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The Body and Figurative Language in Ben Jonson's *Epigram CXXV*, "To Sir William Uvedale"

Authors: [Martin, Mathew B.](#) (Brock University)
Source: [The Ben Jonson Journal: Literary Contexts in the Age of Elizabeth, James and Charles](#); 2022 May; 20(1): 65-75. [\[Journal Detail\]](#) Edinburgh University Press.
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[Primary Subject Work: 'Epigram CXXV, To Sir William Uvedale'](#)
[Genre: poetry](#)
Subject Terms: use of [figurative language](#); treatment of [male body](#); relationship to [disembodiment](#); [discourse](#)
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Abstract: This essay argues that the relationship between the body and figurative language is central to Ben Jonson's epideictic poetry. In his poetry of praise, Jonson attempts to anchor a disembodied speaking voice in the bodies of those to whom his poetry is addressed. Generated by the bodies of others, Jonson's figurative language asserts and even depends for its success upon the speaker's inappropriateness. Yet, I will argue, in Jonson's poetry in general and his epideictic poetry in particular, the body is not just the object of discourse but also the subject of discourse; the interplay between the two shapes Jonson's figurative language even in the case of a poem, such as epigram CXXV, "To Sir William Uvedale," that seems to have very little to do with the body. The epigram is neither Petrarchan love poem, satire, nor an indulgence in the grotesque. Nonetheless, it is structured by Jonson's attempt to deny the male body as the ground of its figurative language, a denial that is itself rooted in bodily metaphors. The failure of the attempted denial reveals at once the figurative, back-constructed nature of the ostensibly literal object of the poem, Uvedale's body, and the very embodied nature of the supposedly disembodied, transcendental speaker.

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