CRISPINUS STRAIGHTWAY became in Bohemia another name for Shakespeare. Touchstone had informed William that

> all your writers do consent that ipse is he: now, you are not ipse, for I am he.

He might at this point have added: "All your writers do consent that Crispinus is Shakespeare: now, Shaksper is not Crispinus, for I am he."

The identification was emphasized in two plays which were written at about this time, Thomas Dekker's *Satiromastix,* or *The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet,* and Ben Jonson's riposte, *The Poetaster.* Authorities differ about which of these plays was written first. But since Dekker uses certain characters more likely to have been taken from *The Poetaster* than vice versa—notably Horace-Jonson himself—he had obviously seen at least a preliminary version or been acquainted with the purport of it. Yet it is equally clear that much of Jonson's play was written as a defense of his own integrity and high-mindedness in reply to the "Untrussing" Dekker had given him for his satires on Oxford as the "humorous knight." In fact, he uses the word "untrussing" four or five times in respect to the unfair treatment meted

out to Horace for his "innocent" satires, "perverted by an enemy's tongue." The picture Jonson consistently gives of himself reveals him as self-righteous and arrogant, vindictive though volatile, and clever, without honor or apparent integrity. His self-justification fills more than eight pages of small print in the Everyman edition of *The Poetaster,* repeating and adding to that in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Every Man Out,* and is unutterably tedious.

In *Satiromastix,* Captain Tucca, whom Horace has made the subject of several of his famous Epigrams, tells the poet off in his explosive fashion. Horace-Jonson has said:

> . . . here be Epigrams upon Tucca, divulge these among the gallants; as for that Crispinus, that Crispin-asse and Fannius[1] his Playdresser who (to make the Muses beleeve their subjects' ears were starv'd and that there was a dearth of Poesie) cut an innocent Moor i' the middle,[2] to serve him in twice; & when he had done, made Poules-work of it, as for these twynnes, these *Poet-apes:*
>
> Their Mimicke trickes shall serve
> With mirth to feast our Muse, whilst their own starve.

So Tucca berates Horace:

> . . . You must have three or four sets of names: you must be called Asper, and Criticus, and Horace . . . Quintus, Horatius Flaccus.

Jonson was Asper and also Macilente in *Every Man Out;* Criticus in the first quarto of *Cynthia's Revels,* later changed to Crites; Horace in *The Poetaster.*

He continues:

> I smelt the *soule-sifted Marter-treader,* come, my most damnable fastitious rascal, I have a suite to you.

"Marter-treader" refers to Jonson's habit of stalking up and down the stage in his plays, making speeches of martyred virtue.

> *Horace.* Hold, Capten, 'tis known that Horace is valliant, & a man of the sword.

Tucca takes him up on this:

> . . . thou hast forgot how thou amblest (in leather pilch) by a play-wagon, in the high-way, and took'st mad Ieronimo's part, to get service among the Mimickes: and when the Stagerites banisht thee into the Ile of Dogs, thou turnd'st Ban-dog (villanous Guy) and ever since bitest; therefore I ask if thou hast been at Parris-garden, because thou hast such a good mouth; thou bitest well. . . .
>
> A Gentleman or an honest Citizen Shall not sit in your pennie-bench Theaters, with his Squirrel by his side cracking nuttes; nor sneak into a Taverne with his Mermaid; but he shall be *Satyr'd,* and *Epigram'd upon,* and his *humour* must run upon the stage: you'll have *Every Gentleman in's humour,* and *Every Gentleman out on 's humour;* we that are heades of Legions and Bandes, and feare none but these same shoulder-clappers, shall feare you, you Serpentine rascall. . . . Art not famous enough yet, my mad Horastratus, for *killing a Player,* but must thou eat men alive?
>
> Tis thy fashion to *flirte Inke into everie mans face, and then to crawle into his bosom. . . .*

"Every Gentleman" indicates that it was a man of gentle birth Jonson had been satirizing.[3] The "Player" whom Jonson had killed was Gabriel Spencer. For this Jonson had been imprisoned at Tyburn. Narrowly escaping the gallows, he was branded on the thumb with the felon's mark, the letter T.

After one of these outbursts, Crispinus remonstrates with the irate Captain in the words of the Constable of France to the Dauphin (*H.V.:* II.4.29):

> *O peace,* good Tucca, we are all sworne friends.
> *Tucca.* Sworne, *that Iudas* yonder will dub *you Knights* as Posts, if you serve under *his* band of oaths, the *copper-fac'd rascall* will *for a good supper out swear twelve dozen of graund Iuries.*

This passage is interesting in two striking particulars. First, a contemporary, a colleague, calls Jonson a "Judas," one who "will for a good supper out swear . . . grand Juries." (He was, as it happens, given a very "good supper" for his work on the First Folio.) It seems that the epithet, "honest Ben," was cherished, if not bestowed, by later generations—those same gentlemen who have postulated a quiet, simple, "retiring" Shakespeare who was, according to J. Q. Adams, "overshadowed" by "Ben Jonson—with his vast learning in the classics and strong assertive personality."[4] How could anyone ever have imagined the creator of Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear as "simple" or "retiring," or as "overshadowed" by Ben Jonson? Only a man of strong passions, to say nothing of a "strong assertive personality," could create such passionate characters as Shakespeare did.

Shake-speare was called "gentle" by his contemporaries, but the word "gentle" meant, in Elizabethan parlance, "well-born, having the right to bear arms." Such a man would be courteous, but not necessarily soft, "simple," or "retiring."[5] Shakespeare was *a force* in his

[1] Evidently Dekker.

[2] Aaron-Othello? Or perhaps a dual characterization of Othello?

[3] It could have been no one but Oxford. The satire of *Every Man In,* milder and less well-informed, cannot be analyzed here. There is much made of the "water-bearer."

[4] *A Life of Wm. Sh.;* p. 242.

[5] Adams writes: "Shakespeare's grief at the loss of his only son must have been poignant, yet in none of his plays does he allow an echo of this sorrow to obtrude itself upon his audiences, nor did he write an elegy on the boy, for by nature he was too shrinking to give utterance to his private emotions." (Op. cit., p. 199.)

Shakespeare "shrinking!" Like all creative writers he *was* giving utterance to his emotions—what are "private emotions?"—constantly, in all his work: giving utterance to his passions, thus bridling them.

age. It could not possibly have been otherwise. "Honest Ben" is a concept quite as illusory as a "too shrinking" Shakespeare. One has only to read the man's work with an informed and critical eye to take his moral measure.

The second point is that because Jonson has called Crispinus, or Crispinas, a "poetaster," a "parcel-poet," [6] and a "post," Tucca says Horace "will dub you Knights as Posts"; thus he indicates unmistakably that Crispinus is a knight, therefore the knight Oxford, just as the knight Puntarvolo was. He is Crispinus-Shakespeare-Oxford. And Judas Jonson will swear that he is Shaksper. Tucca also calls Jonson "copper-faced," or, as we should say, brazen. The satirist certainly, on his own showing, was that.

We cannot go into the dominant plot of *Satiromastix* further than to say that it suggests *Romeo and Juliet,* in that it has to do with a wedding, for which the festivities seem to commence at dawn, as the Capulet party did, and that the exigencies of the plot demand the bride's simulated but temporary death—to save her from the King's lust—as well as the presence of the King (instead of the Prince) and a loquacious father.[7]

Jonson's ridicule of the Knight, Sir Puntarvolo, in *Every Man Out,* is glanced at in Asinius Bubo's inquiry as to Horace's opinion of "the Knight's inditing"—the reference being ostensibly to a character in this play.

> *Horace.* Why, you see, wel, wel, an ordinary Ingenuity, a good wit for a Knight, you know, now.

Horace's remark, "I'll fat thy spleane and make it plump with laughter," suggests Achilles's speech to Patroclus (*Troilus and Cressida:* I.3.177-8.)

> Or give me ribs of steel; *I shall split all*
> *In pleasure of my spleen;—*

this and other parodies pointing to Jonson's habitual use of Shakespearean phrases.

In another passage, Asinius, seeing Horace with papers, asks what his "fardle" is; "fardel" being a word Oxford used for implications concerning Ralegh.

> *Horace.* Fardle, away, 'tis my packet; heere lies *intomb'd the loves of Knights and Earles.*

("When you *entombed* in men's eyes shall lie." Sonnet 81.)

[6] A parcel-poet is "like a parcel-gilt goblet; he is a poet on the surface only, but inwardly and truly base metal."—Greenwood: *The Sh. Prob. Restated;* p. 458.

[7] Mr. Percy Allen believes that in the final revision of *R. and J.,* Shakespeare visualized Juliet as the plays. Whether this be the case or not—and it is a notion which would be offensive to many readers who cannot match the Elizabethan zest for extended symbolism—it gives food for speculation in reading *Satiromastix.*

In *Cynthia's Revels* Jonson had ridiculed Oxford's courtier-manners and his relation to Southampton: a "brace of butterflies." It seems hardly possible that satire could be employed in a meaner spirit than had actuated Jonson in that play. That he was incurably jealous of Oxford not only because his dramas continued to draw crowds after many years on the stage,[8] while his own "played to empty houses," but also because of the Earl's position of privilege, appears in the spiteful things he says; for instance, in his description of Oxford in Crites's long speech (III.2):

> He past, appears some mincing marmoset
> Made all of clothes and face; his limbs so set
> As if they had some voluntary act
> Without man's motion, and must move just so
> In spight of their creation: one that weighs
> His breath between his teeth, and dares not smile
> Beyond a point, for fear t' unstarch his look;
> Hath travell'd to make legs, and seen the cringe
> Of several courts and courtiers; knows the time
> Of giving titles, and of taking walls;
> Hath read court common-places; made them his:
> Studied the grammar of state, and all the rules
> Each formal usher in that politic school
> Can teach a man.[9]

Now, with the initiation of the legend that Shakespeare was a common citizen, "Master Shakespeare," and with the increasing prominence of the Stratford Shaksper, who was making an elaborate pretence of being the dramatist (this testified to unmistakably, not only in *The Poetaster* itself but also in *The Return from Parnassus,* where Gullio struts about in satin, pretending to be a courtier, scholar, and poet)—*now* Jonson was, in *The Poetaster,* adopting the position that Cri-spinus was the same person as Cri-spinas, a "Poet-ape."

Is it any wonder that the Earl had had enough? Is it any wonder that his friends of the theatre rallied to his side and did the best they could to make a clear statement of the truth?

Dekker—undoubtedly with the encouragement, if not the collaboration, of Oxford—shows at the outset that he sees what Jonson is up to in *The Poetaster,* when he has Horace say:

> That same Crispinus is the silliest Dor and Fannius the flightiest
> cobweb-lawne peece of a Poet, oh, God!
> What care I if every Dor doth buz [10]

[8] In justice to Jonson, it must be remembered that he was more than twenty years younger than Oxford and had the younger writer's intolerance of what he considered outmoded.

[9] Compare this with Gabriel Harvey's *Speculum Tuscanismi,* with Chapman's description of the Earl of Oxford, and with Jonson's description of Amorphus.

[10] A *dor* is an insect, drone, idler; therefore a courtier, or a knight, in Jonson's jaundiced view.

In credulous eares, it is a crowne to me,
That the best judgments can report me wrong'd;

which rhyme is repeated almost verbatim from Crites's speech in *Cynthia's Revels* (III.2). The author is also deliberately indicating that he believes Jonson, in satirizing this Crispinus, is aiming at Oxford-Hamlet, just as he was in *Cynthia's Revels* (V.2), where he had Umpire Crites decide Amorphus's duel with the parody of Osric's words:

The Dor, the Dor, the Dor . . . the *palpable* Dor!

Dekker's Crispinus says, speaking in a Shakespearean vein—and we are still discussing *Satiromastix:*

Horace, Horace,
To stand within the shot of galling tongues
Proves not your guilt, for could we write on paper,
Made of these turning leaves of heaven, the cloudes,
Or speak with Angels' tongues; yet wise men know
That some would shake the head, though Saints should sing,
Some snakes must hisse, because they're born with stings.
Horace. 'Tis true.
Cris. Doe we not see fooles laugh at heaven and mocke
The Makers workmanship; be not you griev'd
If that which you molde fair, upright and smooth
Be jerk'd awry, made crooked, lame and vile,
By racking comments and calumnious tongues,
So to be bit it ranckles not: for innocence
May with a feather brush off foulest wrongs.
But when your *dastard wit* will strike at men
In corners, and *in riddles* folde the vices
Of your best friends, you must not take to heart
If they take off the gilding from the pilles,
And only offer you the bitter Coare.

This is a statement wise, generous and just, such as we should expect from Shakespeare.

Crispinus and Demetrius Fannius come as peacemakers to Horace, and Fannius makes a long speech reproaching Horace, which concludes:

. . . yet must we
Dance Antickes on your Paper.

Crispinus explains:

This makes us angry, but not envious,
No; were *thy warpt soule* put in a new molde,
I'd wear thee as a Iewel set in golde.
. . . . . .
We come like your Physitians, *to purge*
Your sick and dangerous minde of her disease.
Deme. In troth we doe, out of our loves we come,

And not revenge, but *if you strike us still*
We must defend our reputations.
Horace. Deliver me your hands, I love you both,
As deare as my own soule, proove me, and when
I shall traduce you, make me the scorn of men.
Both. Enough, we are friends.

It is here that Tucca enters, berating Horace for writing Epigrams about him, and Crispinus says, speaking in character:

For our sake, Captaine, nay prithee hold.

Then when he and Demetrius have gone, Horace promptly turns coat:

Hor. No, they have cloakt me with mine owne disgrace,
Which (fooles) *Ile spit againe even in your face.*

On the whole, a strong case is made out for Jonson's malice and unreliability. To offset Tucca's accusation against Horace as a Judas who will "out swear twelve dozen of grand Juries," we are given the bridegroom Terril's credo regarding an oath, which, if not written by Shakespeare, is certainly written in his manner, Terril being a representation of Romeo:

An oathe? why, 'tis the traffic of the soule,
'Tis law within a man: the seal of faith,
The bond of every conscience, unto whom
We set our thoughts like hands: yet *such a one*
I swore, and to the King; a King containes
A thousand thousand; when I swore to him,
I swore to them; the very *haires* that guard
His head, will rise up like sharp witnesses
Against my faith and loyalty; his eye
Would straight condemn me; *argue oaths no more,*
My oath is higher, for to the King I swore.

(We are constrained to suspect a deeper significance here, the "haires" being a far-fetched image. It is probable that we are being told of an oath Oxford swore to his sovereign, concerning himself and, it may be, Southampton as well.)

At the close of the play, when the bride has been revived, saved from the King's lust, to which she preferred death, and everyone is feeling mellow, the King, now softened by contrition, designates Crispinus to pronounce the *Arraignment of Horace.*

Cris. My Liege, to wed a Comicall event
To presupposed tragicke Argument:
Vouchsafe to exercise your eye and see
A *humorous* dreadful Poet take degree.
King. Dreadful in his proportion or his pen?
Cris. In both, he calls himself the whip of men.[11]

[11] So Jonson did.

King. . . . Therefore be thou ourself, [etc.] . . .
Cris. [*to Horace.*] Under control of my dread Soveraigne,
We are thy Iudges; thou that didst Arraigne
Art now prepar'd for condemnation;
Should I but bid thy Muse stand to the Barre,
Thyself against her would give evidence;
For flat rebellion 'gainst the sacred lawes
Of divine Poesie: heerein most she mist,
Thy pride and scorn made her turn Satirist,
And not her love to vertue (as thou Preachest.)
Or should we minister strong pilles to thee:
What lumps of hard and indigested stuffe,
Of *bitter Satirisme, of Arrogance,*
Of *Selfe-love, or Detraction,* of a blacke
And stinking *Insolence,* should we fetch up?
But none of these, we give thee what's more fit,
With stinging nettles crown thy stinging wit.

Following this there is a hubbub of talk; then Sir Rees ap Vaughan adds his Welsh comment, *aux* Flewellyn and Sir Hugh Evans, which sheds light upon what may have been Jonson's relation to Lord Oxford:

> Moreover and *Imprimis* when a Knight or Sentleman of virship does give you his passe-port, to travaile in and out of his Company, and gives you money for God's sake, I trust in Sesu, you will sweare (toothe and nayle) not to make scalde and wry-mouth jests upon his Knight-hood, will you not?
> *Horace.* I never did it by Parnassus.

He repeats the oath, elaborating on it; after which, Crispinus sums up:

> That fearful wreathe, this honour is your due,
> *All Poets shall be Poet-Apes but you.*

All this seems lucidly revealing. We shall hear more from Jonson about "poet-apes." There is plenty in *The Poetaster.* But this play seems to have frightened him sufficiently to make him return to his and pretend he was talking about Sogliardo-Shaksper all the time, not the real Crispinus, Oxford-or-Southampton-Shakespeare.

We have gone into *Satiromastix* at some length, because, since the record of the true Shakespeare's life and connection with the theatrical world has been almost completely destroyed, we are obliged to take the evidence where we find it. The Stratfordians have injected a shadowy, self-effacing figure into this vivid *milieu,* but he never really comes to life.

If the personality of Shakespeare has presented the greatest mystery of the literary world, the behavior of Jonson has provided the greatest paradox. Except for one consideration—and this is incalculably great—we should find it difficult to forgive Ben Jonson for his disingenuous, his persistently devious and tricky, behavior. However, perhaps it is not a matter for *forgiveness,* since it was not so much what the man *did* as what he *was.* Being what he was, his actions were instinctive. And it may be this very fact to which we owe the preservation of Shakespeare's work. Jonson may have shown the "grand possessors" of the invaluable manuscripts the way they could be given to the world without betraying what Burghley's—to say nothing of the Queen's, via Southampton's—immediate descendants considered a sacred trust. For after Oxford's death Jonson became a friend of at least two of the Earl's daughters and their husbands, as he was also of the influential Lady Mary Pembroke. He had been crafty in the beginning: he remained crafty until the end. If he profited by his craft, perhaps, in the long run, we have profited too.

After giving the whole situation much thought and careful study, we have reached a conclusion which seems to resolve the hitherto perplexing contradictions and to shed light upon the strange mystery of the Stratford hoax. The first beginnings of the action appear in the *Every Man* plays—let us say, with *Every Man Out,* the composition of which belongs to the eventful 1597–98 period.

Although we have not been able to discuss *Every Man Out* and *Cynthia's Revels* as fully as we should have liked to do, we hope we have made apparent what is, indeed, undeniable when these plays are closely examined—that Jonson had seen and envied Lord Oxford, had read, absorbed, and to a large extent understood the hidden meaning of his work, and that he quite knew whom he was satirizing in the persons of Puntarvolo and Amorphus, of Fastidious Brisk and Asotus, as well as in that of the gull, Sogliardo, and Cos (in *Cynthia's Revels*). He was spiteful and vindictive in his portrayals, but it would seem that Oxford did not retaliate in full force until after Jonson had ridiculed his relation to Southampton—as Achilles was aroused only when Patroclus had been wounded. Then came the final version of *Troilus and Cressida;* and Jonson, bully as his entire record shows him to have been, would have resented acutely having his unpleasant bluff called, quite as he is shown to do in *Satiromastix.*

Following the formal adoption of the pseudonym—not only "Shakespeare," but "Master Shakespeare"—the Stratford man and his father became active on the scene. Their "resolution" certainly received "countenance" in some way or other, had some connection with the arrangement, although Lord Oxford himself had no more intention of allowing Shaksper to claim his plays than Touchstone had of allowing William to claim Audrey—or, for that matter, than Sir Puntarvolo had of permitting liberties to be taken with his dog. The action of the Shepherd and the Clown in *The Winter's Tale* gives us what must be the most accurate picture; and there is a scene which

seems to follow it closely in *The Return from Parnassus.*[12] We may be sure Jonson was well aware of what was going on, and we are justified in supposing that he was not averse from seeing the man whom he considered his most successful rival, and whose superiority and prerogatives he resented, robbed of his birthright. This is, indeed, all one *can* suppose, in view of his subsequent actions.

In 1599, the new version of *Henry V* appeared. At some time after that Jonson heard, or heard about, Crispin Crispianus. And as soon as he had finished *Cynthia's Revels,* he began *The Poetaster,* in which "Crispinus or Crispinas" figures as Shakespeare-*cum*-Sogliardo. Not as Lord Oxford; for *he* seems to be Ovid *senior,* with Southampton his son, Ovid. In other words, Jonson's "Shakespeare" becomes a gull; and it is partly for this that *Satiromastix* rebuked him, as openly as was permissible.

Thereupon Jonson added a long passage to *The Poetaster* in which Virgil (obviously the author of the Sonnets) reads his *Aeneids* before Caesar, Horace, and others, and is praised to the skies by Horace himself. In this way, Jonson seems to say that he honored the true Shakespeare—as of course he must have, for Jonson had intellect and judgment, and he had paid the works the high tribute of imitation; yet, all the time, he was *calling the gull "Crispinus."*

In other words, Crispinus—or Crispianus—was Shakespeare in *Henry V.* Crispinus was indubitably Shakespeare in *Satiromastix.* But Jonson made Crispinus Shaksper, the gull, the braggart who had suddenly become a gentleman, with all the allusions to the coat-of-arms included. This was the slander which provoked *Satiromastix,* in which Jonson was reminded as plainly as he could be told, without a public betrayal of the secret, that Crispinus is the true Shakespeare, not the ass; in which he was crowned with "stinging nettles" and warned that he must cease making his "scalde and wry-mouth jests upon his Knight-hood." But Jonson's admonishers knew he would not cease. They knew "All Poets shall be Poet-Apes but you."

And this statement was prophetic. Jonson maintained until the very end his deliberate policy of confusing the real Shakespeare with the charlatan. Students have pored over his writings, striving to separate the man whom he loved "on this side idolatry" from the "poor poet ape"; to differentiate the poet who was "made as well as born" and labored over his "true-filed lines" from the suppositious one of whom Jonson also said, "Would that he had blotted a thousand"; to divorce the eclectic scholar who drew upon Greek and Latin classics for his poems and dramas from the dummy of whom Jonson used a fluke of speech to suggest that he had "small Latin and less Greek"; the polished courtier—"Soul of the age! . . . the wonder of

[12] Chap. Seventy-eight.

our Stage!"—from the man who talked so much that *"sufflaminandus erat."* He adopted this dishonest and insulting attitude with the first version of *The Poetaster;* he pursued it as a definite policy until 1616, when he published his own complete works. Then, *mirabile dictu,* this paradox, this trick, was found to be the ideal basis, the sole basis, upon which the works of the Earl of Oxford could be given to the world in folio. Jonson was the very man to write the Introduction. Had it not been all his own idea?

Remember, it was this same Ben Jonson who made the authoritative statement about Queen Elizabeth's incapacity for motherhood. "She had a membrana." This too was a lie, if we are to believe her personal physician's word, Cecil's knowledge, and, of course, what we have learned. It is amazing what vitality lies have. The author, or authors, of *Satiromastix* had called Jonson a Judas. And they knew him well. But we have better authority still; for in *Troilus and Cressida* Thersites says Ajax is "bought and sold like a barbarian slave."

It would be interesting to know whether Jonson's success in achieving fame as a playwright and grand impresario of the First Folio compensated him for the injustice he had done to a great spirit, to a man who, when Jonson had been needy and obscure, had provided him with "a passe-port to travail in and out of his Company" and had given him "money for God's sake"—it would be interesting to know whether that poet's own words may not at times have haunted him, so that he might have said to himself that this Oxford

> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels trumpet-tongu'd against
> The deep damnation of his taking off;
> And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.

If he had been really honest he could have added:

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on the other.