

TAJIK NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Asian and European languages

IWS



Theme: « Ben Jonson »

Student: Nuralizada M

Supervisor: Shaydulloi H

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Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

We know that Shakespeare was the greatest of English authors and that he had an enormous influence on the whole of world literature. But Ben Jonson had greater direct influence on English literature than Shakespeare himself ever had.

Ben Jonson was born in Westminster. His father, a clergyman, died shortly before the birth of his son. Adopted in early childhood by a bricklayer Ben was educated at Westminster School, where his teacher was William Camden (1551-1623), the great historian and antiquarian.

This was the beginning of Jonson's education; he learned a great deal from Camden, and picked up much more of his splendid erudition by his own efforts; for though later he had the reputation of being the most learned man of his time and received honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge, he never attended any university. After leaving Westminster School, he worked as a bricklayer for some time, and then entered the army and fought the Spaniards in Flanders, proving himself to be a man of extraordinary courage. Returning to England about 1595, he began to work

as an actor and playwright, and very soon became a dramatist of the first rank. A man of fiery temper, he was jailed for killing a fellow-actor in a duel, and again jailed for being collaborator in a play that insulted the Scots at the time King James succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of England. Tension was always in the thick of literary battles with his fellow-dramatists and as he grew older, he became literary battles with his fellow dramatists and he grew older, he became literary dictator of London and gained the friendship of men like Shakespeare and the great philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626). He was the literary teacher of many young poets, whom he called "his sons"; among them was John Milton.

If Shakespeare is unsurpassed in the genres of historical chronicle and tragedy, Tension is the author of the best English satirical comedies. Among his best works are "Volpone, or the Fox" (1606), with the action set in Venice, a devastating satire on the lust for riches; "The Silent Woman" (1609), one of the funniest comedies ever written with probably the most unexpected ending in all drama; "The Alchemist" (1610), in which he ridicules many superstitions of his time, "Bartholomew Fair" (1614), a wide satirical survey of all contemporary classes of society.

From 1605 Ben Jonson started writing what were called masques, that is plays to be presented at court and acted mainly by the nobility and sometimes even by royalty; these were elaborate and very expensive spectacles, involving music, song, and dance, built around a moral allegory and culminating in a compliment to the king and queen. In 1616 Ben Jonson was made poet laureate and granted a pension, but, nevertheless, he died in poverty, stricken by paralysis. His last play, left unfinished, is unlike any other written by him: it is a pastoral drama, "The Sad Shepherd" with Robin Hood and his merry men among the characters; it is written in most exquisite verse.

The ideology of Jonson was complex: loathing the decaying feudal aristocracy, he was in his social views very close to Puritan Republicanism, but at the same time he hated the Puritans because they considered the theatre to be sinful. Jonson was convinced that the theatre was a mighty weapon in the moral improvement of mankind, and attached great importance to it. His hostility to tyrants and political adventures was expressed in his tragedies of "Sejanus" (1611), based on Roman history.

Ben Jonson was also a fine lyric poet. His minor poems and the songs in many of his plays are true masterpieces. Many English poets have written poems dedicated to Shakespeare, but the poem by Ben Jonson, composed to the memory of his colleague and friend, remains unsurpassed.

But it was in the genre of satirical comedies that Ben Jonson became leader and excelled all other dramatists. The comedies were written after the "theory of humours". It was believed that a certain inclination or passion in the character of every individual was due to certain "humours" of the constitution, or "liquids" flowing in the body of man. Jonson slightly exaggerated these "humours". It made his characters

Who Was Geoffrey Chaucer?

In 1357, Geoffrey Chaucer became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster and continued in that capacity with the British court throughout his lifetime. The Canterbury Tales became his best known and most acclaimed work. He died October 25, 1400, in London, England, and was the first to be buried in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner.

Early Life

Poet Geoffrey Chaucer was born circa 1340, most likely at his parents' house on Thames Street in London, England. Chaucer's family was of the bourgeois class, descended from an affluent family who made their money in the London wine trade. According to some sources, Chaucer's father, John, carried on the family wine business.

Geoffrey Chaucer is believed to have attended the St. Paul's Cathedral School, where he probably first became acquainted with the influential writing of Virgil and Ovid.

In 1357, Chaucer became a public servant to Countess Elizabeth of Ulster, the Duke of Clarence's wife, for which he was paid a small stipend - enough to pay for his food and clothing. In 1359,

the teenage Chaucer went off to fight in the Hundred Years' War in France, and at Bethel he was captured for ransom. Thanks to Chaucer's royal connections, King Edward III helped pay his ransom. After Chaucer's release, he joined the Royal Service, travelling throughout France, Spain and Italy on diplomatic missions throughout the early to mid-1360s. For his services, King Edward granted Chaucer a pension of 20 marks.

In 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Roet, the daughter of Sir Reyno Roet, and the marriage conveniently helped further Chaucer's career in the English court.

Chaucer's earliest poems were written in imitation of the French romances. He translated from French a famous allegorical poem of the 13th century, "The Romance of the Rose". Though the poem is very long, its plot is simple: a young man falls asleep and dreams of a garden in which there is a Rose that he desires to own.

He is helped by such virtues as Beauty, Wealth and Hospitality, and hampered by such vices as Pride, Poverty and Evil Report. After a long time he gets the Rose.

The second period of Chaucer's literary work was that of the influence. To this period belong the

following poems: "The Parliament of Fowls (birds), an allegorical poem satirizing Parliament; "Troilus and Cressida" Troilus and 'kresida', considered to be the predecessor of the psychological novel in England, and "The Legend of Good Women", a dream-poem.

Chaucer was well read in ancient literature, Italian literature of the time taught him the importance of national literature in the life of a nation.

When Chaucer came back to England, he received the post of Controller of the Customs in the port of London. Chaucer held this position ten years. He devoted his free time to hard study and writing.

In 1377 King Edward III died, his ten-year-old grandson Richard succeeded him. A host of uncles who disagreed with each other acted as regents. At first all went well with Chaucer, he was appointed "Knight for the shire of Kent", which meant that he sat in Parliament as a representative for Kent. He often had to go on business to Kent and there he observed the pilgrimages to Canterbury. Travelling in those days, was very dangerous, and several times Chaucer was robbed of money which was in his charge. However, these duties grew very tiresome to the poet; he longed for leisure to write. He petitioned the king several times for permission to give up his post, and

Finally the king granted, him a pension so that he could enjoy the leisure he so desired. But after his patron John of Gaunt went to Spain, Chaucer lost his offices and all his pension. He became so poor that he had to borrow money for food.

The third period of Chaucer's creative work begins in the years 1384 - when he started writing his masterpiece, "The Canterbury Tales".

When the new king, Henry IV, came to the throne in 1399, the poet immediately addressed a poem to him, "The Complaints of Chaucer to His Empty Purse", with the result that this old pension was given back to him and new one granted; Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Chaucer was the last English writer of the Middle Ages and the first of Renaissance.