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PROHIBITION OF GRIEF AND JONSON'S FUNERAL POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The paper identifies three attitudes towards mourning in the English Renaissance--the duty of grieving for the dead, the concession of moderate grief, and the prohibition of all grief--and shows how this final, little-known attitude characterizes the funeral poetry of Ben Jonson.

Prohibition of Grief and Jonson's Funeral Poetry

One of Ben Jonson's briefest epigrams, "Of Death," expresses an unusual attitude towards mourning which helps to explain certain tensions in his own funeral poetry and that of the English Renaissance in general:

He that feares death, or mournes it, in the iust,
Shewes of the resurrection little trust.¹

These lines do not represent the common condemnation of immoderate grief. Instead they approach a complete prohibition of mourning for those who have died virtuously and are thus in heaven. They illustrate a relentless Christian logic which poses a painful dilemma. If a good person dies, one should rejoice at the soul's deliverance from this world and its translation to heaven; unless one is mourning the soul's eternal punishment in hell, one is guilty of the sin of despair.

This rigor understandably does violence to the feelings of loss which most people experience at the death of those whom they love. Not everyone is as hardened as the Thracian tribe, the Trausoï, whom Herodotus describes at the opening of his fifth book and who often appear in ancient and Renaissance consolations: they lament the birth of a baby for the ills it will have to suffer in this world, but rejoice at and celebrate death. Consequently it is no surprise to

discover that the prohibition of mourning is only a minority view, both in the Christianity of the fathers and during the Renaissance. Opposing this prohibition are the injunction of mourning as a necessary expression of humanity and the milder prohibition of immoderate mourning. Nevertheless the rigoristic position continues to assert itself and to affect the composition of funeral poems. After sketching the philosophical and theological history of the expression and repression of grief, I shall show how rigorism enters, and in particular, creates conflict in Jonson's verse.

I

The most important and relevant ancient disagreement over mourning centers on Stoic "apatheia."² Since death is a matter of indifference, the wise man will not be affected by it. Consequently the wise man will not mourn. This standard of conduct does not appear in consolations other than as an ideal, and one most frequently detects its existence in polemics directed against it.

Seneca, although he champions "apatheia" against Peripatetic "metriopatheia" in Epistulae morales 85 and, to a lesser degree, 116, argues against a total prohibition of mourning in his consolations. In the opening of 63 he gestures towards "apatheia" as an ideal:

I am sorry your friend Flaccus died; nevertheless I do not want you to grieve more than is just. I will hardly dare require that you not grieve, though I know that is best. But who has such firmness of mind except one who has greatly risen above fortune? Such an event will sting him too, but only sting him. We, however, may be pardoned for breaking into tears provided that

they do not flow to excess and that we ourselves hold them back. When we lose a friend let our eyes neither be dry nor flow; we must cry not wail [lacrimandum est, non plorandum].³

Not even the person who has succeeded in rising above fortune can avoid being pinched by grief; for normal people moderation in grief is all that can be expected. In another letter Seneca rejects "apatheia" as "inhumanitas":

What? Am I now advising insensibility, do I want the countenance to remain rigid at the very funeral, and do I not allow the mind even to be depressed? By no means. It is inhumanity, not virile strength, to look at funerals with the same eyes as one would look at the people themselves and not to be moved at the first wrenching apart from one's intimate acquaintances. (99.15)

Once again Seneca proceeds to advise moderation of grief.

Although the most common doctrine of both pagan and Christian consolation is that one must keep one's grief within bounds, one does find some ancient passages in which the attack on "apatheia" is extended to "metriopatheia." They urge that no limit whatsoever be set to grief, as the first lines of Statius, Silvae 2.6: "It is too savage to set limits to tears or bounds to grieving." Statius implies that any restriction of mourning is, in Seneca's term, "inhumanity."⁴

Christian authors resume the attack on Stoic "apatheia," but because of Augustine's interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14⁵ as a prohibition of immoderate mourning, they do not go as far as Statius and in fact often contrast the immoderate mourning of the pagans, who have no hope of resurrection, with their own moderate grief. Calvin

insists that Paul to the Thessalonians does not support "apatheia": "They who misuse this testimony to establish Stoic "apatheia" [indolentiam], that is, an iron insensibility, among Christians find nothing of the kind in Paul's words."⁶ Commenting on the same passage 68 years later, William Sclater inveighs against the Stoics "or stockes rather" because "...God himselfe hath imprinted such Affections in mans Nature with his owne finger; and they blame Gods workmanship, that condemne them." Typically, Sclater balances his attack on "apatheia" with an injunction of moderation: "Moderation of Affections is no small part of Sanctification."⁷ In 1584 John Jewel makes the same argument against the unnaturalness of not mourning (he does not refer to the Stoics explicitly) and also insists on moderation, by depicting pagan sorrow for the dead:

Wee are not therefore forbidden to mourne over the dead: but to mourne in such sorte as the heathen did, we are forbidden. They, as they did neither believe in God, nor in Christ, so had they no hope of the life to come. When a father saw his sonne dead he thought he had beene dead forever. He became heavie, changed his garment, delighted in no companie, forsooke his meate, famished himselfe, rent his bodie, cursed his fortune, cried out of his Gods.... Thus they fel into dispaire, and spake blasphemies.⁸

Calvin, Sclater, and Jewel represent the opinion of the majority of Renaissance Christians who write on mourning, but there are strong opposing voices from the earliest fathers on. In fact this Christian tradition is even more severe than the Stoic ideal of "apatheia," which is in the final analysis only something which the

perfect wise man can obtain, not a standard of conduct which all must observe in order to avoid sin. The controversy centers on the interpretation of the passage from Paul to the Thessalonians which Calvin and Scalder use to condemn "apatheia." Other authorities take the verses as a prohibition of all mourning as evidence of the sin of despair, not just a prohibition of immoderate mourning:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (KJV)

This important point of dogma comes down to the interpretation of the "even as" ("kathos" in the Greek; "sicut" in the Vulgate) clause. Some take it to mean "not to be sad in the manner of the others who have no hope." Others take it to mean "not to be sad, which is what the others do who have no hope." Is this a prohibition of all sadness or of a certain mode of sadness? In each of the three languages the conjunctions point towards the first interpretation but do not, especially "sicut," rule out the second.

Four texts of the early fathers best represent the rigoristic position: Tertullian's De patientia probably composed around 200, Cyprian's De mortalitate, composed in 252 when an epidemic of the plague was afflicting Africa, the letter Ad Turasium presbyterum, of unknown authorship, attributed in various manuscripts to Cyprian, Jerome, and Augustine, and the pseudo-Augustinian Sermones de consolatione mortuorum, which may be Latin translations of lost works

of John Chrysotom, but which circulated in the Renaissance as genuine works of Augustine. The most influential representative of the moderate position are Augustine's Sermones 172 and 173, although one finds it in Ambrose's De excessu fratris sui Satyri and consolatory letters by Paulinus and Jerome.

Chapter 9 of Tertullian's De patientia contains most of the important rigoristic arguments and almost certainly influenced later formulations and thus deserves to be quoted in full:

Not even that kind of inability to endure is excusable--in the loss of our friends when an assertion of grief serves as a defense. For we must respect the apostle's warning, "Do not feel sorrow when someone falls asleep as do the heathen, who lack hope." And rightly so. For if we believe in Christ's resurrection we also believe in our own because he died and rose for us. Therefore, since the resurrection of the dead is certain, the pain of death is gone, and the inability to endure grief is gone. For why should you grieve if you believe that no one has perished? Why should you bear without endurance that someone is led away for a while whom you believe will return? What you consider death is setting out on a journey. The one who goes first is not to be mourned but surely to be missed. This missing, too, must be tempered with endurance, for why should you bear it immoderately that someone whom you will shortly follow has departed? Moreover this sort of inability to endure augurs poorly of our hope and gives the lie to our faith. We injure Christ when we do not accept with equanimity that He has summoned

them--as if they were to be pitied. "I wish," says the apostle, "to be taken back and to be with the Lord." How much better a desire he shows! Therefore we ourselves do not wish to obtain the desire of Christians if we grieve without endurance others who have obtained it.⁹

Tertullian relies heavily on Paul's warning to the Thessalonians; he cites it as the reason for prohibiting this kind of lack of endurance, despite his recognition of the strength of grief. Like pagan authors of consolations, Tertullian puts great faith in the power of reason to control emotion. If one can only see clearly the reasons why one should not feel sorrow, it will disappear. Thus most of the passage is a relentless deduction of the consequences of the resurrection, and Tertullian does not spare his causal connectives ("for" appears four times and "therefore" twice). The resurrection logically excludes mourning, since the deceased is not dead, but only set out on a journey which all must make.

This passage introduces an important distinction which reappears in Cyprian, pseudo-Augustine, and elsewhere. Although he prohibits grief, Tertullian allows one to miss or feel loss. He immediately qualifies this recognition that people naturally miss their dead friends and relatives: moderation must keep the feeling of loss under control. After exposing the unreasonableness of mourning and immoderate missing or longing, Tertullian returns to Paul for his conclusive argument--which barely disguises a threat. This lack of endurance violates two of the theological virtues, hope and faith, and offends and hurts Christ. The reader is left with the certitude that

mourning is a sin which argues against a desire for heaven and which will be punished.

Two short sermons by Augustine on 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14 best represent the moderate patristic position and were the most influential of any writings on the subject. Augustine complicates the response to death by establishing a conflict between a natural abhorrence of death and faith in the resurrection. One sees the incipient contradiction in the earlier prohibition of mourning with the simultaneous concession of moderate missing and longing. In Augustine, however, the Christian is caught between sorrow and consolation, or even between sorrow and joy.

Augustine begins his first sermon by showing that some sorrow is natural. All animals shun death, and man shuns it all the more because he was created to live forever if he had abstained from sin. When death seizes someone whom we love, it saddens us because of our affection for the person. Since death naturally causes sorrow, Paul does not prohibit all sorrow, but rather that we be sad in the manner of those who have no hope. The prohibition of manner leads to a delicate balancing of emotions which is reinforced by the antithesis and anaphora of Augustine's words.

Contristamur ergo nos in nostrorum mortibus necessitate
amittendi, sed cum spe recipiendi. Inde angimur, hinc
consolamur: inde infirmitas afficit, hinc fides reficit: inde
dolet humana conditio, hinc sanat divina promissio.

Therefore we are sad at the deaths of our friends because of the necessity of loss, but with hope of regaining. There we are

distressed; here we take comfort; there weakness affects us; here faith restores us; there the human condition grieves; here the divine promise heals.¹⁰

Although sorrow is allowed, conflict is more prominent: hope and faith are struggling with the weakness of the human condition. Augustine seems to view grief as one more instance of the Pauline war between the spirit and the flesh, and the concession to humanity depends on a recognition of the weakness of the flesh. Augustine's restatement of justifiable mourning also allows and represses at the same time:

Thus pious hearts should be permitted to be sad, with curable grief, at the death of their dear ones and should pour forth consolable tears--which the joy of faith should quickly repress, as the faithful are believed to go away from us a little while and to pass on to better things when they die. (3)

Grief is allowed, as long as it is curable; one may weep, as long as the tears are consolable. And the tears hardly have time to fall before faithful joy should stop them.

The second sermon goes one step farther towards a justification of mourning. Augustine resumes the attack on "apatheia" in a sentence that approaches the later position that mourning is a duty of the Christian, not merely something permissible:

The human heart is able not to grieve when a very dear person dies; nevertheless it is better that the human heart be healed when it grieves than become inhuman by not grieving. (2)

Insensibility to grief is undesirable if purchased at the price of inhumanity; compassion, love for one's neighbor, are more important.

The last section of the sermon restates the interpretation of Paul's words, making more explicit that they only prohibit a type of grief:

He does not say simply, "Do not be sad," but, "Do not be sad in the manner of [quemadmodum] the gentiles, who do not have hope." For it is necessary that we be sad, but when you are sad, let hope console you.

This paraphrase of Paul removes all the ambiguity; "quemadmodum" makes it impossible to read the sentence as Tertullian, Cyprian, and the other two early fathers did. The paraphrase allows Augustine to proceed directly to the necessity of grief, even though he concludes the sermon with the triumph of the resurrection over grief.

In the Renaissance the phrase, "in the manner of the others who have no hope," is often glossed as "immoderately." William Sclater in 1619 cites Augustine to support his interpretation:

It should seeme, the Apostle interdicts not sorrowing, but desires to moderate it. Contristamur et nos in nostrorum mortibus necessitate amittendi, sed cum spe recipiendi.... Religion abolisheth not affections, but only moderates them.

Paul prohibites not to mourne, but to mourne without measure.

(p. 316)

Calvin, commenting on Paul's epistle in 1551, also takes it as an exhortation to moderation:

The is the main point: we must not mourn the dead beyond measure because we all shall rise again....He does not, however, absolutely forbid that we mourn, but requires moderation in mourning. (p. 481)

After Augustine, in fact, moderation is the standard interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14 and the normal attitude towards grief.¹¹

Some authors go farther than justifying moderate grief; they insist that one must mourn for the dead. One sees the beginning of this position in Augustine's resumption of the argument against the inhumanity of "apatheia," and it is implicit in the attacks on the Stoics which I quoted earlier from Calvin, Sclater, and Jewel. Miles Coverdale, in his purported translation (c. 1555) from a treatise on death by the German theologian Otho Wermullerus, agrees that we naturally mourn because "Such heaviness, pity, and compassion doth God allow. For he hath not created us to be stones and blocks...."¹² Not only does God allow grief; He hates those who are not moved at the death of relatives. In support of God's hatred Coverdale cites the biblical examples of Abraham mourning for Sarah, Joseph for Jacob, and Paul for Epaphroditus. In 1596 Robert Southwell begins an attack on "apatheia" by asserting that the Bible commands us to mourn:

The scripture moveth us to bring forth our tears on the dead, a thing not offending grace, and a right to reason. For to be without remorse in the death of friends, is neither incident nor convenient to the nature of man, having too much affinity to a savage temper, and overthrowing the ground of all piety, which is a mutual sympathy in each of others miseries....¹³

Southwell balances his injunction to mourn with a warning against excess, reassociating his letter of consolation with the tradition of moderation.

The continuation of Matthew Poole's Annotations upon the Holy

Bible contains the most explicit injunction of mourning. He begins with the standard interpretation of moderation and proceeds to an attack upon the Stoicsocks which strongly recalls Sclater. Then follows the injunction:

And to mourn for the dead, especially the dead in the Lord, is a Duty that both Nature and Grace teach, and God requireth; and the contrary is reproveth by God himself, Isa. 57.1, and to die unlamented is reckoned as a Curse, Jer. 22.18,19. Its only then immoderate Sorrow the Apostle here means.¹⁴

Although moderation of grief becomes the prevalent position in the Renaissance and there is also some feeling that mourning is a duty, the rigoristic attitude of the earliest fathers still makes itself heard, especially in the middle of the sixteenth century. Calvin's commentary on 1 Thessalonians (1551) implies that some contemporaries take Paul's words as prohibiting all mourning:

They who misuse this testimony to establish Stoic "apatheia," that is, an iron insensibility, among Christians find nothing of the kind in Paul's words. What they raise as an objection, that we must not mourn at the death of our friends lest we oppose God, would hold good in all instances of adversity. But it is one thing to bridle our grief to submit it to God and another to harden like a stone after throwing off human sensibility. (p. 482)

Thomas Wilson in his Arte of Rhetorique of 1553 quotes Paul as prohibiting all grief:

Paule the Apostle of God, reproveth them as worthie blame, which

mourne and lament the losse of their dearest. [Wilson quotes 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14.] Then your grace either with leaving sorrowe, must shewe your self faithfull, or else with yeelding to your woe, declare your self to be without hope.¹⁵

Wilson, however, oscillates between a prohibition of all mourning whatsoever and of immoderate mourning. In some parts of his exemplary letter of consolation he condemns impatience as falling out with God "because he made us men and not Angels" and claims that at the death of our friends we "declare our want of God's grace, and all goodness" and our faithlessness (p. 71). His standard of conduct appears to exclude all expressions of grief:

A constant Christian should beare all miserie, and with pacience abide the force of necessitie, shewing with sufferance the strength of his faith, and especially when the change is from evill to good, from woe to weale, what folly is it to sorrowe that, for the which they ioye that are departed? (p. 70)

But opposing all these uncompromising statements one finds passages of moderation. One should bear all inevitable harms moderately.

"Immoderately to wayle" is "fleshly madness" (p. 72). Nature has taught us to weep for our children; let reason teach us to wipe away our tears, and "let not phantasie encrease that, which nature hath commaunded moderately to use" (p. 76). The sorrow of the animals is shortlived; only men, especially those subject to their passions, mourn at length: "whereupon we may well gather, that immoderate sorrowe, is not naturall" (p. 77). Wilson concludes his letter with the recommendation that one day, but only one, be given to mourning.

The rhetorical effect of this interlacing of rigoristic and moderate positions is similar to the impression made by Augustine's Sermones 172 and 173. Grief is permitted, but it is a weakness that one should strive to overcome--a mode of permission which creates a sense of guilt in those who avail themselves of it.

The most rigorous prohibition of mourning, worthy of Cyprian himself, the main authority behind it, appears in one of the most popular religious tracts of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Thomas Becon's The Sick Man's Salve. After 1561, the year in which the tract apparently first appeared, it went through at least 18 more editions, the last in 1632.¹⁶ It was well-known enough to be mentioned twice in Jonson's plays, once in the same breath with another immensely popular religious work, Foxe's Book of Martyrs.¹⁷

The Sick Man's Salve, like the pseudo-Platonic Axiochus, is a dialogue that stages the conversion of a dying man from despair at death to resolution to confront it. Epaphroditus, named for Paul's sick friend in Philippians 2.25, is suddenly taken ill and becomes impatient. A group of friends and neighbors comes to console him. They overwhelm him with biblical citations and standard topoi of consolation and succeed in restoring his faith. At this point Epaphroditus' friends induce him to make his will, since one of Becon's didactic purposes, as he states in his preface, is to teach Christians how to dispose of their worldly possessions. One friend asks how much money he wishes to leave for mourning gowns, and this question gives Epaphroditus the opportunity to show how well he has learned his lesson. He asks who is to be mourned, is told himself,

and replies:

Why for me? Because good things have chanced unto me? Because I have passed over the dangerous sea, and am come unto the haven of quietness? Or because I am delivered from all evil, and set in a blessed and joyful state? I think that at the burials of the faithful there should rather be joy and gladness than mourning and sadness; rather pleasant songs of thanksgiving than lamentable and doleful dirges. Let the infidels mourn for their dead: the Christians ought to rejoice when any of the faithful be called from this vale of misery unto the glorious kingdom of God. (Parker 4 [1844], p. 120)

Philemon responds with approval, citing Paul, who "would not have us mourn for them that are fallen asleep, as the heathen do, which know not God." This close translation does not reveal whether Becon takes the passage as total or partial prohibition, but Theophilus, after quoting long passages from Cyprian's De mortalitate, returns to Paul's words with the comment, "He declareth that such as be sorrowful at their friends' departure have no hope" (p. 121). He sums up the sense of his quotations from Paul and Cyprian: "...they which die in the Lord are in a blessed state, and therefore not to be mourned nor lamented" (p. 122).

A verse of Paul's letter to the Romans (12.15) is occasionally cited as a biblical justification of mourning.¹⁸ Becon, however, has one character, Eusebius, cite it to show the foolishness of mourning:

Indeed it is a point of fondness to mourn for them that are in joy, and to be sorry for them that are merry. The apostle saith:

"Rejoice with them that rejoice, and mourn with them that mourn."
 Seeing that the faithful, which are delivered out of this world,
 are in joy, it is more seemly that we should joy in God with
 them, than mourn and be sorry for them, as though they were in
 worse case now than they were afore. (p. 122)

The section on mourning concludes with approval of the Trausoi and the citation of Luke 23.28, Jesus' words while carrying the cross, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Tears for the misery of the living, not for the dead.

II

Jonson's adherence to the rigoristic attitude to mourning is easier to document than that of most poets of the English Renaissance. Even if we did not have Selden's assurance that Jonson was well-read in the fathers and possessed many of their works,¹⁹ Jonson's references to Becon's The Sick Man's Salve leave no doubt that he was acquainted with rigorism. His epigram, "Of Death," states its major position succinctly. More significantly, over a period of 30 years Jonson wrote about 20 funeral poems which indulge in very little grief. The poems that do mourn exhibit great restraint, never exceed the feeling of loss allowed by such strict fathers as Tertullian and Cyprian, and struggle to overcome even this. The restraint is not merely a matter of genre, for it characterizes all the poems, the two long elegies and the ode on Cary and Morison as well as the epitaphs. In fact the elegies, which Puttenham allowed greater indulgence in grief,²⁰ are more severe than some of the epigrams. A quick glance at

other poets of the period shows how unusually consistent Jonson's restraint is, for praise of and grief for the deceased are the two major ingredients in Renaissance funeral poetry.²¹ In addition to avoiding or tempering expressions of grief Jonson exhorts his addressees--and himself--not to mourn and chides them if they do so.

Only twice does Jonson ask the reader to weep for the dead. "An Epitaph, on Henry L. La-ware" requests the bare minimum of grief, one tear: "If, Passenger, thou canst but reade:/Stay, drop a teare for him that's dead" (VIII, 233). The most unrestrained appeal for sympathy occurs in the poem with the lightest tone, the "Epitaph on S. P.":

Weepe with me all you that read

This little storie:

And know, for whom a teare you shed,

Death's selfe is sorry. (VIII, 77)

The witty conceit that the young actor impersonated old men so well that death mistook him for one hardly creates an atmosphere of grief, and the bouncy meter makes for little gloom. This is one poem in which the conventional assurance that the dead live in heaven eliminates all sadness. The epitaph "On Margaret Ratcliffe" does not ask the reader for a tear, but it does begin, "Marble, weepe, for thou doest cover..." (VIII, 39). No other mourning for Margaret occurs.

This last epitaph illustrates Jonson's one concession of mourning. From Archilochus' urging Pericles, "Endure and cast aside womanish grief," to the last lines of William Habington's elegy for Venetia Digby, "But if th' art too much woman, softly weepe,/Lest

griefe disturbe the silence of her sleepe," a consolatory commonplace condemns grief as womanly, that is to say weak and unworthy of a man, or deems it more fitting in a woman.²² In accordance with this bit of sexual stereotyping Jonson includes the grief which Margaret felt at her brother's death in the list of her praiseworthy accomplishments. Likewise, in a passage that barely hides its misogyny, Jonson approves grief for a husband in "To y^e memorye of that most honoured Ladie Jane":

But, I would have, thee, to know something new,

Not usuall in a Lady; and yet true:

At least so great a Lady. She was wife

But of one Husband; and since he left life,

But Sorrow, she desir'd no other ffriend. (VIII, 394)

Jonson proceeds to show how grief brought on the wife's death.²³

The distinction between masculine and feminine grief enters one of the few poems in which Jonson expresses any personal loss, "On My First Daughter":

Here lyes to each her parents ruth,

MARY, the daughter of their youth:

Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due,

It makes the father, lesse, to rue.

At sixe moneths end, shee parted hence

With safetie of her innocence;

Whose soule heavens Queene, (whose name shee beares)

In comfort of her mothers teares,

Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-traine:

Where, while that sever'd doth remaine,

This grave partakes the fleshly birth.

Which cover lightly, gentle earth. (VIII, 33-34)

In order to understand Jonson's expression of his loss and his attitude towards mourning in general one should not forget how much Jonson prided himself on his manly accomplishments, in particular the single combat in the Netherlands in which he killed his man and took "opima spolia" and the duel in which he killed Gabriel Spencer. He boasted of both feats over 20 years after their occurrence to Drummond (I, 139). And one should recall the one bit of information we have about his mother; after he was released from prison in 1605 "he banqueted all his friends":

at the midst of the Feast his old Mother Dranke to him & shew him a paper which she had (if Sentence had taken execution) to have mixed jn y^e Prisson among his drinke, which was full of Lustie strong poison & that she was no churle she told she minded first to have drunk of it herself. (I, 140)

Whether or not Jonson's mother was as tough as he claims is not as significant as the fact that he presented her as such, since Jonson is probably sketching an ideal of conduct he himself wants to follow. This ideal scorns death and avoids any indulgence of weak, "feminine" feelings and thus makes it difficult to acknowledge tender feelings like the loss of an infant daughter. This ideal is another version of the exaltation of reason as king of the passions or affections, a doctrine which Jonson preaches in "Epode" (VIII, 109).²⁴

A struggle between reason and the emotions takes place in the

first four lines of "On My First Daughter." Jonson admits his sorrow, but quickly asserts that understanding the consolatory commonplace--life is a loan--diminishes it.²⁵ He makes himself more reasonable than his wife, since both grieve but only he is consoled by the commonplace. Jonson swerves away from his own emotional response; he mentions his wife's tears, not his own. She requires more comforting, special intervention from the Virgin Mary in fact. He seems completely resigned to his daughter's death by the poem's close. His confidence in her resurrection is unassailable, and he softens the burial commonplace, may the earth cover you lightly, by addressing the earth as "gentle": the epithet leaves no doubt the request will be fulfilled.²⁶ Grief has been contained, reason has won the struggle, and the strictures of rigorism have not been violated.

Feelings of loss are much stronger in "On My First Sonne," and no quiet resolution is achieved:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
 My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy,
 Seven yeeres tho'wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
 O, could I loose all father, now. For why
 Will man lament the state he should envie?
 To have so soone scap'd worlds, and flesh's rage,
 And, if no other miserie, yet age?
 Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye

BEN. JONSON his best piece of poetrie.

For whose sake, hence-forth, all his vowes be such,

As what he loves may never like too much. (VIII, 41)

This poem is much more personal than the one on his daughter, which immediately adopts the public stance of epitaph ("Here lyes") and speaks of the parents' loss. One does not realize that "On My First Sonne" is an epitaph until line 9, and Jonson's relation with his son excludes his wife. We know that Jonson was not with his family when his son died in 1603, although not enough evidence exists to say whether or not he was estranged from his wife at the time.²⁷ In any event what is striking is not so much that Jonson does not mention the mother as that he refers to his son as if he were alone responsible for his birth: "thou child of my right hand." The phrase, as has been pointed out so often, translates the Hebrew "Benjamin"; it also suggests the child is the product of Jonson's pen and thus anticipates "his best piece of poetrie." In either case Jonson's attachment to the child is fiercely possessive: the child is his creation.

The entire poem is centered on Jonson; the son has no existence independent of his relation to his father. One can guess his name only from "thou child of my right hand," and that name is the father's. His age is mentioned in terms of how long the father had him. For a moment the son seems to be addressed for himself--"Rest in soft peace"--but in the next is being told to speak of his father. Although Jonson addresses his son, the poem is really an internal dialogue; the questions in lines 5-9 are ones he is arguing with himself. Jonson cannot separate himself from his son in the poem even though he realizes in line 2 that his attachment and expectations were excessive. His son is very much part of himself, a part about which

he could feel proud and hopeful. His confusion of his son with himself is strongest in the last two lines. For whose sake does Jonson make his vow? The preceding line is a paraphrasis for his son in which his own name is the most prominent feature. At first glance one probably assumes Jonson makes the vow for his son's sake, but what difference would the vow make to the child, who is presumably in heaven? Jonson is making the vow for his own sake; he is attempting to cut off the possibility of another painful loss by sacrificing in advance some of the self-satisfied attachment which he felt for his son. He seems to share some of the superstitious sense of nemesis that animates his model, Martial:

Inmodicis brevis est aetas et rara senectus.

quidquid amas, cupias non placuisse nimis. (6.29)

The life span of immoderate things is short; rarely do they reach old age. You should desire that whatever you love does not please too much.

Jonson does not want to provoke the jealousy of the gods by too much happiness, for they would exact some punishment, for example, kill the object of his affection.²⁸

The conflict between reason and emotion is most powerful in the center of the poem. Jonson knows he should envy his son's death, but his desire to annihilate all fatherly feelings and his phrasing the consolatory commonplaces as questions rather than statements testify to the failure of reason. Jonson is struggling to reconcile the precepts of rigorism with his loss, but is reduced to wishing for no paternal feelings and weaker affections in general.²⁹

"An Epitaph on Master Vincent Corbet" reveals a similar conflict between familial feeling and restraint:

I have my Pietie too, which could
 It vent it selfe, but as it would,
 Would say as much, as both have done
 Before me here, the Friend and Sonne;
 For I both lost a friend and Father,
 Of him whose bones this Grave doth gather. (VIII, 151)

These lines refer to the elegy which Richard Corbet wrote for his father and perhaps to a lost poem by an unidentified friend. Corbet by no means indulges in extravagant grief, but does insist on his own bereavement and does ask the reader's tears for his father:

Besides his fame, his goods, his life,
 He left a greiv'd Sonne, and a wife.
 Straunge Sorrow, not to be beleiv'd,
 When the Sonne and Heire is greiv'd.
Reade then, and mourne, whate're thou art
 That doost hope to have a part
 In honest Epitaphs; least, being dead,
 Thy life bee written, and not read.³⁰

Corbet has no difficulty expressing his grief; if anything "Straunge Sorrow..." suggests that he may feel a bit defensive about not feeling sad enough. Unlike Jonson he is under no constraint not to grieve. Jonson does not say what is holding back his emotions, and the restraint would be mysterious if one did not know Jonson's allegiance to rigorism.

The reference to "Pietie," though somewhat obscure, helps to explain the restraint, as Jonson is alluding to a paradox that had some currency among the church fathers. The paradox turns on the double meaning of "piety," dutiful respect towards one's family, especially parents or children, and reverence for God. In English the second meaning has displaced the first, which was still common in Jonson's day, but in classical Latin they were often not separated or if they were, the first predominated as in Cicero's definition of different types of justice, "eaque erga deos religio, erga parentes pietas" ("justice towards the gods is religion, towards parents piety," Partitiones oratoriae 78). With Christian Latin "pietas" comes more and more to refer to God, and the paradox of "impia pietas" becomes possible.

For Paulinus of Nola in De obitu Celsi pueri panegyricus the paradox hinges on the opposition between piety towards the dead and faith. Near the beginning of his poem he does not know whether to grieve or rejoice:

Alas, what shall I do? I am afflicted and waver with alternating piety (dubia pendens pietate labor): should I rejoice or grieve? The boy deserves both, for whom love urges me to tears and to joy. But faith bids me rejoice, piety to weep. (Carmen 31.7-10; PL LXI, 676)

"Doubtful piety" produces emotional civil war. Paulinus is torn in two ways until he resolves the struggle by condemning piety:

For it is impious piety to mourn a blessed soul and harmful love to weep for one who is rejoicing in God. Is it not plain how

great a sin comes from such piety? We accuse ourselves of holding our faith by fraud or of finding fault from rebellious error with God's laws unless what has pleased God pleases us.

(43-48)

These lines make use of the rigoristic equation of mourning with infidelity.³¹ Unless the piety is specified as excessive, in fact, "impia pietas" is only compatible with rigorism.

By asserting his "Pietie" Jonson hints that his emotions are struggling against a knowledge that it is sinful to mourn the dead. Consequently he focuses on Corbet's virtuous life and his own deprivation and suffering, as he did not learn as much as he could have from his dead "father." When Jonson requests tears at the poem's close, they are for himself, not Corbet. The lines gently correct the tears at the close of Richard Corbet's elegy by directing them away from the dead:

Now I conceive him by my want,
And pray who shall my sorrowes read,
That they for me their teares will shed;
For truly, since he left to be,
I feelee, I'm rather dead then he! (VIII, 152)

In these epigrams Jonson appears to be trying to suppress all grief, although one cannot always be positive that he is not simply trying to moderate it. Other poems are more severe. The consolatory epigram to King Charles and Queen Mary on the death of their infant son, contains no expression of sympathy, allows no mourning, lectures on doubting God's truth and promise, and orders the

king and queen not to complain. The tone is remarkably harsh for an address to royalty; no doubt Jonson was pleased with this opportunity not to flatter, as ten years earlier he mentioned to Drummond:

he heth a minde to be a churchman, & so he might have favour to
make one Sermon to the King, he careth not what y^rafter sould
befall him, for he would not flatter though he saw Death. (I,
141)

In the epigram Jonson does adopt the persona of the religious teacher who makes no concessions to human frailty, even though he does end with an assurance that God will grant them a large posterity for their patience.

The death of the Marchioness of Winchester inspired elegies by Jonson, Milton, Sir William Davenant, and John Eliot. Jonson's is the most severe, although Eliot's makes confused use of rigoristic arguments. Davenant's poem expresses no grief and offers some conventional lines on the death of Love, Summer, and Beauty. Milton chooses to focus on her early death, just before she turned 24, in childbirth. Later in life he endorses the moderate interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14,³² so it is no surprise that he allows mourning in this poem:

Here, besides the sorrowing
That thy noble House doth bring,
Here be tears of perfect moan
Wept for thee in Helicon.... (53-56)

Eliot awkwardly combines passages of rigorism with assertions that future generations will mourn the Marchioness and that he himself

is so overcome that he can hardly write for his tears.³³ He begins by asking who will weep for her. Not women; they all envied her. Not men; they were all her idolatrous lovers and are glad for their souls' sakes that temptation has been removed. Her parents?

Shall I rub natures sores, and once again,
 From tender parents eyes press drops of rain;
 That were a Crime that would beget a storie,
 To mourn for her they know is crown'd with glory,
 But they religious are, and will repent
 The sighs, and groans, and teares already spent;
 For being married thus before they die,
 To Ioyes long liv'd, as is eternitie,
 Part of her hapiness they shall destroy
 That weep for her, unless they weep for Ioye.

Should her husband?

That were a Crueltie her gentle soul
 Would sharply in his sleep and dreams controule,
 For if the Saints our actions doe discover,
 To weep for her would show he did not love her.

Up until this point Eliot appears as rigoristic as Jonson ever does; any grief is criminal unless for the damned. Next come some bizarre conceits on the Marchioness' dead infant as a diamond. Then Eliot switches gears, as if he has not understood the force of the rigoristic commonplaces he has been using. Will no one weep? Future generations will; they will go on pilgrimage to the grave of mother and babe. The poet is so overcome that he cannot write for the tears

falling on his paper. This leads to his concluding couplet: "Rest then in peace, the world to dust shall turne/When tears are wanting to keep moyst thy urne." The two parts of the poem sit together so poorly that one wonders whether Eliot was borrowing rigoristic commonplaces from Jonson, whom he imitates in his epigrams despite two attacks on his morals (pp. 26-27), without understanding them. Eliot's poem represents the artistic incongruities into which poets--and greater poets than Eliot, Statius and Marot to name only two--can be led when they try to accommodate passages of mourning and consolation.³⁴

Jonson ignores the untimely death and does not mention her pregnancy. He is avoiding whatever would rouse the reader's compassion for the Marchioness. Instead he sketches a death scene of such resolution and fortitude that she converts her family's tears and fears into joys. Her fervour for death receives its reward in heaven, at which point Jonson turns to her parents with a "permissio" to be sorrowful:

Goe now, her happy Parents, and be sad,

If you not understand, what Child you had.

If you dare grudge at Heaven, and repent

T'have paid againe a blessing was but lent,

And trusted so, as it deposited lay

At pleasure, to be call'd for, every day!

If you can envie your owne Daughters blisse,

And wish her state lesse happie then it is! (VIII, 271)

The strong irony condemns and forbids grief by equating it with impiety, impatience, and envy.

Jonson can be just as severe on himself. The last of the three epigrams on Sir John Roe, printed immediately before "Of Death," rebukes the tears shed in the first:

Ile not offend thee with a vaine teare more,
 Glad-mention'd Roe: thou art but gone before,
 Whither the world must follow. And I, now,
 Breathe to expect my when, and make my how.
 Which if most gracious heaven grant like thine,
 Who wets my grave, can be no friend of mine. (VIII, 37)

The poem turns on the rigoristic position that one should mourn only the deaths of those whose souls are going to hell, as, for example, in Jerome's formulation: "Let the dead be mourned, but the one whom hell receives, whom Tartarus devours, for whose punishment the eternal fire burns."³⁵ This explains why the tears are offensive to Roe and why a weeper over Jonson cannot be his friend; the tears imply that they are in hell. Besides being offensive, Jonson's tears are vain. Not only are they useless--they cannot bring the dead back to life--they are self-indulgent and reveal more self-love than affection for the dead, who should be rejoiced with.

The opening of "Elegie on my Muse" indulges Jonson's "wounded mind" and leads to an imprecation on nature. But Jonson quickly stops himself:

My Passion

Whoorles me about, and to blaspheme in fashion!
 I murmure against God, for having ta'en

Her blessed Soule, hence, forth this valley vane
 Of teares, and dungeon of calamitie!
 I envie it the Angels amitie!
 The joy of Saints! the Crowne for which it lives,
 The glorie, and gaine of rest, which the place gives!
 Dare I prophane, so irreligious bee

To 'greet, or grieve her soft Euthanasee? (VIII, 283)

These lines ignore any human aspect of grief and take it as a direct challenge to God--blasphemy. Grief affronts God's ordering of the world. Jonson uses self-rebuke to check Sir Kenelm Digby's grief for his wife; he is offering himself as an example of the victory of faith over the emotions.³⁶

This poem shows how unswervingly Jonson holds to rigorism. He is writing thirty years after the death of his first son, almost thirty years since the death of Roe. If anything, he is more severe than he was earlier in his life because here, and in the almost contemporary "Elegie on the Lady Jane Pawlet," he dwells on the offense to God. His confidence that reasoned reflection on the sin of grief can curb the emotions is at its height. His portrayal of the resurrection is more elaborate than anywhere else in his funeral poetry. After the portrayal he pauses to ask a question similar to one in "On My First Sonne":

This being thus: why should my tongue, or pen
 Presume to interpell that fulnesse, when
 Nothing can more adorne it, then the seat
 That she is in, or, make it more compleat?

Better be dumb, then superstitious!

Who violates the God-head, is most vitious

Against the nature he would worship.

The differences between the passages are striking. In the earlier poem grief is inevitable though mysterious; man "will" lament the state he should envy. Here grief is much more under control. The "should" implies options, and "presume" hints at self-indulgent rebellion. The pause ends with a generalizing condemnation; the questions are answered, not mysteries as in the poem on his son. The struggle with grief is over.

Notes

1. All references to Jonson's works are to Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1925-52). The poems are in volume VIII; "Of Death," p. 37. I have changed consonantal u to v and i to j in accordance with modern typographical conventions.
2. Throughout this study I am greatly indebted to two works on "consolatio": Rudolf Kassel, Untersuchungen zur griechischen und roemischen Konsolationsliteratur (Munich, 1958) and Peter von Moos, Consolatio: Studien zur mittellateinischen Trostliteratur ueber den Tod und zum Problem der christlichen Trauer, 4 vols. (Munich, 1971-72). Kassel comments on "apatheia," pp. 56-59; see von Moos' Testimonienband, III, 88-93. Also see Horst-Theodor Johann, Trauer und Trost: Eine quellen- und strukturanalytische Untersuchung der philosophischen Trostschriften ueber den Tod (Munich, 1968), pp. 41-43.
3. All translations are my own.
4. Cf. Horace, "Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus/tam cari capitis?" (Odes 1.24.1-2), and see the note in R. G. M. Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, A Commentary on Horace: Odes 1 (Oxford, 1970), pp. 281-282.
5. Verse 11 of the Vulgate is often divided in two in other editions of the Bible; consequently this passage is 12-13 in the Vulgate.
6. Ioannis Calvinii in omnes D. Pauli epistulas (Geneva, 1551), p. 482.

7. An Exposition with Notes upon the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, (London, 1619), p. 317.
8. An Exposition upon the two Epistles of the Apostle S. Paul to the Thessalonians (London, 1584), p. 161.
9. Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera, Pars I., Corpus Christianorum Series Latina I (Turnhout, 1954), pp. 309-310:

Ne illa quidem inpatientiae species excusatur, in amissione nostrorum, ubi aliqua doloris patrocinator adsertio.

Praeponendus est enim respectus denuntiationis apostoli qui ait: "Ne contristemini dormitione cuiusquam sicut nationes quae spe carent." Et merito: credentes enim <in> resurrectionem Christi in nostram quoque credimus propter quos ille et obiit et resurrexit. Ergo cum constet de resurrectione mortuorum, vacat dolor mortis, vacat et inpatientia doloris. Cur enim doleas si peris non credis? Cur impatienter feras subductum interim quem credis reversurum? Profectio est quam putas mortem. Non est lugendus qui antecedit sed plane desiderandus. Id quoque desiderium patientia temperandum: cur enim immoderate feras abiisse quem mox subsequeris? Ceterum inpatientia in huiusmodi et spei nostrae male ominatur et fidem praevaricatur et Christum laedimus cum evocatos quosque ab illo quasi miserandos non aequanimiter accipimus. "Cupio," inquit apostolus, "recipi iam et esse cum domino." Quanto melius ostendit votum! Christianorum ergo votum, si alios consecutos impatienter dolemus, ipsi consequi nolumus!

De patientia is edited by J. G. Ph. Borleffs.

10. Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina (hereafter PL), ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844-55), XXXVIII, 936.
11. The following glosses on 1 Thessalonians 4.13-14 represent the moderate position: Rabanus Maurus, PL CXII, 544; Bruno the Carthusian, PL CLIII, 408; Hugh of St. Victor, PL CLXXV, 588; Herveus, PL CLXXXI, 1373; Petrus Comestar, PL CXcII, 301-303; Geneva Bible (1560) ad loc. I quote Hugh of St. Victor as typical (note the borrowing from Augustine Sermo 172): "Queritur an contristari et flere pro morte amicorum sit peccatum, cum Apostolus dicat: Ut non contristemini? Solutio. Necesse est ut cum mors occupat dilectum, ut contristet dilectionis affectum; non ergo culpa, si contristemur necessitate amittendi; si consolamur spe recipiendi: unde Apostolus non dicit simpliciter, ut non contristemini sed ait, ut non contristemini sicut caeteri, qui spem non habent, quasi diceret: Licet contristari, sed cum spe." Only the gloss attributed to Ambrose (PL XVII, 474) prohibits mourning: "Manifesta est ratio, quia si resurrectio creditur mortuorum futura, non sunt lugendi, qui cum signo crucis exeunt." In the Admonition controversy moderation of mourning is one of the few things that Thomas Cartwright and John Whitgift agree upon; see Whitgift, The Defense of the Answer to the Admonition, Against the Reply of Thomas Cartwright (1574), The Parker Society 48 (Cambridge, 1853), pp. 361-362, 369-371. For other moderates see James Pilkinton, A Godlie Exposition upon certaine chapters of Nehemiah (1585), Parker 35 (1842), p. 319;

- Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1597), book 5, chapter 75; The Way to True Happiness, Leading to the Gate of Knowledge (London, 1633), p. 76; John Diodati, Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, 3rd ed. (London, 1651), ad 1 Thessalonians 4.13; Jeremy Taylor, The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying (1651), section 8; David Dickson, An Exposition of all St. Pauls Epistles (London, 1659), p. 150.
12. A most frutefull pithye and learned treatyse, how a christen man oughte to behave hymselfe in the daunger of death, Parker 14 (1846), p. 111.
 13. The Triumphe over Death; or, A consolatory Epistle for afflicted Minds in the Affects of Dying Friends, in Archaica, ed. E. Brydges (London, 1815), I, 1-2.
 14. Vol. II. Being a Continuation of Mr. Poole's Work by certain Judicious and Learned Divines, 3rd ed. (London, 1696), ad 1 Thessalonians 4.13.
 15. I cite the 1560 edition as edited by G. H. Mair (Oxford, 1909), p. 80.
 16. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, Thomas Becon and the Reformation of the Church of England (Edinburgh and London, 1952), p. 144. For a summary and discussion of The Sick Man's Salve see Nancy Lee Beaty, The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England (New Haven, 1970), pp. 108-156.
 17. In Eastward Hoe, which Jonson wrote with Marston and Chapman in 1605, the audience begins to learn of Quicksilver's repentance when the jailor says: "Hee can tell you, almost all the Stories

of the Booke of Martyres, and speake you all the Sicke-Mans Salve without Booke" (IV, 604). Incredible as the conversion may appear, the play does nothing to suggest that it is phony, and thus one gathers that Becon's book is presented as a model for pious living. The Oxford editors assign this scene to Jonson (IX, 645). In Epicoene (1609) Jonson seems to be making fun of The Sick Man's Salve by associating it with the spurious learning of Lady Haughty and her college. A dispute arises on the best authors to cure Morose's insanity, the ancients (Seneca, Aristotle, Plutarch) or moderns (Indian fables translated by North out of Doni confused with Reynard the Fox). Lady Haughty resolves the question by appealing to her woman, Mrs. Trusty, one of whose parents was cured by reading Becon:

Haughty. And one of 'hem (I know not which) was cur'd with the Sick-mans salve; and the other with GREENES groates-worth of wit.

True-wit. A very cheape cure, madame. (V, 232)

It is difficult to conclude what Jonson thought about Becon's book (much less the section on mourning) except that he expected the audience to be familiar with it.

18. For example, Paulinus of Nola, Epistula 13, PL LXI, 207, and Sclater, p. 320. Both authors take Paul as advising sympathy with the bereaved.
19. In a letter ("with a mass of Rabbinical and other lore") to Jonson on the legitimacy of a male actor wearing female dress Selden says:

In the connexion of these no vulgar observations, if they had been to the common learned reader, there had been often room for divers pieces of European theology, dispers'd in Latin and Greek authors of the Gentiles and fathers of the church too, and often for parts of mythology; but your own most choice and able store, cannot but furnish you incidently with whatever is fit that way to be thought of in the reading. (quoted by Herford and Simpson, I, 250)

20. L. A. Beaurline, "The Selective Principle in Jonson's Shorter Poems," Criticism 8 (1966) 69. Jonson's copy of The Arte of English Poesie is in the British Library.
21. A. L. Bennet, "The Principal Rhetorical Conventions in the Renaissance Personal Elegy," Studies in Philology 51 (1954) 107-126.
22. Iambi et Elegi Graeci, ed. M. L. West, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1971), p. 6 (fr. 13); The Poems of William Habington, ed. Kenneth Allott (Liverpool, 1948), p. 65. For other references to the topos see Kassel, p. 59, and von Moos, III, 53, 233-236. Many examples could of course be given from the Renaissance; Habington's is merely the first that falls to my notice.
23. For the sake of completeness I should mention that the opening of this poem gestures towards the epitaph convention of requesting the reader's tears: "I could begin with that grave forme, Here lies,/And pray thee Reader, bring thy weeping Eyes/To see...." Primarily Jonson is disassociating himself from hackneyed epitaph, but this has the added advantage of avoiding a request for grief.

24. See the fine psychological study by E. Pearlman, "Ben Jonson: An Anatomy," English Literary Renaissance 9 (1979) 364-393.
25. Jonson is fond of this topos; see Herford and Simpson's note, XI, 5, for the other appearances. On the topos in general see von Moos, III, 137-141, and Richmond Lattimore, Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs (Urbana, 1962), pp. 170-171.
26. Ira Clark, "Ben Jonson's Imitation," Criticism 20 (1978) 122, has surely missed the tone of the last line when she says it lays bear the poet's anguish and requires us to reconsider the success of the consolation.--The topos is as old as Euripides, Alcestis 463; see Lattimore, pp. 65-74.
27. Jonson told Drummond he was separated from his wife for five years, during which he stayed with Lord Aubigny (I, 139); in a passage quoted in the next note he says he was away from London when his son died. Herford and Simpson originally dated Jonson's stay with Aubigny to 1602-07, but later were in doubt; see XI, 576-577, for the details.
28. Is there a suggestion in the poem's first lines that Jonson is afraid his immoderate hope for and attachment to his son killed him, that the boy's death is a punishment for the father's sin? Jonson must have felt there was something uncanny about his son's death because of the vision he saw:

When the King came jn England, at that tyme the Pest was jn
 London, he being jn the Country at S^r Robert Cottons house
 with old Cambden, he saw jn a vision his eldest sone (yⁿ a

child and at London) appear unto him w^t ye Marke of a bloodie crosse on his forehead as if it had been cutted w^t a suord, at which amazed he prayed unto God, and jn ye morning he came to M^r. Camdens chamber to tell him, who persuaded him it was but ane apprehension of his fantasie at which he sould not be disjected<.> jn ye mean tyme comes yr letters from his wife of ye death of yt Boy jn ye plague. (I, 139-140)

If Jonson did feel some unconscious guilt for his son's death, some sense that his own excessive desires were being punished, it would help explain why he vows to avert (a recurrence of) nemesis at the poem's conclusion.

29. "On My First Sonne" has received more critical attention than most of Jonson's poems. See the discussions by Beaurline, pp. 65-70, Pearlman, pp. 389-390, Francis Fike, "Ben Jonson's 'On My First Sonne,'" The Gordon Review 11 (1969) 205-220, W. David Kay, "The Christian Wisdom of Ben Jonson's 'On My First Sonne,'" Studies in English Literature 1500-1900 11 (1971) 125-136, Arthur F. Marotti, "All About Jonson's Poetry," ELH 39 (1972) 227-228, J. Z. Kronenfeld, "The Father Found: Consolation Achieved Through Love in Ben Jonson's 'On My First Sonne,'" Studies in Philology 75 (1978) 64-83.
30. English Seventeenth-Century Verse, vol. 2, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, (New York, 1974), pp. 193-194.
31. It looks like Paulinus has resolved his dilemma in favor of joy, and he does relegate mourning to the faithless later in the poem

(383-390), but towards the end one sees that the tension is not resolved: "Celse, dolor patribus, gloria Celse patrum/amor et desiderium" (590-591). Weeping and rejoicing prove inseparable. Paulinus' letter of consolation to Pammachius (PL LXI, 207-223) expresses the same ambivalence, although not in such a deliberately paradoxical form: "Pium est contristari de avulsione carorum; sed sanctum, laetificari spe et fide promissionum Dei....Esto, temporaliter fleat pietas sed oportet ut jugiter gaudeat fides" (Epistula 13.9-10). For more examples of "impia pietas" see von Moos, III, 279.

32. De Doctrina Christiana, The Works of John Milton, vol. 17 (New York, 1934), pp. 260-262.
33. "An Elogie.[sic] On the Lady Jane Paulet Marchioness of Winchester daughter to the right honourable the Lord Savage of Rock-Savage," Poems (London, 1658), pp. 34-39.
34. See Statius, Silvae 2.6 and Marot, "Complaincte de Madame Loyse de Savoye."
35. Epistula. 39.3; Saint Jérôme, Lettres, ed. Jérôme Labourt, vol. 2 (Paris, 1951), p. 76. For other examples see von Moos, III, 197-199.
36. One sees the intensity of Digby's grief in a despairing poem he wrote after her death, Poems from Sir Kenelm Digby's Papers, in the Possession of Henry A. Bright (London, 1877), pp. 7-9.