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TOPIC- **JACOBEAN DRAMA**

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JACOBEAN DRAMA

After the death of queen Elizabeth in 1603 James-I ascended the throne. But while Elizabethan age is known for its fostering the varied forces of Renaissance , joys of humanism, passion of the individual and the ideals of nationalism, Jacobean period certainly faced a decline. The dramatists lost their interest in chronicles and romances and all the merits of the Renaissance , instead ,they grew satirical and critical of the evils of the time which dominantly find place in their plays.

Ben (Benjamin) Jonson (1573-1637) undoubtedly reigns supreme as dramatic satirist. He wrote comedies like “Every Man in his Humour” (1598) , “Every Man Out of His

Humour”(1599), “Cynthia’s Revels(1601)”, “The Poetaster”(1601) “Volpone or the Fox ”(1606), “The Silent Woman”(1609), “The Alchemist”(1611) etc. Jonson was in fact a great observer of human weaknesses. He was a moralist and his aim was ferocious satire. In his early plays he beautifully depicts human follies and foibles, and frauds of the day with stark realism. His satire becomes more bitter as he lashes out at the vices of society or the baseness of human nature. All these comedies are powerfully constructed- all of them perfectly follow the classical unities of time and place. In them Jonson invents everything, matter, plot and character. Normally there is little laughter in his comedies in contrast with Shakespeare’s.

Jonson wrote two historical tragedies, “Sejanus”(1603) and “Catiline”(1611) on the basis of Roman history being inspired by the success of Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar”. He is learned and accurate, there are no such anachronisms or historical blunders as spoiled historical plays of Shakespeare, rather, Jonson fails to make his characters live and forceful as also fails to infuse blood into the dry bones of history as Shakespeare does.

His numerous 'masques' declares him to be a great poet, they are, "The Satyr", "Masque of Beauty", "The Masque of Queens", "Cupid" etc. The masques are remarkable for the mingling of allegory, mythology and fairy tale and the exquisite lyrics and songs that abound in them.

Thomas Dekker (1570-1641) appeared as a writer of "Citizen Comedy" in his famous play, "The Shoemaker's Holiday"(1600).It is a boisterous comedy in which life of the London working class is treated humorously and romantically.

Beaumont and Flectcher were joint collaborators in many plays.Their plays are romantic, witty, melodramatic and without moral seriousness. Their most important work "The Knight of the Burning Pestle"(1607) is an excellent comedy with a burlesque motive .Some of the elements of the chivalric romance are ridiculed in this play.

The tragic playwrights, Chapman, Webster, Tournour and Middleton successfully carried forward the tradition of Shakespearean tragedy. George Chapman(1559-1634) is known for his translation of Homer. He had enough classical learning but he lacked classical spirit. His best known tragedy is "Bussy D, Ambois",a revenge tragedy on a historical theme of France.But the events and characters lack life and reality,the play degeneratr into melodrama.

John Webster(1575-1633) is generally regarded as the greatest tragic dramatist in English after Shakespeare.He has finer sense of language than either of his Jacobean contemporaries except Shakespeare. Shakespeare too had his Jacobean phase in the period of his great tragedies. Both of them wrote revenge tragedies. Webster had a powerful imagination but he lacked Shakespeare’s insight into human psychology. Webster is remembered today for his tragic plays. “The White Devil” is a study of infatuation, illicit love, intrigue, revenge and murder . “The Duchess of Malfi” indeed has some fine lyrics ,but dramatically it is not so powerful as “The White Devil”.

John Ford(1586-1639) had a melancholy and morbid temperament and gloom; tragedy and bloodshed had a strange fascination for him.The theme of his masterpiece “It is Pity She is a Whore” is based on incest. It is a powerful study of guilty passion. Middleton is remembered for his tragic drama “The Changeling”.

Thus, in the post-Shakespearean period tragic drama became blood ,horror, gloom and intrigue tragedy with the theme of revenge on the Senecan pattern.
