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CONTRIBUTION OF BEN JONSON TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE COMEDY

Abstract. Ben Jonson's *Works*, published in 1616, included all his comedies written that far, and meant an important precedent which helped to establish drama as literary kind comparable to the rest of literature. Before that date, drama was regarded as unworthy of the name of *literature*, and Jonson was the first to give it its new dignity. His comedies written after 1616 were usually published immediately after they were acted. Jonson's theoretical interests were an expression of his intellectual aristocratism and his realistic temperament. He took pride in being able to create comedies according to the best scientific rules, and felt superior to those who made them by sheer talent. Jonson was the only theoretician among the English Renaissance dramatists, but although he was ready to fight for his rules, his application of them was broad and elastic. In his comedies there are many departures from classical models, often modified by his keen observation of everyday English life. The theory he adhered to was an abstract and rigid kind of realism, which in his practice was transformed by his gift of observation and his moral zeal into a truly realistic and satirical comic vision of life.

Key words: comedy, drama, theory, classical models, everyday English life, realism, satire.

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EXCEPTIONAL PERSONALITY, OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

Benjamin or Ben Jonson (1573?-1637) was the central literary personality of the first two decades of the XVII century. He was a born leader – a big, bulky person, of fierce temperament, quarrelsome and coarse (killed a man in a duel!), boasting and self-important, stubborn, but a man of real learning – well-read not only in the classics, but also in Italian, Spanish, and other European humanistic authors. His accustomed seat was the Apollo room in the Mermaid Tavern in London, mentioned in some of his comedies. There he presided over the *tribe of Ben*, his younger followers in the fields of drama and poetry (Puhalo, 1968: p. 126).

Jonson came from the ranks of petty bourgeoisie, but aspired to nobility – not so much that of *blue blood* as that of letters and learning. Because of poverty he had a defective formal schooling, and so he had to teach himself. This is why he valued learning much more than those who got it the easy way. That was the root of his later life-long quarrel with the theatre-going public. His chief ideals were honest work, self-sufficiency, moderate enjoyment of life, honesty and frankness in personal relationships. He was most sternly opposed to the *acquisitive attitude* (Knights, 1973: p. 309), to that unscrupulous striving after gold and material profit which characterized the middle classes of his society.

Ben Jonson's dramatic work consists mainly of comedies, fourteen in number, but he also wrote two tragedies with the subjects from Roman history. A long gap may be noted in his comediographer's activity between 1616 and 1625, partly due to his disappointment with his audience, but also to the fact that he was busy writing *masks* for the court of James I. He published his *Works* in 1616, including in them all the comedies written to the date. It was an important precedent, as before that drama was regarded as a *low* kind of writing, and Jonson was the first to give it this new dignity. His comedies written after 1616 were usually published immediately after they were acted. To be noted is the fact that most of Jonson's comedies are placed in London, or (in two cases only) in the English countryside; only three of them, *The Case is Altered*, *Every Man in his Humour* in its first version, and *Volpone*, have an Italian setting. This means that he drew his comic stuff out of his immediate surroundings, creating a realistic and satirical comedy.

Jonson's theoretical views are found scattered through his writings, especially in the prologues and *inductions* (short introductory scenes) of his plays. They are also expressed in some parts of his *Timber*, and in his *Colloquies* with the Scotch poet William Drummond, whom he visited in 1619 (Puhalo, 1968: p. 126). His views about drama are derived either from classical sources, or from the Italian Renaissance theoreticians, or again from his English predecessors. Jonson was, in fact, an early classicist.

The first ingredient of his theory is his high notion of poet and poetry (Knights, 1973: p. 303), common to all Renaissance authors. The best expression of this notion is found in his Prologue to *Volpone*. In line with this view are his frequent outbursts against cheap, mercenary poets and dramatists, who did not observe the dramatic rules as he conceived them, or against his public, and his appeals to the *understanders*, the people with an educated taste. The basic dramatic rules that he accepted from his authorities were, first, those concerning the *aim* of comedy: to correct manners and morals, by showing human follies and vices and exposing them to ridicule. Then there was the principle of *verisimilitude*, and the still more important one of *decorum* (fitness, suitability), which meant that the actions of all the characters, as well as their speech, dress, and behaviour should correspond to their social status. Jonson also accepted the principle of *unities* – of time, place and action – proclaimed by Renaissance theoreticians, but he rarely applied them to his comedies. What he did apply in most cases was the standard division of the play into five acts.

The *theory of humours* was Jonson's only original contribution to dramatic theory, expounded in the Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour*, "his first celebrated and really personal work" (Legouis and Kazamian, 1971: p. 445). It is based on the naive physiology of his time, which taught that man's mentality and character was regulated by the four liquids or *humours* (Salingar, 1973: p. 24). Jonson thought that every character could be defined by a predominant trait which was most conspicuous in his behaviour, and which could be called his *humour*. He was in effect trying to base his character creation upon a scientific foundation (Puhala 1968: p. 127). Taken in its broadest sense, the theory was a rationalization of an existing dramatic practice: many characters have been created on the basis of one predominant characteristic. In Jonson's dramatic practice, however, and still more in the practice of his followers, the *humour* soon acquired a restricted meaning, that of a person possessed by a comic whim or eccentricity, a folly or a prejudice. Thus *humour* came to mean what was later called an *original*, and as such had a numerous progeny in the later English fiction (Fielding, Stern, Dickens, etc). Another consequence of the theory was his giving his characters the names expressing their chief characteristic. The practice had its origin in the morality plays, but Jonson made it universal; after him it became a common habit of all English comedigraphers. Jonson took pride in being able to create comedies according to the best scientific rules, and felt superior to those who made them by sheer talent, without learning; Shakespeare was one in that number.

THE COMEDIES

Jonson's comedies are narrower in scope and clearer in outline than Shakespeare's, but they too do not always fit into standard patterns. This is why they are worth discussing in their chronological order, giving the years of their first performances, however not focusing on the three best ones that are much better known and analysed than the rest of his comedies

The Case is Altered (1597), Jonson's earliest extant comedy, is nearest to Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Its plot is a tissue of many motives, most of them derived from Plautus' comedies, and some historical or legendary. The place of action is Milan, ruled by the Count Ferneze, during its historical wars with the French. There are two main plots, and three groups of persons; the third is made of servants and pages who serve as *fools*. The first plot centres round Count Ferneze and is concerned with the fortunes of war. Ferneze's general Maximilian goes to the war with the French, taking with him Ferneze's son Paulo, and promising to take good care of him, for he is an only son – Ferneze used to have also another one, who had gone lost as a child. In spite of Maximilian's care Paulo is taken prisoner, but Maximilian brings with him two French prisoners of high rank, one of whom is Chamont, son of the famous French marshal, and proposes to exchange Chamont for Paulo. But Chamont interchanges his identity with his friend Gasper, an unknown young nobleman, and goes back to the French camp instead of Gasper. When the deceit is discovered, Ferneze quarrels with Maximilian and threatens Gasper with death if his son does not return. At the last moment, Paulo returns safe with Chamont; the crown of all the heavy suspense is that Gasper proves to be Ferneze's lost son Camillo.

The second plot concerns beautiful Rachel, daughter to a mysterious beggar, Jaques de Prie, and her suitors, the chief among whom is her true love Paulo, Ferneze's son. The suitors crowd round Rachel during Paolo's absence: there is the foolish Christophero, court steward, then Onion, a barber who aspires to learning (the chief fool of the play), servant Juniper who helps him, Count Ferneze himself (who abandons the suit, sobered down, when he hears of his son's misfortune), and Paulo's faithless friend Angelo, whom he had entrusted with protecting Rachel in his absence. Of course, Paulo gets Rachel in the end and she proves to be the French marshal's daughter. Parallel with this plot runs a subplot, borrowed directly from Plautus' *Aulularia*: Jaques de Prie, Rachel's supposed father, is a rich miser who hides and jealously guards his wealth (he stole it long ago, together with the marshal's child), until it is accidentally discovered and stolen by Onion and Juniper. The two are caught and punished, and Jaques is forced to confess his past misdeeds, after which he is pardoned.

Combined here there are the interchange of prisoners, the loyal and disloyal friend, the lost children who are found through tokens, the love rivalry between father and son, the miser and his pot of gold, the girl with many suitors, etc., and Jonson shows a considerable skill in weaving all these strands into a plausible dramatic whole. The characters have no great depth, but some scenes are good, and the play is full of action and surprise, witty and entertaining in many parts, and not deprived of a moral foundation.

Every Man in his Humour (1598) is one of Jonson's most popular comedies. He first placed the action in an Italian setting and gave the characters Italian names, but soon he revised it completely. In the second version he placed it in London and made the persons English (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971: p. 445). This English version is generally considered better (Knights, 1973: pp. 305, 317). The plot, based again upon Plautian themes and character-types, is complex, but the motives of action are not always convincing. There are two places between which the main plot moves – Old Knowell's house outside London, and merchant Kitley's home in London – and two subsidiary ones, Cob the waterman's cottage by the City wall, and Justice Clement's house in London, wherein the action is resolved in the end. The main plot is the well-known Plautian theme of the young vs. the old: the old Knowell, *laudator temporis acti*, is suspicious of his son's movements and company, follows his steps and hires his servant Brainworm to report on him. But Brainworm changes sides, helps the son, and deceives the father; he is a Plautian clever servant, but he is not properly integrated into the plot. Young Knowell's company represents Jonson's first gathering of *humours* – there are two *gulls*, stupid persons who are easily duped: the city gull Matthew and the country gull Stephen, both good comic portraits, but the best is Bobadill, a Plautian braggart soldier with individual features and an English local colour. Another kind of humour is Downright, a freely spoken misanthropic moralist.

The merchant Kitley, in whose house the meetings of gay young men and *humours* take place, provides a subplot which attracts more attention than the main plot. He torments his wife with suspicions and keeps her in custody, till he is brought to his senses through an efficient comic intrigue. Both husband and wife are convincing characters, and the study of jealousy is done with such psychological insight and truthfulness that it grows almost too serious.

Although Plautian in its basic texture, this comedy is rooted in contemporary London life and has a refreshing breath of living actually, together with more enduring comic and satiric values.

Every Man Out of his Humour (1599) was performed at the Inns of Court, London law schools, before a sophisticated audience of intellectuals, and Jonson was eager to display his theoretical knowledge and his *scientific* dramaturgy to this *understanding* public. He wrote a flowery dedication to the Inns of Court, and en-

cumbered the play with a theoretical apparatus: there is, first, the *Induction* with three Latin-named persons, whose dialogue serves to expound Jonson's theory of *humours*, and to announce a merciless castigation of all the vices and follies of the society.

The play itself is a review of *humours*, something like a puppet-show, manipulated by Macilente (the "Lean one"), character developed from Downright in the previous play, a misanthropic moralist: he hates other people because they are happy with their vices, and he, being virtuous, cannot be happy seeing the corrupt world. Macilente is no real character, for the simple reason that he stands outside the plot, and the plot itself is mostly a series of tricks by which he "cures" the rest of people in the play from their *humours*.

Some of the *humours* are good satiric portraits. One among the most interesting is Puntarvolo, the mad, quixotic gentleman (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971: p. 447) living in the country who cherishes foreign customs and adores travel. One of these customs is his return home from hunting, a ceremony repeated almost every day, when he salutes his wife like an errant knight his fairy queen. This scene has a poetic dimension which makes it touching, so that Macilente's wrath at Puntarvolo's folly is felt as disproportionate. Another one of Puntarvolo's follies is his love for his cat and dog, which Macilente "cures" by killing the poor animals. It is simply disgusting, and Puntarvolo strikes today's reader as a harmless creature, wronged by his author.

Other *humours* are of a lighter kind, while the portrait of Sordido, wealthy peasant, has a more serious social dimension: he lends money to his poor neighbours when their crops are green, and then is happy if the weather is bad and the neighbours' crops are ruined, because then he can get their lands for nothing. When once the weather turns good, contrary to the forecast, he hangs himself, but is ironically rescued by the same villagers whom he was going to ruin.

The following two comedies, *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*, represent Jonson's contribution to the "War of Theatres", conflict between some public and private theatres and the authors working for them, interesting for the stage history and as its products were some polemic comedies. In this *war* Jonson took sides against his fellow-dramatists John Marston and Thomas Dekker, and used these comedies as polemical weapons.

Cynthia's Revels (1600) is a curious medley of mythology, morality, satiric allegory, and court entertainment. There are in it Cupid and Mercury, who came to serve as pages to court ladies, Cynthia as the goddess of chastity and a flattering portrait of Queen Elizabeth, morality abstractions like Arete (Virtue), the virtuous writer Crites, who represents the author, and a number of courtiers and court ladies, representatives of fashionable vices and follies. The only things of any value are

the two fine lyrics: “Slow, slow, fresh fount...” and “Queen and huntress, chaste and fair”.

The Poetaster (1601) is a shade better. In order to make his personal satire more objective, Jonson placed its action in the Golden Age of the Roman Empire. He introduced into it all the great poets of the time of Augustus, representing Ovid, Propertius, and Tibullus as gay and dissipated young men, and Horace and Virgil as model poets and wise men. He added to them two unhistorical persons, Crispinus the poetaster, who represents Marston, and Demetrius the actor, who represents Dekker (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971: p. 447). These two tease, importune, and slander the great poets, till they are caught and punished by Horace, who probably represents Jonson himself.

The play contains also a secondary group of persons, *humours* of a more homely kind, who give some life to the comedy.

THE GREAT PERIOD

After these unsuccessful attempts at the *comedy of humours* Jonson at last found his true artistic self and wrote his best pieces. The years between *Volpone* and *Bartholomew Fair* (1606-1614) can be called his great period. The “war of the theatres” had ended, he had again made friends with some of his adversaries, he was busy writing masks for the Court, and his reputation and influence with the literary public reached its peak in these years.

Volpone (1606) is undoubtedly, together with *The Alchemist*, his best comedy (Knights, 1973: pp. 314, 315). Its plot – how Volpone, a wealthy Venetian *magnifico*, makes it known that he is about to die and that, being without heirs, he will leave his wealth to the friend who brings him the best gift, and how the prospective heirs flock round him – is only too well known to be retold in detail again. It is made out of Plautian elements, thoroughly reworked and recreated. The setting is Italian, which contributes to the universality of the play, but the characters have their roots in the contemporary English reality. Jonson’s characters are representatives of the bourgeoisie and moneyed aristocracy, with vices and ambitions which are present everywhere. It is also the fullest display of his moral outlook. Here the reader can best feel his hate of the acquisitive attitude, of sham and pretence of all kinds, of cheaters and their dupes, of cowardice and foolishness, as well as his love of moral purity.

The Silent Woman (1609) is not a play of such a high order, but it is the most entertaining one among Jonson’s comedies. The plot, based on Morose’s hate of noise and his search for a silent wife, is an original combination of themes from various sources. The chief source, however, is Jonson’s thorough acquaintance with the London middle-class and aristocratic circles, with their fashions and follies.

The comedy involves four groups of people. The first is that of aristocratic young men about town (Dauphine Eugenie, Ned Clerimont, Truewit), well bred, making poetry, ready to start practical jokes but essentially honest, and therefore enjoying the author's sympathies. The second is the group of Ladies Collegiate, a circle of married rich women who spend their time in scandalous gossip and looking for amorous adventures, with their foolish attendants, Sir John Daw and Sir Amorous La Foole. It is a more serious criticism of the manners of courtly ladies than in the foregoing comedies, and this group has probably given the idea to Sheridan for a similar one in *The School for Scandal* (1777). The third group is made of the barber Cutbeard, Captain Otter, and his wife; they are humours and practical jokers, and serve as tools of the young men in their plot against Morose. The fourth group includes Morose, his servant Mute, and his *silent wife* – a boy hired by Morose's nephew Dauphine to undo Morose and compel him to meet the desires of the young man. The main plot is based on the Plautian scheme of the young vs. the old, but there is no clever servant; his role is distributed between Dauphine himself and his helpers, Cutbeard and Otter the chief ones among these.

The comedy has a very good beginning: the action starts when the plot is already mature, but this fact becomes clear to the reader or spectator only by degrees. Only when Truewit almost spoils it by his unwelcome help (his visit to Morose to dissuade him from marriage – otherwise a very good comic scene), does the reader begin to suspect the existence of a plot; but only at the very end of the play the true nature of the plot – that the supposed bride is a boy in disguise – is discovered.

Some consider this play a farce, but it is much more; it has the ingredients of all the kinds of social comedy (Puhalo, 1968: p. 129), and although it contains more humor than satire, and more intrigue than manners, it is one of the best of Jonson's comedies.

The Alchemist (1610), Jonson's best constructed comedy, is based partly on elements from one of Plautus' plays and from some Italian contemporary comedies, but its plot and characters are firmly rooted in the reality of the XVII-century London. Taking as his starting point a fashionable superstition of the times (Jamieson 1974a) – belief in alchemy (Salingar, 1973: p. 26) – Jonson built the play upon his close experience of the life and habits of the petty bourgeoisie and petty aristocracy of London. He found a happy structural device – a house whose master is temporarily absent, and which a triumvirate of rogues takes for their headquarters, there receiving their victims, believers in alchemy (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971: pp. 450-451). This ensured the unity of action, together with the unities of place and time. Along with the unities, however, goes an amazing variety of characters and incidents, made possible by this very simple central situation (Puhalo, 1968: p. 129). Because of this richness the reader feels the time of the play as longer than it really is – the action happens in less than one day – but we live through the

whole history and pre-history of the roguish trio and their enterprise, and besides get an insight into the lives of a number of common London citizens. It is a comically-critical picture of contemporary life of an exceptional range and power. The satire in *The Alchemist* is neither so intense nor absolute as in *Volpone*, but it is not less serious or less comprehensive. And just because of this comparative mildness, *The Alchemist* is a more entertaining and more enjoyable comedy.

Bartholomew Fair (1614) begins with the Induction, a comic scene between some people connected with the making of the play, in which Jonson expounds some of his theoretical views in a lighter way than he used to do. And indeed this play is nearer to common reality and low life than any of the foregoing. Here Jonson stoops to the very bottom of London society, offering an ample insight into the world of thievish peddlars and horse-dealers, of harlots and bawds, of ballad-sellers and pickpockets, of thieves and rogues of all kinds. This motley world of the Fair is only a lively background against which we see the protagonists of the play, the respectable citizens and their wives who are chief subjects of Jonson's comic and satiric presentation.

Bartholomew Fair is the noisiest and liveliest of Jonson's comedies, the best realistic picture of London life, and at the same time an excellent entertainment full of wit and fun (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971: p. 451; Puhalo, 1968: p. 130).

GRADUAL DECLINE

The five comedies that follow show a gradual decline in Jonson's powers, the process which is partly a reflection of the decline in his personal fortunes at Court and in the public theatre, of his impoverishment and gradual falling off from public notice.

The Devil is an Ass (1616) is a kind of experiment in the spirit of morality plays, with some supernatural elements. It is written wholly in verse, which is a constant feature of the last comedies, but it is mainly realistic, a satire of bourgeois manners and characters. The unity of time is observed in the play, but the action is manifold and complicated, with no firm nucleus and no unity of place.

The main idea of the play – that the devil himself, were he to come to the earth, would be outwitted by evil men – offers good dramatic possibilities, but Jonson did not carry it out with the best effect. His *lesser devil* Pug, whom his chief, Satan, allows reluctantly to visit the earth – warning him in advance against men's cunning – shows little cunning or evil in all his doings, is caught and beaten many times in his awkward attempts at wickedness, and in the end proves only a minor gull. The interest of the spectator is attracted to the fates of Pug's earthly master, Fitzdottrel, and the various plots woven around him make in fact the main line of the action.

Fitzdottrel unites in himself too many features, which makes him in some moments inconsequent and not wholly convincing. He is, first, a jealous husband, with a wife younger than himself, sensible and virtuous; then he is an upstart, craving after titles and honours; he is also a lover of fine clothes and of playgoing, especially if there is a devil in the play – for his last feature, or *humour*, is his desire to see a devil in the flesh. With all these qualities he is a perfect gull, and he indeed becomes an object of plots by various people to gull him by. He is fooled in a milder way by a young gentleman Wittipol, in love with his wife, who tries to win her by various stratagems and would succeed in the end had he not had by his side another gentleman, Manly, his friend and his good angel, who restrains him from the final step. Manly is in fact the author's voice of reason and morality, and has no individuality.

Fitzdottrel is being cheated in much grosser ways by another group of people: his relative Everill, a never-do-well who lives on blackmail and false pretences; his broker Engine, professional cheat, and above all by the *projector* Meercraft, the embodiment of the new spirit of capitalist speculation in its worst aspects. Meercraft has plenty of projects, varying them according to the sort of people he has to deal with; to Fitzdottrel he offers a project of the drying of some waterlands, and promises to make him the Duke of the Drowned Land, which Fitzdottrel accepts with enthusiasm. Meercraft is a foreshadowing of the big capitalist sharks of later times, but his portrait is too naturalistic and local.

This play is more restricted in scope than *Bartholomew Fair*. Its vision of contemporary life is nearer to naturalistic document (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971) than to poetic realism, but it is nevertheless a good comedy with a convincing picture of manners, some good comic scenes and speeches, and even two or three lyrics pleasant enough.

The Staple of News (1625), written after a long interval (1616-1625), is an attempt at the fusion of a topical comedy of manners and a satiric allegory. The comedy has a frame-structure, given in the Induction, a colloquy of four *gossips* (named Mirth, Tattle, Expectation, and Censure) about their expectations from the comedy. The gossips then remain on the stage and give their comments – illustrations of popular taste – after every act.

The comedy is made of two distinct plots superficially linked together: the first is that of the Staple of News itself, the second that of Lady Pecunia (*riches*, in Latin). The *staple* (store, magazine) of news is a venture of some resourceful production and selling of news: they have their *emissaries* in all the important places, who gather the news which are then sold to people. It is only a big swindle, “a weekly cheat to draw money” (Knights, 1973: p. 315), because the news they sell are preposterous and grotesque inventions. The group of people who conduct the business are also called *jeerers* because they jeer (mock) at everybody and every-

thing, having no shame nor scruple. There really were such beginnings of journalism in Jonson's London, and Jonson could foresee the possibilities of its misuse.

The theme of lady Pecunia constitutes in fact the main plot. The underlying theme is that of a prodigal son, a popular subject of moralizing comedies before and after Jonson's times. It is here constituted as a story of the three Pennyboys: Pennyboy Junior (the prodigal son, who at the news of his father's death and his coming into a large inheritance, promptly begins to lead a life of luxury, wasting his money), Pennyboy Canter (Beggart), his disguised father who has feigned death in order to watch his son's reactions, and who discovers himself and deprives his son of his money only at the end of Act IV; and Pennyboy Senior, the Junior's rich uncle, with the typical features of a Plautian miser. Lady Pecunia herself dwells with Pennyboy Senior, together with her attending ladies (which have the names after various financial operations), and Pennyboy Junior has to woo and marry her; he instead leads her among his gay company of jeerers and makes her kiss everybody and prostitute herself to all who come (i.e. wastes his money). After his loss of her he repents and reforms, and so do all the main persons. This edifying end advocates a moderate enjoyment of the material goods got by honest work.

The New Inn (1629) marks the lowest point in Jonson's decline. It is a melodrama, or a very low kind of romantic comedy, a pure play of intrigue with no depth and hardly any wit or fun. It is based on a well-worn theme of lost children and lost parents, all of whom appear in various disguises and go unrecognized for a long time, till they are finally united, by chance and a series of plots, rather shallow and artificial. The centre of events is the inn of the title, so that the play has unity of place. There is no real unity of action, and no underlying structure of moral or social or any other meaning.

SIGNS OF RECOVERY

The Magnetic Lady, written three years later (1632), shows some signs of recovery. Jonson again provided the play with an Induction of some theoretical significance, a colloquy between a Boy-Actor (representative of author's views) and two critical commentators, Damply and Probee, who later comment after every act and get answered by the Boy. Their commentaries are for the most part sensible, and the Boy always justifies the author's methods, without being too apologetic.

The lady of the title, Mrs. Loadstone, is a mechanical centre of the play, simply because her country house is a place of meeting for numerous people; she has no other significance. The play gives a survey of country characters or *humours* (it has a sub-title *Humours Reconciled*, and Jonson insists on this theme, which remains unconvincing): there are a parson, a doctor, a vicious steward, a lady-com-

panion with a shadowy past, a miserly financier, a courtier, a young lawyer, an honest captain (as different from braggart soldiers of the early comedies), and a mathematician called Compass, who is the architect of the plot and partly his author's mouthpiece. The plot centres round the two girls, Placentia and Pleasance, one of whom is Mrs. Loadstone's daughter and heiress, and is therefore attractive to a number of suitors; their rivalry and their stratagems to get the upper hand make the bulk of the action. But the girl is with child, and in due course bears a son, which fact cannot be hidden for long. It would be a disaster, but then it is discovered that the real heiress is the other girl – there has been an interchange of identities in their cradle. Compass marries the right girl, and the honest captain (called Ironside, which contains an unwilling ominous prophecy) marries, quite unexpectedly, Mrs. Loadstone herself.

This is a Plautian comedy of intrigue, but also a comedy of provincial manners and *humours*, with some interesting features. The world of this comedy is quite different from that of Jonson's city comedies – it is already similar to Fielding's or Jane Austen's country societies. *The Magnetic Lady* has little fun or satire, and could almost be called a naturalistic drama of everyday life. It is a moderate success in this kind, quite readable and perhaps even more actable.

A Tale of a Tub (1633), Jonson's last extant comedy, is perhaps his revised version of his own early play, written originally before 1600. It is a comedy of intrigue and manners, with a complicated Plautian plot but otherwise full of native fun and native English types, probably based on local anecdotes. The action takes place on St. Valentine's day and is concerned with marriage: the beautiful Awdrey, a simple bourgeois girl, daughter of Tobie Turfe, high constable of Kentish Town, has to be married on that day to a stupid clay-maker of her father's choice. The marriage procession is already in progress, when it is stopped and interrupted by stratagems devised by two other suitors, who are eager to get Awdrey by any means: a young squire Tripoly Tub, whose name is present in the title of the play, and the young judge Preamble, popularly called Bramble. Their plots are engineered and sided by Canon Hugh, vicar of St. Pancras Church, who cunningly serves both sides, but is caught in the end. These stratagems, with various changes of luck, make most of the action. There are many amazing and incredible disguises and deceptions, but they are easily swallowed because the play is quick, lively and highly entertaining. The leading characters (Tub and Preamble) have no individuality, but there are many humoristic sketches very good in their kind, such as Tub's mother, an amorous widow, the simple constable himself, his man Hannibal-Ball Puppy who likes high talk, and especially the group of his friends, "the wise men of Finsbury", craftsmen-amateurs who remind us of Shakespeare's mechanicals in *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

A Tale of a Tub is a gay comedy, with no satiric sting and with good humour, the most serene and good-natured among Jonson's comic productions. Its world is that of petty bourgeoisie and its chief persons are simple working men, essentially good in spite of their disproportionate ambitions and little whims.

Summary

Ben Jonson came from the ranks of petty bourgeoisie, however aspiring to nobility – that of letters and learning. Because of poverty he had a defective formal schooling, and so he had to teach himself; and like many self-taught people he valued learning much more than those who got it the easy way. That was the root of his later life-long quarrel with the theatre-going public. Besides his intellectual aristocratism, to be found in some of his poems is a sentimental idealization of aristocratic families; but although he had a real esteem for his patrons and was apt to base his ideal upon the supposedly aristocratic virtues, he was always ready to see and castigate the aristocratic vices as well as those of the bourgeoisie. He was, in fact, a serious moralist, and his moral views, although partly traditional or retrograde in form, were progressive in substance. His chief ideals were those he practised in real life: honest work, self-sufficiency, moderate enjoyment of life, honesty and frankness in personal relationship. He was most sternly opposed to the unscrupulous striving after gold and material profit which characterized the middle classes of his society.

As for Ben Jonson's literary work other than that in comedy, to be kept in mind is that he was a good lyrical and reflexive poet, who left an important heritage to the later "Cavalier" school. The prose work, *Timber, or Discoveries*, published posthumously in 1640, has some bearing on his dramatic practice, because in it he gave utterance to some of his theoretical views about drama. His dramatic work consists mainly of comedies, but he also wrote two tragedies with the subjects from Roman history, *Sejanus his Fall* (1603) and *Catiline his Conspiracy* (1611), which his public received coldly and which were long neglected or underrated.

Jonson's comedies (fourteen of them) are more varied than they appear to casual observation. It is true that all of them have something in common, and that we could perhaps describe them by some general term, such as *realistic city comedy of the early XVII century*. By his theoretical work, and still more by his achievement, Ben Jonson showed the way to practically all the comedigraphers of the English language that were to come after him (Puhalo, 1968: p. 131). His realistic revolution in comedy has meant a certain narrowing down of its scope, but the narrowing to the true bounds of comedy, which finally made of it a stable and well defined literary and dramatic kind. The development after him was a further narrowing down, not salutary but decadent. The English comedy restricted itself, for a long time to come, to two kinds only: comedy of manners and comedy of intrigue,

or a mixture of the two. Only with George Bernard Shaw there emerged again a satiric comedy comparable to Jonson's, but never so powerful as his greatest ones. That is the true measure of his achievement.

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ДОПРИНОС БЕНА ЏОНСОНА РАЗВОЈУ ЕНГЛЕСКЕ РЕНЕСАНСНЕ КОМЕДИЈЕ²

Резиме

Бен Џонсон је потекао из редова ситне буржоазије, али је тежио да се издигне до племства – оног од пера и учености. Услед сиромаштва формално школовање му је остало непотпуно, тако да је морао сам да се образује. Због тога је вредновао ученост и школу много више него они којима је иметак обезбеђивао образовање. Управо у томе је корен његовог каснијег доживотног препирања с позоришном публиком. Уз интелектуални аристократизам, у његовој поезији може да се наиђе и на сентиментално идеализовање аристократских породица. Ипак, иако је високо уважавао своје покровитеље, иако је своје идеале заснивао на аристократским врлинама, увек је био спреман да примети и да осуди пороке аристократије, као и буржоаског слоја. Он је био озбиљан морализатор, а главни идеали су му били управо они којих се држао у стварном животу: честит рад, ослањање на сопствене способности и снагу, умерено уживање, поштење и отвореност у међуљудским односима. Најоштрије се противио бескрупулозној жудњи за златом и материјалном добити која је карактерисала средње слојеве његовог друштва.

Што се тиче Џонсоновог књижевног стваралаштва ван поља комедије, он је био добар лиричар и песник мисаоног, који је доста вредног пренео каснијој „кавалерској” школи. Познато прозно дело *Грађа, или ошкрића*, објављено после његове смрти, има везе с његовом драматуршком праксом, пошто је у њему изложио неке од својих теоријских погледа на драму. Драмско стваралаштво Бена Џонсона чине углавном комедије, али је он написао и две трагедије на тему из римске историје – *Сејанов њаг*, 1603, и *Катилинина завера*, 1611. Њих је публика примила хладно, и дуго су остале непризнате.

Џонсонове комедије (укупно их је четрнаест) разноврсније су него што се то чини на први поглед. Тачно је да све имају нешто заједничко, и да би свима одговарало да се назову *реалистичном градском комедијом с почетка 17. века*. Својим теоретским доприносом, а још више оним што је лично остварио, Бен Џонсон је утро пут практично свим комедиографима који су стварали на енглеском језику у временима која су уследила (Puhalo 1968, 131). Његово реалистично револуционисање комедије значило је одређено сужавање њеног захвата, али је реч о свођењу на истинске оквире комедије, који су је коначно оцртали као стабилну и добро дефинисану књижевну и драмску врсту. Развој који је уследио водио је даљем сужавању, у суштини декадентном. Енглеска комедија се задуго касније ограничила на само две врсте, на комедију нарави и комедију интриге, или на њихово међусобно прожимање. Тек се с појавом Џорџа Бернарда Шоа поново јавила сатирична комедија налик Џонсоновој,

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али опет не толико моћна као што су његова најбоља остварења. У томе је права величина Џонсоновог постигнућа.

Кључне речи: комедија, драма, теорија, класични узори, свакодневни живот у Енглеској, реализам, сатира.