MS. Rawlinson, B. 158, pp. 178–80, in an eighteenth-century hand, contain a more explicit statement:- "Ben: Johns: In his old age, grew very poore and haueing borrowed £40 of a Certain woman (mistriss to the E. of Dorset.) She Inveigled him to come and sejourne at her house, he did so, and brought with him all his books, the onely houshold stuff he had, which she haveing In possession, attached the old man, sent to all his friends, but could not amongst them borrow the Money to redeeme them which broke his heart and so he died.'