

## 74 SHAKESPEARE AND ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

[BY MONTAGUE SUMMERS]

It is a fact beyond dispute that however excellent are learning, industry, and perspicuity—three vitally important qualities in any editor, critic, or biographer—the writer who in particular proposes to deal with Ben Jonson must, if he is going to do sufficient justice to this titanic figure, be also possessed of an intense and burning enthusiasm for his subject, an enthusiasm, indeed, which must never falter nor wane, but shall always be at white heat, unexhausted, glowing, sincere.

It is such a single enthusiasm, bordering but little upon this side of idolatry, that has kept alive with perennial freshness the pages of William Gifford. In spite of all his waspishness; his unkind and often unfair comments upon Malone, Aikin, Weber, Upton, and the rest; his textual liberties; his obvious limitations and occasional mistakes, this ardour it is which still maintains the name of Gifford in the forefront of the commentators upon Jonson, if not, indeed, as the very foremost of them all.

Professor Gregory Smith's recent work upon Johnson<sup>23</sup> is, as we have a right to expect, meticulously painstaking and unmistakably the result of no little thought and care. There is a considerable amount of detail presented with conscientious accuracy and orderly precision, if not with complete ease. All this as far as it goes is valuable, all this is to the good. But page after page passes by and nowhere does the writer seem to have been inspired by his subject. He approaches Jonson with academic reserve, almost harshly sometimes; he is, it may be argued, always exact, but he is, it cannot be denied, always severely cold.

It is curious to notice that we meet a precisely similar want of appreciation in another Jonsonian volume, a new edition of *Volpone*<sup>24</sup> hailing from America. In his Introduction, under the

<sup>23</sup> *English Men of Letters. Ben Jonson*, by G. Gregory Smith. London: Macmillan & Co, Limited, 1919. vi + 310 pp. 8s. net.

<sup>24</sup> *Yale Studies in English, LIX. Volpone, or The Fox*, by Ben Jonson. Edited with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary, by John D. Rea, Ph.D., Professor of English in Earlham College. New Haven: Yale University Press. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1919. 10s. 6d. net.

heading, 'C. Sources', Dr. Rea goes so far as to question the merit of Jonson's scholarship, and actually writes that his 'wide reading in the classical authors' has been 'considerably exaggerated'. At first sight such a pronouncement might seem one of those empty attempts at paradox of which a certain school of ultra-modern editorship is only too liberal and free, would-be revolutionary judgements whose aim, and indeed whose only quality, is to startle and amaze by their novel topsyturvydom. But we would hasten to add that Dr. Rea must be acquitted of any such fantastic tricks. He works out his theme at some length and with a certain ingenuity; but none the less very unconvincingly.

The text given by Dr. Rea is a reproduction of the edition of 1616, with the addition of the Commendatory Poems from the quarto of 1607. Four trifling typographical errors have been duly amended. Such a reprint was much needed, for it must be confessed that most modernized recensions, especially the Cunningham-Gifford and Mermaid texts, have blundered hopelessly in Act III, scenes 6 and 7, the most crucial moment of the whole drama, and by altering Jonson's script and writing in three changes of scene and various stage directions, have so obscured the issue that neither action nor intrigue is intelligible. The reader is mazed and left in wonderment. According to Jonson's own arrangement the whole episode of Bonario's introduction into Volpone's house and his rescue of Celia is perfectly natural, logical, and plain. Dr. Rea relates the stage-history of *Volpone* far too sparsely, and relies too much on Genest. There should have been independent research in this direction and fuller details. The notes, again, are entirely from Whalley, Gifford, and Cunningham, which is to say that almost everything of value is Gifford's.

The identification of Sir Politique Would-bee with Sir Henry Wotton is interesting and apparently well-founded. It may be mentioned that the comic episodes of Sir Politique Would-bee and Peregrine are infinitely more diverting upon the stage than is generally supposed by the reader. In fact, in order fully to appreciate the greatness of *Volpone* it is necessary to have witnessed an actual performance of this stupendous drama.

Of very different standing to Dr. Rea's *Volpone* and thoroughly welcome, is Mr. Percy Simpson's erudite and scholarly recension of *Every Man in His Humour*,<sup>25</sup> a happy earnest of the long-promised complete edition of Ben Jonson's Works under the care of the present editor and Professor C. H. Herford. Mr. Simpson, who modestly says that this edition is only in the nature of a pioneer volume, has in producing it kept three objects steadily in view—to print the authoritative text; to solve the problem of its date and composition; to illustrate its literary relations and its faithful picture of contemporary London. The play was first printed in Quarto in 1601, but Jonson revised it with extreme care for the Folio edition of his *Works* published in 1616, and this is the version here reproduced. As Mr. Simpson points out, the Folio, which was issued from the press of William Stansby, is one of the best-printed books of the seventeenth century and the text is authoritative. Moreover, the text of the present edition has been collated by Mr. G. Thorn Drury, a fact which is of itself a sure guarantee for the most meticulous exactitude. The detailed discussion of the Quarto and Folio, and of the Date of the Revision is informed with ripe scholarship and the nicest judgement; the essay upon The Portraiture of Humours is a most valuable contribution to this important subject, and we are glad to note that incidentally Mr. Simpson denies that Jonson gave 'serious attention' to *Euphues* or owed any direct debt to Lyly, Lodge, and Nashe. The critical apparatus, the notes, and illustrations are very full and of excellent quality. The only desideratum, indeed, and this it must be confessed is no small one, is a theatrical history of the comedy. We hope that this will be remedied in a second edition, especially as *Every Man in His Humour* so long kept the stage. Originally produced in 1598 by the Chamberlain's men, who were then acting at the Curtain Theatre in Shoreditch, it met with very great success. Revived immediately after the Restoration at the Theatre Royal, it was also played some twenty years later upon the amalgamation of the two Companies in 1682. In 1725 it was produced

<sup>25</sup> Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*. Edited by Percy Simpson. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1919. lxiv + 175 pp. 6s. net.

‘with alterations’ at Lincoln’s Inn Field with Quin as Old Kno’well, and Hippeasley, Hall, Spiller, Ryan, and Mrs. Bullock in the cast. In November 1751, Garrick having ‘revised’ the play—which revision included the writing in of a new scene at the end of the fourth Act—and having composed a special prologue for the occasion, produced Jonson’s comedy at Drury Lane, with himself as Kitely, Woodward Bobadill, Yates Brainworm, Palmer Well-bred, and Mrs. Ward Dame Kitely. The revival proved a triumphant success and Woodward in particular excelled as Bobadill; ‘since his time’, writes Doran, ‘the part of Bobadill has never been justly represented; it may be said to have died with him’. How Garrick looked as Kitely we know from Reynolds’s fine portrait. He dressed the character in a full Spanish cloak, a guarded satin doublet with slashed sleeves, and a fine lace collar of many points, with which costume he donned a short dark wig of fruzzed-out hair. During the latter half of the eighteenth century *Every Man in His Humour* was frequently seen at Drury Lane or Covent Garden, and it is the only play of Jonson’s included in Cumberland’s *British Drama*, fourteen volumes, 1817. In December 1800, at Drury Lane, Munden played Brainworm, John Fawcett, ‘a great, original, masterly comedian’, Bobadill, Emery Justice Clement, with George Frederick Cooke as Kitely, ‘considered his best character after Iago’. In June 1816, at the same house, Kitely was acted by Edmund Kean. In May 1825, at Covent Garden, W. Farren appeared as Brainworm to the Clement of Blanchard and the Mr. Matthew of Keeley. In September 1845 a private performance of *Every Man in His Humour* was given at Miss Kelly’s Theatre, Soho, under the direction of Charles Dickens, who himself sustained Bobadill. Other parts were acted by Douglas Jerrold, John Forster, Mark Lemon, John Leech, &c. On 17 May, 1848, George Cruikshank was seen as Cob. The success of this amateur revival ‘speedily led to a repetition, and afterwards to many other performances for public and charitable objects’.