CONTRIBUTION OF JONSON’S YOUNGER CONTEMPORARIES TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE COMEDY

ABSTRACT. The starting point of this article lies in the fact that among the later post-Shakespearean dramatists there are no pure comediographers. Like Shakespeare himself, they wrote all kinds of drama, following not so much their inclinations as the changing fashions and the taste of the theatre-going public. This means that in the case of Shakespeare’s successors, under Charles I (1625-1642), the word is of authors whose main work lay in other fields. The paper intends to show that although still plentiful in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the comedy was declining in quality. Its satire grew more superficial, limited to transitory follies of humours – many were imitating Ben Jonson in this. Intrigue and entertainment were growing more important than character or criticism of life. To be singled out deserve authors of the few good comedies produced in Jonson’s times, with the review of their general characteristics.

KEY WORDS: comedy, humours, satire, collaboration, entertainers.
INTRODUCTION

Benjamin, or Ben, Jonson (1573?-1637) was the central literary personality of his time, or, more precisely, during the first two decades of the seventeenth century. His dramatic work consists mostly of comedies, and in his Works, published in 1616, he included all the comedies written to the date. It was an important precedent as it helped to establish drama as a literary kind comparable to the rest of literature. Before that date, the drama was regarded as a “low” kind of writing, unworthy of the name of “literature”, and Jonson was the first to give it its new dignity. His example, of course, was then followed by others, whose extant plays speak of a rich prolificity concentrated within narrow limits of time.

The sequence of playwrights and plays speaks of a close likeness between most of these works, created on the same principles. Nearly all of them divide a whole story, rarely invented by the author but rather taken from books, into scenes. They thus share their descent from the mystery plays of the Middle Ages. The rather close likeness between most of these works relates, among other things, to the appeal in their scenes by turns to the imagination, the understanding, the feelings, the senses. They strive to interest the whole of man and of mankind and not merely learned persons, in all this almost always mingling comedy and tragedy. The limits of the individual accomplishment of authors are not known for certain, and there are also difficulties due to the then prevailing custom of collaboration. However, it is still easy to distinguish certain very distinct figures and their individual traces.

THE MOST OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTORS

GEORGE CHAPMAN

George Chapman (1559?-1634?) had a university education, and was well known as the translator of Homer’s epics (translated Iliad in 1611, and Odyssey in 1614 – Puhalo, 1968, p. 133) and other classical works, as perhaps a “rival poet” of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, and as the author of powerful tragedies with subjects from French history – Bussy D’Ambois, 1607, The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois, etc. He also wrote eight comedies, not without success. In collaboration with John Marston (1575?-1634), author of sadistic satires and bloody trage-
dies in the Senecan tradition, and Ben Jonson, who had little part in it, he wrote the comedy *Eastward Hoe* – also quoted as *Eastward Hol* (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971) – (1605), one of the most popular in this period, which landed the authors in prison because of their ironic allusions to the Scots who came to England with James I. Of the comedies Chapman wrote alone, *The Gentleman Usher* (1606) is perhaps the best.

*Eastward Hoe* is an intensely bourgeois comedy, dedicated “to the City”. Its title means the craving after high life and luxury, because the East of London was then the centre of fashion. The plot centers round the family of the goldsmith Touchstone, character similar to that of Simon Eyre, with original tags such as “Work upon it now!”, but less humorous. His wife and one daughter aspire to nobility, and the younger daughter is good and sensible. He also has two apprentices, a good one, named Golding, and a bad one, Quicksilver. Gertrude, the upstart daughter, marries Sir Petronel Flash, a rake who robs her of everything, but is soon caught. The ludicrous episode of his and Quicksilver’s failed voyage to Virginia makes the best comic scene in the play. The comedy is written in prose, flat in comparison with Jonson’s. It is entertaining enough, contains effective social satire, but is overburdened with the preaching on bourgeois virtues – progressive at the time, but faded today.

*The Gentleman Usher* (published 1606) is a romantic comedy on Shakespeare’s model, in good blankverse and colloquial prose, verse being predominant. It was played by children-actors, and therefore contains mask-like pageants, dance and song. The setting is Italian, and the main plot based on Plautus: it is a rivalry between a father, Duke Alfonso, and his son, Vincentio, for Margaret, daughter of an earl. The father is aided by Medice, a machiavellian villain, and the son by his friend Strozza, a strong and independent man, one of Chapman’s characteristic heroes. Strozza is heavily wounded and in his convalescence he develops a mystical sight, prophetic vision – a rare feature in this period. Margaret shows some individuality when marring her face in despair. There is a subplot of servant-fools, the group like those in Lyly’s comedies. One among them is the gentleman- usher of the title, Bassiolo, mediator in love correspondence between Vincentio and Margaret. The comedy contains some expressions of Chapman’s bold and unconventional views, such as Vincentio’s and Margaret’s betrothal scene, where they despise the conventional marriage rite, Strozza’s expressions of the view that the only true nobility is human worth and strength of character, and
his fine praise of a good wife as man’s chief blessing. It is a successful and highly original play.

**THOMAS DEKKER**  THOMAS DEKKER (c.1570-c.1632) wrote a number of tragedies and tragicomedies, mainly in collaboration, as well as some prose works, journalistic narratives about London low life. Nothing is known of him for certain, but it may be suspected that he sprang from the people of London and was irregularly educated. London was often his theme and the citizens were always his public: “This child of Lon- don writes especially of London and for the cockney people. (...) ... Dekker is, with Thomas Heywood, almost alone in his sympathy for the world of the craftsmen and the ragtag and bobtail of the streets.” (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971, p. 463). He wrote for the stage from 1594 onwards, at first as a subordinate. His comedies are few in number, and only two of them deserve attention: *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1599) and *Old Fortunatus* (1600). The first one is a romantic and humorous comedy, celebrating the “gentle craft” of shoemak- ers, and displaying a petty-bourgeois class consciousness. It con- tains two well united plots: that of the love between a citizen’s dau- ghter and an earl’s son, and how the two outwit their elders – the earl’s son taking temporarily a shoemaker’s job; and the plot of the fate of a young couple separated by the wars, and of their happy re- union after much suffering. The mediator between the two plots, who helps to bring them to a happy solution, is Simon Eyre, master- shoemaker, a merry madcap with a jargon of his own, an original and successful humorous character, “surely the breeziest character that has ever set foot on the stage, Falstaff not excepted. (...) (...) the Shoemaker, (...) is a model to all industrious apprentices and a para- gon of civic virtue. (...) a character irresistibly ludicrous, one whose portrait will be hung unforgettably in the reader’s mind.” (Wheeler, 1971a, p. viii). There is some sentimentality and idealization in the play, but also plenty of good-natured humor, tender lyricism in the songs, good characterization of the main persons, and a mild human kindness characteristic of Dekker.

*Old Fortunatus* is an original combination of various forms, a med- ley of morality, mask-pageant, and romantic comedy, based on a folk story about the inexhaustible purse with gold and following the fate of its possessor, old Fortunatus, and his two sons with contrast- ed characters (one virtuous, the other a spendthrift). It is built as a series of pageants and episodes, more like a picaresque novel than like a drama. Mixed with human persons there are various allegori- cal abstractions, as Virtue, Vice, Fortune, etc. The most interesting
episode is that about the suitors to King Athelstane’s daughter, which contains some real drama. It seems that Dekker was partly imitating Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, and Fortunatus has some Marlovian speeches. The comedy is burdened with moralizing, has little of the comic spirit and no real unity.

**JOHN MARSTON** (1575?-1634). Of the two dramatists against whom Jonson was most implacable early in the seventeenth century, Marston and Dekker, Marston engaged him most and received his hardest knocks. The conflict was between two satirical, arrogant men, of whom Marston was foul-tongued into the bargain. His first literary essay was the collection of satires or rather coarse insults called *The Scourge of Villanie* (1598). Subsequently, for eight or nine years, he tried his fortunes in drama, and met with very fair success before he abandoned writing entirely and gave himself up to a long, silent ecclesiastical career; “It seems a reasonable inference that he found in the Church the source of moral authority vainly sought for in his plays.” (Salingar, 1973c, p. 338).

Marston’s dramatic production belongs to the most glorious and most intensely active period. Although an industrious and busy student, his temperament inclined him to romantic drama. Traces of Seneca are visible in his work, notably the conceptions of atrocious vengeance and of the horror of crime. He might, however, have found all this equally well in Kyd and Marlowe, and his first tragedies, *Antonio and Mellida* and, even more, *Antonio’s Revenge*, show the influence of the Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedie* (Puhalo, 1968, p. 133). Same as in his satires, here Marston seems to wish to attract attention by violence, by using more furious and eccentric language and greater coarseness than any other writer.

Since *Antonio’s Revenge* is possibly prior to *Hamlet*, Marston certainly has more than one point of contact with Shakespeare. This is even more obvious in his comedy, *The Malcontent* (1601?), than in his tragedies. He introduces into this play a character who ironically comments on actions and personalities, underlines whatever is ridiculous or vicious, deals blows right and left, and voices Marston’s own pessimism and cynical view of human motives. Only a happy ending saves *The Malcontent* from being a tragedy. In some respects it also anticipates *Measure for Measure*, and even *The Tempest*. He often recalls or anticipates Shakespearian subjects.

Marston’s other comedies are less gloomy and have more cheerfulness, as well as some flashes of tenderness. *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604) is a pendant to Dekker’s domestic drama *Honest Whore*, and
the order in which the two plays appeared is not certain. The heroine is no penitent Magdalen, who cleanses her soul by sacrifice, but a passionate and potentially criminal woman. Franceschina, a courtesan, has for some time been loved by young Freevill, a libertine who has sown his wild oats and aspires to the hand of a pure young girl, Beatrice. He introduces the courtesan to one of his friends, a morose young man named Malheureux, who falls in love with her at first sight.

The play aims chiefly at affording amusement, and is really diverting. In spite of the happy ending, however, there is little of comedy about the plot, which is “more heavily sordid than is usual among plays of its kind” (Enright, 1973, p. 419). The principal plot is relieved by another, purely farcical, which shows a sharper’s tricks, the practical jokes played by the rogue Cockledemoyn on a miserly, stupid, and ridiculous citizen. Miscellaneous obscenities are scattered here and there and spoken by episodic characters. The psychology is slight and the portrait of the courtesan rudimentary, yet there is a little bit of everything in this play, even feeling and grace.

The fact also deserves attention that Marston is one of the three signatories of *Eastward Hoe* (1605), a play which is among the best of the Renaissance comedies and which he wrote in collaboration with Chapman and Jonson. It is difficult to distinguish what each contributed to it, but certainly Chapman nowhere else shows such vigour and realism, Jonson so much lightheartedness, or Marston such decency. The play is “a lively morality on the theme of social pretension and the good and bad apprentices: a combination of Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* with Massinger’s *The City Madam*” (Enright, 1973, p. 420).

The very simple theme recalls the moralities. The industrious and the idle apprentice are here side by side. Touchstone, a very worthy city goldsmith, has two apprentices – the dissipated and extravagant Quicksilver who spends his leisure among gamblers and tippers, and the orderly, respectable, and virtuous Golding. Quicksilver, drunken and insolent, is suspected of theft and turned away, and he afterwards lives by his wits, is thrown into prison and is in danger of the gallows. He is, however, saved by his repentance, his piety during his imprisonment, and Golding’s intervention, and in the end meets no worse fate than marriage with a girl he has debauched. Golding, on the other side, receives the hand of his master’s younger daughter, becomes a deputy-ala-derman, and judges his fellow-apprentice, saving him out of the goodness of his heart. He is
a model apprentice, model son-in-law, model husband, and model friend.

The two apprentices are balanced by Touchstone’s two daughters, the younger well-behaved, sweet-tempered, and modest; the older, a minx, ambitious to be fashionable, who, with the connivance of her pretentious mother, marries not an honest apprentice, like her sister, but a certain Sir Petronel Flash, a regular adventurer. She flatters herself that she will ride in her coach and be mistress of a fine house. But that house is Sir Petronel’s invention, and while she is in a hurry to get there, Petronel is planning to flee to Virginia with her dowry. He is put into prison, and the elder sister is obliged to implore mercy from the younger and from her father.

This morality play has much animation. It affords some vivid glimpses – the apprentices living in their master’s household, the interior of his shop, vainglorious Gertrude starting off in her coach, dazzling all the neighbours. In a scene laid by the Thames, Sir Petronel and Quicksilver, the one as drunk as the other, plunge into the water during a storm in order to swim to Captain Seagull’s ship, and are cast up on to the river-bank. Still fuddled, they imagine that they have landed in France.

The drawing of the characters, especially the less virtuous of them, is vigorous. Quicksilver with his rascality and his conversion, and the moral ballads in which he embodies his adventures for the edification of his prison-mates; Gertrude with the airs she gives herself and the romantic dreams in which she still indulges long after misfortune has overtaken her. These are memorable portraits.

Throughout the play there is a lively realism which gains credence for the moral concealed beneath its varied and comic incidents. And all goes merrily forward to the end. No structural devices obtrude themselves. Whatever part Marston may have had in the writing of this play, it does him greater credit than any which he produced by himself.

THOMAS MIDDLETON (1580-1627) was a professional dramatist from 1602. He wrote about forty plays, mainly in collaboration, about 13 as the sole author. He is the author of the powerful tragedies The Changeling and Women Beware Women, and he also wrote a number of comedies. Worth mentioning are A Mad World, my Masters; A Trick to Catch the Old One; Michaelmas Term (all acted about 1605), and A Chaste Maid in Cheapside (between 1611-1613).

Michaelmas Term is a naturalistic and satiric comedy of London life, with Plautian elements and some imitation of Jonson, but main-
ly original, and in a more naturalistic spirit. The main plot concerns Quomodo, a rich woollen draper, an arch-deceiver and exploiter, and his devilish plot to cozen and ruin Easy, an innocent young gentleman. Another knave is Lethe, an upstart Scot who is not willing to recognize his own mother when he has got up in society by ill-gotten wealth. The rivalry between him and an honest youth for Quomodo’s daughter Susan makes a subplot. Quomodo feigns death, like Volpone, and is ruined and punished by it. It is a well constructed comedy of rough social satire and interesting intrigue, in mixed prose and verse, which is very colloquial, careless and prosaic.

*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* is a brutal naturalist satire of sexual and economic corruption. The plot moves between four families: that of Alwit, a citizen who gets living by letting his wife to Sir Walter Whorehound, who has become the real head of his household; that of Touchwood Senior and his wife, a couple who willingly separate because too fertile and poor; then that of Sir Oliver Kix and his lady, a couple without children who solve their problem by allowing Touchwood to become “family friend”; and that of the goldsmith Yellowhammer, central to the plot, rich citizen with a marriageable daughter, who fights for a lover of her choice, and a foolish son. There is a conventional happy ending, but it is clear that the chief corrupt characters will continue in their evil courses.

Another one of Middleton’s comedies, *A Game of Chess* (1624), was immensely popular, owing to its topical subject: satire against bishop Dominis, from the Adriatic isle of Rab, who was converted to Protestantism, lived in England between 1617 and 1622, but was then returning to Rome and Catholicism. The satire is gross and unjust, but effective. In the history of the English Renaissance theatre the play remains recorded as the only one acted on nine successive days (not counting Sundays), each time in the overcrowded Globe Theatre (Kostić, 1978, p. 151).

Middleton’s comedies are comedies of intrigue and social satire. Their plots are well constructed and fast moving, but characters are less clear and more conventional than Jonson’s, there is less poetic power and more bawdiness and brutality. The moral standard is present, the social ills are well observed, but Middleton’s outlook is pessimistic and sometimes cynical.

**Thom as Heywood** (1573?-1641) was a prominent playwright, actor, and author whose peak period of activity falls between late Elizabethan and early Jacobean theatre. Few details of Heywood’s life have been documented with certainty. Most references indicate...
that the county of his birth was most likely Lincolnshire, while the year has been variously given as 1570, 1573, 1574 and 1575. It has been speculated that his father was a country parson and that he was related to the half-century-earlier dramatist John Heywood.

Thomas Heywood is said to have been educated at the University of Cambridge. Subsequently, however, he moved to London, where the first mention of his dramatic career is a note in the diary of theatre entrepreneur Philip Henslowe recording that he wrote a play for the Admiral’s Men, an acting company, in October 1596. By 1598, he was regularly engaged as a player in the company, of which he was presumably a shareholder, as was normal for important company members. During this time, Heywood was extremely prolific. In his preface to *The English Traveller* (1633) he describes himself as having had “an entire hand or at least a maine finger in two hundred and twenty plays”. However, only twenty three plays and eight masques have survived that are accepted by historians as wholly or partially authored by him. Heywood’s first play may have been *The Four Prentises of London*, printed in 1615, but acted some fifteen years earlier. This tale of four apprentices who become knights and travel to Jerusalem may have been intended as a burlesque of the old romances, but it is more likely that it was meant seriously to attract the apprentice spectators to whom it was dedicated. Its popularity was satirized in Beaumont and Fletcher’s travesty of the middle-class taste in drama, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

Thomas Heywood wrote for the stage, and, perhaps disingenuously, protested against the printing of his works, saying he had no time to revise them. Heywood had a keen eye for dramatic situations and great constructive skill, but his powers of characterization were not on par with his stagecraft. He delighted in what he called “merry accidents”, that is, in coarse, broad farce; his fancy and invention were inexhaustible; “He was rather, perhaps, a prose Dekker, a Dekker shorn of lyricism, fancy, and gaiety, able to create dramatic and moving situations rather than strongly individualized characters” (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971, p. 469).

Heywood’s best known plays are his domestic tragedies and comedies, plays set among the English middle classes. His masterpiece is generally considered to be a widely admired Plautine farce *The English Traveller* (acted approximately 1627; printed 1633), which is also known for its informative “Preface”, giving Heywood an opportunity to inform the reader about his prolific creative output. His citizen comedies provide a psycho-geography of the sights, smells, and
sounds of London’s wharfs, markets, shops, and streets which contrasts with the more conventional generalisations about the sites of commerce, which are satirised in city comedies; “(...) because he found it easier than Dekker to do without romance, he was, in some of his plays, more successful than the former in realizing the ideal citizen drama” (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971, p. 469).

Heywood wrote numerous prose works, mostly pamphlets about contemporary subjects, of interest now primarily to historians studying the period. His best known long essay is An Apology for Actors, a moderately-toned and reasonable reply to Puritan attacks on the stage, which contains a wealth of detailed information on the actors and acting conditions of his day.

**BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER**

Francis Beaumont (1584-1616), dramatist of aristocratic origin, the poet who wrote the famous lines “Upon Mermaid Tavern”, and a friend to Ben Jonson, worked in close collaboration with his friend John Fletcher (1579-1625), who also came from an aristocratic family of poets and intellectuals. In the years 1606-1616, after Beaumont’s early death, Fletcher wrote many plays alone or in collaboration with many other dramatists, chief among whom was Philip Massinger. The complete plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were published in the 1647 Folio – 50 of them. Later research, however, has found that only 15 are their joint work, 16 written by Fletcher alone, while the rest are either Fletcher’s collaborations with others, or works of other dramatists.

The fifty-odd plays ascribed to Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher would not have meant an incredibly large output for the working life of even one man. Their contemporary Thomas Heywood, for instance, claimed to have had a hand in two hundred and twenty! However, only five years – between 1608 and 1613 – can be taken with certainty as the period of their collaboration. The work of these five years, more importantly, sufficed to establish a type of play which remained influential throughout the seventeenth century, and which was long appreciated as superior to Shakespeare’s. The problem of deciding which plays belong to Beaumont, which to Fletcher, which to both and which contain works by other playwrights can hardly be expected to ever reach its final solution. The Faithful Shepherdess and The Wild Goose Chase are certainly entirely Fletcher’s, while Bonduca is probably only Fletcher’s. The Knight of the Burning Pestle is now ascribed to Beaumont, while The Maid’s Tragedy and A King and No King remain examples of their collaboration (Bradbrook, 1970, p. v). Beaumont and Fletcher, succeeding the greater
dramatists – Shakespeare and Jonson – could most readily outgo their predecessors by blending sophistication with violence. Their writings, especially what was created by Fletcher alone, supply a characteristic example of the appearance and development of a new and significant type of dramatic work in the time of James I (1603-1625) – baroque. The independent note of humanism then gradually faded from the drama, as the dramatists tended to identify themselves solely with the dominant section of their public. The age of a national drama was definitely over. The irony of Jacobean baroque, however, should not be difficult to be understood by the present age. The “sick” humour of their comedy provides insights highly relevant to the deeply disturbed, powerful although seemingly lighthearted work of the authors who have been known as “entertainers to the Jacobean gentry”.

Beaumont and Fletcher were the most popular dramatists in the last two decades of the period, and their popularity continued for more than a century later. The reason for it was that they successfully represented the new, courtly taste of the late Jacobean and Caroline period, when private, closed theatres became more fashionable and the superficial and corrupted taste of court aristocracy prevailed over the broader and more humanistic taste of the popular theatres. Most of their plays are tragicomedies, as this kind was most pleasing to their audience. This public wanted excitement, sensation, perverse crimes and naturalistic scenes, but demanded a happy ending. These plays resemble those of Shakespeare’s last period, but are much more superficial; the best known is *Philaster*. Their comedies are for the most part good entertainments with little depth. Worth discussing are two of them, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1609), and *The Wild Goose Chase* (1621). The first is today ascribed to Beaumont alone, the second is Fletcher’s work.

*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is an interesting and exceptional comedy, a “rehearsal-play”, a parody and a romantic comedy all in one. It has three plots: a parody of Thomas Heywood’s bourgeois plays about the heroic exploits of apprentices, a romantic love story of a young couple who want to marry against the will of their parents, and the plot of Citizen and his Wife who attend the play with their ridiculous comments, revealing their simple-minded characters. It is a vivid, funny play, more humoristic than satiric, highly entertaining, written in good verse, and racy colloquial prose. The characters of Citizen and his Wife are living and memorable, the rest are caricatures.
The *Wild Goose Chase*, comedy with a French setting (Paris), deals with the “chase” of a husband by a girl. The *wild goose*, a young man who tries to escape marriage, is Mirabel, an aristocratic Don Juan, witty and cynical. There are two subplots, with two other *wild geese*, Mirabel’s friends. All are family caught, after many stratagems by the fairy Oriana and others. The comedy is witty and skillfully constructed, but its action moves in an artificial world of comic lovemaking by people who have no other cares or interests; “(...) though love figures so prominently as motive, it is always seen as a comic madness.” (Bradbrook, 1970, p. vii). There are, besides, visible pornographic tendencies. Fletcher’s verse is colloquial, nearing prose. It is a foreshadowing of the Restoration comedy, witty but narrow, artificial, and immoral.

**PHILIP MASSINGER** (1583-1640) was a prolific professional dramatist, who wrote above 30 plays alone, and much more in collaboration with Fletcher, Dekker, and others. Like Chapman, he was an independent thinker, but more conservative than Chapman or Jonson. In his comedies he imitated Jonson and Fletcher, but he also has some originality, at least of his character. His best comedies are *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (acted some time before 1626, first printed in 1633), and *The City Madam* (acted in 1632).

*A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is a comedy of satire and intrigue, placed in Nottingham. The plot deals with a stratagem of Frank Wellborn, young gentleman ruined by his own liberality and the dishonesty of his rich uncle, Sir Giles Overreach, by which he intends to recover his economic and social station. Overreach is a tyrant, who gets rich by force and deceit and who keeps in his pay a justice of peace and a corrupted lawyer. His only weakness is his wish to marry his daughter to a lord (while she loves the lord’s page), and Wellborn profits by it, making a plot together with the virtuous Lady Alworth and lord Lovell to expose and ruin Overreach, in which they succeed. Overreach, utterly defeated, goes mad at the end. His character is an original version of an early-capitalist criminal, convincing and very successful on the stage. The play has not much fun, but its plot serves well its satiric purpose, creating the “curiously modern atmosphere which hangs about it. We seem to have left behind the gloom and strength, whether tragic or comic, of the Elizabethans and to be mixing with people fashioned far more like ourselves. Indeed, barring a few obsolete or unusual expressions, the work might almost be a product of some early Victorian.” (Wheeler, 1971a, p. viii). The moral of the play, that a man is judged to be or to
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possess what he appears to be or to possess, is also commented by Wheeler (1971a, viii): “Many an adventurer has lived comfortably on his reputation for wealth; indeed, the whole of modern commerce is based on credit, and Massinger’s play affords a good illustration of the value of credit in social life. For, in man’s dealings with his fellows, to him that is thought to have shall be given, and from him that is thought not to have every attempt will be made to take away that which he hath.”

The City Madam is a satiric comedy of character and intrigue, dealing with the family matters of a rich citizen, Sir John Frugal, whose wife and daughters, similar to those in Eastward Hoe, are mad with ambition to become noble and live in luxury. But the chief character is Sir John’s brother, Luke Frugal, reduced to poverty and living on his charity. When Sir John, to try him, ostensibly goes to a monastery and leaves him his wealth, he is soon transformed into a greedy exploiter, miser, and home tyrant over his brother’s wife and daughters, till he is unmasked and punished.

Massinger’s best comedies are Jonsonian, but his outlook is more narrow and conventional, and his style less poetic and more naturalistic. The intrigue takes too much place, at the expense of character. He is moving towards the later comedy of manners and shallow entertainment, but his comedies are still the best fruits of the late Renaissance.

CONCLUSION

One general conclusion can always be drawn with certainty – that the drama was “the great home of the literary activity of the English Renaissance” (Legouis and Cazamian, 1971, p. 515). When extant plays and plays which survive only in their titles are added together, their total number comes near a thousand, and that riches was concentrated within narrow limits of time. Only about sixty years separate the date on which the first public theatre was opened (1576 – Mabilard, 2000) from that on which all the playhouses were closed, when in 1642 Cromwell and his puritans locked the theatres due to fear of their spreading revolutionary propaganda (Kostić, 1978, p. 158).

The likeness between most of these works is the result of the concept of drama which they have in common, and the breadth of the principle on which they depend produces, at the same time, their diversity. There is nothing really academic about these plays, not even about those of the classicist Jonson. A lively air blows through all of them. The role given to a homely comic element is a corrective of ro-

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manticism and brings realism everywhere. The presence of poetry and lyricism are controlled, tempered, and made true to life by this realism. There is nothing very distant from the earth, nothing entirely in the clouds, in a world of abstraction. Elements of direct observation of the real life occur in some scene of every play.

The rather free field given to the comediographers also enabled them to let their personality be felt. Each of them could, depending on his powers and his angles of observation, impress his own mark on his work. Their gifts of life, variety, poetry, and realism lead readers to overlook defects which are also numerous and sometimes very serious – the loose, clumsy, or too complicated composition, the devotion of too much space to low buffoonery, the inclination to melodramatic effects, the frequent introduction of horrors and gloomy subjects due to the desire for immediate success.

In this period the dramatic style is gradually made flexible; prose is more frequently used and grows more natural; tone increasingly resembles the natural, normal voice. Conventional characters inherited from the miracle plays, personified Vice and the Fool, give place more and more often to real beings. The Fool is a comic actor rather than a character, and thus has neither place nor date. He does not long survive Shakespeare, and his disappearance marks the advance of drama, not necessarily towards more truth, but towards more realism. In the plays of Jonson, Middleton, Fletcher there is hardly anything in the equipment of plays which is not modern. It is sometimes really astonishing how their comedies are near to our modern times although very little separates them from their predecessors.

While getting nearer to reality in external elements, however, in essence these comediographers become more remote from it. Their comedy shows a preference for eccentricity and anomalies. More and more, the presentations of normal thought and feeling made room for that of the extraordinary and complicated, even morbid. In order to hold the attention of their audiences, the writers of comedy sought to astonish them. Comic characters drawn mainly from life evolved to the excesses of Volpone or Overdo, or some other previously highly successful ones, as “Baroque art, which in the early seventeenth century developed all over Europe, is an art of distortion.” (Bradbrook, 1970, p. vi). This is the true reason why every analysis returns inevitably to Shakespeare. It was exactly his genius that humanized the initial roughness, but in the decades after him it tended once again to become remote from the central truth – that of the hu-
man character and feeling. The superficial and corrupted taste of the court aristocracy definitely prevailed over the broader and more humanistic taste of the popular theatres.

REFERENCES


CONTRIBUTION OF JONSON’S YOUNGER CONTEMPORARIES TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH


Међу драматичарима после Шекспира нема оних који су са- свим посвећени комедији. Као и сам Шекспир, они су писали све врсте драмских дела, водећи се више модом и променљивим укусима публике. У време Чарлса I (1625-1642) реч је о писцима који су углавном стварали на другим пољима, па је комедија, ма- да веома заступљена у прве две деценије седамнаестог века, опа- дала у квалитету. Сатира је све површнија, ограничена на муши- чавости хумора; интрига и површна заврша су од све већег значаја у односу на приказ каракtera и критику живота.

Са сигурношћу може се понуди закључак да је драма била велико стеципште и средиште књижевног стваралаштва енглеске ренесансе. Укупан број комада који су сачувани до наших дана и оних од којих су нам остали само наслови близу је једне хиљаде, а цело то богатство било је згуснуто у врло ограниченом времен- ском раздобљу. Од тренутка када је отворено прво јавно позори- ште до времена када су Оливер Кромвел и његови пуританци за- печатали сва позоришта, у страху од ширења револуционарне пропаганде, протекло је тек неких шездесет година.

Између већине ових дела постоји сличност у заједничком пои- мању драме, мада је њихова разноврсност велика. У овим кома- дима нема нишег строгог академског, и кроз све њих струје жива- хност и свежина. Улога дата обичном елементу комичног служи да растрезни романтизам и да свуда унесе оно стварно, реално. Поезије и свега лирског има онако и онолико колико је животу верно. Нема нишег што би лебдело у сфери апстрактног, а у сва- ком комаду постоји бар неки призор посматрања и сагледавања стварног живота.

Прилично слободно и широко поље препуштено комедиогра- фима давало им је могућност да и својом личношћу буду присут- ни. У зависности од угла посматрања, сваки од њих је био у прилици да свом делу угисне властиће печат. Њихов дар да буду животни, да пруже разноврсност, да удахну и поезију и реали- зам, чини да читаоци превида мане, које су понекад сврло озбиљне – оне лабаве, неспретне, понекад сувише замршене елементе
Композиције, оно пружање превеликог простора приземном шегачењу, склоност мелодраматичним ефектима, често увођење страве и мрачнавања у жељи да се напреча постигне успех.

У овом периоду драмски стил постепено постаје еластичан; проза се чешће користи и при томе постаје природнија; општи тон се све више приближава природном, нормалном, гласу. Конвенционални ликови који су наслеђени од миракула, отелотворени Порок и Људа, све више се повлаче пред стварним људским бићима. Људа је комични глумац пре него што је драмски лик, и стога му више нема места, тако да не успева дуго да надживи Шекспира. Његов нестанак означава искорак драме, можда не ка већој истинитости али свакако ка већем реализму. У комедијама које пружају Џонсон, Милтон, Флечер тешко да има чега што још није модерно, и они су близу нашем савременом добу иако их врло мало тога јасно одваја од претходника.

Док се у спољашњим елементима ближе реалности, међутим, ови комедиографи се у суштини од ње одвајају. Дело им испољава наклоњеност ишчащеном и уврнутом. Све више и све приметније, приказ нормалне мисли и нормалних осећања устугњује пред оним што одудара, што је чак мрачно и болесно. У настојању да задрже пажњу, писци комедија се све више упињу да публику нечим запрепасте. Комични ликови изведени углавном из стварног живота кренули су у различита претеривања. Према Бредбруку (Bradbrook, 1970, p. vi), барокна уметност, која се почетком седамнаестог века развила и раширела по целој Европи, јесте уметност уврнутог и укривљеног. И управо је у томе разлог што се свака анализа неминовно враћа Шекспиру. Управо његов геније је улио људскост у ону почетну грубост, али је у деценијама после њега она поново испољила тежњу да се удаљи од истинитости људског карактера и људских осећаја. Површни и искварени укус дворске аристократије дефинитивно је надвладао онај шири и хуманији укус јавних позоришта.

Кључне речи: комедија, хумори, сатира, колaborација, задављачин.