CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

On August 25, 1594, Henslowe's company presented what is thought to have been a newly revised version of *The Merchant of Venice*. Some students have seen in the character of Shylock a portrayal of the Jewish physician, Dr. Lopez, who was executed on the 7th of June of that year for having attempted to poison the Queen. Since, as has been shown, most of the plays were kept up to date with current allusions, there may well have been alterations thus topically to identify Shylock. We have already suggested that this would account for the extreme harshness of his punishment. Yet intrinsically Shylock remains forever Burghley, with "my daughter and my ducats," crying his wrongs in the streets.

Although undoubtedly an important figure in 1594, Launcelot (Lancelet in the First Folio) is more likely to have made the stipulation in 1598 that he must be called "Master Launcelot," as his original will thereafter be called "Master William Shakespeare," for compelling reasons. (It was at about this time that Florizel, the Fair Youth, married Perdita, the plays.)

> Talk you of *young Master* Launcelot? . . . Well, *let his father be what 'a will*, we *talk* of *young Master* Launcelot. (II.2.46-53.)

Whatever his father may now be, it is young Master Shakespeare who is to be represented as author of the plays.

He airily tells his father, old Gobbo—or the aging Oxford—that the "young *gentleman*" he is seeking is no more, that he—

> according to Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings, the Sisters three and such branches of learning,—is, indeed deceased. . . .
> *Gobbo.* Marry, God forbid! the boy was the very staff of my age, my very prop.

Launcelot, because he is actually a little Spear, asks aside:

> Do I look like a *cudgel* or a *hovel-post,* a *staff* or a *prop? Do you know me, father?* . . . Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes, *you might fail of the knowing me:* it is a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I will tell you news of your son. Give me your blessing; *truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long: a man's son may, but, in the end, truth will out.* (59-80.)

That the truth was bound to come out, Oxford believed. The "murder" of his name was sure to "come to light." "Truth" could "be hid" for a time, and so could "a man's son" be—as his own had been—but "in the end, truth will out."

We shall have more to say about this particular species of murder presently, but we must interrupt ourselves—first to record an event of which Nichols' *Progresses* gives a rather vague account [1] and which took place also in 1594. During December of that year, while Southampton was attending Gray's Inn, several nights of revels were held there. On the opening night, St. Thomas' Eve, the Prince of the Purpoole pardoned all his subjects, and amid much lively and esoteric business, the following passage occurred:

> *Questio.* Whether any of his Highness' wards *ought to be adjudged of full age* during the *non-age* of his discretion, though he hath numbered 21 years?
> *Responsio. The infancy of the nobler part* denominates the whole matter, and none ought to be so foolhardy to take upon him the performance of knight-service *without an head-piece.* [A visor?] 'Tis therefore resolved that all such *wards* shall be sent to *travail* [or travel?] in pursuit of their *beautiful mother* experience, with whom *Pallas* hath left *an old rusty helmet;* and those that by their service to this great lady can attain that price, are to be *deemed of full age.* 'Tis also resolved that a ward of twenty-one years, having married a widow lady, *ought to be adjudged of full age.* . . .

Southampton was the only Royal Ward who reached his majority in 1594. All this innuendo about his being "of full age" and not "of full age" is apparently directed at the false date, October 1573, given for his birth, which would seem actually to have occurred in June 1574. "The infancy of the nobler part" is his minority, his "non-age," as Prince; for as Earl he "hath numbered 21 years." He will "be sent to travail" in the theatre for his experience, or, like his father, to travel on the Continent to gain experience. The "old rusty helmet" Pallas has left him is the mask, "Will Shakespeare," Oxford's pseudonym for his old stage-plays. As for the "beautiful mother," the secondary meaning is that he is the "beauty's rose" of the Sonnets. The last sentence is more enigmatic. At this time, Southampton had not yet married Mistress Vernon but was known to be having a protracted affair with her. It may be that, for this reason, because she was not a virgin and not a wife, she was humorously called "a widow lady"; but there may be some further inscrutable significance.

On the following evening a performance of *A Comedy of Errors* was given, with the students of the Inner Temple guests for the occasion. Everything seems to have gone wrong. A "company of base and common fellows" was present in connection with the entertainment; part of the elaborate scaffolding erected to accommodate the tremendous crowd collapsed, a few persons were hurt, and chaos ensued. The visitors from the Inner Temple seem to have been disgruntled and took their leave. The occasion was later referred to as "The Night of Errors." Someone mysteriously called "the Sorcerer" was questioned. Significantly, he is nameless; but who could he have been except Oxford-Prospero, the "sorcerer" who produced *The Tempest,* as well as *The Comedy of Errors?* Among other complications which need not detain us here, the crowd was found to have been too numerous for the improvised seats. But soon afterwards another entertainment was tendered by the students of Gray's Inn to the Inner Temple, and all was forgiven. (Not to be forgotten is the fact that Nichols's account is always Burghley's authorized version.)

In 1596, Lady Oxford bought an old manor house at Hackney, which was called King's Place because three monarchs had held court there: Henry VIII in 1546, Edward VI in 1549, and Queen Elizabeth in 1583. But to Lord Oxford a stronger attraction than its historical distinction must have been its proximity to The Theatre and The Curtain, both of which, situated "not far outside the Bishop's Gate of old London Wall," were within a half-hour's ride on horseback. It was a charming place, with its "great balconied corridor one hundred and sixty feet long" looking out over pleasant gardens.[2] Here the Earl was to spend the remainder of his life, making occasional visits to the court, and others to the Derbys, who also visited him there, but employing the major part of his time revising, and revising again, many of his old plays, giving them the philosophical and literary beauty which has so enriched English-speaking peoples everywhere.

Two other matters concern us at this time. One is that, in July

[1] Vol. III, pp. 328-9; and p. 279.

[2] We are indebted for this information to Mr. Percy Allen: *The Life-Story,* etc.; p. 288.

1597, Nashe's satirical play, *The Isle of Dogs,* was presented by the Earl of Pembroke's men and gave such offense that, as the playwright himself put it, "the troublesome stir which happened about it is a general rumour that hath filled all England." It was suppressed, and the Privy Council ordered the arrest of the author and the actors concerned in the production. Several of the latter were imprisoned, and so was Ben Jonson, who had some part in the authorship, it seems; but Nashe got away, as did the remainder of the actors, hiding in the country, where the Privy Council were unable to locate them.

J. Q. Adams, who gives an account of the disturbance,[3] assumes that the kingdom inhabited by dogs which was the subject of this play was a disguise for the government, hereby symbolically attacked. But from what we have observed regarding the playwrights' use of "dogs"—Puntarvolo's dog, Launce's dog, the dog Apemantus, the dog Thersites, etc.—we are confident that it was concerned with the theatre and playwrights, with Oxford, and probably far too candidly with Southampton—a case in which it will be recalled Nashe had erred before. That Nashe himself used the word "dog" for a playwright is clear from his reproach to Harvey, in *Four Letters Confuted,* for slandering Greene. "Out uppon thee," he wrote, "for an arrant dog-killer. Strike a man when he is dead?" And in his *Epistle Dedicatorie* to Oxford, he spoke of "dog's meat" for the "mongrels," who were certainly the playwrights.

Unfortunately, no remnant of *The Isle of Dogs* survives. The Privy Council not only had every copy of the play destroyed, it appointed a commission to ascertain "what copies they have given forth of the said play, and to whom." It further ordained that "no play shall be used within London, or about the city, or in any public place, during this time of summer," and finally went so far as to order "all playhouses in and about London to 'be plucked down.'" [4] But this order was not put into effect. It may be that the influential noblemen who were patrons of the leading companies, including the Earl of Pembroke, whose men were most closely involved, bestirred themselves and circumvented other members of the Privy Council, two of the most powerful of whom were Burghley and his son, Robert Cecil.

There was probably never a time when Burghley would not gladly have used his influence to have all playhouses "plucked down"; but it so happened that, during the following month, he was endeavoring to arrange a match between the Lady Bridget Vere, aged thirteen, and William Herbert, eldest son of the Earl and Countess of Pembroke—a match which the Pembrokes were eager to consummate and

[3] *A Life of Wm. Sh.;* p. 269 ff.
[4] Op. cit.

seem to have initiated; and the Fox would have been all complaisance.

In September, Lord Oxford wrote Burghley expressing his enthusiastic approval of the match. He was an old friend of Mary Sidney, Lady Pembroke, and he knew that her elderly husband had not long to live. We quote his letter in part:

> . . . Again being a thing agreeable to your Lordship's fatherly care and love to my daughter; a thing for the honour, friendship and liking I have to the match, very agreeable to me. . . . I know no reason to delay it, but according to their desires to accomplish it with the convenient speed; and I do not doubt but your Lordship and myself shall receive great comfort thereby. . . . I am sorry that I have not an able body which might have served to attend on Her Majesty in the place where she is, being especially there, whither, without any other occasion than to see your Lordship, I would always willingly go. September 8th, 1597.
>
> Your Lordship's most assured,
>
> EDWARD OXEFORD [5]

"The place where she is" was Theobalds. And when the Earl speaks of "their desires to accomplish it with the convenient speed," he refers to the elder Pembrokes' desires, not the young couple's.

However, nothing came of the proposed betrothal, and in 1599, Lady Bridget married Francis Norris, who became Lord Norris of Rycote in the following year upon the death of his grandfather. But in 1604 Lady Susan Vere married the younger brother, Philip Herbert; so the two families were eventually allied.

The second important event of this period occurred on August 4, 1598, when Lord Burghley died, at the great age, for those times, of seventy-eight. He had seen to it, with his accustomed thoroughness and authority, that the noble name of his son-in-law would be denigrated, if not practically obliterated from the annals of the time. He had employed Camden to write these annals and had furnished him with the necessary materials and documents. Burghley had kept meticulous and abundant notes of everything: nothing was too trivial to be mentioned in his diary or in his memoranda for the state records. His highest ambition was that the house of Cecil should be wealthy and eminent. He achieved that ambition as completely as even he could have desired. He left his son Robert in the position of Secretary of State. And he left his own record of Shakespeare's age—a record deeply inimical to Shakespeare, the man and the supreme artist.

While Oxford was writing him cordially, and trusting him moderately (perhaps), Burghley was busy at his murderous machinations. For it was a clear case of murder. Even in his will, he does not men-

[5] Ward; p. 330; cit. S.P.Dom. Eliz., 264.111.

tion his son-in-law's name. After bequeathing the bulk of his property to his two sons, he continues:

> . . . to my said son Sir Robert Cecil and to Lady Bridget and the Lady Susan Vere, *the daughters of my deceased daughter the Lady Anne, Countess of Oxford,* all my goods, money, plate and stuff that are or shall be remaining at my death within my bedchamber at Westminster, and in my two closets, and any chamber thereto adjoining. . . .[6]

Not one word of the Earl of Oxford, not even the courtesy of naming him as the granddaughters' father, and this although Lord Oxford had written him, within the year, in the most friendly and cordial terms. There is too much to be deduced from this circumstance for us to elaborate upon it here; it bears out what we have hitherto said. But Burghley had been all-powerful, and it is patent that with cold deliberateness, he had eliminated Oxford from all public or historical consideration.[7]

His action also showed that William Burghley knew himself to have been characterized by Shakespeare. For it would have done no harm to the legend of the Virgin Queen to record Lord Oxford's eminence as the first earl of England—or, for that matter, to leave him a ring or other souvenir. Even if the Earl had been an improvident father and husband, Burghley would still have taken pride in his connection with Edward de Vere, except that by stressing the relationship he ran the risk of being shown up for what he himself had been, if the truth of the authorship ever came to light—if, that is to say, the "murder" he had done ever did "out."

To the Earl of Oxford this cold impassive denial must have been a cutting blow. It had been a strange relationship these two men, diametrically opposed both in code and temperament, had maintained. If Oxford, in the frenzied compulsion of his creative genius and passion for truth, had held the mirror up to the cold-blooded

[6] Ward; p. 332. "The will extends over 18 pages."

[7] 1605 (03) From the epistle dedicatory of Camden's *Remains of a Greater Work concerning Britain,* published anonymously:

"These may suffice for some poetical descriptions of our ancient poets; if I would come to our time, what a world could I present to you out of Sir Philip Sidney, Th. Campion, Mich. Drayton, George Chapman, John Marston, William Shakespeare, and other pregnant wits of our times, whom succeeding ages may justly admire."

No word of the Earl of Oxford, whom many of his contemporaries had put at the top of the list for literary excellence, adjudged "the best for comedy."

The same thing happens in Stowe's *Annals,* where the list includes "M. Willi Shakespeare gentleman," with no word of de Vere, although in *Minerva Britannica,* 1612, Peacham, Mr. of Arts of Cambridge, puts him at the head of the list of those who made the Elizabethan era the "golden age of literature."

What could be more obvious than that Burghley, the Bear, Authority, had erased Oxford's name from the authorized records?

(Above quotations from Camden and Stowe taken from *The Life of William Shakespeare Expurgated:* W. L. Stoddard.)

"fishmonger," that consummate old hypocrite, on his part, had lived a lie with his son-in-law. He had circumvented him in every way he could, while pretending friendship and interest; he had never—so far as we can find—really helped him in his times of deepest need, except superficially, for show, in ways that cost him nothing; and although the younger man's great properties had been for thirty years in his charge, they had dwindled to comparatively small holdings, while the Lord Treasurer himself had waxed rich beyond what must have been even his own dreams of avarice. Oxford was the only person he had ever met who had seen through him and revealed him for what he was. And Burghley did everything possible in his position of almost supreme power to defame him for all time.

It is evident, since the slurs upon Lord Oxford's character originated from insinuations recorded in Camden's *Annals,* that Burghley is responsible for them. (Camden tried afterwards to make amends.) Oxford knew Burghley was murdering his reputation, but he believed the truth would one day be known.

One discerning historian, Thomas Birch, writing in 1754, sharply criticized Camden's account of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Although not apprehending the most serious defect of the manipulated story, he plainly saw that all was not as it should be. He writes as follows:

> Camden was encouraged in his new task by no less a personage than that of the lord high Treasurer Burghley, who had borne so eminent a part in the actions themselves, and now *assisted as well as rewarded his labours,* opening to him the treasury of his own state papers, and those of the public offices. But copious as the Annals of Queen Elizabeth are in the matter, and elaborate in the style and composition; yet *the defects of the work are too obvious.* For, besides *the partiality* scarce avoidable in an history written and published so near the time of which it treats . . . we have frequent occasion to *regret the want of the writer's usual industry and accuracy* in the use of the material within his power, and to excuse him for *such errors and defects* as later discoveries would have enabled him to avoid.[8]

"The defects of the work are too obvious" and the "partiality" too apparent, because Burghley manipulated every account to suit his own purposes, just as he compelled Holinshed to "slant" his in 1587.

The record of Elizabeth's reign is singularly complete, for never had monarch more articulate subjects. Many of the Queen's sayings have been gathered together and preserved in books. And yet—*significant fact*—her most brilliant courtier, poet and dramatist, *who was for at least fifteen years her high favorite and for forty years on terms of intimacy with her,* as well as with all the prominent persons of the time, the Lord Great Chamberlain, distinguished peer of the realm, member of the most important Law Committee of Parliament,

[8] *Memoirs of the Reign of Q. Eliz.,* etc.

has been excluded from the account, too obviously blotted out: *there is no record of any conversation between him and Elizabeth.* The loss to English culture is beyond computation. Only one anecdote survives which definitely presents the Queen and the Earl in each other's company. And this, strikingly enough, has perpetuated a derogatory remark Lord Oxford made about Sir Walter Ralegh on the day of Essex's execution—the very thing the Cecils would have wished to be perpetuated, since Robert Cecil had behaved in a dastardly fashion towards Ralegh and would have been glad to have it appear that Oxford looked down upon him.

How can one escape the belief that Lord Oxford had Burghley's and Robert Cecil's actions in mind when he wrote not only Launcelot's words, but Hamlet's too:

> For *murder,* though it have no tongue, *will speak*
> *With most miraculous organ* (II.2.601-2);
>
> . . . *foul deeds* will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes (I.2.256-7);

and even Queen Margaret's speech (*3 H.VI:* III.3.76-7):

> For though usurpers sway the rule awhile,
> Yet *heavens are just,* and *time suppresseth wrongs.*[9]

In March 1599, Lord Oxford received a letter from the seventeen-year-old Robert Bertie, son of his sister Mary and Lord Willoughby, now travelling abroad, which must have helped to thaw the frost around his heart:

> *Monseigneur, Je désire infiniement de vous faire paroistre par quelque effect l'honneur que je vous porte, ayant esté tousjours bien veu de vous; mais d'autant que je n'ay trouvé encores aucun subject assez digne de vous divertir de vos plus serieux affaires, je n'osoy pas prendre la hardiesse de vous escrire, de peur d'estre trop mal advisé de vous importuner de lettres qui ne mériteroyent pas d'estre seulement ouvertes, si non en ce qu'elles vous asseureroyent de l'éternelle service que je vous ay voué et à toute vostre maison; vous suppliant très humblement, Monsieur, de l'avoir pour agréable et de me tenir pour celuy qui est prest de reçevoir vos commandemens de telle dévotion que je seray toute ma vie vostre très humble serviteur et neveu.*[10]
>
> (My Lord, I wish infinitely to convey to you in some manner the honor I bear you, having always been well looked upon by you; but aside from the fact that I have not yet found *a subject worthy to take you from your more serious affairs,* I should not make so bold as to write you, for fear of being too ill-advised to importune you with letters which

[9] Compare the following from *The Spanish Tragedy,* which bears in a hundred instances the unmistakable mark of Shakespeare's hand:

> *The heavens are just; murder cannot be hid:*
> *Time* is the author of both *truth and right,*
> And *time will bring this treachery to light.* (II.4.173-5.)

[10] Ward; p. 333; cit. Cal. Ancaster MSS., 345.

> would not even deserve to be opened, if not in that they would assure you of the eternal service which I have sworn to you and to all your house; praying you very humbly, sir, to take this kindly and to consider me one who is ready to receive your commands with such devotion that I shall be all my life your very humble servant and nephew.)

It was in the year Burghley died that Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* appeared. *Cynthia's Revels,* sub-titled *The Fountain of Self-Love,* is dated two years later, but it may well have been privately presented some time before the record indicates. It would seem to have been the former play which called forth Oxford's comments in *Much Ado* and the latter which so angered him that he took up *Troilus and Cressida* again and almost blasted Jonson, Chapman and others off the planet with this eloquent exercise in the classical vein they so approved. No wonder Achilles-Oxford felt like sulking in his tent: he seemed to be getting attacks from all sides.

The Earl's personal situation had altered considerably since the latest revision of this old play. Cressida was now dead to him, even the part of her which had been Anne Vavasor. Helen-Elizabeth was an old woman. Paris-Ralegh and Diomedes-Ralegh had given place to Essex in her favor. Menelaus-Leicester was dead. So was Oxford's youthful self, Troilus; so also was Pandarus. Thersites, here, is patently a composite, for the most part the unworthy side of Chapman—with Hector probably a combination of his and Jonson's better aspects, for Lord Oxford could still be generous and recognized the quality, certainly of Chapman, at his best. Chapman had been persistently *hectoring* Oxford (no less than Jonson had), with his School of Night—said to have been connected with Ralegh's school of Atheism —opposing the Earl's School of Day (Phoebus, the Sun, etc.); he was at times insultingly spiteful.

Now, Chapman's 1598 translation of Homer's *Iliad* has "a filthy dog" named Thersites. Bearing in mind Oxford's identification as Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida,* and his innate scorn for the niggling meanness of "base-born men," we find startlingly apposite the rebuke which, in the *Iliad, Ulysses* administers to *Thersites* in the council of princes before "cudgelling" him:

> Not a worse of all this host came with our king than thee
> To Troy's great siege; then *do not take into that mouth of thine*
> *The names of kings, much less revile the dignities that shine*
> *In their supreme states.* (II.216-19.)[11]

The Earl of Oxford had been patient and courteous until things went too far; then he slashed about in keen earnest. Neither Chap-

[11] This quotation from the *Iliad* taken from Charles Mills Gayley: *Shakespeare and the Founding of Liberty in America;* p. 236. He does not, of course, connect Ulysses with Lord Oxford.

man, nor Jonson nor the others would have missed the cutting point here. However, as we say, "rank Thersites" with "his mastick jaws" probably now stood for a composite of the railing playwrights, not for Chapman alone (although the name Thersites may have been used for the first time in this version, for its parallel in the *Iliad*), while still trailing objectionable characteristics of the original Puritan identity.

Ajax is indubitably Jonson. Ulysses is still the mature Oxford, the nobleman with a patriotic responsibility toward the state, while Achilles is partially the dramatist Oxford, being taunted by his rivals, melancholy, disillusioned, resting on his laurels and unwilling to bestir himself in the cause. In this version, the Earl seems to share the role with Essex, whom the physical description fits,[12] as he shared it originally with Leicester.

> *Ulysses.* We saw him at the opening of his tent:
> He is not sick.
> *Ajax.* Yes, *lion*-sick, sick of a proud heart; you may call it *melancholy* . . . but by my head, 'tis pride. (II.3.84-8.)

Jonson, whom, as Ajax, Thersites calls "thou mongrel beef-witted lord" (II.1.14), was a slow and uninspired worker. In *Satiromastix,* Dekker—it may have been with the aid of Oxford, of whose phenomenal fluency Jonson never ceased to speak with jealous scorn—mocked Jonson in the throes of composition, as follows:

> O me, thy priest, inspire!
> For I to thee and thine immortal name
> In—in—golden tunes—
> For I to thee and thine immortal name
> In—sacred raptures flowing—flowing—swimming—swimming—
> In sacred raptures swimming,
> Immortal name—game—dame—tame—lame, lame, lame!
> Pux!—hath shame—proclaim—oh!—
> In sacred raptures flowing, will proclaim, not—
> O me, thy priest inspire!

Troilus and Cressida may possibly be the play referred to in the famous scene in *The Return from Parnassus* (1601-2), in which Burbage, as a character, says:

> Why, here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down; aye and Ben Jonson too. O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow; he brought up Horace, giving the poets *a pill,* but our fellow Shakespeare *hath given him a purge* that made him *bewray his credit.*[13]

[12] Drawing upon the record of Thuanus, Agnes Strickland states that "Essex's achievements were confined to acts of personal valour, which procured him, in the French camp, the name of the English Achilles."—p. 459.

[13] In *Satiromastix* there occur numerous references to "pills" and "purges" to be given Horace-Jonson, who is made to "bewray his credit." The reference may pos-

Horace, in *The Poetaster,* represents the arrogant, self-righteous author, Jonson. The praise the man accords himself, especially as Crites in *Cynthia's Revels,* is almost beyond belief. He was intensely jealous and envied those whom the world treated well. Hence his spiteful satires upon Oxford, apparently written on a basis of no personal acquaintance with the Earl. His three "comical satires," of which the first was *Every Man Out,* were his contribution to the *poetomachia,* or war of the theatres.[14] At about this time, Jonson was involved in a protracted feud with Marston, and had challenged him to a duel, which Marston declined, knowing the powerful ex-bricklayer had already killed two men in duels; but Jonson, coming upon Marston armed, in a tavern, took his pistol away and gave him a thrashing.[15]

While the Greek-heroes revision of *Troilus and Cressida* must have been made before *Cynthia's Revels* was publicly presented and certainly before the quarto was printed, there are cogent reasons for believing that it was provoked by the satire on Amorphus-Oxford and Asotus-Southampton. Jonson handled the relationship very cautiously, calling Asotus the "heir to Philargyrus [Sugary love], a citizen." But Oxford made no bones about recognizing what the truculent playwright was up to. As usual he is forthright in saying what he thinks. Alexander, describing Ajax for Cressida's benefit (*T. and C.:* I.2.19 *et seq.*), is giving a striking presentment of Jonson:

> This man, lady, hath robbed many beasts of their particular additions: he is as valiant as the lion, churlish as the bear, slow as the elephant: a man into whom nature hath crowded so many *humours* that his valour is crushed into folly, *his folly sauced with discretion:* there is no man hath a virtue that he hath not a glimpse of, nor any man an attaint but he carries some stain of it. He is melancholy without cause and *merry against the hair;* he hath the joints of every thing, but *every thing so out of joint* that he is a gouty Briareus, *many hands and no use;* or purblind Argus, *all eyes and no sight.*

The meaning is unmistakable. In particular, it is implied that the "folly" of being "merry against the hair" (the heir, Southampton) is "sauced with discretion," although the "churlish" playwright has "everything out of joint." In our belief, Jonson never forgave Oxford this passage, although he himself had committed far worse affronts against the Earl.

Thersites assumes in *Troilus and Cressida,* as we have elsewhere observed, the kind of relationship between Achilles and Patroclus

sibly be to this play instead, and Shakespeare have collaborated to some extent with Dekker. This whole subject requires careful study. We shall return to this passage in Chap. Seventy-eight.

[14] Felix E. Schelling: Intro. Everyman ed. *Complete Plays of Ben Jonson.* He omits *Every Man In.*

[15] J. Q. Adams: *A Life of Wm. Sh.:* Chap. XVI.

that Jonson suggests in *Cynthia's Revels* between Amorphus and Asotus—with a mischievous glance at Oxford's Sonnet 20, which was written before he was able to disclose to Southampton what their true relationship was. We have spoken of the scene in which Amorphus offers to give Asotus

> the particular and distinct face of every your most noted species of persons, as your merchant, your scholar, your soldier, your lawyer, courtier, etc. (II.1.)

Here we have (I.3.142 *et seq.*):

> *Ulysses.* The great Achilles *whom opinion crowns*
> *The sinew and the forehead of our host,*
> *Having his ear full of his airy fame,*
> Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent
> Lies mocking our designs. With him Patroclus
> Upon a lazy bed the livelong day
> Breaks scurril jests,
> And with ridiculous and awkward action—
> Which, slanderer, he *imitation* calls—
> *He pageants us.* Sometime, great Agamemnon,
> *Thy* topless deputation he puts on
> And, *like a strutting player,* whose conceit
> Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
> To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
> 'Twixt his stretch'd footing and the scaffoldage,—
> Such to-be-pitied and o'erwrested seeming
> *He acts thy greatness in:*—and *when he speaks,*
> *'Tis like a chime a-mending. . . .*
> . . . . . .
> . . . At this fusty stuff
> The large Achilles, on his press'd bed lolling,
> From his deep chest *laughs out a loud applause;*
> *Cries, "Excellent! 'tis Agamemnon just.*
> *Now play me Nestor; hem, and stroke thy beard,*
> *As he, being drest to some oration."*
> That's done; . . .
> . . . . . .
> *Yet good Achilles still cries, 'Excellent!*
> *'Tis Nestor right. Now play him me, Patroclus,*
> *Arming to answer in a night alarm.'*
> And then, forsooth, the faint defects of age
> Must be the scene of mirth; to cough and spit,
> And with a palsy-fumbling on his gorget,
> Shake in and out the rivet: and at this sport
> Sir Valour dies; cries, "O! enough, Patroclus;
> Or give me ribs of steel; I shall split all
> In pleasure of my spleen." *And in this fashion,*
> *All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,*
> . . . . . .
> *Success or loss, what is or is not, serves*
> *As stuff for these two to make paradoxes.*

At the time this section of the play was written, many of "your writers," as Touchstone called them, evidently did not know the truth of the relationship between Oxford and Southampton. The dramatist skilfully combined the large, florid Essex with himself here, complicating the allusion.

Thersites calls Patroclus "Achilles' brach" (II.1.119); and in an altercation with Patroclus (V.1.16 *et seq.*), in a passage where he curses like the brutish Caliban, Thersites says to the younger man:

> . . . thou art thought to be Achilles' male varlet.
> *Patroclus.* Male varlet, you rogue! what's that?
> *Thersites.* Why, his masculine whore.[16] Now the rotten diseases of the south, the guts-griping, ruptures, catarrhs, etc., etc., . . . take and take again such preposterous discoveries![17]
> *Patroclus.* Why, thou damnable *box of envy,* thou, what meanest thou to curse thus?

Patroclus seems young and rather innocent. It is only when he is "wounded" that Achilles rouses himself to the combat.

> *Ulysses.* O! courage, courage, princes; great Achilles
> Is arming, *weeping,* cursing, *vowing vengeance:*
> Patroclus' wounds have rous'd his drowsy blood. (V.5.30.2.
> . . . . . .
> *Enter Achilles.*
> *Achilles.* Where is this *Hector?*
> Come, come, *thou boy-queller,* show thy face;
> *Know what it is to meet Achilles angry.* (44-6.)

This is precisely the way Oxford would have behaved if Southampton's honor or credit had been treated lightly—as it certainly was in *Cynthia's Revels,* and probably more so in *The Isle of Dogs,* where the reckless Nashe must have given the story away, as he had come near doing before, signally in *Summer's Last Will,* as well as in the Prologue to *Choice of Valentines.* The Earl was tired of having the Fair Youth *hectored.* (We shall have subsequent evidence that he was incurably hurt by Nashe's *Isle of Dogs.*)

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[16] It would seem that Oxford is jeering at the "dogs" who have questioned or speculated about his relation to the Fair Youth, allowing them to think the worst, since he cannot tell them the truth. In *King Edward II,* att. to Marlowe but showing unmistakable signs of Shakespeare's hand, the following passage occurs:

> The mightiest kings have had their minions:
> Great Alexander loved Hephestion;
> The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept,
> And for *Patroclus* stern *Achilles* droopt. (I.4.391-4.)

[17] This seems to be an elaborate paraphrase of du Bartas's *Weeks*—the *Furies*—where a grisly and comprehensive list of diseases reads, in part:

> King's evils, cankers, cruel gouts, and biles [boils],
> The itch, the murrain, the Alcides grief.

The opening lines of Ulysses's great speech on Degree give a hint that Oxford, having masked his nobility and descended into the ranks of the common playwrights, feels that he shows no worthier than the "unworthiest" of them. In the role of the noble Ulysses, he is rebuking what he considers his renegade self.[18] He had violated the hierarchical, which the Elizabethans regarded as a cosmic, law.[19]

> Degree being vizarded,
> The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask. (I.3.83-4.)

And he adds:

> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark! what discord follows; *each thing meets*
> *In mere oppugnancy.* (109-11.)

This was what Oxford was finding true in his bohemian life. The jealous playwrights were meeting him "in mere oppugnancy."

Thersites, the vulgar "dog" we have encountered elsewhere—in the "puppy-headed" Caliban, etc.—is described by Nestor as

> A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint. (I.3.193.)

Undoubtedly some older friend of Oxford's—it may have been Lord Lumley, now in his late sixties—had remonstrated with the Earl for mingling with the riff-raff of the theatres. But since he has done so, he should stand up to them.

> *Nestor.* Ajax is grown self-will'd, and bears his head
> In such a rein, in full as proud a place
> As broad Achilles. . . . (I.3.188-90.)
> . . . . . .
> Though 't be sportful combat,
> Yet in the trial much opinion dwells. (335-6.)

To Ulysses's suggestion that it is better to turn "blockish Ajax" upon Hector than risk Achilles's prowess, Nestor replies:

> Now I begin to relish thy advice;
> . . . . . .
> Two *curs* shall tame each other: pride alone
> Must tarre *the mastiffs* on, as 'twere their bone. (388-92.)

In the following scene (II.1), Thersites and Ajax vilify each other:

> *Thersites.* Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full of envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proserpine's beauty,

18 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdu'd
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand. (Son. 111.)

For I am sham'd by that which I bring forth. (Son. 72.)

19 See E. M. W. Tillyard: *Eliz. World Picture;* Chap. II.

> ...ay, that thou *barkest* at him. . . . Thou shouldst strike him. . . . He would *pun thee into shivers* with his fist, as a sailor breaks a biscuit.
> *Ajax.* You whoreson *cur.*
> . . . . . .
> *Theristes.* . . . thou sodden-witted lord! . . . *thou art bought and sold* among those of any wit, *like a barbarian slave.* . . .
> *Ajax.* You *dog!* . . . You *cur!* (33-55.)

Who was more likely to pun a rival "into shivers" than Oxford? The dog-image prevails throughout in connection with the inimical playwrights, corroborating our belief that Nashe's *Isle of Dogs* was necessarily concerned with personalities prominent in the theatre and no doubt revealed the identity of Shakespeare, if not of Will, the actor, who was Southampton. Further proof exists in *Satiromastix,* where Horace-Jonson is rebuked for his arrogant and insolent satires and is said to have been banished by "the stagerites . . . into the Ile of Dogs," where he turned Ban-dog and began to bite.[20]

As for Thersites's taunt that Ajax could be "bought and sold like a barbarian slave," this accusation against Jonson was still valid in 1623, when for a handsome consideration he lent his name and peculiar talents to the perpetration of the greatest hoax in history. Perhaps he took a "cynical" satisfaction in thus avenging himself.

Agamemnon and Ulysses flatter Ajax to bend him to their purpose. They are speaking of Achilles:

> *Ajax.* What is he more than another?
> *Agamemnon.* No more than what he thinks he is.
> *Ajax.* . . . Do you not think he thinks himself a better man than I am?
> . . . . . .
> *Why should a man be proud? . . . I know not what pride is.*
> . . . . . .
> I do hate a proud man, as I hate the engendering of toads. (II.3.141-58.)

This is perfectly true of Jonson, who was a notorious sycophant; but if he was not "proud," he was certainly vain of his work and full of self-conceit.

Ulysses declares that Achilles is "so plaguy proud" that he will not recover.[21] Then he proceeds to feed the vanity of Ajax in a speech full of irony (181-98), and Nestor says, aside:

> O! this is well; *he rubs the vein of him.* (199.)

Ajax "drinks up the applause":

> *Ajax.* I'll let his *humours'* blood. (213.)

20 Chap. Seventy-five.

21 This statement was quite true of Essex; and one type of audience would naturally have connected Achilles with Essex. Of course Oxford was proud too.

Which is of course what Jonson thought he had done to Oxford in *Every Man Out of His Humour,* where he satirized him as "the humorous knight."

They keep it up, the flattery:

> *Nestor.* He is not *emulous* as Achilles is.
> . . . . . .
> *Ulysses.* If he were *proud,*—
> *Diomedes.* Or *covetous of praise,*—
> *Ulysses.* Ay, or *surly borne,*—
> *Diomedes.* Or strange, or *self-affected!*
> *Ulysses.* Thank the heavens, lord, *thou* art of *sweet composure;*
> . . . . . .
> Thrice-fam'd, beyond all *erudition;*
> . . . . . .
> . . . I will not praise *thy wisdom,*
> . . . . . .
> *Thy spacious and dilated parts.* . . . (232-51.)

Ajax becomes inflated with vainglory. Jonson was a consummate pedant, vain of his classical learning. All these epithets and insinuations applied tellingly to him.

The magnificent passage between Achilles and Ulysses (III.3.74 *et seq.*) in which Lord Oxford is rebuking himself is too long to quote in full, although every line is pertinent to his character and situation.

> *Achilles.* What! am I poor of late?
> 'Tis certain, greatness, once fall'n out with fortune,
> Must fall out with men too.

Follows a speech which might have been made by Timon. Then Ulysses reads a letter written him by "a strange fellow" (who is Plato), to the effect that greatness comes from a man's "virtues shining upon others," and reminds Achilles

> That no man is the lord of any thing
> . . . . . .
> Till he communicate his parts to others;

adding,

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion;
> . . . . . .
> . . . perseverance, dear my lord,
> Keeps honour bright; to *have done* is to hang
> Quite out of fashion, like a rusty nail
> In monumental mockery.
> . . . . . .
> For time is like a fashionable host,
> That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
> And with his arms outstretch'd as he would fly,
> Grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles,

> And farewell goes out sighing. O! let not virtue seek
> Remuneration for the thing it *was;*
> For beauty, wit,
> High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
> Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
> To envious and calumniating time.
> . . . . . .
> The present eye praises the present object:
> Then marvel not, *thou great and complete man,*
> That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;
> Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
> Than what not stirs. *The cry went once on thee,*
> And still it might, and yet it may again,
> If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive,
> And case thy reputation in thy tent. (115-87.)

This was the situation with Oxford at the end of the '90's, though Ajax here stands for other playwrights, not specifically Jonson. By then he had written all his great plays. (No phrase could better describe him than "thou great and complete man.") In 1597 he had said, in a letter to Burghley, that he had not "an able body." He was at this time, besides, deeply discouraged because the Queen, though evidently still leading him to hope, never gave him preferment, unmindful of his "desert in service." Perhaps she thought the thousand pounds a year was as much as she could manage; but he felt she had treated him unworthily. In 1601, when requesting Robert Cecil to intercede with Elizabeth to have him granted the Presidency of Wales, Lord Oxford wrote:

> But if Her Majesty, in regard to *my youth, time, and fortune spent in her Court, and her favours and promises which drew me on without any mistrust the more to presume in mine own expense* . . .

All this seems to shed light upon Achilles's remark,

> Of this my privacy
> I have strong reasons.
> *Ulysses.* But 'gainst your privacy
> The reasons are more potent and heroical.
> 'Tis known, Achilles, that you are in love
> With one of Priam's daughters.
> *Achilles.* Ha! known! (190-5.)

The allusion here is necessarily heavily disguised. But Oxford was worried at this time about the status of Southampton, who had been born of his love for "one of Priam's [a king's] daughters." Ulysses declares, apropos of the "divinity" which "doth hedge a king":

> There is *a mystery*—with whom *relation*
> *Durst never meddle*—in the soul of state,
> Which hath an operation more *divine*
> Than *breath or pen* can give expressure to. (202-5.)

It is significant that Patroclus now intercedes:

> To this effect, Achilles, have I mov'd you.
> A woman impudent and mannish grown
> Is not more loath'd than an effeminate man
> In time of action. *I* stand condemn'd for this:
> They think *my* little stomach to the war
> And *your great love to me* restrains you thus.
> Sweet, rouse yourself . . .
> . . . . . .
> *Achilles.* Shall Ajax fight with Hector?
> *Patroclus.* Ay, and perhaps receive much honour by him.
> *Achilles. I see my reputation is at stake;*
> My fame is *shrewdly gor'd.* (217-29.)

This is especially interesting if Chapman is a partial prototype of Hector, for Chapman is supposed to be the "rival poet" of the Sonnets. But the Earl of Oxford felt impelled to defend his "reputation" against them all, certainly against Jonson as well as Chapman.

Thersites enters and announces,

> Ajax goes up and down the field, *asking for himself.*

Here is a recognizable jibe at Jonson's pompous, self-righteous soliloquies, as Crites, for instance, in *Cynthia's Revels,* one of which begins:

> Do, good Detraction, do, and I the while
> Shall shake thy spight off with a careless smile.
> . . . . . .
> . . . It is a crown to me
> That the best judgments can report me wrong'd;
> Them liars, and their slanders impudent;
> . . . for of such
> To be dispraised, is the most perfect praise. . . .

Thersites says of Ajax:

> Why, he stalks up and down like a peacock . . . bites his lip with a politic regard, as who should say, "There were wit in this head, an 'twould out"; . . . The man's undone for *ever;* for if Hector break not his neck i' the combat, he'll break it himself in vain-glory. He knows not me: I said, "Good morning, Ajax"; and he replies, "Thanks, Agamemnon." What think you of this man that takes me for the general? He's grown a very *land-fish, languageless, a monster.* . . . (III.3.252 *et seq.*)

Here we have Caliban again, and once more in Thersites's soliloquy (V.4), which begins:

> Now they are *clapper-clawing* one another; I'll go look on.

He calls Ajax a "mongrel cur" and Achilles "a dog of as bad a kind."

An interesting point in connection with Jonson's characterization as Ajax is the fact that he had once, during his service in the Low

Countries, killed one of the enemy, "in the face of both the camps." And there seems to be a teasing reference to Marston's refusal to fight a duel with Jonson in the meeting between Hector and Thersites, in which the latter saves his skin by his cowardice (V.4.26-9):

> *Hector.* What art thou, Greek? art thou for Hector's match?
> Art thou of blood and honour?
> *Thersites.* No, no, I am a rascal; a scurvy railing knave; a very filthy rogue.

As Thersites belonged to Achilles, so Marston was an adherent of Lord Oxford's; this sharpens the point here.

In the scene where Achilles and his Myrmidons meet Hector, we find an allusion to Chapman's School of Night:

> *Achilles.* Look, Hector, how *the sun begins to set;*
> How *ugly night comes breathing at his heels* . . . (V.8.5 *et seq.*)

This is, of course, an allegorical statement of the theme elaborated by Ulysses (III.3), that Oxford's day is waning and new men are coming in.

We are not informed who Oxford's Myrmidons were in this contest. Dekker, principal author of *Satiromastix,* was one. Marston, who eulogized the Earl in 1598, was certainly another. Although Ben Jonson shared in the character of Hector, as appears in the dialogue with Thersites above, he never really forgave Oxford for portraying him as Ajax, seriously provoked to it though he had been. In *The Poetaster,* Jonson praised the poet of the Sonnets, after having first made insulting and damaging insinuations about the dramatist. Both he and Marston were constantly repudiating Shaksper. Moreover, the two bitter enemies, Jonson and Marston, were collaborating a few years later upon *Eastward Hoe.* But Jonson's feelings about the Earl of Oxford were contradictory and complex, and "old Ben" was a vindictive man.

Because so many of the records were destroyed, we have no surety as to the dates when *Troilus and Cressida* was performed, though it was performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Company.[22]

[22] Henslowe's Diary records payment to Dekker and Chettle "in earneste of their boocke called *Troyelles and cresida*" on 7th and 16th April, 1599. (In July and August, 1599, Dekker is mentioned in connection with a play called *the stepmother's tragedy,* which may have been a revision of the old play, *Cymbeline.*) It was, of course, only the manuscript of *Tr. and C.* upon which Dekker and Chettle borrowed money. Dekker was always in financial straits; he was working closely with Oxford at this time, and may have had a part in the additions made for the *poetomachia* and been thus repaid by his patron. One of the rewarding features of this study is the way all newly discovered facts fit into the picture as integral parts of the whole.

Troilus and Cressida, "as yt is acted by my Lord Chamberlain's men," was entered on the Stationers' Register, Feb. 7, 1603, with a note that sufficient authority

The Preface to the 1609 quarto, headed,

A nEver writer to an E.Ver reader,

begins:

> Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar.

It would be gratifying to know who wrote this long preamble in praise of the author's comic genius. Dekker was working with Lord Oxford at this time. He uses Thersites's word "clapper-clawed" and compares the play to the works of the pseudonymous Terence and to Plautus, from whose *Menoechmi* this same dramatist had taken the theme of *The Comedy of Errors.* It seems likely that Dekker may have had a hand in the final revision of *Troilus and Cressida,* writing at Lord Oxford's direction.