

Poetic analysis of ben jonson essay sample

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Ben Jonson was an English dramatist and poet, born in 1572 and whose classical learning, gift for satire, and brilliant style made him one of the great figures of English literature. Although he had very little formal education he had a vast knowledge of Latin and Greek literature. His work became popular and he wrote entertaining plays for the court of King James I. These plays displayed his erudition, wit, and versatility and contained some of his best lyric poetry. Although Ben Jonson lived during the middle 1600's, when people were at most times trying to put on genteel airs, he developed a more earthy view of existence. He lived a violent life at times and had a few run-ins with the law. By all appearances it may have seem he was a brutish rogue but underneath it all he had the heart of a romantic.

Ben Jonson wrote many lyrical poems and he was keenly adept at illustrating and portraying contemporary people. The poems, Song: To Celia and Song: Still to Be Neat are both written about a particular women. The theme or central idea of the first poem is about all consuming love that he had for the person Celia. Throughout this poem his praise of her is so extreme that she takes on an unearthly quality. The line which clearly expresses the author's attitude are lines 7-8:" But might I of Jove's nectar sup, I would not change for thine." He declares the only thing that his soul needs is her love, which is divine and all-encompassing. In contrast, his theme in the second poem, is one of chastisement on vain women. He declares that he prefers a natural and simple woman in lines 7-8:" Give me a look, give me a face, that makes simplicity a grace." His central idea suggests that women who hide their natural beauty behind powder and perfume are superficial and unable to

move a man's heart. In many of his poems he critically addresses the façade's that people put up for others.

This author wanted to be a professional writer and earn a living with his writing. He depended on the nobility for his livelihood and although he himself was not a gentleperson, he was supported by them. He had a down to earth way of reaching the soul of a man and exposing hypocrisies of life. The author uses imagery in both poems to make a connection between fragrances and the women. In the Song: To Celia, her fragrance is natural and appealing. With the lines 15-16: " Since when it grows and smells, I swear, not of itself but thee", he states that her fragrance is stronger and sweeter than even the roses. On the other hand, in Song: Still to Be Neat, he condemns a woman who wears a perfume that covers up her natural scent as in line 6: " All is not sound, all is not sweet."

Additionally, he uses personification in the first poem in line 1: " Drink to me only with thine eyes," which gives the eyes the capability to drink.

Comparatively, in the second poem the author feels like the woman's makeup covers her real beauty or art and that doesn't attract him. In the lines 11-12: " Than all the adulteries of art, They strike mine eyes, but not my heart." he gives the qualities of striking, to the " adultery of art". He wrote many short poems and odes that were easily set to music, about all walks of life and most were moralistic without being preachy.

During the time when Ben Jonson lived in England the classes of people were clearly divided. He used the standards and morals of the time to poke fun at man and his insecurities with short lyrical poetry. The poem, Song: To Celia,

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is lyrical poetry because Ben Jonson expresses a deep emotional love and like many of his poems, its rhyme can be put to song. It has sixteen lines, with a rhyme scheme of ABCBABC B, (first stanza), DEFED EFE, (second stanza). The other poem, Song: Still to Be Neat, is an allegory because it contains abstract concepts concerning beauty and art. The underlying moral of this poem is that the beauty of a woman is more than skin deep. It has a total of twelve lines and the pattern different from the other poem. It's rhyme scheme is AAB BCC, (first stanza), DDEEFF, (second stanza); the pairs of letters representing rhyming lines with identical meter.

Ben Jonson was a simple man who lived at a time when everyone, even men, wore frills and put on artificial acts to impress others. He had the knack of breaking through the veneer to get to the core of the person he wrote about. No one was spared his astute observations because he even wrote satirical pieces about his friends and himself. He could poke fun at his good friend, Shakespeare, and get away with it. He had a rough life physically and emotionally as well. Although much is not known about his wife, it is a fact that both of his children lived for only a short time. The emotional loss of the people he loved may have given him the gift to get past all deceit in life and understand what really mattered. At the time of his writings the popular writers leaned more toward intellectual subjects, like theology and history. Their works were considered serious while his light, but he soon changed the minds of the critics. With short and direct verses he made the literary world understand that poems can be serious works of art.