CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

After the failure of Lord Burghley's much-publicized efforts to arrange a match between his granddaughter and the Third Earl of Southampton—the youth never, of course, having seriously considered the proposal—he "went round to work" elsewhere.

> Lord Burghley has tried to marry Elizabeth Vere to Lord Northumberland [wrote Mary Harding to the Countess of Rutland in 1592] . . . she cannot fancy him.[1]

In 1594, William Stanley succeeded unexpectedly to the earldom of Derby, through the sudden death of his brother Ferdinando and the circumstance that Ferdinando's posthumous child was a daughter; whereupon the young man, with whom Elizabeth Vere had evidently been in love for some time, was considered eligible, the marriage taking place at Greenwich on January 26, 1595, "in the presence of the Queen and the Court 'with great solemnity and triumph.'"[2] Ward writes:

> As was customary at all important weddings, the occasion was marked by feasting and revelry. It is of particular interest that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably performed during these celebrations. It is known that the play was written for a wedding about this time; and the Lord Chamberlain's company gave a performance that evening. Shakespeare was then writing for this company, which had been taken under Lord Hunsdon's patronage on the death of its previous patron, Ferdinando.[3]

Actually *The Dream* had been written many years before, and also more than once rewritten. Now, again, it was adapted for this gala event, for the wedding festivities of a new Hippolyta and Theseus.

The marriage certainly pleased Oxford well, for he and the Earl of Derby, congenial friends, were to spend periods in the ensuing years working together. During the August following he was writing Burghley after a visit to the Stanleys at Cannon Row:

> On my coming to Byfleet from Cannon Row the Earl of Derby was very earnest that he might assure £1000 a year for my daughter, and marvelled that Sir Robert Cecil her uncle, and *I her father* were so slack to call upon it; so I desire something may be done therein.[4]

We cannot resist quoting Mr. Percy Allen's witty comment upon this letter:

> "I her father" had never yet been found importunately forward in seeing that his children were properly provided for; and this slackness of 1595 was, I imagine, a lethargy that the Earl—an old man now, when judged by Elizabethan standards—will never learn to throw off.

It is very striking to find that this expression, "I her father," exactly parallels one Lord Oxford used in *Lucrece* (*st.* 30):

> That my posterity . . .
> Shall curse my bones, and hold it for no sin
> To wish that *I their father* had not been.

Like "truth is truth," and other characteristic expressions, it constitutes a link between Oxford and Shakespeare which officious hands failed to sever.

Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange, had been the patron of a com-

[1] Ward; p. 314; cit. Cal. Ancaster MSS.

[2] Op. cit.; p. 318, quot. Stowe's *Annals*.

[3] Ibid.; p. 318; cit. Chambers: *Elizabethan Stage;* vol. IV, p. 109.

[4] Op. cit.; p. 319; quot. Cal. S.P.Dom. (1595–97), p. 88. "The Stanleys were reputed to be the richest family in England, hence the size of this allowance."—Ward.

pany of players since 1576, when he was seventeen years of age. Upon Leicester's death, some of his best men, including William Kemp, seem to have gone over to his company, which soon afterwards amalgamated with the Lord Admiral's players; among them was the great tragedian, Edward Alleyn. As Lord Strange's company, these men had given six performances at court in the winter of 1591–92, and later filled a six week's engagement under Philip Henslowe at the Rose, at which time it is said by Chambers that they began to present Shakespeare's plays. Early in 1594, the Fourth Earl of Sussex's men were acting Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* at the Rose. Henslowe's Diary lists frequent performances of *Harey vj* during the early 1590's.

William Stanley, Sixth Earl of Derby, became the patron of a company of players in 1594. And, in 1600, records appear in the Stationers' Register of two plays acted by "the Earl of Oxford's servants": *The Weakest goeth to the Wall,* and *The History of George Scanderbeg,* both published anonymously and both lost. Perhaps these were two of the comedies which the Earl of Derby was said to "be penning" soon after his marriage, undoubtedly with the aid of his experienced father-in-law.[5]

In 1602, the Earl of Oxford combined his company with that of the Earl of Worcester; and, as will be seen from the following letter, addressed by the Privy Council to the Lord Mayor of London, the Queen was, at his request, "requiring" the Lord Mayor to assign them the place they liked best, the "Boar's Head":

> After our very hearty commendations to your Lordship, We received your letter signifying some amendment of the abuses or disorders by the immoderate exercise of stage plays in and about the City, by means of our late order renewed for the restraint of them, and withal showing a special inconvenience yet remaining. By reason that *the servants of our very good Lord the Earl of Oxford, and of me the Earl of Worcester, being joined by agreement together in one company,* (to whom upon *notice of Her Majesty's pleasure, at the suit of the Earl of Oxford,* toleration hath been thought meet to be granted, notwithstanding the restraint of our said former orders), do not tie themselves to one certain place and house, but do change their place at their own disposition, which is as disorderly and offensive as the former offence of many houses. And as the other companies that are allowed, namely of me the Lord Admiral and the Lord Chamberlain, be appointed their certain houses, and one and no more to each company, so we do straitly require that this third company be likewise to one place. And because we are informed that *the Boar's Head is the place they have especially used and do best like of,* we do pray and require you that that said house, namely, *the Boar's Head, may be assigned unto them,* and that they be very straitly charged to use and exercise their plays in no other but that house, as they will look to have that toleration continued and avoid further displeasure. And so we bid your Lordship heartily farewell. From the Court at Richmond the last of March 1602.
>
> Your Lordship's very loving friends,
>
> T. Buckhurst — Nottingham
> E. Worcester — W. Knollys
> John Stanhope — Ro. Cecil
> John Fortescue — J. Herbert[6]

[5] All this from Ward; pp. 322-5. Jonson uses the word "Scanderbag" in *E.M.I.*

But we were speaking of the wedding festivities of the Lady Elizabeth Vere and the Earl of Derby, and of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

By 1595, Oxford, in his middle forties, felt himself an old man; Queen Elizabeth, at sixty-two, was certainly an old woman. Yet he was still writing for, and at, her. And there was much in this charming old fantasy that so intimately concerned them both, which would have afforded them a shared amusement. She was still Titania, but Oxford—who, as Oberon, had long since acquired his "little changeling boy"—could now appear, laughing at himself, as the sole prototype of Bottom, the weaver (of Dreams), who had so long ago been made an ass of by Titania's infatuated blandishments. The "ass's nowl," strangely and appropriately enough, was the crest of the Earl's paternal grandmother's family, the Trussells. Oxford, like Valentine, had aspired, through his "daring folly," to "guide the heavenly car," and had come to grief. This might be said to have been "Bottom's dream, because it hath no bottom." He could still be Romeo-Pyramus, as well.

Now that some of the most popular plays of the day—many of them grown old and familiar but still beloved—had begun to be attributed to the author calling himself by the mysterious name of Shakespeare, or Shake-*hyphen*-speare, there was considerable effort on the part of enterprising publishers to get copies into print; but this was difficult, since there was no one with whom they could deal directly. *This dramatist's name, Shakespeare's name, never appeared on Henslowe's lists, which cited all the contemporary playwrights whom he paid for their work.*[7] However, at some time during the '90's, there had turned up, in London, an alert young provincial who had a name so similar to the famous *nom de plume,* first signed in 1593 and 1594 to the dedications of the popular poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece,* that a chain of events was set in motion through the exploitation of this similarity which has hoodwinked students of English literature for more than three centuries.

Not much is positively known about William Shaksper of Stratford-on-Avon; yet one signal fact of his career has not only been definitely established but has become the action by which he can infallibly be

[6] Chambers: *Eliz. Stage;* vol. IV, p. 335.

[7] This situation is discussed at length in Chap. Eighty-seven.

recognized. This is his ambition to be a gentleman, and his efforts, thwarted at first but later successful, to acquire a coat-of-arms. We meet this lively, simple, but shrewd citizen in certain plays of the period—Hamlet spoke for other players than his own when he said, "the players . . . tell all"—usually in relation to the nobleman of bohemian tastes, whose attitude towards him seems kindly, often amused, but dignified and aloof.

In Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1598) the young man is Sogliardo, described as

> an essential *clown,* brother to Sordido, yet *so enamoured of the name of a gentleman, that he will have it, though he buys it.* He comes up every term to learn to *take tobacco,* and to see *new motions* [i.e., puppet-shows]. He is in his kingdom when in company where he may be well laughed at.

It is especially to be noted that Sogliardo takes tobacco, for Shift, his *alter ego,* is such an addict that he is sometimes called Whiffe.

The dialogue opens—after a long, would-be Hamlet-like soliloquy by Macilente, who enters "with a book"—with Sogliardo and Carlo Buffone conversing:

> *Sog.* Nay, look you, Carlo, this is my humour now! I have land and money . . . and *I will be a gentleman whatsoever it cost me.*
> *Car.* A most gentleman-like resolution.
> *Sog.* . . . But for my name, signior, how think you? will it not serve for a *gentleman's* name, when the signior is put to it, ha?
> *Car.* Let me hear; how is it?
> *Sog.* Signior Insulso Sogliardo: methinks it sounds well.
> *Car.* O excellent! tut! and all fitted to your name, you might very well stand for *a gentleman;* I know many Sogliardos gentlemen.
> *Sog.* Why, for my wealth, I might be *a justice of the peace.*
> *Car.* Ay, and *a constable* for your wit.

(The reference here is, of course, to the popular characters, Shallow and Dogberry.)

Macilente, who is Jonson, listens in disgust.

> *Maci.* 'Sblood, why should such *a prick-ear'd hind* as this
> Be rich, ha? *a fool! such a transparent gull*
> *That may be seen through!* wherefore should he have land,
> Houses and lordships? O, I could eat my entrails,
> And sink my soul into the earth with sorrow!

Sogliardo remarks (II):

> They say there's a new *motion* of the city of Nineveh, with Jonas and the whale, to be seen at Fleet-bridge. . . . I'll see all those *devices* an I come to London once.

He denies vociferously that he lives by his wits.

> I scorn to live by my wits, I. I have better means. . . . (I.)

Carlo says of him (IV.6):

> I am persuading this gentleman to turn courtier. He is a man of fair revenue, and his estate will bear the charge well. Besides, for his other gifts, *of the mind or so, they are as nature lent him them, pure, simple, without any . . . mixture of these two threadbare qualities, learning and knowledge. . . .*

Sogliardo is spoken of by Macilente (I) as not only "a prick-ear'd hind . . . a transparent gull," but as "this dusty turf, this clod, a whoreson puck-fist" (which last is defined in the Glossary as "an insignificant boasting fellow"), "this hulk of ignorance": and by Carlo as "the lord of the soil." He adds that he is "a trout, a shallow fool . . . a mere stuft suit." His first name, Insulso, is Italian for "dull, insipid." "You shall have one," says Carlo, "to take measure of you, and make you *a coat of arms to fit you.*"

It will be observed that he is consistently described as a provincial, a peasant, simple and unlearned, yet pretentious. (In subsequent plays, as his fortunes flourish, he becomes a great braggart.) For such a "hulk of ignorance," however, he is given a great deal of attention —though we are never told why. He is much interested in Sir Puntarvolo's dog:

> Save you, good Sir Puntarvolo, *your dog's in health,* I see.

Sordido—who is called his brother, but seems, from his actions and his close similarity to characters who appear with Sogliardo's counterpart in other plays (*The Winter's Tale, Return from Parnassus*), to be his father, John Shaksper—is

> a wretched hob-nailed chuff whose recreation is reading of almanacks; and felicity, foul weather. One that never prayed but for a lean dearth, and ever wept in a fat harvest.

Sordido makes money by hoarding corn and selling it at a high price during a shortage. There was such a shortage in 1597, which quadrupled prices and induced financial havoc; it was caused by a wet winter and intensified by the need of extra rations for the Fleet. Sordido hangs himself (III.2), though unsuccessfully, because his crops of grain are so heavy: this obviously to correspond with the "farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty," from the porter's speech in *Macbeth.* His son, in London trying to be a gentleman, writes him a letter, signed "Yours, if his own," after the fashion of gallants, puzzling the farmer considerably. Though this son is named Fungoso, he is really another aspect of Sogliardo, the parasitic aspect: Jonson was playing safe. Ironically enough, he could portray Oxford with greater impunity, knowing the Earl would not prosecute.

John Shaksper was a dealer and speculator in grain, as well as a

butcher and wool-merchant: an enterprising man.[8] So much is known of him. There is, besides, an incident on record that he was fined for having a dung-hill in front of his house; and there seems to be a reference to this in Sordido's contrite confession (III.2):

> Though hitherto amongst you I have liv'd,
> Like an unsavoury muck-hill to myself . . .

John Shaksper's son, William, who was a hard trader and made a financial success, worked with him for a time. They evidently profited well in 1597.

When Fastidious, Carlo, and Sogliardo arrive at Puntarvolo's country house (II.1), Fastidious says:

> By the virtue of my soul, *this knight dwells in Elysium* here:

a satirical allusion to Viola's,

> My brother he is in Elysium. (*T.N.*: I.2.3.)

The pedantic Jonson was criticizing Oxford for the wrong use of the word in a Greek sense.

Puntarvolo, who, as we have said, is Lord Oxford, enters from hunting (II), leading a greyhound, in a scene which parodies *The Taming of the Shrew* (Ind.: I.1.15 *et seq.*). Follows the balcony scene satirizing *Romeo and Juliet.*

Since, in his early plays, most of Jonson's characters' names are anagrams,[9] we hope we are not being too fantastic (if, indeed, one can be so in reading the Elizabethans) when we suggest that Sogliardo is an anagram for O's Liar Dog, or O's Dog Liar. For Sir Puntarvolo's "dog" plays a crucial part in this satirical farce, which abounds in paraphrases of the text of many of Shakespeare's plays and of the Sonnets as well; and Shift, representing one aspect of Sogliardo, is a prodigious liar who impersonates a playwright.

Sogliardo introduces Shift to Puntarvolo (IV.4):

> . . . prithee, sweet knight, know this gentleman, he's one that it pleases me to use as my good friend and companion . . . *I know him all over . . . cry you mercy* . . . I think him the tallest man living.

This thoroughly Shakespearean phrase, "cry you mercy," is followed by another of Macilente's numerous self-pitying soliloquies:

[8] Evidence that he sold wool may be found in J. Q. Adams's *A Life of William Shakespeare;* p. 331. His estate consisted of his house and an adjacent woolshop. Someone has suggested that the name Shaksper was originally derived from Jacques-Pierre and, indeed, both John Shaksper and his son showed signs of French thrift.

[9] In *Cynthia's Revels,* for example, Prosaites is Poet's airs:

> *Asotus.* Prosaites! a very fine name, Crites, is it not?
> *Crites.* Yes, and a very ancient one, sir, the beggar.

> . . . O, that such muddy flags,
> For every drunken flourish, should achieve
> The name of manhood, *whilst true perfect valour,*
> *Hating to show itself, goes by despised!*
> Heart! I do know now, in a fair just cause,
> *I dare do more than he,*[10] a thousand times:
> Why should they not take knowledge of this, ha?
> And give *my* worth allowance before *his?*

Sogliardo, always pretentious, declares of Shift:

> Ay, he is my Pylades, and I am his Orestes; how like you the conceit? *Car.* O, 'tis an *old stale interlude device;* . . . he shall be your Judas, and you shall be his elder-tree to hang on.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *Punt.* Faith, let me end it for you, gallants: you shall be his Countenance, and he your Resolution.

Shift, whom we take to be the acquisitive, shady side of Shaksper, is described by the author as

> a thread-bare shark, one that never was a soldier, yet lives upon lendings. His profession is skeldring [i.e., getting money under false pretences, swindling] and odling ["must have some relation to cheating": Nares], his bank Paul's.

At the beginning of *Act* III (*sc.*1, the Middle Aisle of St. Paul's) Shift comes forward gloating:

> This is rare, *I have set up my bills without discovery;*

which recalls Benedick-Oxford who "set up his bills here in Messina." (*M.A.*: I.1.37.) Only Shift is doing it stealthily, "without discovery," for he is a fraud. This obviously alludes to surreptitious publication of another man's work,[11] which he advertises by posting his bills in the middle aisle of St. Paul's, the gathering place of writers and artists. In fact, the scene develops into a merely slightly veiled statement of Shift's whole procedure. Emphasis is placed, heavily, upon the word "rapier" (for "spear," of course). A man named Shift who shakes or brandishes his rapier "in public" is not brought by Jonson into a satire upon Lord Oxford for nothing, especially in conjunction with "manuscripts" and the phrase, "good name." The scene (III.1) follows the one which we shall quote presently concerning Sogliardo's coat-of-arms, but it is given here for the sake of continuity.

It is clear that Shift and Sogliardo are the same man. In his third aspect, as Fungoso, he imitates the manner, dress, and speech of the

[10] Cf. *Macbeth* (I.7.46-7):

> *I dare do all* that may become a man
> Who *dares do more* is none.

[11] In *The Poet Ape,* Jonson says of Sogliardo-Shift's counterpart that his practice is to "buy up the reversion of old plays."

courtier, Fastidious Brisk-Southampton, who, be is remembered, was evidently called Will Shakespeare round the theatre.[12]

In the Middle Aisle of Paul's Puntarvolo, Sogliardo, Fastidious Brisk, and Carlo observe Shift walk by, "using action to his rapier." Shift, having just set up his bills "without discovery," is self-conscious about "using action to his rapier," which can only mean, shaking his spear, or flaunting his name.

> *Fast.* See how he is expostulating with his *rapier:* look, look!
> . . . . . .
> *Punt.* Except it were in the person of a cutler's boy, or that the fellow were *nothing but vapour,* I should think it impossible.
> *Car.* See again, he claps his sword to his head, as who should say, well, go to.
> . . . . . .
> *Fast* [*addressing him*]. Signior.
> *Shift.* At your service.
> *Fast. Will you sell your rapier?*

(It is by some believed that Southampton paid Shaksper the sixty pounds he received in 1597 and other sums upon other occasions. If so, he was acting for Oxford, to induce the troublesome man to leave London.)

> *Car.* He is turn'd wild upon the question; he looks as if he had *seen a serjeant.*
> *Shift.* Sell my *rapier!* now fate bless me! [13]
> *Punt.* Amen.
> *Shift.* You ask'd me if I would *sell my rapier,* sir? . . . 'Slid, sir, what should you behold in my face, sir, that should move you . . . to ask me, sir, if I would *sell my rapier?*
> *Fast.* Nay, let me pray you, sir, be not moved: I protest, I would rather *have been silent,* than in any way offensive, *had I known your nature.*

Shift excitedly brags of the exploits he has made with his rapier in the Low Country; he boasts of his *travels* quite preposterously, and Sogliardo remarks that he's "a proper man."

> *Shift.* My rapier, no sir: my rapier is my guard, my defence, my *revenue,* my *honour.* . . . Hard is the choice when the valiant must eat their arms or clem [starve.] Sell my rapier! no, my dear, I have *ever* found thee *true* as steel. . . .

At this point Orange steps forth and accosts Shift as "signior Whiffe." Clove appears and greets him as "master Apple-John," as though mistaking him for Falstaff (who had come to be taken as a partial representation of the jovial Oxford of the earlier 1590's). At another time Clove says to him—and this corroborates us:

> Master Apple-John! you are well met; when shall we sup together, and laugh together, and *be fat with those good wenches,* ha?

For Pistol has exclaimed (*2 H.IV:* II.4.183-4):

> Then feed and *be fat,* my fair Calipolis.
> Come, give 's some sack.

To return to the scene in Paul's:—Puntarvolo is astonished at the different names Shift answers to. (He is, of course, impersonating the dramatist, who filled many roles.) And Carlo says:

> Resolve us of it, Janus, thou that look'st *every* way; or thou, Hercules, that hast *travelled all countries* . . . here's a gentleman [Puntarvolo] desirous of your name, sir.
> *Shift.* Sir, my name is cavalier Shift. . . .
> *Car. Shift!* I heard your name *varied* even now. . . .
> *Shift.* True, sir, it pleases the world, as I am her excellent tobacconist, to give me the style of signior Whiffe; as I am a poor esquire about the town here, they call me master Apple-John. Variety of *good names* does well, sir.
> *Car.* Ay, and *good parts,* too, to make those *good names;* out of which I imagine yon bills to be yours.
> *Shift.* Sir, if I should *deny the manuscripts,* I were worthy to be *banish'd* the middle aisle *for ever.*

Carlo introduces Shift to Sogliardo in significant terms:

> *Car.* Signior Insulso Sogliardo, this is *the professor.*

That is precisely what he is: he professes authorship of the manuscripts of plays. We are being given the inside story gratis. We have only to read the words with attention.

Shift agrees to instruct Sogliardo in the use of tobacco.

> *Sog.* You will not serve me, sir, will you? I'll give you more than *countenance.*[14]
> . . . . . .
> *Shift.* Pardon me, sir, I do scorn to serve any man. . . . But I'll be your follower, if you please.
> *Sog.* Sir, you shall stay and dine with me, and if we can agree, *we'll not part in haste.* I am *very bountiful* to men of quality. Where shall we go, signior?

Puntarvolo injects a reply in a recognizably Oxfordian idiom:

> Your Mitre is your best house;

[12] We have explained that the device of portraying a person in two or three characters, or two or three persons in one, was made necessary by the stringency of the statutes, similar to our libel laws. Jonson, too well-acquainted with prison, would have been careful to avoid trouble.

[13] A curious and, it would seem, significant expression. Fate did, with Ben Jonson's help.

[14] The word "countenance" figures in the discussion of William Visor (*2 H. IV:* V.1.). Chap. Seventy-two.

adding significantly and, for all that has been said, quite gratuitously:

> . . . *my dog shall not eat in his company for a million.*

And Sogliardo adds, to Shift:

> No, for you do not know the humour of the dog, as we do.

This mysterious "dog," Puntarvolo presently says, in another Oxfordian phrase, is "born to disastrous fortune."

It is arranged that Sogliardo will be "Countenance" to Shift's "Resolution." This compact is never elucidated: we can make what we will of it. But it all seems fairly clear. The provincial braggart gives "countenance" to his own ambitious and shifty "resolution" to pass himself off as author of the plays, for which he has already secretly "set up" his "bills." Shift actually calls himself Apple-John (IV.6) when making the deal. He boasts again of all sorts of exploits.

But in the end, he is thoroughly confounded and turns out to be not a really hardened villain after all:

> *Shift.* I never robbed any man; I *never stood by the highwayside,* sir, but only said so, because I would *get myself a name,* and be counted a tall man.

In other words, he was not Falstaff at all—the Falstaff who had stood by the highway at Gad's Hill. He was not the author of the "manuscripts" he was advertising, the original of Prince Hal, whose own men had long ago held up the messengers upon Gad's Hill and been dramatized in his play.

Sogliardo is disconcerted, for he too is a braggart, and he had boasted that Shift had been

> the only Bid-stand [i.e., hold-up man] that ever kept Newmarket, Salisbury-plain, Hockley-i'-the-Hole, *Gads-hill,* and all the high places of any request. (IV.4.)

Shift had merely been making great pretenses all the while, to get himself "a name," to say nothing of money.

At the outset, Carlo Buffone has instructed the ambitious Sogliardo in some of the first essentials of being a gentleman; and in doing so he simply gives the inexperienced Jonson's idea (in 1597–98) of Lord Oxford, whose plays he has not only seen and read assiduously, but whom, it would appear, he has watched from a distance in a tavern or the theatre:

> *Car.* You must endeavour to feed *cleanly* [15] at your ordinary, sit *melancholy* and *pick your teeth when you cannot speak;* and when you come to plays, be humorous, look with a good starch'd face, and ruffle your brow like a new boot, laugh at nothing but your own jests . . .

[15] Cf. *W.T.* (I.2.123-4):

> Come, captain,
> We must be neat; not neat, but *cleanly,* captain.

There is a later scene, in which Puntarvolo, Fastidious Brisk, and Fungoso are conspiring with Macilente to conduct Sogliardo to the palace—"into the presence," as they say—and pass him off on Saviolina (San Olivia) as a courtier. This device, similar as it is to that of the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew,* is not only suggestive of Oxford's high-spirited mischief: it is identical with an incident related in The Second Book of *The Courtier;* and such a jest may therefore have been actually staged at court by the Earl to bait Elizabeth (Olivia)—though whether with Shaksper or not one cannot guess. On the other hand, however, it could simply be an expression of Jonson's bilious derision of the courtier, Oxford, and of *The Courtier* as an ideal.

Before Sogliardo enters, Saviolina inquires about him.

> *Puntarvolo.* Pray . . . give me leave to report him. He's a gentleman, lady, of that rare and admirable faculty, as, I protest, I know not his like in Europe; he is exceedingly *valiant,* an excellent *scholar,* and so exactly *travelled,* that he is able, in discourse, to deliver you a model of any prince's court in the world; *speaks the languages with that purity of phrase, and facility of accent,* that it breeds astonishment; *his wit, the most exuberant.* . . . But that which transcends all, lady: he doth *so peerlessly imitate any manner of person for gesture, action, passion, or whatever.* . . . Ay, he is *a gentleman,* madam, and *a reveller.*

Thus Jonson reporting what he supposes is Oxford's opinion of himself. It will be recalled that, in the character of Amorphus, Oxford imitates various types of faces when instructing Asotus in the art of being a courtier.

At first the great lady is taken in, for Sogliardo performs a fairly good burlesque of a courtier. Then Macilente, unable to bear the farce any longer, protests:

> In good faith, lady, he is a very perfect *clown,* both by father and mother, that I'll assure you. . . . Nay, do but look on his hand, and that shall resolve you; look, lady, what a palm here is.
> *Sog.* Tut, that was with *holding the plough.*
> *Mac.* The plough! did you discern any such thing in him, madam?
> *Fast.* Faith, no, she saw the *gentleman* as bright as noon-day; she *deciphered* him at first.

But the most important scene of all is the one in which Sogliardo is definitely identified, or "deciphered," as Shaksper of Stratford, who was at great pains to obtain a coat-of-arms. It seems that Shaksper's application, made in his father's name, was at first denied, the College of Heralds dismissing it with the notation, *Non, sanz droict.* Three years afterwards, however, it was granted him; and it is in character with the picture Jonson gives us of the brash, amiable parvenu that he cheekily took for the motto on his crest, *Non sanz droict,* eliminating the embarrassing comma.

In *Act* III, Carlo says, of Sogliardo:

I came from him but now; he is *in the herald's office* yonder. . . .
Punt. What, has he *purchased arms,* then?
Car. Ay, and rare ones too; of as many colours as e'er you saw any fool's coat in your life. . . .

After Sogliardo enters, he, Puntarvolo, and Carlo walk together.

Sog. By this parchment, gentlemen, I have been *so toiled among the harrots* yonder, you will not believe! they do speak *in the strangest language* and give a man *the hardest terms for his money,* that ever you knew.
Car. But have you arms, have you arms?
Sog. I' faith, I thank them; *I can write myself gentleman now;* here's my patent, it cost me thirty pound, by this breath.
Punt. A very fair coat, well charged, and full of armoury.
Sog. Nay, it has as much *variety* of *colours* in it, as you have seen a coat have; how like you the crest, sir?
Punt. I understand it not well, what is't?
Sog. Marry, sir, *it is your boar without a head, rampant. A boar without a head,* that's very rare.
Car. Ay, and *rampant* too! I commend the herald's wit, he has *deciphered* him well; a swine without a head, without brain, wit, anything indeed, ramping to gentility. You can blazon the rest, signior, can you not?
Sog. O, ay, I have it in writing here of purpose; it cost me two shillings the tricking.[16]
Car. Let's hear, let's hear.
Punt. It is the most vile, foolish, absurd, palpable, and ridiculous escutcheon that *ever this eye* survised. . . . [Note the familiar Oxfordian "ever I."]
Car. Silence, good knight; go on.
Sog (reads). Gyrony of eight pieces; azure and gules; between three plates, a chevron engrailed checquy, or, *vert,* and ermins; on a chief argent, between two ann'lets sable, *a boar's head proper.*
Car. How's that! On a chief argent?
Sog (reads). On a chief argent, *a boar's head proper,* between two ann'lets sable.
Car. 'Slud, it's a hog's cheek and puddings in a pewter field, this.
Sog. How like you them, signior?
Punt. Let the word be, *Not without mustard;* your crest is very rare, sir.

This is all too transparent to require comment. Oxford's crest, the "boar," but "without a head." He has been "deciphered well." And instead of *Non sans droict,* the word is *"Non sans moutarde":* "Not without mustard." [17] The burden of all this is that Sogliardo-Shift is making every kind of effort to identify himself as Oxford-Shakespeare, and that he is the Shaksper of Stratford who bought a coat-of-arms with the motto, *Non sanz droict.*

The group begin to walk about in pairs. Puntarvolo speaks to his servant:

Sirrah, keep close; yet not so close: thy breath will thaw my ruff.

And Sogliardo addresses his cousin proudly:

O, good cousin, I am a little busy . . . I am to walk with a knight here.

There is no proof, however, that Shaksper ever walked with Shakespeare, or, indeed, had any personal acquaintance with him. There was much in this play to make Oxford angry—specifically, all the involved and, to us, somewhat obscure business about Puntarvolo's dog, and the knight's resulting fury, which led him to seal up Carlo's mouth with wax, to prevent him from discussing the matter. To this we shall return after a time.

But in case there is any reader still reluctant to believe that Shift was pretending to be Benedick-Oxford when he set up his bills, or that the Earl himself was not well aware of all the satirical implications, we refer him to *Much Ado About Nothing* (V.4.100-2):

Benedick. I'll tell thee what, prince; a college of wit-crackers *cannot flout me out of my humour.* Dost think I care for a *satire* or an *epigram?*

In view of the fact that it was for his satires and his *Epigrams* that Jonson was best known, the reference is inescapable. So perhaps the Earl was not seriously disturbed, after all.

[16] Note the emphasis upon his preoccupation with money. This is typical of Shaksper, "the well-to-do householder of Stratford."

[17] It would be interesting to know if Jonson alluded here to Bottom's remark to Mustardseed that a "giant-like ox-beef hath devoured many *a gentleman* of your house. . . ." (*M.N.D.:* III.1.189-94.) This phrase seems to have become a *cliché* among the writers. Nashe tells an anecdote which stresses it in *Pierce Pennilesse;* vol. I, p. 171.