CHAPTER IX

"A NEW SUFFICIENT PLAY": BARTHOLOMEW FAIR.

If we were to add yet another to Polonius's list of hybrid dramatic forms, we might call Bartholomew Fair a holiday play, topical satire, satirical festive comedy, and 'comedy of vapours'. In this lengthy rubric lies the source of the play's richness. In Jonson's own description, however, it is "a new sufficient play" ('The Induction', 1.81).

Bartholomew Fair was written when Jonson's mind had reached the peak of its maturity. The play was produced at the Hope on "the one and thirtieth day of October 1614". ('The Induction', 1.68). But, surprisingly enough, it was not included in the Folio of 1616. It is generally felt that Jonson did not have sufficient time to prepare the play accurately for the press. But Bartholomew Fair, we may say, was deliberately omitted from the Folio inasmuch as its implications go far beyond those of the earlier plays. It is clear that Jonson, in the four years since The Alchemist (1610), had begun to move into a new comic world wherein he was prone to give more concession to the popular taste than he did before. He creates in Bartholomew Fair a world into which he infuses more of sympathy, tolerance and humanity than it is usually acknowledged he ever possessed.

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1. In 1616, the first volume of Jonson's 'Works' (he himself called them so) was published, an admirably printed edition containing the best of his plays and masks, his epigrams, and his poems, The Forest.
**Bartholomew Fair** was written three years after *Catiline* (1611) which was an unmistakable failure.² Keenly disappointed at its cold reception Jonson "had bitterly resented the rebuff and appealed to the judgement of the reading public, with surly assurances of its incompetence to judge".³ All the same, the three intervening years seemed to have completely allayed his rancour. Being too self-confident to distrust his art, Jonson quickly changed his estimate of the public. He became aware of the "jig-given times" in which he was living. Besides, there was an assuaging influence on him. His recent masques *Challenge at Tilt* (December 27, 1613) and *Irish Masque* (December 29, 1613) were so well liked that the latter was repeated on January 3, 1614. So he was now in a cheerful mood.

Naturally Jonson was disposed to meet his unruly audience in a pleasant fashion. He was ready to give them as much as they wanted, instead of as much as they ought to want, and also to resent no man's disapproval. 'The Induction' to the play announces the author's changed disposition. He no longer brands his public, in an armed prologue as ignorant enemies of art if they find his play dull. He no longer swears the play was good "and if you like it you may". Instead, he says "I'll be judged

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2. *Catiline* failed chiefly because Jonson worked out the play on the assumption that like himself the public was deeply interested in classical archaeology. He had conceived the masses to be hearers and readers "extraordinary". But they proved themselves very "ordinary".

by you, Gentlemen, now" (l. 30), and further categorically declares:

every person here, haue his or their free-will
of censure, to like or dislike at their owne charge,
the Author having now departed with his right: It
shall bee lawfull for any man to judge his six pen'orth,
... to the value of his place; provided alwaies his
place get not above his wit.

(ll. 85-91)

Nevertheless, lest the character of his art, which on the
face of it bears so largely the character of a holiday riot of
the comic and satiric Muse, should be misconstrued, Jonson is
extremely careful in introducing the play. Despite his strong
desire to give his audience what they want, he postulates that
they shall not expect from him what they would from a raree-
show. Therefore, with any amount of ingenuity and tact he makes
the 'stage-keeper' apprise the audience of these limitations
on his part:

But for the whole Play, will you ha' the truth on't?...
Hee has not hit the humours, he do's not know 'hem; hee
has not conquer'd with the Bartholomew-birds, as they say;
hee has ne're a Sword, and Buckler man in his Favre; nor
a little Daue, to take toll o' the Bawds there, as in my
time, nor a Kind-heart, if any bodies teeth should chance
to ake in his Play. Nor a Luggler with a wel-educated
Ape, to come over the chaine, for the King of England,
and backe againe for the Prince, and sit still on his
arse for the Pope, and the King of Spain! None o' these
fine sights! Nor has he the Canuas-out i' the night,
for a Hobby-horseman to creepe in to his she-neighbour,
and take his leap, there! Nothing!

('The Induction', ll. 6-22)

Thus, Bartholomew Fair came to be composed as a sort of
compromise in which "it is covenanted and agreed, by and between
the parties", the 'Spectators' and 'Hearers' on the one party
and the author of *Bartholomew Fair* on the other, 
to remain in the places, their money or friends 
haue put them in, with patience, for the space of 
two hours and an halfe, and somewhat more. In which 
time the Author promiseth to present them by vs, with 
a new sufficient Play* called BARTHOLOMew FAIR.6, merry, 
and as full of noise, as sport: made to delight all, 
and to offend none: Provided they haue either, the wit, 
or the honesty to thinke well of themselves.4

('The Induction', ll. 78-85)

It is this consciousness that he was attempting something still 
original, experimental and difficult at this mid-Jacobeian time 
that explains Jonson's insistence that his play was not to be 
judged by popular Elizabethan criteria, which have "stood still, 
these five and twentie, or thirtie yeeres" ('The Induction', 
ll. 108-109).

It is not for nothing that Jonson called *Bartholomew Fair* 
a new sufficient play". It is daringly 'new' in that it is 
the first of its kind among Jonson's plays. It is purely 
Jonsonian. Absolutely original in conception5 and construction 
alone, it stands a little apart from the other comedies of 
Jonson. No doubt, there are some clear points of resemblance 
between this and the earlier comedies in point of the topsy-turvy 

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*Underlining is mine.*

4. The manner of this genial compact and generous appeal must 
have gone a long way in conciliating the goodwill of the 
audience, besides exciting their curiosity.

5. C.R. Baskervill questioning the play's originality ("Some 
Parallels to *Bartholomew Fair*", M.P,VI (July, 1908) pp.109-127), 
traces the main motive and situation of *Bartholomew Fair* in 
the old play, *Sir Thomas More*. But, since *Sir Thomas More* 
was not published till 1644, it is not likely that Jonson 
knew the play. However, for the outpurse scenes in the play 
Jonson may have been indebted to Shakespeare's *The Winter's 
Tale*. *Shakespeare's* Autolycus belongs to the same general 
class of rogues like Lanthom Leatherhead of *Bartholomew Fair*. 
Behind both Autolycus and Leatherhead are Greene's "canny-
social world presented. But the presentation of the social world in it is intensified and the terms of its presentation invariably engage new worlds of experience hardly admitted earlier. Although stylistic affinities link this play with the great comedies and with the earlier plays, several important advances open into novel forays.

*Bartholomew Fair* is 'new' in its fresh subject and novel scheme. The Fair itself is the true subject to which is closely related all the bewildering multiplicity of details. With its multitude of interests and attractions, the fair itself "provides the perfect environment for Jonson's genius". The Fair consists of a noisy and colourful mass of booths for the roast pig and toy sellers, the gingerbread woman and ballad-singers, the quack doctors, freaks and showmen - all with the single ambition of getting as much money as possible out of customers' pockets. There is neither a hero nor a dominant character. But the Fair bringing, as it does, all this motley multitude together provides a real unity and tone as the Forest of Arden does in *As You Like It*.

As regards the scheme, Jonson for once seems to approach "the art which conceals art", which is difficult even for the most masterful and self-conscious of artists to practise. Although Jonson's shaping and contriving hand is still active, here it operates less obtrusively if more subtly. However

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admirable might be the method in the greatest of his plots, it is somewhat too easily described or formulated. But there is no trace of artifice in the artistry of *Bartholomew Fair*. Jonson brings all the resources of his mature mastery to bear on a problem of writing a masterpiece while virtually dispensing with a strong main plot and one or two major protagonists. Again, the lines of cleavage between the tricksters and the dupes, which so largely determine the structure of Jonsonian comedy, are here managed most adroitly. The comic results come about inevitably as natural incidents of the Fair, without the intervention of a professional contriver - Brainworm or Buffone, Mosca or Face.

*Bartholomew Fair* is also new in that it is more inclusive than any of Jonson's plays. Thoroughly diverse with symbolically infinite scope, the play itself moves steadily toward greater expansiveness and inclusiveness. Characters, actions and interests are all multiplied. Never before such a number of characters has so crowded the stage. Besides being a fair at Smithfield, *Bartholomew Fair* provides a symbolic locale. As suggested in 'The Induction' (ll. 113-34), the Fair stands for human life as well as the world of comic drama. The people of the Fair are described in such a manner as to give the impression that they were the characters of a play.

*Bartholomew Fair* is new too in its tone which is more extravert and happier than that of the foregoing comedies which are closed away almost within doors. In conformity with Jonson's
promise in his Induction, the play "has the air of a kind of saturnalia of the comic muse - a true holiday play in keeping with its holiday theme". The play stretches itself into a vaster background and breathes more of open air than it is common in Jonson. It is the most expansive of his mature comedies and the most English in atmosphere. Conceived in the spirit of rollicking mirth, and executed with lively energy, it is the most high-spirited and hilarious of his comedies. Vibrating with life, the play is full of colour, bubbling with boisterous spirits and the zestful rendering of London low-life. A broad Dutch painting of the humours of a London carnival, an air of relaxation blows through it as in Midsummer Night's Dream. The play provokes laughter at every point but there comes a time towards the end when one almost sympathises with the characters.

Then, Bartholomew Fair is "sufficient" in that it is a perfect fulfilment of Jonson's dramatic art marking the highest development of the 'Comedy of Humours'. It was written at a time when Jonson was in a state of such lively energy that there was no danger of the playwright being overwhelmed by the critic. We may justly consider it to be the most perfect representative of Jonson's characteristic comedy. A finished performance of the 'Comedy of Humours', Bartholomew Fair represents the culmination of Jonson's dramatic art.

The most concretely realistic piece of portraiture Jonson ever did, Bartholomew Fair is all 'deeds, and language, such as

men do use'. It shows admirably how Jonson could make the commonplace artistic by furnishing a veritable picture of an actual cloth fair.

The play appears to be a transcript of real life. Jonson seems to have been attracted towards the subject of the Fair as a study in vulgar realism. This is made clear to us in 'The Induction' where Jonson cajoles the audience through the Stage-keeper, saying that

the whole play ... is like to be a very conceited sourry one, in plaine English. When it comes to the Fair, once you were a' en as good goe to Virginia, for any thing there is of Smith-field.

Bartholomew Fair may justly be regarded as a unique example of Jonson's 'pure realism'. Farther removed from his classical models, both incidents and characters in this play are freer from imitation of Plautus or Aristophanes than those in other comedies of Jonson. Most local in atmosphere, the play is a realistic portrayal of the annual Fair held at Smithfield, London, on every twenty-fifth day of August. It shows how well was Jonson acquainted with every corner and habit of Smithfield.

Stinking and dirty and populated by rogues and cheats, the Fair provides a typically realistic locale. The Fair is at once the scene and subject of the play. The visitors to the Fair - the

8. The Fair, a chartered resort for all the gross pleasures of the capital, was founded in the 12th century and its decay and final dissolution took place 730 years later. Morley's *Memories of Bartholomew Fair and Walfrids Fairs Past and Present* are useful to get at the history of the Bartholomew Fair.
clothiers, toysellers, gingerbread and pig women, ballad singers, cut-purses, freaks, quack doctors, Puritans and showmen - still more numerous than the clients of the Alchemist - are closely studied from life, and are representative of the various classes and disposition of the civic world.

It looks as though Bartholomew Fair was a dramatisation of 'conny-catching' material of the Elizabethan and Jacobean prose pamphlets by Greene, Nashe and Dekker. Such episodes as the cutting of Bartholomew Cokes' purses, the tobacco taking, the wandering madman's appearances, while also displaying London's low-life, demonstrate the criminal techniques and the depravity of petty criminals, prostitutes and fairground booth holders. Besides, "the densely physical, strongly visual language of the low-life characters gives conviction to episodes which are, plainly enough, absolutely conventional to the 'genre' and had been the stock-in-trade of the pamphleteers before Elizabeth died".9

The play furnishes a lively picture, the hurly-burly and rough roaring merriment of the Fair inimitable in its varied realism. The scenes are typical of London low-life compressed and heightened as it naturally would be in the annual merrymaking of Bartholomew Fair. For instance, we find Leatherhead, the horse-courser and Joan Trash, the ginger-bread woman, indulging in quarrelling. Leatherhead complains:

Doe you heare, Sister Trash, lady o' the Basket?
Sit farther with your ginger-bread-progeny there, and
hinder not the prospect of my shop, or I'll ha' it
proclaim'd i' the Fayre, what stuffe they are made on.

Trash immediately retorts:

Why, what stuffe are they made on, Brother Leatherhead?
nothing but what's wholesome, I assure you.

But Leatherhead brags out:

Yes stale bread, rotten egges, musty ginger, and
dead honey, you know.

(II, ii, 2-10)

Witnessing this spirited quarrelling we feel as if we were in
a busy bustling fair.

The intensely popular nature of the subject of the play
seems to have dictated to Jonson that it should be a prose play
'par excellance'. The play is written wholly in prose remarkable
for its clearness and flexibility. It is admirably suited to
the different speakers and imitative of the manners of the time.
It is fully animated, idiomatic and precise. And, what is more,
"there is music in Jonson's prose, but it is a music of brusque
dissonances and irregular rhythms, which those addicted to the
clear, regular, euphonious music of Shakespeare must sensitise
themselves in new ways to hear rightly".10

Jonson had a first-hand knowledge of the Fair. He had
gone to the real Bartholomew Fair a great many times and had
taken a vast and critical delight in its goings-on, enjoying its

dirt, its noise, its vulgarity and its bounce. Hence he could heartily enter into the characters and talk their very language. He had an intimate knowledge of those characters and of their manner of life as well as of their speech. Naturally enough, the dialogue is a perfect dictionary of technical speech of all sorts, from the slang of the horse-courser and of the ginger-bread-woman to the cant of the Puritan.

The language of each speaker is magnificently alive. The local life of each speech is found in its colloquial rhythm as well as in its imagery. We find Leatherhead, the Hobby-Horse-seller and toy man, make business crying out:

what do you lacks, Gentlemen, what is 't you lacks? a fine Horse? a Lyon? a Bull? a Beare? a Dog, or a Cat? an excellent fine Bartholomew-bird? or an instrument? what is't you lacks?

(II, v, 4-7)

Thus the horse-courser talks so exactly like a horse-courser down to the minute jargon of his trade. Ursula, the pig-woman, enters complaining the hardships of her vocation:

Fie vpon't: who would ware out their youth, and prime thus, in roasting of pigges, that had any coholer voca-
tion? Hell's a kind of cold cellar to't, a very fine vault, O'my conscience!

(II, ii, 42-45)

In Busy's talk the typical puritan cant is vibrating. He reacts to Mrs. Littlewit's visiting the Fair to eat roast pig:

Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnall disease, or appetite, incident to women; and as it is carnall and incident, it is naturall, very naturall: New pigge, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing, and may be longed for, and so consequently eaten; it may be eaten; very exceeding well eaten; but in the Favre, and
as a Bartholomew-pig, it cannot be eaten, for the very
calling it a Bartholomew-pigge and to eat it so, is a
spice of Idolatry, and you make the Favre, no better then
one of the high Places. This I take it, is the state
of the question. A high place.

(I, vi, 48-57)

In this long set speech the mind of the Puritan is clearly
expressed. As in the hands of Racine and the mature Shakespeare,
here "the speaker appears to utter his mind directly, so that
the speech mirrors the mental process as it develops". Thus,
in the words of Jonson himself, "the language" employed in the
play "savours of Smithfield, the Booth, and Pig-broth, or
prophanenessse" ('The Induction', l. 150-151).

Jonson, in this manner, presents a most vivid picture of
contemporary London life, providing an extremely rich field
for the study of English social history. Vibrating with the
very life of Bartholomew Fair, the play has 'Hogarth-come to
life' in it. The author, as it were, takes the reader to the
Fair. And "part of the pleasure for the first audience must
have been that shock of recognition as they saw their own
great Fair put vividly and realistically upon the stage of Hope
Theatre at Bankside in October 1614, only a couple of months
after the Fair itself had been held as usual at Smithfield".

Bartholomew Fair sufficiently answers Jonson's intention
'to sport with humane follies'. Jonson, by now, not only

11. Harold F. Brooks, "Marlowe and Early Shakespeares",
Christoher Marlowe (Mermaid Critical Commentaries), ed.
Brian Morris; p.86.
12. Michael Jamieson, ed. Three Comedies (A Penguin International
Edition), 'Introduction', p.26,
collected a great many more things to be satiric about but knew much better how to achieve the kind of realistic satirical comedy he had been trying to write in 1598. Besides, the Fair itself - with its varied gross appeals to the senses, its wealth of physical detail, its cheats and dupes, its bright shells and hollow centres, its dialects and slang - offers Jonson tremendous scope for his satire. Exasperated by the demands of the groundlings and exhausted by the rivalry of Marston, Dekker and other poetasters and professionals, Jonson, though committed himself 'to sport with humane follies' only, was led to adopt the idiom of the Silver Age, and to address himself in the tone of Martial and Tacitus. And, in Volpone, the 'follies' attacked almost border on 'tragedies'.

But the satire in Bartholomew Fair is not that found in Jonson's previous work. In the earlier plays he lapsed not infrequently into long descriptions and minute character-analysis as he defined the follies he sought to expose with a scholar's exactness. The satire in the present play does not brag itself. For, the dramatist is now more reticent and of better temper in the standing matters of quarrel with his public. This is evident not only from the indenture between him and the public set forth in 'The Induction' but also from Justice Overdo's general invitation to supper at the close of the play:

I invite you home, with me to my house, to supper; I will have none to fear to go along, for my intents are 'Ad correctionem, non ad destructionem; Ad medificandum non ad diruendum: so lead on.

(V, vi, 119-119)

All the same, there is an earnest attempt to correct the
extravagant 'humours' and reconcile the contentious natures of men. The play is at once a satire on the puritans and on the stage trashery they condemned. Jonson had dealt with their financial and political aspirations in The Alchemist. Now he fastens his attention upon the simpler unpolitical ambitions of the Puritan brethren. In the figures and actions of Win-the-Fight, Dame Purecraft, and Zeal-of-the-land Busy are forcefully represented, hypocrisy, gluttony, superstitiousness, and contempt for classical antiquity, or for any learning other than that of scriptural revelation.

Win-the-Fight is hypocritical, vain and frivolous. She is so well-versed in hypocrisy that she tells her husband that she has no need to cut her laces in order to play the hypocrite. She says:

No I'll not make me unready for it. I can be Hypocrite enough, though I were neuer so straight lac'd.

(I, v, 160-161)

At the Fair she turns her thoughts even in the direction of lechery. She easily adapts herself to the idea of taking twenty lovers "and be honest still, that were fine sport" (IV, v, 44)

Dame Purecraft, the sanctified widow, is superstitious, hypocritical and avaricious. When she discovers Quarlous, disguised as a madman, she thinks in terms of marrying him because she has been told by the 'cunning-man' that she must marry a madman or run mad herself. But unable to secure the madman
through her hypocritical piety, she tells him about the wealth she has amassed through her dexterous practice as a "wilfull holy widow" (V, ii, 48-74).

Busy is made to display himself as the most arrant hypocrite of them all. The gentleman who considers eating pig in the Fair to be 'a carnall disease' immediately changes his mind, himself smitten with the savoury temptation of pig at the Fair. He says that the pig

may be eaten, and in the Fayre ... in a Booth, the tents of the wicked, the place is not much, not very much, we may be religious in midst of the prophane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth, with sobriety, and humblenesse.

(I, vi, 70-74)

We find Busy in the Fair in pompous orations against every frivolity. To him long hair is 'an Ensine of pride, a banner'; a bottle of ale is a 'drinke of Sathan's, a diet-drinke of Satan's' and tobacco is a smoke used to keep people "in mist and error". He reaches the peak of his oratory in his blatant denunciation of the puppet play. To him Leatherhead, the puppet-master, is "the proud Nebuchadnezzar of Faire" because he sets up idols for the "children to fall downe to, and worship" (III, vi, 56-59). Thus, Jonson's satiric lash descends with full force upon Busy.

The plot of Bartholomew Fair is so organised as to expose implicitly not merely the hypocrisy, gluttony and avarice of the Puritans, the folly of the obviously foolish Cokes, and Littlewit, but the more harmful folly of the lawgivers - Wasp,
Busy and Overdo. Wasp is exposed as a master without self-mastery, Busy as a preacher without sense or sincerity, and Overdo as a judge without judiciousness or tolerance. The play ends with every one chastened by experience but not otherwise punished.

Then, *Bartholomew Fair* presents precisely such 'persons' as Jonson's typical 'Comœdie would choose'. The characters "are not mere warped or eccentric individuals, like the 'Humours', more or less at odds with their milieu, but the very growth of the soil". What supplants 'Humours' approximately is 'vapours' which is used sixty-nine times in the play. Jonson himself suggests this in a marginal note:

*Here they continue their game of vapours, which is nonsensical. Every man to oppose the last man that spoke: whether it concern'd him, or no.*

(IV, iv, 27-28)

First of all, the characters in *Bartholomew Fair* are remarkable for their very unusual great number. It contains a greater number of characters than have before or after been brought together within the compass of one single piece. Nevertheless


15. There are thirty speaking characters besides many supernumeraries. The large number of characters in *Bartholomew Fair* has often been adversely commented on. But the popular London Fair could have hardly been presented with less. The reduction of characters, then, would be at the cost of the verisimilitude of the play.
all the personages are drawn with painstaking exactness as well as with unflagging animation. Almost every character is worked out with elaborate detail. They are admirably studied and grouped together with consummate insight into dramatic effect.

Closely studied from life, most of the characters surpass in keeness of observation, and wealth and precision of detail any previous creation of Jonson's. The portraits in the previous plays are incisive, but in *Bartholomew Fair* they are made more vivid and animating through careful attention to individual frailties. Naturally they are richer in characteristic traits and more intimately true to their place and time than the characters in the earlier plays. To take but a few examples, Bartholomew Cokes is a better country gull than Stephen who is almost a caricature. Busy is a finished picture whereas Ananias is a lively sketch. Surly the honest man cannot be compared in significance with the equally luckless detector of 'enormities', Overdo. The women characters are no less real. The puritanical Dame Purecraft and the bestial Ursula stand out clearly and there is plenty of humour in the drawing of both Win-the-fight and Alice.

Regarding the 'profit and delight' that the 'Comedy of Humours' should provide, *Bartholomew Fair* reveals a new maturity in the playwright. Jonson's primary purpose here is not, as Gregory Smith thinks, "to convey the impression of a fair with its bustling confused humanity". Jonson certainly has

a more significant purpose. With the maturity of mind now attained, he appears to be interested in projecting, of course, quite implicitly, his own view of life. Towards this and the setting of the Fair seems particularly to be a happy choice. For, it provides an exquisite image which dramatizes the feeling Jonson had about life.

He projects a profound view of life through Troubleall's perpetual question - "Have you a warrant?" He goes on asking others:

I question nothing, pardon me. I do only hope you have warrant, for what you do...

(IV, 1, 14-15)

To witness one or two encounters of Troubleall, a former clerk who has been dismissed from his post by Adam Overdo and has run mad upon the conceit, first with Edgeworth:

THO: Whither goe you? Where's your warrant?
EDG: Warrant for what, Sir?
THO: For what you goe about ...

(IV, 11, 2-4)

Then with Quarlous and Winwife:

THO: Have you any warrant for this, Gentlemen?
QVAR: WIN - w. Ha!
THO: There must be a warrant had, believe it.
WIN - w: For what?
THO: For whatsoever it is, any thing indeede, no matter what.

(IV, iii, 71-76)
What is more, Troubleall insists that the warrant has to be signed by none other than Overdo:

If you have Justice Overdo's warrant, 'tis well: you are safe; that is the warrant of warrants. I'll not give this button, for any man's warrant else.

(IV, i, 19-21)

Jonson, then, through Troubleall is asking a most devastating question "where is your warrant?" That is, by whose warrant, whose permission you do what you do? In other words, Jonson is questioning as to who is responsible for the folly and evil we see around us? He gives the answer too. Since the warrant has got to be signed by Overdo, who symbolises a well-intentioned man, we ourselves are responsible for the folly and evil in the world. And we must search our hearts and minds for the warrant.

Besides, through the characterisation of Justice Overdo, Jonson seems to warn us that even the best of warrants is not in itself sufficient to insure right action in the world. When, at last, Justice Overdo discovers himself and prepares to judge the 'enormities' he has observed, he is simply dumbfounded and humbled to discover the respectable Mrs. Littlewit to be a bawd, his favourite Edgeworth a cutpurse and, to cap it all, his own wife a drunken incipient whore. Caught up in the vicious circle he himself is beaten. Thus, the discoverer and chastiser of enormities is brought to a realisation that what he calls 'enormities' are what other people call life. Overdo, therefore, capitulates not to the logic of a puppet but to the good sense of Quarleus:
... remember you are but *Adam*, *Flesh*, and *blood*! You have your frailty, forget your other name of *Querdo*, ...  

(V, vi, 96-98)

Thus, Jonson leaves us with the reflection that we are 'but *Adam*, *Flesh*, and *blood*'. "We have entered, in the Fair, an underworld of amoral human energies, and brought back the sense that, in a strict count, none does offend, none, more than another, and that the recognition of that fact is a more secure basis for an un-self-righteous morality than those moral schemes which working 'a priori', fail to come to terms with flesh and blood".  

Jonson himself who had travelled through the carnival of life was no less persuaded than Overdo that the world was full of folly and self-deception and knavery. But by the time he came to write *Bartholomew Fair* his own self-righteousness seemed to have begun to weaken. Consequent on this phenomenon Jonson arrives at a philosophical tolerance in *Bartholomew Fair*. He seems to have realized that life is full of irony and the good-natured get into as much trouble as the rascals. He, however, achieves a kind of moral health through making Overdo emerge triumphant in good-natured humility. He is, as Quarlous says "*Adam*, *Flesh*, and *blood*" (V, vi, 97) and this truth is brought home to him in the Fair. No doubt, Overdo will certainly stick to his guns but his vision will be clearer. Jonson's ultimate message is that compassion may, after all, become 'a justice'.

Humiliated Adam Overdo confesses:

I will be more tender hereafter. I see compassion may become a justice, though it be a weakness, I confess; and nearer a vice, then virtue.

(IV, i, 83-84)

Thus the speciality of **Bartholomew Fair** is that, unlike other plays of Jonson, it not merely ridicules man's eccentricities and castigates him for his follies, but also celebrates man's humanity and reconciles him to his limitations. At the end, each of us could join all the fallen in saying 'I too am Adam, Flesh and blood'.

Further, a celebration of a rite of summer on a large scale, **Bartholomew Fair** has an infinite scope for mirth. Jonson is here in the best of humours. His 'whip of steel' is laid aside for gusts of Rabelaisian laughter. The play largely bears the character of a holiday riot of the comic muse. It gives us a conception of the Elizabethan forerunner of a present London bank-holiday.

A festive comedy, the play has infinite deal of humour. The humour of incident and action is as delicious as the humour of characterisation. The very sight of the laden Numps brings roars of laughter to the audience. The perpetual punishing of the innocent Justice is excessively mirth-making. The constant coming and going of the afflicted Trouble all with his perpetual question, 'where is your warrant?', is amusing on the stage. The overthrow of Busy by the argumentative puppet
is delightfully effective. Then, Ursula, who is "all fire and fat", watering the ground with her sweat as she goes about "like a garden pot", causes much amusement.

Again, for the most part, the play is given over to natural and rollicking fun - spontaneous and varied. This varies from the rough horse-play of Wasp's beating the Justice and the tragical destruction of Mrs. Overdo's French hood, to the highly respectable wooing of Grace Wellborn. The action moves from one side-splitting situation to another. The project of making a wealthy match devised by Winwife and Quarlous in pursuit of which they are friendly rivals is highly comical. The very visit of Cokes and his party and of Busy and his party to the Fair provokes laughter. Overdo himself, seeing to discover the 'enormities' of the Fair, offers any amount of pleasure. The puppet show at the close contributes much to the comic effect of the play. We may even take Bartholomew Fair as we would take Bunyan's Vanity Fair as a miscellany of entertaining rogues and strange toys for afternoon pastime. Thus, the moving panorama of the Fair with its entertainments and its 'enormities', the bustling action and the crowd of first-rate character parts, all combine to make it good theatre.

Even from the point of view of its plot-structure, Bartholomew Fair strikes a new note. We find in its structure an interesting variation on the quickening and lengthening plot which we find in The Alchemist and in much of Volpone. Jonson
begins in *Bartholomew Fair* with what are to be components in
the action, but are not at first combined in a discernible
plot. Jonson then sets going a whirlpool of action which they
are more and more drawn into until they are all grouped round
in it. What Jonson, as Chaucer in the arrangement of the
portraits in the 'Prologue', does in the construction of
*Bartholomew Fair* "is to get away from 'mathematic form', from
the simply logical and systematic, so as to create original
form, living and in the full sense artistic."18

*Bartholomew Fair* is a panoramic structure. It is looser
but more comprehensive than Jonson's other great comedies.
Though there are three separable intrigues in motion in *Endoene*
they all have a similar pattern of development and are under
the control of three intriguers. But, five or six actions
seem always to be ripening simultaneously in *Bartholomew Fair*.
There are more than a dozen intriguers and no single pattern
of development will fit all the kinds of action which the fair
breeds. The play's principal virtue lies in its controlled
complexity, in the truly remarkable variety and richness of
character and incident that Jonson has managed to shape into a
unified work of art.

Notwithstanding the diversity, the looseness of structure
and the complexity, there are evidences of careful workmanship

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of the Portraits in the Prologue*, p. 67.
in *Bartholomew Fair*. It is often repeated that the play is practically or entirely without a plot.\(^1\) If plot is to be conceived of in a broader sense as "the organising principle that accounts for and connects the separate parts of the play in the actual form in which they appear",\(^2\) then, we have a plot in *Bartholomew Fair*. The people who make up the fair and, consequently, the special dramatic world in which the action takes place, and the outsiders who visit this world constitute the plot of the play.

Also, it is not as though the play wanted 'nothing but a plan'. It does have a definite plan. The structure of the play appears to be casual but the underlying design is always clear. It is slow to reveal itself - the pieces appear at first without relation to a structure and then as more and more they are set in motion, their vicissitudes build up into a plot or design.

The first Act is essentially expository. It is almost a prologue to the four acts that follow. It introduces one segment of the large cast of characters - the uxorious Littlewit with his harmless wife and her hypocrite mother, the cynics, Quarlous and Winwife, and the two law-givers, Wasp, the tutor,


and Zeal-of-the Land Busy, the hypocritical Puritan. Though these are already united through kinship, friendship, business, or Puritanical religious zeal, they are really linked by one thing - their strong desire to go to the Fair. They are presented in ones and twos. The act culminates in the entrance of Busy.

Justice Overdo, who enters at the beginning of the second Act, provides a link between the first and second Acts. In the second Act we move to the Fair. The characters of Act I enter the microcosm of the Fair which represents a different moral world or level of reality. The people of the Fair, though poor, dishonest, ill-educated, and less restrained than the visitors, are more frank about their physical needs and their dishonest way of life. At the centre of the Fair and of the comedy stands Ursula, the pig woman. As the comedy progresses, the people of Act I meet and mingle with the folk of the Fair. As the action develops, frank animal appetite reveals the true nature of the visitors' spiritual and intellectual shortcomings of hypocrisy, folly, and pride.

The puppet play, "Hero and Leander", in Act V forms the climax of the continuously developing action. The basic function of this play-within-the-play is to bring all the characters together. As J.J. Enck has pointed out, "the puppet performance has a logical, almost inevitable, place in the progression of Bartholomew Fair", and "rounds out the play in exhibiting what
the Smithfield men and women are not".21 The dramatic function of the puppet play is to present a further level of reality which reflects, and distorts, the preceding one. The distorting mirror of the puppet play reduces life to miniature size, as the 'reality' of the play-world opens out to a further level of illusion that makes no claim at all to being human. "The audience is made to identify with the actors who are watching the puppet play because they share the experience of being spectators and because the puppets, speaking doggeral verse and like bad actors offering no illusion of life, make the world around them on a stage appear more real".22

The play ends genially. The two authoritarian figures, the Puritan and the Justice are discomfited. With his prodigious rhetorical tirade against the theatre, Busy is out-manoeuvred in debate by Lantern's puppet, and 'retires crest-fallen'. Overdo is silenced when one of the unmasked 'prostitutes' in the Fair turns out to be his own wife. The play comes to a close as Overdo invites all the characters back to his house for supper. The end of the play is good-humoured and forgiving, prolonging the recurring holiday-spirit of the piece. Thus, an analysis of the structure shows Jonson's mastery of dramatic design in which one plane of reality is ingeniously enclosed within another.

Both on the linear and the thematic levels the play has a unity of its own kind. Ursula’s booth, characterised by large congregation of people, bawdry and thievery, huge consumption of roast pigs and ale, vapours, enormity, justice, folly, pissing and the burning of the pig-woman, is the linear centre of the play. Once the rogues and gulls enter the Fair all virtually converge in Ursula’s booth before they appear anywhere else. The booth is headquarters for Edgeworth, the cutpurse, and Whit and his associate pimps. Also, it is the sole object of Mrs. Littlewit’s desires as well as the longings of Busy, although he will not admit it. In this manner, the action becomes all of a piece in Ursula’s booth.

The thematic centre of the play, however, is the ‘warrant’ which the madman, Troubleall, demands of almost all the characters. Troubleall’s main function is to trouble everybody with his embarrassing question, ‘Have you a warrant for what you doe?’ He is obsessed with the necessity of documentary sanction for even the slightest action so much so he

... will not eate a crust nor drinke a little, nor make him in his apparell, ready. His wife, Sirreuerence, cannot get him make his water, or shift his shirt, without his warrant.

(IV, i, 59-61)

In the absurd ‘humour’ of Troubleall we have a grand, extravagant comic conceit which serves as the most significant unifying device in the play. Troubleall intervenes crucially in several of the threads of plot, settling the dispute between Grace’s lovers,
reeing Overdo and Busy from the stock, and enabling Quarlous to cheat Overdo and marry the rich widow Purecraft.

The greatest achievement of the 'Comedy of Humours', Bartholomew Fair thus represents the culmination of Jonson's dramatic art. The play is undoubtedly a supreme effort of Jonson's dramatic genius, a masterpiece where the richest humour and most vivid realism combine with brilliant satire and profound view of life. Furthermore, the vitality and the exuberance native to the Fair itself combined with tolerance, sympathy and humanity that lie at the heart of the play make it unique among Jonson's comedies. In The Alchemist we see the finished artist in comedy emerging, and with Bartholomew Fair his mastery is complete.

Bartholomew Fair may yield its fruits slowly but the longer one dwells on it the more richly one is rewarded. The wealth of incident and character makes the play rather difficult to read and follow, but once the play is put on the stage the difficulty disappears. The whole play is full of colour, movement and excitement and it comes wonderfully alive on the stage. Perhaps, it would be even more successful as a film. However, through its sensuous diction, the individual syntax and rhythm of its speech, and the action which is rendered at once naturalistic in detail and extravagant in effect, the world of the Fair comes pungently alive to us over these three hundred and fifty years. The play, thus, remains the most signal triumph of Jonson's difficult and original dramatic art.
CONCLUSION

A perfect expositor of the movement of the 'Angry Young Men' towards satirical and realistic portrayal of life in drama, Ben Jonson rebelled against the romantic excesses of the age. In the midst of that luxuriant romanticism he emerged essentially as a native classicist with the definite purpose of effecting a reform of theatrical taste and convention both by his precept and example on the lines of what he assimilated from the ancients. With his many-sided acquirements, embracing all that was best in the classical as well as in the contemporary writers, he was eminently fitted for the self-appointed task of reforming and regenerating the Elizabethan drama.

Strongly disapproving of the conventional notion of considering comedy and tragedy as fundamentally opposed to each other, Jonson came forward with his 'Comedy of Humours' which is a combination of the classical and native traditions in the theatre. Here the point to bear in mind is that Jonson chose to exploit the theory of 'humours', ready to hand and familiar to his audience, in order to express his own theories of drama, and as he developed as a dramatist, the achievement of his plays transcended theoretical considerations more and more frequently.

Jonson's chief merit lies in drawing comedy from the improbable realms of romantic flights to the levels of ordinary existence - "deedes, and language such as men doe use". He breathes an air of realism into his comedy by making the setting, incident,
character, and dialogue contemporary with the times. None the less, Jonson is not a literal-minded transcriber of mere fact. In his plays there is an interplay between realism and fantasy which gives them the unity and the universality of great art.

More than any contemporary playwright Jonson brilliantly succeeds in projecting 'an image of the times' - the theatrical world, the non-dramatic poetry, the court life, the scholarship and the spirit of the Renaissance, besides the variegated aspects of daily life - in his comedies. Yet, his vigorous intellectual grasp of the pageant of life combined with a trenchancy of language and control of dramatic form make his comedies appeal to all times. His plays, with all their powerful symbolic suggestions, come alive, or gain new life once they are experienced aesthetically.

Jonson also succeeds admirably well in his endeavour to make his comedy convey serious thought intermingled with an intelligent type of laughter, if not completely in his early plays but almost perfectly in his mature comedies. Achieving a harmonious fusion of 'profit and delight', comedy in his hands becomes a perfect communication between the author and the audience. However, Jonson is neither a doughty champion of didacticism nor a conventional moralist, but essentially a comic dramatist using didactic theory for literary and dramatic purposes.

In keeping with his didactic attitude, Jonson is determined to "sport with human follies" in his comedy. With his conception
of satire as a medium for the essential dramatic art, Jonson stands apart from the formal satirists. Satire in his early plays is levelled mostly against individual vices and affectations. But, broadened in scope and increased in intensity, the satire in the middle and later plays is employed mainly against social vices - avarice, lechery, witchcraft and hypocritical puritanism - that were eating into the vitals of society of the day. Though all these vices are more vigorously and thoroughly satirised by Jonson than by others, he is unmistakably a comic artist. He works his satire into the character and the character into the plot so ingeniously that to remove satire is to remove plot and character. Jonson's relentlessness is, therefore, born of his intellectual uprightness as well as of his artistic integrity.

It is not Jonson's intention to body forth such full-blooded and life-like personages as step out of the pages of Shakespeare, but "persons, such as (his characteristic) Comedie would chuse" to depict, namely, fools, gallants, knaves, dupes and dippers, sharpers and schemers and loose women, in which attempt he astonishingly succeeds. In the study of Jonson's art of comic characterisation, however, the theory of 'humours' should not be over-worked so as to mean that all his characters are of 'humours' type. Even in the early plays the 'humour' is not simply a type, and in the middle and later plays the 'humour' definition fails to account for the total effect produced. Jonson is also not incapable of producing immortal, individualistic
characters like Bobadill and Busy when the occasion demands. In their own way, Jonson's characters are as effective as of any other great dramatists.

In his endeavour to find a proper structure for his comedy, Jonson effects some experiments in his early plays, and ultimately achieves an organic form which has at its base a concern with physical as well as symbolic situations. However indebted is Jonson to the classical and Morality traditions, the form he finally achieves is distinctly his own - 'a particular kind by it selfe'. Critics often question whether Jonsonian structure is linear or thematic. But Jonsonian structure can be said to be at once linear and thematic - two levels of meaning being carried on a single action, each complementing the other.

In its constant evolution, Jonson's 'Comedy of Humours' reaches its perfection in Bartholomew Fair, 'a new sufficient play'. The play is "new" in its fresh subject-matter, in its scheme as well as in its very tone. The play is "sufficient" in that it is a perfect fulfilment of the "Comedy of Humours". However perfect the other masterpieces are in and by themselves, it is certainly in Bartholomew Fair that Jonson's dramatic art reaches its culmination, attaining as it does the acme of perfection.

It is no easy matter to pass an impartial final judgment on the dramatic achievement of Jonson. However, we may say that Jonson, on the whole, had done what he set out to do. He
succeeded well in his attempt to make English comedy realistic and purposeful. None the less, led by his artistic sense, he did make departures from his critical tenets now and then. But this does not necessarily mean that his critical utterances were insincere. It only means that his theory was not complete enough to cover all his practices.

There is no point in condemning Jonson for what he never set out to do. He deliberately imposed, though not always bound by them, a great many limitations on his art as a dramatist by his insistence on the preservation of the three classical Unities as well as the Unity of tone, by his advocacy of realism in setting, character, and speech, by his acceptance of the theory of 'humours' as the basis of characterisation, and by his purpose of moral elevation through satire. Hence the so-called deficiencies - absence of charm and colourful portrayal of characters, lack of appeal to sentiment or emotion, as critics generally point out - are not in truth deficiencies at all, but the outcome of a principle of deliberate exclusion.

Nevertheless, the frequent comparison of Jonson with Shakespeare has got in the way of a full appreciation of his success as a practitioner of the 'Comedy of Humours'. He has been, more often than not, compared with Shakespeare invariably to his entire disadvantage. This method is essentially unwelcome inasmuch as the schools of art which Shakespeare and Jonson represent are so thoroughly incompatible, although each is a master of his chosen type. Though the accident of history
placed Jonson in the same period as Shakespeare, Jonson's mode of drama is properly and intentionally different from Shakespeare's. One must necessarily grasp this point to begin enjoying Jonson.

It is, therefore, not with Shakespeare that Jonson must be compared, but with Aristophanes, Menander and Terence among the ancients, and among the moderns with Molière. With his highly stylised and disciplined writing, Jonson is not in the tradition of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Browning and Dylan Thomas, but in the more critical and satirical one of Congreve, Pope, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw and T.S. Eliot.

A just appreciation of Jonson's achievement demands from the reader a good knowledge of the age in which he lived and wrote. We must see him as a contemporary unbiased by time. Jonson also requires a careful and close study, and a certain intellectual activity, rather 'intelligent saturation in his work as a whole'. Above all, one requires some notion of the underlying principles of the playwright's art for a full appreciation of his achievement. For, Jonson, the conscious artist, seems to build his theory always a little in advance of his experience, so that the experience is moulded by the theory rather than the other way. The theory, on the whole, was probably beneficial to his practice.

If Shakespeare marked the height to which the drama of the age attained, Jonson exercised the more potent influence on what
came after. He was the first to endeavour to relate practice to principle. Naturally enough, he was not only the arbiter of his own age but gave laws which afforded sanction and precedent to generations of successors. The point, however, to be noted is that he enforced rules only after he had convinced himself of their contemporary relevance. Again, his influence was rather intensively provocative than absolute. Furthermore, it was general rather than direct or personal.

The influence of Jonson on his age was clearly an influence of restraint. He invited the attention of his age to classical tradition, as its discipline provided for the immediate necessities of the English drama. By his own example he enforced a respect for more orderly and precise craftsmanship. He first showed his age how the rich abundance and variety of incident and character could be secured even under conditions of an art which excluded all aid from legend and romance and from the prodigal use of space and time. He also showed how the jest of comedy could be had without any stirring or sensational plot. Jonson thus set a standard of literary excellence not recognized before his time.

Jonson's comedies were imitated as soon as they appeared. For instance, his Every Man in His Humour (1598) was followed by the anonymous play, Every Woman in Her Humour, (acted by 1600) Beaumont and Fletcher studied in his school as testified by the latter's The Woman Hater. In its sinew and restraint Beaumont's blank verse seems to bear an impress of Jonson's. Then, Chapman,
Marston and Middleton profited from Jonson's ideal of restraint, of considerate workmanship, and of his constructive originality. Massinger and Shirley owed something to Jonson especially in their shrewd penetrating observation of manners. Of later dramatists, Nathaniel Field, Richard Brome, Randolph, Nabbes, and May appear to have employed Jonson's methods and written plays in his manner. As a matter of fact, all realistic comedy that followed Jonson can be said to owe itself to him in some respect or other.

Jonson's influence on the non-dramatic literature of his day was, perhaps, even greater. Jonson, who survived Shakespeare for over twenty years, drew about him a school of young poets and playwrights who were 'sealed' of the 'Tribe of Ben'. They affectionately called him 'Father', and liked to call themselves 'Sons of Ben'. They attempted the drama as well as the lyric, and the occasional verse of their dear master.

It was, however, reserved for the age of Dryden to realise to the full the assimilated classical ideals Jonson had championed. Jonson's 'Comedy of Humours' extended itself into the 'Comedy of Manners'. His satirically heightened picture of contemporary life handled with a restraint and finish survived on the stage after the Restoration in the comedies of Davenant, Dryden, Etherege and Vanbrugh.

Jonson's influence as a dramatist has been felt in the Novel as well. Constantly read, his plays seem to have encouraged
in the field of fiction, a study of the absurdities of character and the incongruities of manners. Fielding and Smollett can be said to be conscious of the incentive of Jonson's plays. There is a perceptible trace of Jonson in Dickens, who knew his plays and himself acted Bodadill, not only in the subject-matter but in method of creating character. There are specific resemblances between Zeal-of-the-land Busy and Stiggins. Further, his comic invention is often strikingly Jonsonian in method and effect.

The satirical comedy of Jonson is recreated by Sheridan and Oscar Wilde. Especially characters like Sir Anthony Absolute, Lydia Languish, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, (of The Rivals) Joseph Surface and Charles Surface (of The School for Scandal) very much remind us of Jonsonian types of 'humour' characters.

But the successor who most resembles Jonson is George Bernard Shaw. Jonson's influence is discernible not only in Shaw's preference for lively intellectualized talk over action, or the portrayal of emotion, but in such things as the method of creating characters with an emphasis on the external detail and the phrases of colloquial speech. Besides being most self-conscious artists, both give a full canvas of boldly-drawn images in rapid and interesting movement. Again, both, within definite limitations, have the same certainty of touch and the knack of setting their characters moving with a brilliant liveliness that seldom fails.
In so far as Jonson is a realist and the motive and interest of his plays social, he may be claimed to be the founder of modern English Comedy. His fine sense of form and love of solid construction, combined with a great vitality and creative vigour give his plays a unique position. The discipline that a thorough assimilation of Jonson's work invariably imposes, is, perhaps, a special need of all times in the realm of drama. What Jonson said of Shakespeare we may as well say of Jonson himself that

'He is not of an age, but for all time'.