PREFACE

Jonson's theories and practices of drama, no doubt, have sporadically been touched upon by critics like Baskerville, Gregory Smith, and particularly by Elisabeth Woodbridge and Helena Watts Baum. But then, Baskerville is concerned mainly with the theory of 'humours', limiting his study to Jonson's early comedies only. Gregory Smith just casually states Jonson's theory of comedy, but does not examine the plays in the light of the theory. Woodbridge has confined herself to character treatment and structural features, and Baum to the didactic and the satiric in Jonson's comedy. That is to say, no single critic so far seems to have devoted his or her whole work to a study of all the theories and practices of Jonson's comedy.

The aim of the present thesis is to make a close and objective study of Jonson's dramatic theories and practices related to his comedies thereby showing that Jonson is essentially a dramatic artist. It is hoped that an analysis of the interrelationship of his dramatic theory and practice would help appreciate his achievement in comedy better. It is, perhaps, not correct to say that Jonson the dramatic practitioner was cramped by his own theories. For, a consciously-practised theory of art need not necessarily spoil a good artist nor damp inspiration, but rather canalizes it. Besides, theories are all the more necessary at moments when old traditions
break up and when all is in a flux exactly as was the case when Jonson appeared on the scene. Again, the deliberateness with which Jonson wrote is not necessarily uninspired, nor his use of literary tradition necessarily uncreative. The fact that Jonson is a theorist and a critic need not preclude him from being a great artist also.

It is not as though Jonson wrote comedies because he had a definite theory about comedy. His earnest desire to analyse and think about his writing does not make him a desiccated theorist. One should not, however, too readily assume that Jonson's dramatic practice squared rigidly with his critical precepts. For, the mere culling of all the lines from the Prologues, Epilogues, Inductions, and critical inter-act choruses of his plays in which he expresses his dramatic theory, will not give quite an adequate conception of his actual work. This is especially true of his comedies where his artistic sense sometimes compelled him to depart, as a practitioner, from some of his own principles as a theorist. Jonson, then, is essentially a dramatic artist, and his dramatic theory is only a means to achieve artistic excellence. Once we approach Jonson from this angle, he can be fully appreciated, and we get a proper perspective of his craftsmanship.

The work is divided into nine chapters. The first chapter is by way of a general introduction to Jonson the playwright, the emphasis being on the social and literary climate of the 1590s, his reaction to the state and condition of the contemporary
drama, his independent attitude to classicism and his intellectual outfit for the self-appointed task of reforming the Elizabethan drama. The second chapter deals with Jonson's theories of comedy and tragedy testifying to his endeavour to achieve a harmonious fusion of the classical and native traditions in the theatre. In the third and fourth chapters, Jonson's work has been examined from the point of view of its realism indicating, however, that he is not a narrow transcriber of mere fact. The fifth chapter is intended to bring out the didactic and the aesthetic element in his comedies while maintaining that Jonson is not a conventional moralist, but essentially a comic dramatist using the didactic theory for literary and dramatic purposes. The sixth chapter seeks to present the satirical content of Jonson's comedies making it clear that his relentlessness is born of his intellectual indignation as well as of his artistic integrity. While the seventh chapter is concerned with Jonson's art of comic characterisation it is indicated that not all his characters are of 'humours' type, and that he is also capable of creating immortal, individualised characters when the occasion demands. In the next chapter an attempt is made to show how the structural unity of Jonson's comedies is at once linear and thematic or symbolic, two levels of meaning being carried on a single action, each complementing the other. The final chapter is devoted to a close and critical study of Bartholomew Fair; it is revealed that it is a perfect fulfilment of the 'Comedy of Humours', representing as it does the culmination of Jonson's dramatic art.
"There will be no end to Jonson studies because the wealth of his genius is inexhaustible" - this statement of a most recent critic, C.G. Thayer, is only endorsed by the common feeling that no commentary ever exhausts the work of a great creative artist. Hence hope for a rediscovery of Jonson's achievement in drama need not appear misplaced. It is as much out of this belief as out of my own interest in Jonson that I undertook the present study.

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to all those scholars and critics, whose writings I have drawn upon. They have not only enriched my understanding of Jonson's plays but also served as sources of inspiration. All quotations from Jonson's works are from Ben Jonson, ed. C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 Vols. (Oxford, 1925-52).

I am deeply beholden to Professor Harold F. Brooks, Professor John Russell Brown and Professor the Reverend W. Moelwyn Merchant for their kind suggestions and valuable criticisms in improving my thesis. I am particularly grateful to Professor Harold F. Brooks for his very painstaking critical guidance throughout the work.

It is with pleasure that I record here my deep sense of gratitude to my Professor and Director, Dr.M.V. Rama Sarma, Professor of English, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, but for whose affectionate care, constant encouragement and helpful guidance this work would not have been carried out.