

Jacobean and Caroline Drama

James I (1603-1625)

Charles I (1625-1649)

Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

- A classicist; the classic model was the source of his formula.
- He edited and published his own works in a volume entitled *The Works of Ben Jonson* (1616), which also contained his plays unlike the normal practice of his contemporary playwrights.
- His plays respected the classical unities of time, place and action. He also wrote many masques.
- Collaboration with Inigo Jones: stage designer and architect of the sets of his masques.

The Masque

- James I (Elizabeth's successor) favoured an elitist genre, the masque --→ collaboration **Ben Jonson** (text) and **Inigo Jones** (spectacular elements).
- **Masque**: staging followed Italian models (for example the perspective scenery, introduced to England by Jones); texts, provided by poets or dramatists (sometimes recited by the noblemen themselves) were not the main attraction of the spectacle; focus on extravagant costumes, music, dancing, sumptuous sets, special effects provided by purpose-built machines; entertainment at court or in a palace of the aristocracy.

Masque/Antimasque

- Jonson wrote **28 masques** . The most important one is *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618). A celebration of James I. His texts present complex allegories, full of symbolic meanings and references to classical and Renaissance culture.
- He invented the '**Antimasque**' = first part of the masque. Grotesque figures appear (professional actors) performing chaos and disorder → Change of music → the masque begins, performed by noblemen, who re-establish order and harmony.
- The **King** = the ideal point of reference, incarnation of the moral virtues, on which the lines of the scenic perspective, designed by Jones, converged.

Jonson's Satirical City Comedies

- Sardonic* relish for the varied and colourful London life of his day → most of his plays are set in London = **citizen or city comedies** . Even when they aren't (for ex. Venice in *Volpone*), the place still resembles London.
- A sparkling even cruel sense of humour, he wanted to give a satirical picture of his age, to write with cool irony of contemporary human foibles, as he considered Plautus and Terence had done. Sarcastic view of human nature.
- *sarcastico

Jonson's Comedy of Humours

- According to Greek physician Hippocrates, a proportioned mix of 4 humours makes one's character. The prevalence of one on the others causes an unbalanced personality:
- Blood: sanguine character (passionate)
- Phlegm: phlegmatic character (slow, passive)
- Black bile: melancholic (depressed)
- Yellow bile: choleric (angry)

Hippocrates

- **Humours are associated to the 4 elements**
- **Earth:** black bile (Autumn)
- **Air:** blood (Spring)
- **Fire:** yellow bile (Summer)
- **Water:** phlegm (Winter)
- Too much earth made one **melancholic**;
- Too much air, **sanguine**;
- Too much fire, **choleric**;
- Too much water, **phlegmatic**.
- Finally, each element/humor/season was associated with certain qualities. Thus yellow bile was thought of as hot and dry. Its opposite, phlegm (the mucus of colds), was cold and moist. Black Bile was cold and dry, while its opposite, blood was hot and moist.

Jonson's early plays: *Everyman in his Humour* (1598)
and *Everyman out of his Humour* (1599)

- A humour = a bias, a peculiar quality
- In his plays his characters embody a dominant ruling disposition. The excesses of a single character conflict with those of the others.
- Idiosyncratic characters. Idiosyncrasies
- A humorous character is bound to be a caricature (the jealous husband, the anxious father), never a fully realized human being.

Jonson's main plays

- Jonson himself was a highly idiosyncratic man, had a picturesque and violent life, which included slaying an actor in a duel and consequent imprisonment, fierce literary quarrels with fellow dramatists, a bitter feud with Inigo Jones, a temporary conversion to Catholicism, a journey to Scotland on foot.
- *Bartholomew Fair* (1604)
- *Volpone* (1605)
- *The Alchemist* (1610)

Volpone (or the Fox) 1605

- A merciless satire of greed and lust, a satirical denunciation of hypocrisy. Disapproval of human follies but also a conservative view: contempt for the rising merchant class.
- Venice. Rich man, Volpone, pretends to be seriously ill to get presents from would-be heirs. Mosca, his parasite, helps him trick them. Each of them is made to believe that he will be the chosen heir. Voltore (vulture) offers expensive gifts, Corvino (crow) offers his wife, Corbaccio (raven) disinherits his son.
- This time punishment falls on the guilty.

The Alchemist (1610)

- Lovewit abandons his house for the epidemic of plague. His servant Face and Subtle (a false alchemist) engage in a series of deceptions to (apparently) fulfil people's desires (the philosopher's stone, a charm to win at gambling, another to get a rich husband).
- The deceived characters = petty, silly, naïve (ingenuous)
- The deceivers = ingenious (not ingenuous)
- → moral judgement is suspended. The former are no better than the latter. The law might punish them, but the play absolves them.
- Reflection on dubious moral values of honesty and virtue.

City Comedies

- London, characters = **Middle Class** (merchants and craftsmen), rising class with a lot of money and a propensity to use it to bring their lifestyle closer to that of the aristocracy → **this class of parvenu is the target of city comedies.**
- **Thomas Middleton** (1580-1627), photographic representation of the reality in a satirical mode.

Tragedies

- Taste for sensational violence, implausible disguises and tricks.
- Morbid attraction for extremes.
- Italy and Spain = the favourite settings
- Dramatists: Thomas Middleton, John Webster, Thomas Heywood.

Middleton's city comedies

- ***A Trick to Catch the Old One***, (1605), farcical comedy (young nephew vs old, avaricious uncle: the vice of youth comes out victorious).
- ***A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*** (1613), exuberance of London life, sparkling language, Deceit, double-dealing and lies are the norm. Portrait of the middle classes as obsessed by money, social climbing and sex. Negative idea of the mercantile man. Allwit = the protagonist. The “cuckold”.
- Whorehound (father of Allwit's sons, but he has maintained his house for ten years).
- Whore: prostitute; to wound: to pursue or harass without respite

Middleton's tragedies

- ***The Changeling*** (1622), written with William Rowley. Set in **Spain**.
- Beatrice, promised to Alonzo, but in love with Alsemero. She asks her father's servant De Flores to kill Alonzo. The reward is not money but Beatrice herself, whom he seizes by force.
- De Flores = a villain of grandiose wickedness. "Deflower = deprive of virginity"
- Attraction/repulsion for the villain = modern (Stockholm syndrome ?)
- Killing of Beatrice by De Flores who then commits suicide.
- Subplot in lunatic asylum. The castle vs the asylum = both dominated by the unreason of passions.
- ***Women Beware Women*** tragedy set in **Italy**, negative view of humanity: everything is driven by lust, money and quest for power.

Revenge tragedy/Domestic Tragedy

- *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607) by Thomas Middleton (or Cyril Tourneur).
- Setting = somewhere in Italy .
- Vindice enters the stage holding his beloved's head, poisoned by the Duke because she rejected his advances.
- Taste for sensational violence, implausible disguises and tricks.
- Morbid attraction for extremes.
- *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) by Thomas Heywood
- John Frankford, a country gentleman discovers that his faultless wife Anne, has nevertheless yielded to the charms of their guest Wendoll. He locks her in a remote house.
- He pardons her on her deathbed.
- Puritan moral rigour
- *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) by John Webster

Jacobean Drama

- **Comedy of Humours** (Jonson)
- **City/Citizen Comedy** (Jonson, Middleton)
- **Revenge Tragedy** (Middleton) follows the tradition of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1592) and *Hamlet* (1600).
- **Domestic Tragedy** (Heywood, Webster)
- Many tragedies are set in Italy and Spain.
- **Italy** = country of the corrupt and cynical Catholic courts where daggers, poison and treachery abounded.