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## Creative Reading, World and Style in Ben Jonson's 'To Celia'

PETER STOCKWELL

### 1 Jonson and the Literary World

The reputation of the English writer Ben Jonson largely rests on his status as a playwright, a late contemporary of Shakespeare and one who exerted a strong influence on Restoration drama. However, in his time and immediately after his death, Jonson was at least as celebrated for his production of masques (multimedia variety-shows featuring spectacular entertainments) and for his poetic writing. Other writers, describing themselves as the 'Sons of Ben' followed his dramatic principles, and the self-styled 'Tribe of Ben' included the poets Carew, Herrick, Lovelace and Suckling. In 1616 he was given an annual pension by King James I, an act that often leads to him being styled as the first formal poet laureate (though in fact by title that was first awarded to Dryden just over half a century later). Jonson's poetry remained popular largely through two collections, *Epigrams* and *The Forest*, which both appeared in a 1616 folio edition of his *Works*, though the *Epigrams* had also been collected four years earlier. Throughout the rise of his dramatic reputation, its decline in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and rise again in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Jonson's lyric poems have remained consistently admired. Among these is the following perennially popular lyric:

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*Song: To Celia*

Drink to me, only, with thine eyes,  
 And I will pledge with mine;  
 Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
 And I'll not look for wine.

The thirst, that from the soul doth rise,  
 Doth ask a drink divine:  
 But might I of Jove's *nectar* sup,  
 I would not change for thine.

I sent thee, late, a rosie wreath,  
 Not so much honouring thee,  
 As giving it a hope, that there  
 It could not withered be,

But thou thereon did'st only breathe,  
 And sent'st it back to me:  
 Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,  
 Not of itself, but thee.

(Jonson 1984: 102–3)

In this chapter, I will consider the popularity of this poem, and explore what is overwhelmingly its most common reading: a beautifully balanced poem of unrequited love. I will demonstrate how this reading can be generated from the text, drawing on the cognitive poetic framework of *text world theory*. However, I will also consider the positioning of the poem within the historicist paradigm of literary scholarship, and finally present a very rare and eccentric reading of the text, in an analysis that draws more on traditional *stylistics*. The point of the discussion is not so much to offer a simple literary-critical treatment of this Ben Jonson poem, but mainly to suggest that a cognitive approach to literature that neglects the central importance of the stylistic dimension can only ever be partial.

The 'cognitive turn' (Steen 1994), originally affecting literary studies mainly from within European stylistics and north American rhetoric and linguistics departments, has become a 'cognitive revolution' (Richardson and Steen 2002) that has touched most areas of the arts and humanities. In the rush to new projects and insights, however, there is a danger that the systematic application of cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology is neglected in favour of a looser, more fanciful or less rigorous critical theory (as I have argued elsewhere, see Stockwell 2012). There is some evidence of this even in the best work in cognition and literature: work which is otherwise admirable by, for example, Scarry (2001), Hogan (2003), Gottschall

(2005), and in the collection edited by Jaén and Simon (2012). It is almost unfair to pick these examples out, because a cognitive framing of cultural literary studies is increasingly pervasive. However, it is my belief that this significant advance both in the content and the methodology of literary studies risks becoming a transient critical theory unless we retain a grounding in systematic stylistic analysis at the core of cognitive poetics. This chapter, then, stands as a corrective to cognitive approaches to literary studies that are insufficiently rooted in textuality and texture. In order to demonstrate the argument, I outline the most common, natural readings of the poem, and offer a cognitive analysis that operates mainly at the conceptual level. I select *text world theory* (see below) as the model for analysis, partly because it also offers a grounding of the exploration in a close stylistic account. The chapter ends with this account, and aims to show that a range of readings (even eccentric ones of the sort preferred by literary critics) can be encompassed by the approach.

## 2 Reading 'To Celia': A Text World Account

The most common reading of the Jonson poem is that it is a lyric, written by a man pretending to address a woman with whom he is in love, but being rejected. This is by far the overwhelming response of natural (that is, non-academic) readers as a simple online search for the poem and commentary on it will demonstrate. Most people do not seem to regard the poem as an actual letter of correspondence, but see it as being in the conventional tradition of a public declaration of feeling as a piece of artifice. Those academic readers who offer a reading of the meaning of the poem (largely older treatments such as Empson 1930, van Deusen 1957, Press 1958, and Nichols 1969) focus on its beauty and its simple lyricism. Interestingly for my later discussion, their model of Jonson as a lyricist of unequalled clarity causes these critics much consternation over the possibility that some parts of the poem are obscure or ambiguous. The two lines

But might I of Jove's *nectar* sup,  
I would not change for thine

seem, in their opinions, to disrupt the tone of the poem, and in fact to say the opposite of what might usually be intended in a love lyric. Rather than accepting the ambiguity or exploring it further, these critics tend to try to resolve it as a manuscript mistake (perhaps 'for' is an error for 'fro' as a contraction of 'from'), or as an etymological note ('change' is meant in the sense of 'exchange'), or as a poetic contraction to preserve the metre ('I would not change [it] for thine'). However, these resolutions are problematic. As Dutton (1984: 23) points out in his introduction to *Epigrams and The*

*Forest*, 'Jonson was meticulous about his punctuation, the first significant English author so to be', and the poet himself saw the 1616 folio through the press personally. It seems on this occasion it is appropriate to trust the version of the text we have as above. I will return to this issue later on.

The most recent treatments of Jonson's work (see, e.g. Evans 1994, Sanders 2010, and Donaldson 2011) are centrally concerned not so much with interpretation of individual texts as with the cultural significance of the plays and poems in their historical context. The view of poems like 'To Celia' as masterful and influential lyrics is taken as given. It is a view shared by my own students. In an undergraduate class (held, pointedly, on St Valentine's day, February 14<sup>th</sup>), the consensus of the discussion was similarly that the poem was a clever and well-balanced example of a love-lyric, in the tradition if not the form of Shakespeare's sonnets. These readers did not notice that there was an apparent discrepancy in the two lines quoted just above. Instead, their only departure from regarding the poem as a simple love-lyric was to suggest that – in fact like many of Shakespeare's sonnets – the poem was as much about the poet's projection of his own poetic cleverness as about his genuine feelings. This sense that the artifice of the poem, its status as an art object, is foregrounded will be pursued in my analysis that follows.

The sense of balance, proportion, and poise (words all used by both my own students and by many online readers) can be accounted for within the terms of *text world theory* (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007a). This is a cognitive poetic model of discourse based on tracking the reader's mental representation of the text currently being read. The framework has a fractal structure, with reader and author occupying a *discourse world* at the top level, and cocreating a *text world* the reader's mind. This is a working representation of the projected reality articulated not just by the semantics of the text but also conditioned by the reader's experience, culture, memories and other dispositions. Further *sub-worlds* or *world-switches* can be embedded within the matrix text world in order to designate alternations based on flashbacks or flashforwards, metaphors, negations, speculations and hypotheses, direct speech and thought, and modalised states-of-affairs. Text world theory – like the related approaches of possible worlds semantics (Ryan 1992; Semino 1997), schema poetics (Cook 1994; Cockcroft 2002) and conceptual integration (Fauconnier and Turner 2003) – can capture structural organisation and matters of fictionality very well, but it also has the advantage of being able to account rather neatly for some complex effects. For example, the foregrounding property of negation as a sort of positive absence is smartly captured in the notion of a negational world switch: a sub-world in which the item being negated is present for conceptualisation (see Stockwell 2011a). The experienced 'truthfulness' of a metaphor which is patently

false is similarly captured in the notion of a metaphorical world switch (where the metaphorical properties hold), embedded in a matrix text world (where they simultaneously don't).

Text world theory is a model from cognitive science that has been used particularly in the context of literary reading both by its originators (see also Werth 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Gavins 2005, 2007b, 2010) and by subsequent researchers in cognitive poetics (Bridgeman 1998; Hidalgo Downing 2000; McIntyre 2006; Stockwell 2009; Giovanelli 2013). It is especially powerful in accounting for literary works which prominently feature fictional projections of imagination, anticipation or another form of alterity, or the embedding of different voices, perspectives and beliefs. The framework can be used to explore not only these ontological and epistemological matters, but also the subjective and personal experience of readers engaging with imaginary worlds and fictional characters—in other words, matters of aesthetics. Furthermore, since the difference between what is and what should be is a modalised world switch, text world theory is showing that it can also address questions of literary, readerly and character ethics.

The Jonson poem 'To Celia' begins with an directive imperative ('Drink to me'), which of course strongly implicates an addressee. The poem continues consistently with this second-person 'thou' address. This is not an example of what Herman (1994) calls doubly-deictic 'you' (or even, here, doubly deictic 'thou')—in which a postmodernist, experimental or metafictional narrative plays with the conflation of second-person address to both a text world character and a discourse world reader. In text world terms, a reader can be discomfited by a constant and unstable toggling between themselves as a discourse world addressee and their sense of a text world character who is actually being addressed by both a discourse world author and a text world narrator: this sensation is what Gibbons (2012) calls 'bistable oscillation'. Herman (2002: 345) outlines a set of different functions of second-person address, from the *generalized you* and *fictional reference* within the text world right up to *doubly deictic you* as described above. In between these two poles lie what he calls *fictionalized* (or 'horizontal') address and *apostrophic* (or 'vertical') address. The former is when a text world character addresses another character within the same world, and the latter is when a text world character seems to address the reader at a higher world level.

The title 'Song: To Celia' appears to be a discourse world address from the authorial 'Ben Jonson' to a third named person, so the second-person imperative in the first line marks a switch into the text world in which the poetic lover sets out his desires: the address is switched to the direct co-participant 'thou' within that text world. This appears straightforwardly a horizontal address in Herman's terms. However, and though this form is

conventionalised in love-lyrics, it is clear that many readers feel that they are ‘overhearing’ a private, intimate exchange. Though the poem is not addressed to the reader in the discourse world, the strength of the second-person address in this genre begins to approach the function of apostrophic or even doubly-deictic address.

What is odd at this point in the discussion is that all of my student readers (the majority of whom were women) identified more closely with the feelings of the presumed male speaker rather than with the directly-addressed ‘thou’, Celia. If they had to take a ‘side’, they took the part of the poetic voice, feeling sympathy for the spurned lover and feeling that Celia remained distant, other, and aloof. At first there seems to be a contradiction here, with readers making a trans-world identification with the poetic speaker, who is an enactor (a world-switched counterpart) of the discourse world author ‘Ben Jonson’, rather than with the text world addressee ‘thou’/Celia. This identification is made in spite of the potential for an apostrophic address, and in spite of the correlation of gender with most of my readers.

We can resolve this apparent oddity, however, in two ways. Firstly, I have distinguished elsewhere (Stockwell 2009, 2011b) between empathy and sympathy in literary reading in terms of text world distance across world boundaries. Briefly, the most intense, empathetic ‘feeling with’ a character occurs when there is a direct connection across a single text world edge; whereas the less intense, sympathetic ‘feeling for’ a character tends to occur in text world situations which feature some sort of deflection of readerly perspective, such as mediation through another narrating character, or across several world-switches of memory or speculation. In ‘To Celia’, the poetic voice coming directly out of the text world is a strong enactor of the authorial voice ‘Jonson’, who occupies the same discourse world level as the reader, whereas the woman (‘thou’) in the text world remains silent, remote and displaced, and disembodied and rarefied (‘eyes’, ‘kiss’, ‘breathe’, ‘smells’). It is not even certain whether the entitled ‘Celia’ is a real discourse world person or another imagined text world figment.

Secondly, the poem sets up a rich world texture that draws the reader’s attention inwards, towards the deictic centre of the speaking poetic voice. It is this complex but highly balanced structure of switched worlds that accounts for the sense in the poem of balance, proportion and poise, as I believe and will demonstrate now. The timeline of the poem begins with speculation in the near-future across the first half of the poem (the first eight lines), and ends with a flashback to an earlier point (‘I sent thee’) which gradually returns to the present moment by the end of the second half of the poem (also over eight lines). The poem thus accomplishes a pleasing circu-

lar completion from immediate present imperative back to the present moment.

Within this temporal structure, the first half of the poem consists of four embedded worlds, each articulated by a pair of lines. The initial text world is established with two function-advancers ('Drink to me' and 'I will pledge'), both of which gesture towards a near-future moment but do so with a degree of certainty. Indeed, the combination of the imperative, the 'And' conjunction, and the future aspect—together with the promissory meaning of 'pledge'—strongly suggests a certain and definite promise or contract being established. The next two lines set up a parallel, alternative world switch triggered by 'Or', in which the syntactic structure (imperative; 'And'; future aspect promise) is repeated to the same effect. This parallel world remains closely linked to the matrix text world, not only in its echoic syntax but also in the semantic echo in which the definite reference to 'the cup' does not seem odd, since it has already associatively been evoked in 'Drink to me' in the initial world.

The third pair of lines continues with this echoic domain ('The thirst'). It is only by this point (it became apparent from my students' discussion) that the extended metaphor which has actually been running since the opening line is first noticed prominently. 'The thirst' is concretised spatially ('doth rise') and then personified ('Doth ask'), and this metaphorical world switch seems to be the catalyst for a sensitisation that notices retrospectively that there was a metaphor at work in 'Drink... with thine eyes' that blends eyes and mouth sensually, and then in the concretisation and temporal extension of 'leave a kiss'. The overall effect is too delicate and complex for easy logical denotative resolution, and seems instead to be an associative blend in which eyes and mouth, the thirst for wine and sensual desire, and body and soul are ill-definedly but positively present.

The final pair of lines in the first half of the poem introduce a modal world switch ('But might I') with a corresponding conditional within that same world and a further embedded negational world ('would not'). The negational world contains an ellipted 'for thine' which means 'for your wine'. The complete two lines, disentangled for their embedded worlds structure, goes something like: 'But if I had the opportunity to sup the most transcendent, divine wine, even then I would not take that opportunity in place of your wine'. The final ellipsis occludes the fact that her 'wine' is a further world-switched metaphor – but the inputs to this metaphorical meaning are composed of all of the ill-defined echoic and associative semantic domain that has been established over the first six lines: her 'wine' is her body and her soul and her as yet unrealised love. The complexity defies instant logical understanding, leaving a sensation that is more subliminal or associative: a sense of poise and apposite neatness that is ambient (for



more on this notion, see Deggan, this volume, and for a different angle, Stockwell 2013). These are the lines which caused earlier literary critics such confusion, but a simple text world sketch shows the intricacies of their workings. It is important to note that I am not claiming the text world analysis here is a conscious reading; on the contrary, the analysis shows a complexity beyond the possibility of instant delineation. I am accounting for the subliminal effect which is more experiential than logical.

The emotional crescendo reached here has been attained by four anticipatory world switches of various types which have been mutually and complicatedly embedded. Though Jonson's original text is continuous, there is a mid-point pause or stanza break in almost all the many musical versions and most anthologies of the poem over the last four centuries. The second half of the poem does indeed feel different in quality from the first half. The world structure seems less complex and more consistent. It begins with a temporal world-switch to the narrative past ('I sent thee, late, a rosie wreath') and the narrative continues as the woman breathes on it, sends it back, and then it thrives and stands as a (perhaps delusional) love-token for him. However, this apparent simple narrative trajectory is disrupted by some artful sleight-of-pen. A fleeting negational world switch follows ('Not so much honouring thee'), and then the discourse returns to the matrix world in the narrative past in which the wreath receives a hope that in the woman's company it will not wither. But wait just a minute – we seem to have slipped from a factual narrative recount into a fantastical wish-world in which an inanimate wreath has hopeful feelings, in which a woman's presence prevents flowers from withering, and whose breath has such a restorative power and intensity that a dead wreath can grow again miraculously and transfer her scent to overpower the roses! In fact, we have ended up in this world of delusional absurdity because that fleeting negational world in fact referenced the prosaic reality in which the wreath's function simply was to honour her. In leaving that world we have been seduced into going along with the poet's delusion. The fleeting negational world is partly responsible for this, since the natural assumption of a fleeting world is of a return to the previous matrix world; instead, here, the formulation 'Not so much... as...' effects a further deflection into a world in which personified wreaths have emotions. The continuous syntax over the last 8 lines of the poem are also partly responsible for the reader's distraction: there is no pause in which as reader you can orientate yourself and realise you have been taken in.

However, most readers seem perfectly happy to be in the poetic persona's world by the end of the poem, feeling empathy for his unrequited situation, and identifying strongly with him rather than the addressed 'thee'. The complex world switching of the first half and the apparent consistency of

the second half, the repeated ABCBABC B rhyme with its constant alternating return to the B rhyme ending, and the associative semantic consistency of the metaphorical threads throughout the poem, can all be readily interpreted as a finely balanced and consistently poised articulation. The artfulness of the poem lies in encouraging the reader to adopt an empathetic position in which—by apparently rational and reasonable calm argument—reason has been abandoned in favour of a satisfyingly intense if unreciprocated experience of love. The text world analysis points to a balance of the actual and the anticipatory.

### 3 'To Celia': Adding a Stylistic Account

The foregoing text world theory account requires a reasonably close attention to textuality, in order to identify the most likely points at which readers might create worlds and switches. The centrality of textuality is one of the reasons why I like text world theory as an analytical framework in cognitive poetics. However, if we rest at the conceptual-structural level and even though we can gain insight into some complexity, we still miss out, I believe, on features of the literary work that a closer stylistic analysis can bring to critical awareness.

A great deal of the literary criticism that deals directly with the text of the poem itself rather than its broad cultural significance is even then concerned merely with identifying historical and allusive elements in the text. Speculation as to the identity of 'Celia', for example suggests that she was the poet and friend of Jonson's, the daughter of Sir Robert Sidney the Earl of Leicester, Lady Mary Wroth, who lived at Penshurst Place, a great country house and the subject of one of Jonson's other most famous poems. On discovering this it might not be too fanciful to note the phonological echo of 'Mary Wroth' in 'rosie wreath', especially since the '-ie' ending on what might more normally be 'rose wreath' seems marked and not only for the sake of the metrics and the child-like or endearing diminutive.

The poem itself is a *cento* (from the Latin for 'patch' or 'patchwork'): it is a part-assembly of lines translated from the letters of Philostratus, a Greek philosopher and teacher of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, who had settled in Rome, where he was then known as 'the Athenian'. The translation by Benner and Fobes (1989) renders Philostratus' words as: 'Drink to me with thine eyes only. Or, if thou wilt, putting the cup to thy lips, fill it with kisses, and so bestow it upon me' (*Letter 24*) and 'I sent thee a rosy wreath, not so much honouring thee (though this is also in my thoughts) as bestowing favour upon the roses, that so they might not be withered' (*Letter 30*). It is clear that this translation (with the middle- to early-modern English 'thine/thou/thy' and 'rosy') has been influenced by Jonson's now more fa-

mous text, but the nature of the original sampling is evident. The object of Jonson's original source was first noted in print by poet and naturalist John Dovaston (1815). Kenner (1964) suggests that if it took two centuries for the source to be identified then Jonson must have meant his readers to treat the poem as original, but of course there are flaws in this argument. It may be that the sampling was so obvious to contemporaries that it was not worth mentioning – in a print essay or reproduced conversation – as being worthy of note. And of course there is a suggestion in 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes that a sort of plagiarism has occurred here, when in fact there is nothing of the sort: centos were evidence of the poet's erudition and artfulness, and offered an authoritative echo of classical wisdom. Jonson is 'not so much honouring' the classical tradition as drawing on its ethos and the breath of antiquity in order to preserve his poem against withering for future ages.

A brief stylistic observation is likely to note that different styles are in evidence in the poem, and these slight alterations align with the world-structure set out above. Overall, whenever desire or anticipation are being presented especially in the alternating words switches in the first half, the tone is relatively poetic, allusive, heavily metaphorical and self-conscious. By contrast, when worlds that are close to the speaker's actuality are in focus, the tone is more prosaic and narrativised across the second half. The first half consists of two promises of the form *DO X AND I WILL DO Y*, but the tone in which these are realised is neither legalistic nor threatening, in the mainstream reading of the love-lyric, but are instead aimed at drawing the addressed woman into the desire world offered by the writer. Nevertheless, the contractual flavour of *X THEN Y* seems to me to persist, even at a rather delicate level. This impression might be reinforced by the four-line propositional conceit that 'The thirst' is not simply based in the body but is a transcendent desire of the spirit, which then requires a divine drink, and this allows the writer to suggest that the woman's love is greater even than that divinity. The classical god Jove (Jupiter) is invoked partly so that hubris with the Christian God is not an issue. Jove was also particularly associated with wine and the grape harvest, so 'Jove's *nectar*' is denotatively simply *wine*, but of course nectar is also the drink of the gods which gave them immortality (from the Greek and previous Indo-European *nek-tar* – death-overcoming). For modern readers, 'nectar' also primes a sense of flowers, which makes the introduction of the 'rosie wreath' a couple of lines later more cohesive, though the botanical usage of 'nectar' was only just beginning in Jonson's period (the *OED* records 1609 as the first use in print in this sense).

The second, narrativised half of the poem presents, not so much the rather abstract desire-worlds of the first half, but rather what in the stylistic choices looks more practical: an object is sent, and then returned. The en-

jambed syntax iconically echoes the ongoing trajectory of the dispatched love-token. The distance between speaker and woman is also reinforced by this part of the text, and their separation is sketched by the spatial deictic difference between 'there' / 'thereon' and 'back to me'; this is also aligned with the temporal deictic shift from past tense for her ('sent', 'did'st breathe', 'sent'st') and present tense once the focus has shifted back to him ('Since when... grows... smells... swear'). This practicality of presentation masks the fact, of course, that the content of what is being presented at this point is a magical, miraculous or deluded impossibility. In fact, the strategy of a plain stylistic delivery of incredible content is a common generic pattern from religious parable to science fiction, and here it is part of the persuasive and empathy-generating aspect of the poem.

The poem cleverly and artfully blends body and spirit, sensual and transcendent desire, and of course the binaries of addressee/speaker, woman/man, over there / over here in consistently aligned ways throughout the text. Though, as I have observed, there is a rational structure to much of the poem (*X THEN Y* either as promise or as narrative sequence), this is realised with a poetic and metaphorical diction, and an incredible content. Much of the sense of the poem's cohesion and coherence lies in the echoic domains such as nectar-roses, drink-thirst, kiss-cup, as already mentioned, and in the central image of something not changing, immediately followed by the circular token of the wreath. There are other echoic connections across the poem. These connections are by their nature at such a level of subliminal delicacy that a stylistician can only raise them to the level of awareness and invite agreement, or not, as to whether they figured in your own initial impression. There are, for example, a great deal of 'th' sounds all the way through the poem: they are more densely occurring than in any other comparable stretch of English, and they are not restricted to the word 'the' (compare the last two paragraphs above of this chapter for a quick illustration). They reach their highest density in the line 'But thou thereon did'st only breathe'. It might not be fanciful to suggest that the alignment of these sound-patterns with the meaning of the poem generates an iconic association of 'th' with the sensual domain, one focused on the mouth, and particularly the tongue and lips foregrounded in its articulation. Primed or sensitised in this way, it is at least possible that 'sent'st' can be read or heard as 'sensed'. In fact, the senses (eyes/look, thirst/drink, breathe, sent'st/sensed and smells) are a particularly foregrounded feature across the poem.

So far, these simple stylistic observations are perfectly in line with the popular sense of the poem as an artful love-lyric, with the sense of empathy for the writer, and with the sense that the most appropriate schema for understanding the situation is one of hopeless but romantic unrequited love. However, it is entirely possible to produce an eccentric reading of the poem

that is still consistent with stylistic evidence. In fact, it is difficult to cast aside the suggestion, throughout a detailed stylistic perusal, that a more sinister or troubling schema can reasonably be framed around the poem. This first suggested itself to me in the semantic scope of the restrictiveness of the word 'only' in the first line, and particularly because of the punctuation that separates it from the clause of which it is a part. There are several ways of reading the scope of 'only' in the first line:

Drink to me metaphorically (that is, not with your mouth but simply  
with your eyes)

Do nothing else except drink to me with your eyes

Drink exclusively to me

Drink to me with your eyes and with nothing else

The first two of these seem to me to underlie the most common reading of the poem. The first foregrounds the poetic-ness of the poem's metaphorical patterns that are to follow, and the second is a marker of insistence that will be read in the context of the rest of the poem as ardour. However, the final two glosses are also possible: in the first, 'only' restricts the scope of the imperative command, and in the second 'only' restricts the scope of the woman to her eyes alone. Both of these glosses suggest a relationship in which domination and passivity is more key. In fact, it is possible, thus primed, to find corresponding suggestions of a more sinister and unhealthy sort of relationship throughout the poem. The promissory syntactic structure of the first four lines now raises the formerly unrealised threatening flavour to a level of consciousness. The persuasive world-structure and syntax comes across as coercive, seductive and manipulative. The woman is silent throughout: she is to make a toast not by speaking but only with her eyes; she does not 'kiss' but rather passively leaves a kiss; she is reduced and disembodied down to her senses; her only action would be a definite and unambiguous rejection, but the writer frames it in a fantastical world that turns it into a token for himself.

There are sinister intimations of death throughout the poem. Thirst is literally life-threatening as well as metaphorically lustful. The phrase 'the soul doth rise' occurs, cunningly embedded in another clause. Jove is a figure not of romantic love but of violence, domination, and rape. A wreath can be funereal as well as celebratory. This last association might even be primed up by the insertion of 'late' in exactly the same appositional position as 'only' in the first line – and the parallelism is further reinforced by the sense that the poem falls into two halves and these are the first lines of each stanza. 'Late', in the common love-lyric reading, means *lately*, *recently*, but of course it also means 'dead', and had acquired this common usage a couple of centuries before Jonson. The word can attach semantically to the im-

mediately preceding 'thee', with the suggestion that she has already died and is then sent a wreath. Alternatively, of course, the word can also be used in the sense of 'I sent thee a wreath too late to have its desired effect'. Finally, there is a marked contrast – certainly for a modern reader, at least – between the high-blown metaphor and allusion of most of the poem and the prosaic, colloquial and rather earthy 'it... smells, I swear'. There is, especially, in the unwanted intimacy of this, an element (isn't there?) of the obsessive, the stalker, the delusional misfit distracted by his own unreal fantasies, convincing himself of his own rightness by the appeal to a misogynistic tradition of literary seduction. 'I swear' binds up the religious oath with the manly curse, and smacks of protesting too strongly.

In this reading, the distraction in the second half of the poem (through the negational and metaphorical non-return of the world switch effected by 'Not so much honouring thee, As...') represents a trick played on the reader. You are drawn into the writer's fantasy world, accepting the conceit of non-withering roses in the woman's breath. The final line, with its self-reflexive tone, its negation and its implication of the woman ('Not of itself, but thee') leaves a sinister and unresolved sense for this more suspicious reader. The writer ends the poem not by returning the reader to the matrix text world of the first line, but to a point internal to his own worldview. The empathetic reader will have been absorbed into this perspective and will thus feel pity; the resistant reader might well recoil from this closeness and leave troubled and discomforted.

#### 4 Stylistics for Creative Reading

It has to be said that the second of my readings here cannot be found 'in the wild'. The vast majority (even perhaps all) of the responses that I could find in an extensive scholarly and popular search share a view of the poem as an artful love-lyric. There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this.

Firstly, it seems clear to me that an historical view of the poem from a cultural studies perspective is interesting in both a generally significant sense and in a local, trivial sense, but any such treatment of the poem is inadequate without a stylistic dimension. It is not only the meaning (the readerly interpretation) of the poem that rests on understanding its stylistic patterns; the significance of the work in terms of its influence, generic position and place in literary history are also matters that can further be serviced by stylistic discipline.

Secondly, it is also apparent not only on this evidence but on similar arguments (see Gavins and Stockwell (2012), and contrastively Burke (2005)) that our collective excitement about the new opportunities being offered by a cognitive approach to literature should not blind us to the root empirical

and evidential basis of textuality on which all cognitive poetics is and must be founded. To be blunt about it: where cognitive literary studies merely recapitulates the broad vacuity of cultural studies, it fails in its intellectual purpose. Where cognitive literary studies retains a cognitive stylistic grounding, then it is at its most successful.

Thirdly, however, it is clear that the scope of stylistics has been greatly and positively expanded by the cognitive turn in arts and humanities that it has most enthusiastically adopted. Stylisticians amongst literary scholars have been the first and most committed researchers in cognitive poetics. Detailed and principled stylistic analysis is not an add-on nor an optional ornamental extra to literary scholarship, but an essential element of basic training.

Fourthly, my discussion of the Jonson poem above demonstrates a feature of the practice of stylistics that shows it can be creative, productive and innovative at the interpretative level, as well as having a considerable explanatory and descriptive power at the analytical level. The sinister reading is eccentric in the sense that it does not largely feature in humanity's collective response to the poem over four centuries, but it is not impossible, implausible or even wilfully contrary or transgressive, since it can be demonstrated to have a grounding in stylistic patterns within a systematically disciplinary interpretative frame.

Lastly, it is not only this sort of eccentricity or strikingly contrary interpretation that stands as a form of creative reading. It should be apparent particularly from the earlier text world analysis of the poem that most of the delicate senses, the subliminal echoes, and the seductive readerly iconicity and aesthetics of Jonson's 'To Celia' require associations, connections, and enrichment from a reader's wider mental and embodied life. All reading involves space-filling and absorption in this sense. The poem's texture sets these patterns up, but it is readers who model, create and engage in the literary experience.

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