CHAPTER VII

"PERSONS, SUCH AS COMEDIE WOULD CHUSE"

As Jonson based his theory of comedy on the precept and example of the comic writers of antiquity as interpreted by Renaissance critics, he was naturally influenced by them both in his conception and delineation of character. The doctrine of 'decorum', preached by his favourite authors - Horace and Quintilian - and popularised by Sidney, coloured his conception and delineation of character. 'Decorum' laid it down that characters in a drama should always act and speak 'in character'. In other words, the characters should behave as one would expect persons in their time of life and social position to behave. As Whetstone puts it:

to worke a Commedie kindly (that is, according to its nature or 'kind'), grave old men should instruct, yonge men should show the imperfections of youth, Strumpets should be lascivious, Boyes unhappy, and Clownes should speake disorderlye ...

Besides, there was a further limitation summed up in a tag from Horace

Seruetur ad imum, qualis ab incepto processerit,
et sibi constet,

which Cordatus quotes in Every Man Out of His Humour (V, v, 57-58). The Horatian tag in effect meant that "a dramatist had to establish his characters on or before their first entrance and then to see that they never subsequently did or said anything that

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contradicted their original presentation. The concept of 'decorum', thus, left no room for untypical behaviour, inconsistency in action, mixture of motive, or development of character. The characters, then, are to be fixed and unalterable ones.

It is not as though characters of this sort were thrust upon Jonson for his having committed himself to the 'Comedy of Humours'. He was ready to accept this limitation though not always bound by it. For, he himself "in make of mind, was, up to a certain point, naturally disposed to this typical and normal handling of character". It is the playwright's instinct in him strengthened by reasoning and reflection that drove him towards this neat and tightly contained way of looking at and presenting character.

The 'humour' motive, however, helped Jonson in more than one way. First of all, it released him from the traditional categories of comic types, besides throwing the comedy of mere intrigue into the background once for all. Then, providing a bridge, as it were, between classical theory and modern life, the 'humour' motive "helped to render it possible for the master of satiric comedy, the doughty champion of classicism, and the most powerful of Elizabethan realists, to be united in the same man."  

2. J.B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson, p.34.  
4. Ibid., p.348.
All the same, too much stress should not be laid, as has sometimes been done, on the importance of 'humours' in Jonson's comedy. If he had, by any chance, limited himself to characters who were 'humours' in the strict and proper sense of the term, he would thus have had a very restricted cast indeed. Comparatively few of his characters will yield to 'humour' analysis, and his range is obviously much wider. The source of the comic which Jonson tapped in his comedies seems to be related, if not absolutely, to Meredith's explanation of the comic. According to Meredith, whenever men

Wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever they are ... self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or minded with conceit, individually, or in bulk - they are fit subjects for the satiro-comic spirit. These are also, in reality, the 'persons, such as (Jonson's) Comedie would chuse' to portray.

Jonson starts with characters set, formed and fully defined at the very outset. His characters are, no doubt, taken from life, but once they enter his comedy they must necessarily leave behind them all their human inconsistencies and run to form. For, they are now in the hands of a master logician who

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would present them as 'studies in special types of behaviour'. Jonson catches them at a moment when they are most expressive for his purposes and invests them with all the details of dress, speech and action. "He seeks his effects by working from the outside, by picking out the contours of character in the changing limelight of circumstance". And with his strict grasp of common circumstance and the immense resources of his thought and language, he is able to flash rays of light on each facet of the chosen character.

Before we proceed further, it is essential to remember that Jonson's method of characterisation is restricted and conditioned by certain factors. It is, of course, true that characterisation in Jonson is restricted less by the story than in the other Elizabethan dramatists. But, at the same time, it is conditioned more than that of others by Jonson's adherence to classical models and rules. Particularly his observance of the Unities has an important bearing on his characterisation. As the action of a comedy of his does not generally take more than twenty-four hours for its completion, Jonson is not in a position to represent many facets of a character's personality. So, his characters do not have the time to develop and grow and change.

However, it may be argued that Shakespeare in *The Tempest* and Dryden in *All For Love* show us several well-developed aspects of their characters, even while they closely observe the three

unities. But it may be pointed out that Shakespeare and Dryden did not aim at the kind of satire and realism favoured by Jonson. Besides, they revealed the past of their characters by means of reminiscences which would be quite out of place in the type of comedy attempted by Jonson.

Again, we should not lose sight of the fact that Jonson's acceptance of 'humours' as the basis of character-creation carries with it several obvious limitations. Its simple clear-cut theory of character naturally forbids any of that 'life-like complexity' which marks Shakespeare's full-blooded and dynamic characters. As the character is absolutely explained by his 'humour' which is made known at his first appearance and, more often than not, by his name, it obviates all needs for a fine psychology. This phenomenon reacts in a serious way by preventing any self-development in the characters.

Also, the presentation of certain select 'humours' throughout a play invariably involves two risks in respect of characterisation - standardisation and exaggeration. It makes the characters become too rigid and uniform in habit, puppet-like after the fashion of the personages in the old Morality and thus dramatically unreal. It also involves the playwright in exaggeration if he would strive to escape from it. Furthermore, Jonson's insistence on the 'humours' is at cross purposes with his realistic intention. A 'humour' character is liable to be a caricature presented, not as a fully realized human being, but only as a fop, a jealous husband and an anxious father.
A clear and sympathetic understanding of these restrictions, limitations and risks and such other difficulties on the part of Jonson in his creation and portrayal of character is absolutely necessary for a correct and full appreciation of Jonson's art of comic characterisation. We must not, at any rate, belittle his brilliant achievement in characterisation. We must necessarily bear in mind that Jonson's alleged shortcomings in respect of characterisation are due to the restrictions imposed by his theory of comedy and his conception of the functions of a comic poet. Once we sympathetically take into consideration these restrictions and limitations by which Jonson was deliberately bound, his achievement in characterisation would appear remarkable. Within his self-imposed limits, Jonson is able to hold the attention of the audience not only because his characters have sufficient vitality but also because they fulfil his aim of realism and moral elevation.

Yet, critics failing to understand Jonson's self-imposed system, have been constantly finding fault with him condemning his art of comic invention for many things he cannot help himself. The grounds of this criticism, however, lay undoubtedly in the unphilosophical habit of comparing Jonson's characters with the entirely different type of creations of Shakespeare or Beaumont and Fletcher.

It has often been felt that Jonson's characters are only English copies of Plautian or Terentian types, or that his gulls
and misers, braggarts and rascally servants are a blind imitation of Latin comic characters. This is not true. Because, even if Jonson relies on the Renaissance 'decorum' for his conception of character "the genius of Jonson has intensified and individualised the portrayal of character beyond the limits of mere Horatian and Renaissance decorum". There is a thorough-going transfusion of the comic spirit into the moulds of another race and time. And from their immediate contact with contemporary reality they derive gusto and exuberance. Jonson's men and women are essentially English men and women. For instance, Bobadill is not a mere soldier braggart of Plautine tradition, He stands out distinctly from the traditional types. With his up-to-date oaths, his skill in the tobacco art and in the latest duelling strokes and his haunting of the disreputable purleurs of London or the middle aisle of St. Pauls, he vividly expresses the Elizabethan species of the class.

Jonson's characters are often dismissed as mere personified abstractions. Coleridge affirms that they are "in the strictest sense of the term, abstractions". But, to label Jonson's personages as mere personifications of a vice or a folly is to shut one's eyes to the nicety with which they are distinguished from other characters to which they bear a

superficial likeness. What makes his characters appealing to us is his superb art of happily marking the different shades of the same colour thereby distinguishing the covetous from the covetous and the voluptuous from the voluptuous. Although "there is no room in his plays for sentiment, idyllic romance, or atmosphere, his types are far from being cut from one pattern". Jonson quite ingeniously differentiates those of his figures which resemble each other most closely in type.

Just because Jonson, quite unlike other dramatists, makes matters easy to his hearers and readers alike, by way of clearly defining and minutely describing the characters he seeks to present, it is erroneous to think or say that he has done no more than define and describe. The living realism of his humour should not be ignored. What we, in this respect, should necessarily remember is that it is in the interests of dramatic clarity that Jonson seeks a simplification of the complexities of human nature and 'a common denominator for the diversity of mankind'. The dramatis personae is not an analysis and schematisation of human nature, but a rationalisation and simplification of human nature for the sake of his dramatic art.

Even if it comes to that, Jonson can be defended fully on the ground that modern psychology has shown us that ruling passions do exist and individuals in their grip do not change.

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without a complete overhauling of their personalities. Such neurotics are living parodies of average human emotions. Jonson seems to have foreshadowed, although he did not know the names for them, the maniac personalities, anal-erotics and types of conversion hysteria.

It is also complained that while Jonson is presenting striking types he fails to exhibit, in the action of his plays themselves, "the process of coming into being, the growth of character". The charge seems inadmissible in that it cannot justly be levelled against a dramatist like Jonson who has committed himself to the classical unities which could hardly allow any kind of development. How can any character possibly grow and develop within eight or nine hours which his plays normally take for their action?

However, within the limits of the action Jonson appears to account for his characters admirably exhibiting them in operation. He enables us to notice the external features of any character as well as to understand the real nature of them. We are able to understand the best-drawn of them at all events through themselves. However, what we must look for in Jonson's comedies, 

13. Yet Jonson's undue indulgence in describing his personages even to an unwarrantable extent, and, what is more, his fondness for furnishing a sort of Theophrastian chorus for the readers' better guidance may have possibly misled critics to neglect the characters themselves.
as in Molière's, is a study not of character development but of characters which are already formed, or which are treated as if they were already formed. For instance, in portraying Morose, Jonson is not concerned to show how such a man came to harbour such an obsession of hatred of noise but how, given the fact of the obsession, he behaves in the grip of it.

Jonson has been reproached with a failure to create good and endearing characters. It is, of course, true that it is difficult to feel much affection for Jonson's characters. For, even Jonson's greatest creations like Volpone, Mosca, Subtle, Face, Sir Epicure Mammon are dramatizations of basic, unworthy human traits. But, this is the direct result of his decision to instruct by ridicule. It was but natural that Jonson's observation should turn rather to the uglier side of human nature than to the brighter. Depravity, failings, moral short-comings attract his attention. He analyses them minutely and draws a striking picture of them. This makes his characters different from those of Shakespeare.

Jonson is attacked on the ground that he has created not characters but caricatures. "Jonson's characters", says Hazlitt "are caricatures by dint of their very likeness, being extravagant tautologies of themselves". But, we should remember that a flat distortion in the drawing of characters is quite essential to the art of a comic poet like Jonson. However, we

may say that Jonson's comedies transcend caricature through their architectural beauty and poetry. To cite but one instance, Sir Epicure Mammon, though satirised as an embodiment of lust and greed, rises above the level of caricature by virtue of the poetic touch given to him. We tend to forget his 'humour' in his poetic rhapsodies. We find him tempt Dol Common painting a glorious picture before her:

We'll therefore goe with all, my girle, and line
In a free state; where we will eate our mullets,
Sow'd in high-countrey wines, sup pheasants egges,
And have our cockles, boil'd in siluer shells,
Our shrimps to swim againe, as when they liu'd,
In a rare butter, made of dolphins milke,
Whose creame do's look like opalls: and, with these
Delicate meats, set ourselves high for pleasure,
And take vs downe againe, and then renew
Our youth, and strength, with drinking the elixir,
And so enjoy a perpetuitie
Of life, and lust. And, thou shalt ha' thy wardrobe,
Richer then Natures, still, to change thy selfe,
And vary oftener, for thy pride, then shee;
Or Art, her wise, and almost-equall servant.

(IV, i, 155-69)

At any rate, Jonson's art of caricature, like Marlowe's, "is a great caricature, which is beautiful; and a great humour, which is serious". 14

The most common charge that is levelled against Jonson is that his characters are not full-blooded, complete men and women but mechanical types especially when compared to those of Shakespeare. Hazlitt says - "Shakespeare's characters are men; Ben Jonson's are more like machines". 15 Coleridge concludes

that "Ben's personae are too often not characters but derangements - the hopeless patients of a mad doctor rather".16

Our immediate answer could be that it was not in Jonson to body forth such figures as step out of the pages of Shakespeare and live with us as familiar acquaintances. It is neither his intention nor his endeavour to present full-blooded, life-like characters, or dynamic living individuals who can exist independent of their settings, but only 'persons' as are required by his characteristic comedy. There is no point, then, in condemning Jonson for what he never set out to do. We have, moreover, no right to demand of Jonson to give us complete human beings. Jonson, the satirist and the censor, did not require for his purposes the creation of complete men and women. We should also remember that where the main end is the satirical portraiture of social types, complete human beings demanding sympathy are out of place. However, Jonson's abundant wit and inventive resourcefulness succeeded to keep his characters human and interesting.

Another equally untenable charge levelled against Jonson is that he cannot invest even his female characters with the charm of Shakespearean romance. It is true that Jonson has not created charming women characters, not only in comparison to Shakespeare, but also in comparison to some of his own male characters. But the truth lies in the fact that Jonson does not

require for his purposes the creation of charming women. We cannot expect from him a Portia, a Rosalind, a Viola, an Imogen, a Duchess of Malphi or even an Aspatla. Such women belong essentially to the romantic species and not to the satiric species which Jonson is chiefly concerned with. Hence the women characters, Kitesys, in Every Man in His Humour are insubstantial, created merely to fill two necessary parts. The court ladies in Cynthia’s Revels as well as the Collegiate women in Epicoene simply serve the purpose of revealing the sad state of morals among the upper classes. Lady Politick Would-be is simply a chatter-box. Even Mrs. Fitz Dottrel in The Devil Is An Ass and Lady Frampul are dull and not quite convincing.

Nevertheless, we cannot possibly say that Jonson has ‘scarcely one well-drawn female figure’. Jonson has to his credit at least two well-drawn women characters of excellence. Dol Common in The Alchemist is one of the most convincing women characters of Jonson. She is no common whore. She is a doll and common in the sense that she is a woman of the town, accessible to every one and prepared to play with every one. But, in fact, she is neither doll nor common. When she is instructed by Face to play the role of a stately lady before Sir Epicure Mammon, she says:

O, let me alone,
I’ll not forget my race, I warrant you.
I’ll keep my distance, laugh, and talk aloud;
Have all the tricks of a proud sciruy ladie,
And be as rude’ as her woman.

(II, iv, 7-11)
As the passage makes it clear she is a tactful woman. It is her adroit threat to leave the partnership:

S'death, you perpetuall curres,
Fall to your couples againe, and osseen kindly,
And heartily, and louingly, as you should,
And loose not the beginning of a terme,
Or, by this hand, I shall grow factious too,
And, take my part, and quit you.

(I, i, 136-141)

that compels Face and Subtle to compose their quarrel. Again, she cheats Sir Epicure of his diamond ring and talks him out of his wits. She is a 'smock rampant' only at the beginning and briefly at the end of the play. Elsewhere "she is the Queen of Fairies, the mad sister of a lord, elegant enough in speech and manner ... and able to spout theology out of Broughton".17

Then, we have in Ursula in Bartholomew Fair a very amusing woman character, indeed, a "female Falstaff". There are close echoes of the Falstaff sequences in the satiric descriptions of Ursula - 'a walking sow of tallow', 'an inspir'd vessell of kitchen-stuffe', 'quagmire', and 'a whole shire of butter'. She presides over the events of Bartholomew Fair with her greasy moon face like some disreputable minor deity. Like the wife of Bath, she has a high opinion of herself and describes herself modestly as

a plaine plumpe soft wench o' the Suburbs .. juicy and wholesome:

(II, v, 83-84)

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Ursula is a fat, old pig woman who sells hot roast pork sweating like Falstaff. She herself admits:

I am all fire and fat ... I shall een melt away to the first woman, a ribbe againe, I am afraid. I doe water the ground in knots, as I goe, like a great Garden-pot.

(II, ii, 50-52)

She is so fat that she overflows her chair which needs to be let out o' the sides, for me, that my hips might play?

(II, ii, 64-65)

She smokes like a chimney, swears outrageously and is immensely proud of her booth. "With all her faults", as J.E.M. Latham suggests, "she has both warmth and kindness".18 This is brought out especially when she welcomes Overdo to her booth and orders a six penny bottle of ale for him despite his disguise as Mad Arthur of Bradley. Such a character is certainly more than a type or 'humour'. She would be a worthy companion for Chaucer's wife of Bath and Shakespeare's Mistress Quickly.

It is, however, necessary to issue a word of caution in the study of Jonson's art of comic characterisation. The theory of 'humours', as has already been suggested, should not be over-worked in the interpretation of Jonson's dramatic art. It is wrong to believe that all his characters are of the 'humours' type. It is not as though Jonson was incapable of creating life-like characters. There are, at least, a few characters who evidently rise far above the 'humours' types by virtue of

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their being endowed with vigour, animation and an individuality of their own.

The immortal and inimitable Bobadill is the first and foremost of such living creations. He is far more than a mere type or 'humour'. For he is more self-expressive, more independent of the devices of setting on which the other personages rely as of necessity and a living creation like Shakespeare's. He is endowed with an individuality thanks to a freer allowance in the control of action and situation.

Like Falstaff Bobadill is exceedingly resourceful. There is in this fire-eater an unfailing submissiveness to reason. He lives in a mean lodging but excuses his residence on the ground that he loves

a cleanly and quiet priavcy, above all the tumult, and roar of fortune.

(I, v, 45-46)

Expecting much, he asks Matthew what money he has about him. When he learns that Matthew has only two shillings, Bobadill, instead of feeling depressed, says with perfect resignation:

We will have a bunch of redish, and salt, to tast our wine; and a pipe of tobacco, to close the orifice of the stomach.

(I, v, 165-167)

When, in the midst of his boasts and fiery threats, Bobadill is caught by Down-right and trounced, he quite ingeniously defends himself saying that he was "bound to peace, by this good day" and also that he was
strooke with a plannet thence, for I had no power to touch my weapon

(IV, vii, 141-42)

Bobadill amuses all the audience with his most fantastic scheme by which he and nineteen other choice spirits chosen by an instinct will in two hundred days kill forty thousand enemies of the queen in open fight "civilly by the sword" despatching them in batches of twenty. There is really life in this lean, hungry figure. Presenting, thus, a perfectly individualistic character Jonson rises above his usual method.

Jonson pours all his intellectual strength into the characters of Volpone and Mosca. They defy the application of the humour scheme. They rise far above the types. Secluded from the world, Volpone lives like a Roman among his creatures. Enjoying life with a gusto, Volpone is an Epicurean. To him life is all fun and joy, and he wants to make the most of it. Therefore he expends all his mental powers on subtle schemes for making life a comedy. His passionate intensity is reminiscent of the great characters of Marlowe.

Volpone has been mistaken for an avaricious cheat. But Volpone cannot be charged with the vice that he himself ridicules and exposes in others. He is not blinded by the love of gold. He is not interested in the mere accumulation of wealth. As David Cook puts it, "the artist in him is stronger than the money-spinner".19 This is clear from his own categorical

declaration that he will 'glory'

More in the cunning purchase of my wealth,
Then in the glad possession;

(I, 1, 31-32)

Besides, greed makes a man circumspect. Volpone is shrewd enough in his own way but he is not circumspect. Otherwise he could not have been so reckless as to make Mosca his heir thereby throwing away his own wealth in pursuit of his game. This shows clearly how Volpone is not simply an embodiment of greed.

So, rather than giving us still another example of a greedy man in a play which already contains three of these, Jonson, we may say, is depicting in Volpone the real nature of evil. As Charles A. Hallett has recently pointed out "Jonson had various devil-traditions in mind when he was writing Volpone and he meant us to see Volpone, if not as Mammon himself, at least as a diabolical force, the essence of evil". That Jonson meant us to take Volpone as an entirely terrestrial creature, with a Satanic approach to religion, is sufficiently indicated by the dual nature of Volpone as tempter in the first four acts and as tormentor in the final act of the play.

In Mosca Jonson paints a monumental portrait of the parasite. "He is no mere automation in a scheme of humours". He is all deceit, craftiness, unscrupulousness, and double-crossing. In


\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\] David Cook, ed. Volpone, 'Introduction', p.31.
drawing this lively character, Jonson is indebted to the cunning parasites of the preceding English drama as well as to those of the Latin comedy.  

Mosca is no common trickster. He is a trimmer of infinite resources. Plausible and pliant, he comes very near Iago. He has the ability to deceive people and make each one think he is his friend while he is plotting against all of them, as Iago gulls Rodrigo, Othello and Cassio. He too receives such undeserved compliments as 'kind', 'loving', 'sweet', 'excellent', and 'grateful' Mosca - which suggest to us 'honest Iago'.

Endowed with very sharp intelligence, Mosca knows the nature of his dupes thoroughly. When Volpone expresses his fear that the legacy-hunters may scent their trick, Mosca replies:

True, they will not see't.
Too much light blinds 'hem, I thynke.

(V, ii, 22-23)

Thus, he guides Volpone through the dangerous and complicated circumstances of their common plots with the suppleness and quickness of a serpent. He is intelligent enough to plan and unscrupulous enough to execute any sort of devilry. Like Face, he is an ingenious contriver of situations, and like Iago he subtly spreads his net to entrap his victims, and if he is entrapped in his own net ultimately, it is because his master chooses to get him punished by ruining himself.

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Like many other parasites, Mosca is a pander. But, his polished manner and subtle trickery make him superior to most other parasites. He is aware of his uniqueness as well as his superiority to the poor, hungry parasite. This is clearly brought out in his soliloquy (III, i, 7-33). He is not an ordinary hungry toady but, as he himself boasts, a "fine, elegant rascal". As E.P. Vandiver has rightly pointed out Jonson has drawn in Mosca "the most outstanding of the so-called parasites in Elizabethan drama".

The creation of Sir Epicure Mammon, again, is absolutely of the first class and no longer the mere vehicle of a 'humour'. He is an incarnation of a human temperament in which voluptuous and avaricious concupiscence is sublimed and idealised into something immortal. Sir Epicure may be a fool, yet he is an Elizabethan who is constantly preoccupied by dreams of magnificence and voluptuous desires. He "comes closer to Chaucer's January in the enthusiasm and extravagance of his self-deceit". He is engrossed in the expectation of plentiful gold. The possession of the philosopher's stone, he thinks, will make him master of infinite wealth and he will pronounce to all his

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23. W.D. Briggs is of the opinion that this soliloquy is derived from Plutarch's "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend". (See "Source-Material for Jonson's Plays", MLN, XXXI (1916), p.331).


friends "the happy word, BE RICH". He further dreams that when his expectation of receiving the stone is fulfilled his "flatterers shall be the pure and gravest of divines"; and his mere fools, "eloquent burgesses". His "foot-boy shall eat pheasant, Calver'd salmons, knots, god-wits, lampreys". As far as he himself is concerned he will have his shirts

of taffata-sarsnet, soft, and light
As cob-webs; and for all my other rayment,
It shall be such, as might provoke the Persian;
Were he to teach the world riot, a new
My gloues of fishes, and birds'-skins, perfum'd
With gummies of paradise, and eastern aire -

(II, ii, 89-94)

Finally when "all the works are blown 'in fumo'" he persuades himself that he has been "justly punished" for his vice and lust and agrees to pay a hundred pounds as a token of penitence. He quits the scene almost with a stoic resignation:

I will goe mount a turnep-cart, and preach The end o' the world, within these two months.

(V, v, 81-82)

Bartholomew Cokes is one of Jonson's most enduring young characters drawn with amazing vigour, and put before us with extraordinary fidelity. He is a subtler and more imaginative study in fatuity than Stephen who is almost a caricature. He is presented as little more than a child. As a critic has recently pointed out in Bartholomew Cokes "Jonson was creating .... a character to demonstrate the limitation of morality - some one outside the world of intelligence, as the name suggests, and outside the world of good and evil".26

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The most regular visitor, he falls helplessly in love with the Fair. He calls it "my fair" because of his first name. He cannot buy just one ballad but "a whole bundle" because he collects the pictures on them and pastes them over the nursery chimney at home. Being interrupted by the gingerbread woman he proudly buys the whole of her basket. At last he finds himself perfectly in his element among the puppets when he says:

I am in love with the Actors already, and I'll be allied to them presently.

(V, iii, 131-32)

Cokes unfailingly reminds us of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Epitomizing, as it were, silly humanity itself, as Jonson views it in the Discoveries, (11. 1437-44), Bartholomew Cokes is one of the most finished products of a simpleton.

Zeal-of-the-land Busy is another most convincing vital character Jonson gave to the stage. He is, again, no careful study of a humour dissected and anatomized, but a full-length portrait of the hypocritical puritan faithfully observed and presented with a careless vigour and animation. He is no vulgar impostor, no mere religious quacksalver of such a kind as supplies the common food for satire, but a hypocrite of the earnest kind, an "Ironside among the civilians". A sketch of sonorous hypocrisy and unconsumed greed, at once historically and universally just, Busy is a living character.
Longing for a roast pig, Busy comes to the fair but he supplies himself with a noble reason for it saying:

I'll eate exceedingly and prophesie; there may be a good use made of it, too, now I thinke on 't: by the publike eating, of Swines flesh, to profess our hate, and loathing of Judaisme.

(I, vi, 93-96)

After eating two and a half servings of Ursula's roast pig and washing it down with "a bottle of painful ale" he starts condemning the fair:

Thou art the seate of the Beast, O Smithfield, ...
Idolatry peepeth out on every side of thee.

(III, vi, 44-46)

The snuffling glutton who begins by exciting our laughter finally ends his career in the stocks displaying a comic perversity of stoicism -

I am glad to be thus separated from the heathen of the land, and put apart in the stocks, for the holy cause.

(IV, vi, 86-87)

Thus, drawn with enormous vivacity and vigour of invention, Zeal-of-the-land Busy remains one of the liveliest and best hostile portraits of a Puritan in the English language.

Here, then, are characters who might be the envy of even the greatest masters of English drama - Bobadill, Volpone, Mosca, Sir Epicure Mammon, Bartholomew Cokes, Ursula and Rabbi Zeal-of-the Land Busy. No theory of 'humours' will account for them. Now it is evident that Jonson is also capable of producing immortal, individualised characters when the occasion demands. If such characters are less in number, it is because his main
purpose is not to produce such characters but 'persons, such as
his) *Comedie* would chuse'. And the kind of comedy he attempts,
seeks to choose, in order to achieve its end, mostly 'humours'
types. Ben Jonson brilliantly succeeds in producing them.

Jonson's 'humours', however, are not simply types in the
sense Marston's or Molière's are. They are simplified and some-
what distorted individuals with a typical mania. Their simpli-
ication does not, as is often assumed, consist in the dominance
of a particular humour or monomania. The simplification, con-
sists largely in reduction of detail and in the seizing of
aspects relevant to the relief of an emotional impulse in
order to make the character conform to a particular setting.
This sort of 'stripping', it should be noted, is essential to
Jonson's dramatic art to which in turn a flat distortion in
the drawing of character also becomes essential. Jonson's
vitality and observant power endow his characters with life
and make us believe in them. His characters are not 'a priori'
from some abstract and ideal pattern. They are constructed,
as it were from bits of real people. Also, Jonson habitually
relates the quirks and oddities of behaviour he observes to
underlying laws of human nature. As a result his characters
have both an intellectual consistency and a universal significance.
What is more, he "is able to add that extra of intensity which
is the mark of the great creator". 27 We may conclude that

27. H.R. Hays, "Satire and Identification: An Introduction
Jonson's characters, on the whole, are as effective in their own way as those of Shakespeare, with this difference that "whereas in Shakespeare the effect is due to the way in which the characters act upon one other, in Jonson it is given by the way in which the characters fit in with each other". 28