CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

WHETHER OR NOT Jonson's policy caused him twinges of conscience in late life, he was cultivating it assiduously when he wrote *The Poetaster,* although evidently the attack made upon him in *Satiromastix* for his scurvy treatment of Crispinus had caused him to add a tribute to the poet of the Sonnets, whom he called Virgil. If from now on, however, we are unable to tell whether Jonson means Shakespeare or the "essential clown" Shaksper, when he writes about Crispinus or a "poet-ape," it is well to reflect that he intended we should not, and that "honest Ben" had at the service of his jealous malice a keen and resourceful mind. In 1619, Drummond wrote of him,

> He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and Scorner of others.

One cannot but wonder at the curious ways of fate, which, in the very year that Burghley died, provided Lord Oxford with an equally potent enemy in the person of Ben Jonson. We say equally potent, though he was not entirely inimical: for Jonson admired Oxford and his dramas, as it were, in spite of himself. But he used the same methods Burghley did—the occasional sharp stab in the back, the slow trickle of poison, the smiling hypocrisy and affectation of honorable intentions—and he has probably deceived more people than even the Machiavellian Lord Treasurer deceived. The two together were stronger than justice, but they have not been stronger than truth. And this Oxford himself believed would be the case. He knew that

> foul deeds will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

Ben Jonson perpetrated some decidedly foul deeds in *The Poetaster.* He was playing a subtle game. The *cognoscenti* would, he knew, see in Ovid *senior* and Ovid Lord Oxford and Southampton, although, if he had been challenged for making them father and son, he would always be able to say he had intended Ovid *senior* for the original Ovidius Naso and Ovid *junior* for his disciple, the poet Oxford, as

indeed he seems to do, for a time, at the end. He was diabolically clever about leaving himself a loophole: he had to be; and he was shameless about wriggling out. For those who appreciated the Earl's great verse, he introduced Virgil-Oxford, allowing him to make the *Arraignment,* as Crispinus-Oxford made it in *Satiromastix.* But with the general public—of this he was well assured—*his* Crispinus, the Poetaster, would stand for Shakespeare, the author of the plays which for years they had flocked to the theatres to see; though he was actually the dummy, Shaksper, the man who strutted about quoting a line or two from *Venus and Adonis,* letting slip a casual phrase in a foreign tongue, usually incorrect—"moy mistressa," etc.[1]—the man who pretended to be a courtier, who dealt with pirate-printers, and wished to get himself a name and be thought "a tall man": Crispinus, or Cri-spinas, the Poetaster, the poet-ape. The public had no discrimination: they would take him for the Shakespeare he claimed to be. Jonson says so, in Epigram No. 56:

> He takes up all, makes each man's work his own,
> And told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes
> The sluggish, gaping auditor devours;
> He marks not whose 'twas first, and aftertimes
> May judge it to be his, as well as ours.

The Poetaster opens with one of Jonson's long and tedious preambles:

> *ENVY arises in the midst of the stage.*
>
> Light, I salute thee, but with wounded nerves,
> Wishing the golden splendour pitchy darkness.
> What's here? THE ARRAIGNMENT! ay, this, this is it.
> . . . . . .
> Are there no players here? no poet apes,
> That come with basilisk's eyes, whose forked tongues
> Are steep'd in venom, as their hearts in gall?
> Either of these would help me; they could wrest,
> Pervert and poison all they hear or see,
> With senseless glosses and allusions.
> . . . . . .

Jonson is using here the timeworn but still, in our own day, popular device of accusing his opponents of his own malignant tactics.

After some seventy lines of this, *ENVY descends slowly,* and *PROLOGUE enters, in armour,* just in time to set his foot upon her and tread

[1] In *E.M.O.,* when Sogliardo is taken to court to be palmed off as a courtier, for a practical joke, he addresses Saviolina with:

> And how does my sweet lady? in health? Bona roba [This is Shallow's expression, 2 *H. IV:* III.2], *quaeso, que novelles? que novelles?*

Thy malice into earth: so Spite should die,
Despis'd and scorn'd by noble industry.
If any muse why I salute the stage,
An arm'd Prologue; know *'tis a dangerous age:*
Wherein who writes had need present his scenes
Forty-fold proof against the conjuring means
Of base detractors and illiterate apes,
That fill up rooms in fair and formal shapes.
'Gainst these we have put on *this forc'd defence:*
Whereof *the allegory and hid sense*
Is that *a well-erected confidence*
Can fright their pride, and laugh their folly hence.

The epithet "copper-faced" was no misnomer for this self-righteous egoist. When it is remembered that *Satiromastix* had been written in reply to this very play, *The Poetaster*—as well as to *Every Man Out* and *Cynthia's Revels*—it took a good deal of "brass" on Jonson's part to accuse his colleagues of being "base detractors and illiterate apes." The insulting *Poetaster* had surely been written, at least in part, first—hence the names, Horace, Tucca, Crispinus, Demetrius Fannius, adopted by the author or authors of *Satiromastix* in retaliation—yet Jonson has the effrontery to accuse them of the very things he himself had done. It is difficult to believe that a mature man could have been so childish and preposterous. Incidentally, the *Arraignment* in *Satiromastix,* to which Jonson now replies, in his amended version of *The Poetaster,* is mild and good-tempered compared with his retort.

All very well for Jonson to pretend that his Crispinus was merely the Stratford man, Shaksper,[2] and to bolster the pretense by adding Virgil at the close for Shakespeare, as he had presented Ovid *senior* at the beginning as Oxford; he knew that the Crispin Crispianus of *Henry V* and the Crispinus of *Satiromastix* were Oxford-Shakespeare, and so, we repeat, when he was calling that Crispinus and Demetrius Fannius "poet-apes" etc., he knew the public would take him to mean Shakespeare for the former and Dekker for the latter. But he was poisoned with jealousy, to which had now been added wounded vanity.

In order to make it clear that we are doing Jonson no injustice, we shall make a slight digression and quote the descriptions of Oxford and of himself which he puts into the mouth of Mercury, in *Cynthia's Revels* (II.1):

> *Mer.* He. . . . is Amorphus, *a traveller,* one so made out of the mixture of shreds and forms, that himself is truly *deform'd.* He walks most commonly with a clove or *pick-tooth in his mouth,* he is the very mint of compliment, all his behaviours are printed, his face is another volume of essays, his beard is an Aristarchus. He speaks all cream-skimm'd and more affected than a dozen waiting-women. *He is his own promoter in every place.* The wife of the ordinary gives his diet to maintain her table in discourse; which is indeed a mere tyranny over her other guests, for *he will usurp all the talk;* ten *constables*[3] are not so tedious. *He is no great shifter; once a year his apparel is ready to revolt.* He doth use much to arbitrate quarrels, and fights himself, exceedingly well, out at a window. . . . [Evidently a reference to Beatrice's, "Talk with a man *out at a window.—M.A.:* IV.1.313.]

[2] Later he pretended he was Marston!

This must have been the impression, spiced with malice, which Jonson received during the days of Oxford's impoverished bohemianism when, because he was unhappy, the Earl put on weight and was identified even by himself with Falstaff. No doubt he was rather seedy at that time. It is interesting that this particular sally about his clothes is replied to quite disarmingly in *Satiromastix* when Tucca takes Horace to task:

> Thou wrongst here a good honest rascall Crispinus, and a poor varlet Demetrius Fannius (bretheren in thine own trade of Poetry), thou sayst *Crispinus Sattin doublet is Reavel'd out heere,* and that this penurious sneaker is *out at elboes,* goe two my good full-mouth'd *ban-dog,* I'l ha thee friends with both. . . . *Crispinus shall give thee an old cast Sattin suite,* and Demetrius shall write thee a Scene or two in one of thy strong garlic Comedies.

Now for Mercury's description of Crites-Jonson, in contrast to that of Amorphus-Oxford:

> *Mer. Crites. A creature of a most perfect and divine temper:* one in whom *the humours and elements are peaceably met without emulation of precedency;* he is neither too *fantastically melancholy,* too slowly phlegmatic, too *lightly sanguine,* or too *rashly choleric;* but in all *so composed and ordered,* as it is clear *Nature went about some full work, she did more than make a man when she made him.*[4] His *discourse* is like his behaviour, uncommon, but not unpleasing; he is *prodigal of neither.* He strives rather to be that which men call judicious, than to be thought so; and is *so truly learned, that he affects not to shew it.* He will think and speak his thought both freely; but *as distant from depraving another man's merit, as proclaiming his own.* For his valour, 'tis such, that he dares as little to offer any injury as receive one. In sum, he hath a most ingenuous and sweet spirit, a sharp and season'd wit, a straight *judgment* and a strong mind. *Fortune could never break him, nor make*

[3] I.e., Dogberries. It will be recalled that Oxford makes a similar report of himself when Romeo says of Mercutio (II.4.149-50):

> A gentleman, nurse, that loves to hear himself talk, and will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month.

[4] Cf. *J. C.* (V.5.73-5):

> . . . *the elements*
> *So mix'd in him that Nature* might stand up
> And say to all the world, *'This was a man!'*

him less.[5] He counts it his pleasure to despise pleasures, and is more delighted with good deeds than goods. It is a competency to him that *he can be virtuous.* He doth neither covet nor fear; he hath too much reason to do either: and that commends all things to him.

But it is of *Oxford* that he says, "He is his own promoter in every place!"

This self-praise—or, as it might be called, self-adulation—abounds in Jonson's dramas *ad nauseum;* and here it is the very coinage of jealousy. For all his admittedly excellent talents, he must have had an incurable naiveté, which put him at the mercy of his own boundless conceit.[6]

It will have been noted that, in the Prologue, the author has stated unequivocally that his play is an "allegory." He adds,

> . . . he doth implore
> You would not argue him of *arrogance:*
> Howe'er that common spawn of ignorance,

[5] Cf. Hamlet's speech to Horatio (III.2):

> . . . and bless'd are those
> Whose blood and *judgment* are so well co-mingled
> That they are not a pipe for *Fortune's finger*
> *To sound what stop she please.* (68-71.)

[6] Some thirty years later, Jonson described the different types of faulty writers, who fail. . . . "Where *the learned* use ever election, and a means; they look back to what they intended at first, and make all an even and proportion'd body. The true Artificer will not run away from nature . . . or depart from life, and the likenesse of Truth . . . And though his language differ from the vulgar somewhat, it shall not fly from all humanity with *Tamerlanes,* and *Tamer-Chams,* of *the late age* [Is this to say, Marlowe and Oxford, the Ld. Gr. Chamberlain?], which had nothing in them but *scenicall strutting* and *furious vociferation,* to warrant them to ignorant gapers. Hee knows it is his onely Art, so to carry it, as none but Artificers perceive it. In the meane time perhaps hee is call'd *barren, dull, leane,* a poore Writer . . . *by these men, who, without labour, judgement, knowledge, or almost sense, are receiv'd or preferr'd before him.* [These adjectives had been applied to him: he is still replying to "base Detraction."] . . . Another Age, or juster men, will acknowledge the vertues of his studies; his subtilty, in arguing: with what strength hee doth inspire his Readers: with what sweetnesse, he strokes them; in inveighing what sharpnesse; in Jest, what urbanity hee uses. How he doth raigne in mens affections . . . Then in his Elocution to behold what word is proper: which hath ornament: which height: what is beautifully translated: where figures are fit: which gentle, which strong, to shew the composition *Manly.* And how hee hath avoyded, faint, obscure, obscene, sordid, humble, improper, or *effeminate* Phrase; *which is not onely prais'd of the most, but commended* (which is worse) especially for that it is naught."

Compare the latter part of this statement with Oxford's Preface to *The Courtier.* It is a clear case of imitation to the point of plagiarism. Again he uses the Earl's own words and manner to denigrate him and praise himself. Not to be overlooked are the insinuations in "Manly" and "effeminate." Is it any wonder that Drummond said Jonson was "a great lover and praiser of himself?" He also recorded Jonson's statement that "Shakspear [sic] wanted Arte"; which is, of course, what he hints at here.

This quotation from *Discoveries;* pp. 32-3.

> Our fry of writers, may *beslime his fame,*
> And give his action that adulterate name.
> . . . . . .
> Their moods *he rather pities than envies:*
> *His mind it is above their injuries.*

This said, he starts "besliming" his opponents.

We have spoken of the Ovid and the Ovid *senior* theme.[7] When the first Act begins, the former is composing poems instead of studying law. His opening speech identifies him as the Fair Youth of the Sonnets, who has been promised immortality:

> Then when this body falls in funeral fire,
> *My name shall live. . . .*

Luscus, who has brought him his cap and gown for attendance at lawschool, remonstrates with him:

> . . . why, young master, you are not *Castalian* mad . . . ha!—

"Castalian" referring to the waters of Castaly, the Muses' well. And when he leaves, Ovid launches into a long poem of his own composition embodying Jonson's translation of the couplet which heads *Venus and Adonis.* This is the Southampton *motif;* whenever it appears he is present, at least in Jonson's plays and *The Return from Parnassus:*

> Kneel hinds to trash: me let bright Phoebus swell
> With cups full-flowing from the *Muses' well.*

Ovid *senior* is disturbed—as undoubtedly Oxford was when Southampton hung about the theatre instead of attending Gray's Inn.

> *Ovid se.* What, shall I have my son a *stager,* now? . . . a *gull,* a *rook?*

(Here we have the first subtle combination of Will Shakespeare-Southampton with William Shaksper, whom Jonson considers merely another pretender.)

> *Lus.* I did augur all this to him beforehand without poring into an ox's paunch for the matter. . . .
> *Tucca.* How now, goodman slave! . . . *(to Ovid se.)* Why, *my master of worship,* dost hear? . . . is this thy designs and thy discipline, to suffer knaves to be *competitors* with *commanders and gentlemen?* . . .
> *Ovid se.* Sirrah, get my horses ready. You'll still be prating.
> *Lupus.* Marcus Ovid, these players are an idle generation and do much harm in the state, corrupt young gentry very much. . . .

[7] The play, *Every Man In His Humour,* which is woven thickly with Shakespearean phrases, has a similar situation with Lorenzo *senior,* who speaks in Shakespearean periods, and his son Lorenzo. There are also a Prospero, a Stephano—who, as in *The Temp.,* seems to be a presentment of the Stratford man—a jealous Thorello (a rough anagram for Othello), a Peto, a Biancha. In his early play-writing days, Jonson could no more have done without Oxford to draw upon than the medieval painters could have done without the Christian story.

Tucca. Thou art in the right, my venerable cropshin . . . They are grown licentious, the rogues, the libertines. They forget they are in the statute,[8] the rascals; they are *blazon'd* there; there they are *trick'd,* they and their *pedigrees:*[9] they need no other *heralds,* I wiss.

Ovid protests:

I am not known unto the open stage,
Nor do I traffic in their theatres.

There follow Shakespearean allusions and phrases, including Ovid *senior's* remark,

Sir, you shall make me beholding to you,

and young Ovid's poem about his muse beating "at heaven's gate," etc.

Jonson stated in his *Discoveries,* written some time after 1626, published in 1641, that, although his memory was not what it had been in his youth, "Yet I can repeat whole books that I have read, and Poems, of some selected friends, which I have liked to charge my memory with." We may easily guess who one of these "friends" had been. He was simply saturated with Shakespeare's expressions and tricks of language. They gleam in his prosy passages like lighted windows in drab streets.

Tribullus says to young Ovid:

What! turn the law into verse?
Thy father has school'd thee, I see.

* * * * * * *

Act II introduces Crispinus, "a gentleman born."

Cri. My name is Crispinus, or Cri-spinas indeed; which is well expressed in my arms: a face crying *in chief;* and beneath it a bloody toe, between three thorns *pungent.*[10]

Here again we catch Jonson deliberately confusing Shaksper with Southampton. He knows he can never be publicly rebuked for this, because the secret of the Fair Youth's parentage must be kept at all costs. At the same time, he knows he is planting a seed in the public mind which will take root and grow to great proportions. For now, calling himself the equivalent of Shakespeare, or Shake-speare, hyphenated, we have Sogliardo-Shift-Shaksper again, the "gull," the "turf," the "clod," son of Sordido-Shaksper of Stratford, come to London to "see the motions," or puppet-shows, "setting up" his "bills

[8] Elizabeth's statute compelling actors to be licensed.

[9] We have as yet had no *evidence* that Shaksper who had been "blazoned" with a "pedigree," was an actor. We may have the truth about him at last in the final act, Chap. Seventy-seven.

[10] Orig. ital.

without discovery," brandishing his "rapier," and getting himself a "coat of arms." Yet this time his crest is not Oxford's "boar, without a head, on a chief argent," but one which suggests Southampton's—that is, Henry Wriothesley's (or Wroseley's) lineage.

He is "Beauty's rose," or, as Nashe put it, "the fairest bud the red rose ever bore": the son of the Tudor Rose, Elizabeth, whose motto was *Rosa sine spina,* a *Rose* without a *thorn.* Cri-spinas: cry-thorns. The "face" is "crying in chief," he says. And in *Venus and Adonis,* Venus addresses Adonis-Southampton, who is also the "purple flower," as

The field's *chief flower* . . . more lovely than a man. (*st.* 2.)

Cri-spinas, then, is the "chief flower" (Southampton) "crying . . . between . . . thorns," (the "spina" of Elizabeth's motto.) The "bloody toe between three thorns pungent" surely alludes to his having been kicked out so hard that the toe bled—since it must allude to something. It is quite obvious that Jonson now knows who both parents are. We shall presently find him making a dramatic reference to the Queen's love-affair with Oxford, as well as one to the terrible penalty Oxford paid in the loss of his name and high status.

Yes; when he wrote *The Poetaster,* Jonson was completely aware that Queen Elizabeth was the mother of Southampton; otherwise there would be no meaning at all in Cri-spinas' coat-of-arms. Yet what do we find "honest Ben" saying, in 1619, to Drummond of Hawthornden?

> . . . that she [the Queen] had a membrana on her which made her incapable of man, though for her delight she tried many, at the coming over of Monsieur there was a French Chirurgion who took in hand to cut it yett fear stayed her & his death.

This he stated in the face of the testimony of Elizabeth's own physician that he would guarantee that she could bear ten children.

That Jonson had no intention of allowing his point about Crispinas to be missed is patent when he has the socially ambitious Chloe confer with the "gentleman born" regarding the noble guests whom her husband has invited to the house:

> Marry, lady, if you would entertain them most courtly, you must do thus: as soon as your maid or your man brings you word they are come, you must say, *A pox on 'em! what do they here?* And yet when they come, speak them as fair, and give them the kindest welcome in words that can be.
> *Chloe.* Is that the fashion of courtiers, Crispinus?
> *Cris.* I do assure you it is, lady; I have observed it.

When the guests arrive, Chloe admonishes her new friend:

Observe them, Crispinus.
Cris. At a *hair's* breadth, lady, I warrant you.

(Not only did Hamlet address his mother as "lady," but "I warrant you" was also an expression Jonson had taken from Oxford, as he had taken the word "sirrah," to be used for a servant or page, according to information he conveys in *Cynthia's Revels.*)

He labors the point; for after the guests, among whom were several poets, including Ovid, have gone, Crispinus explains to Chloe, in an obvious allusion to the Sonnets:

> . . . 'tis *love* and *beauty* make poets: and since you like poets so well, your love and beauties shall *make me a poet.*
> *Chloe.* What! shall they? and such a one as these?
> *Cri.* Ay, and *a better than these:* I would be sorry else.
> *Chloe.* And shall your looks change, and your *hair* change, and all, like these?
> *Cri.* Why, a man can be a poet, and yet not change his *hair.*
> *Chloe.* Well, we shall see your *cunning:* yet if you can change your *hair,* I pray do.

All this lends further ballast to the inescapable inference that Southampton was using the name, Will Shakespeare, in his theatrical activities. When Oxford had said, "My friend and I are one," he had meant it comprehensively.

One of the guests at the party given by Chloe and Albius is Julia, beloved of young Ovid: partly Juliet, and partly the Julia-Silvia of *The Two Gentlemen;*[11] she is a princess and is addressed as "your grace." This theme is vague and is important chiefly in that it emphasizes the identification of Oxford in his most overtly autobiographical plays.

Another guest is Hermogenes, leading musician of the day. (He may be another presentment of Oxford: the name is suggestive.) When he refuses to sing for the company, the brash Crispinus appeals to Chloe:

> *Cri.* Entreat the ladies to entreat me to sing then, I beseech you.

To Julia's query whether he can sing excellently, Chloe replies:

> I think so, madam; for he entreated me to entreat you to entreat him to sing.

Ovid teases the one who is the real musician:

> Hermogenes, clear your throat: I see by him, *here's a gentleman will worthily challenge you.*

(The play teems with this kind of innuendo.)

[11] There is no record of any public presentation of *The T. G.* during Shakespeare's lifetime. Jonson's familiarity proves that he had seen a private performance, in which, of course, Southampton may have taken part. (The enforcement of Oxford's anonymity was, in some degree, a result of his revelations in the plays, and of course the reverse was also true.) Meres, moreover, refers to it as if it were well-known.

There is much protest on the part of Crispinus that he will "challenge no man." And here Jonson drags in an alibi, which he is to use later. For Marston had recently refused to accept his challenge and been the talk of the bohemian quarter. In 1616, Jonson is to introduce a new scene into this play further to identify Crispinus with Marston, so that in 1619 he is able to tell Drummond that Crispinus *is* Marston.[12]

Crispinus, ever superficial, knows only one stanza of Hermogenes's song, for his rendition of which the company praises him so courteously that he rushes away to "enghle some broker for a poet's gown and bespeak a garland." It takes very little to turn his head.

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Act III opens with a long scene in which Horace-Jonson, accosted by the talkative bore, Crispinus, uses every means to escape, only to be consistently frustrated. The Poetaster has now begun calling himself "we." Like Shift, he is strutting and preening himself.

After Horace's first attempt to take his leave, Crispinus says:

> . . . I could wish thou didst know us, Horace; we are a scholar, I assure thee. . . . Nay, we are turn'd poet too, which is more; and a satirist too, which is more than that: I write just in thy vein, I. I am for your odes, or your sermons, or any thing indeed; *we are a gentleman,* besides; our name is Rufus Laberius Crispinas.[13]
> *Hor.* Doubtless, this gallant's tongue has a good turn, when he sleeps. [*Aside.*]
> *Cris.* I do make verses, when I come into such a street as this: O, your city ladies . . . like the Muses—offering you the *Castalian dews,* and the *Thespian* liquors . . . to—sip of their lips. Did you never hear any of my verses?
> *Hor.* No sir;—but I am in some fear I must now. [*Aside.*]

[12] In this superimposed scene Trebatius reproaches Horace for wounding Crispinus-*Pantalabus,* and Horace replies:

> But he that wrongs me, rather, I proclaim,
> He never had assayed to touch my fame.
> For he shall *weep, and walk, with ev'ry tongue*
> Throughout the city, *infamously sung.*

He told Drummond that in his youth, Marston had represented him on the stage as "given to Venerie," adding mendaciously that he had, therefore, written his *Poetaster* on him. The truth appears rather to be that he had never forgiven Oxford for portraying him as Ajax, "the beef-witted lord," and one who was "bought and sold like a barbarian slave," and that this is why Crispinus-the-Spear-shaker was "infamously sung."

Unfortunately most editors have stated, upon what they believed to be good authority, that Crispinus was Marston. Schelling even takes Amorphus for Marston. These mistaken identifications destroy the significance of both *The Poetaster* and *Cynthia's Revels.*

[13] It may be an accident that an anagram of Laberius yields Liar again: Liar (a)buse. Rufus means red-headed; and although we do not know the color of Shaksper's hair, we have been told that Oxford's was reddish-brown and Elizabeth's reddish-gold, so that Southampton's, which was fair, must have had a reddish tint, at least.

But Crispinus cannot remember any of his verses at the moment. The scene continues, with the egoist boring Horace painfully. Suddenly he recalls one of his poems:

> Rich was thy hap, sweet dainty cap,
> There to be plac'd;
> Where thy smooth black, sleek white may smack,
> And both be grac'd.

. . . A kind of paranomasie . . . *do you conceive,* sir?

Horace grows frantic, communes with himself:

> This tyranny
> Is strange, to take mine ears up by commission,
> (Whether I will or no), and make them stalls
> To his lewd solecisms and worded trash.

He calls Crispinus

> . . . fool and fool,
> And rank and tedious fool!

But still the bore talks on.

> *Cris.* Why, I have been *a reveller,* and at my cloth of silver suit and my long stocking, in my time, and will be again . . . And then, for my singing, Hermogenes himself envies me, *that is your only master of music you have in Rome.*

(So this upstart, who claims to have been "a reveller," like Oxford and Southampton, not only compares himself with the master of poetry and the drama, Shakespeare, but with the master of music too. As we have seen, Oxford ranked high as a musician and composer. Furthermore, he is adopting a Shakespearean locution: "that is your only," etc.)

This keeps up until Horace, in desperation, remarks that long ago

> A cunning woman, one Sabella, sung,
> When in her urn she cast my destiny.
> . . . . . .
> She told me I should surely never perish
> By famine, poison, or the enemy's sword,
> . . . . . .
> But in my time I should be once surprised
> By *a strong and tedious talker, that should vex*
> *And almost bring me to consumption.*

But Crispinus is insensitive; and the scene continues into the sixth page. Horace exhorts the gods:

> Archer of heaven, *Phoebus,* take thy bow,
> And with a full-drawn shaft nail to the earth
> *This Python* . . .
> . . . . . .
> Rescue me from this *hydra of discourse* here.

Later he calls him a "land remora" (an octopus.)

> *Hor.* Mischief and torment! O my soul and heart,
> How are you cramp'd with anguish! . . . O this day!
> That ever I should view thy tedious face.
> *Cris.* Horace, what passion, what humour is this?
> *Hor.* Away, good prodigy, afflict me not.

They are finally interrupted by an apothecary, who brings two Lictors to arrest Crispinus for a debt incurred for sweetmeats. This may be an incident concerning Marston, or Shaksper for that matter, of which we have no record.

Now we must make a brief aside to allow the redoubtable Ben to testify against himself—following the suggestion of Crispinus-Shakespeare of *Satiromastix,* who declared:

> Should I but bid thy Muse stand to the Barre,
> Thyself against her would give evidence.

For we have caught the defendant—or he has caught himself—in what we may politely call a paradoxical situation, a glaring one.

He has told us, in *Cynthia's Revels,* that the courtier, Amorphus-Oxford, "will usurp all the talk: ten constables are not so *tedious.*" Now he has shown us, in *The Poetaster,* that it is the "gentleman born parcel-poet," Shaksper, who talks Horace to death: a "rank and *tedious* fool," a very "Python," a "land remora," a "hydra of discourse." This in itself seems queer; but in a work published some thirty years later, Jonson is still harping on the same theme; only then he quite shamelessly combines the two:

> Indeed, the multitude commend Writers as they do Fencers; or Wrastlers [sic]; who if they come in *robustiously,* and put for it with a deale of violence, *are received for the braver fellowes.* . . . But in these things the *unskilfull* are naturally deceiv'd, think rude things greater then polish'd. . . . I remember the *Players* have often mention'd it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out a line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. *I had not told posterity this* [N.B., he is talking then *for posterity*], but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine own candor (for I lov'd the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any.) He was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature: hee had an excellent Phantsie [sic]; brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he *flow'd with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stop'd: Sufflaminandus erat;* as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times he fell into those things could not escape laughter. As when he said, in the person of *Caesar,* one speaking to him: *Caesar, thou dost me wrong.* Hee replyed: *Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause:* and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeem'd his vices with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be prayed, then to be pardon'd.[14]

[14] *Discoveries;* pp. 27-9.

This is obviously an altogether disingenuous utterance, made, we are bound to understand, for "posterity"—or should we say, for the trade? Jonson is talking about two separate men, both evidently great talkers, but in how different fashions! Nothing is more unlikely than that Ben Jonson or any of his friends was ever in a position to stop, or "shut up," the Earl of Oxford when he was in the vein. It is interesting—if only as a demonstration of the tricks even a scholar's mind will play him, to say nothing of the fact that "murder . . . will speak with most miraculous organ"—that, within the first few lines above, Jonson uses four words from Hamlet's speech to the players: "robustious(ly)," "the unskilful," "fellows," and "Players"; and further, that he quotes Augustus Caesar as saying "Sufflaminandus erat," for it is Augustus Caesar in *The Poetaster* who hears the case against the talkative ass, Crispinus. A striking association of ideas, such as is to be expected of a man who could memorize "whole books . . . and Poems of some selected friends." Thus such minds work.

Whether he were talking of Oxford or of the "poet-ape" in the anecdote which evidently alluded to the passage from *Julius Caesar,* published thus in the First Folio,

> Know Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause
> Will he be satisfied,

who can say? It is unlikely that Shaksper ever took the part of Caesar on the stage; but if he did, what of it? If, on the other hand, Oxford was playing Caesar and forgot his lines, he may have said, "Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause," for a joke, *se moquant.* And, from the dramatist himself, it strikes us as amusing. Jonson was too sour. It seems to us he was rather hard put to it to find something to criticize. (We shall take up the matter of the unblotted lines later.) Talking for posterity, he might have done better, especially when no considerations of honor or fair play hindered him in his purpose. But one is seldom at one's best when arguing from spleen rather than from reason. The important point is that we find Jonson *deliberately misleading posterity.*

He gives voluminous evidence against himself, another salient piece being Epigram 56, which we are now constrained to quote in full, since it is significant enough to have been the subject of exhaustive speculation:

On Poet-Ape

Poor *Poet-ape,* that would be *thought our chief,*
Whose works are e'en the *frippery of wit,*[15]

[15] Sir George Greenwood defines "frippery" as "old clothes, cast-off garments, or a place where *cast-off garments are sold.* French *fripier,* a *dealer in old clothes.* . . . Cotgrave gives 'Friperie, *broker's* shop, street of brokers, or of Fripiers.' And Fripier, *a mender or trimmer-up of old garments,* and *a seller of them so mended.*" *The Sh. Prob. Restated;* p. 455. Ox. Dict. gives: Finery. . . . empty display esp. in literary style, trifles.

From *brokage* is become *so bold a thief,*
As we, the robb'd, leave rage and pity it.
At first he made low *shifts,* would pick and glean,
Buy the reversion of old plays, now grown
To a little wealth and credit in the scene,
He *takes up all,* makes each man's wit his own,
And told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes
The sluggish, gaping auditor devours;
He marks not whose 'twas first, and *aftertimes*
May judge it to be his, as well as ours.
Fool! as if half-eyes will not know *a fleece*
From *locks of wool,* or *shreds from the whole piece.*

There is no evidence as to when this was written, but it is so closely related to *The Poetaster,* to Crispinus-Shaksper, who was also called "Poet-ape," and it is so patently born of the mood of resentment informing this play that it cannot be separated from *The Poetaster* in intention, even if it could be in point of time.

The "Poet-ape," says Jonson, "would be thought our chief": that is, would be thought Shakespeare himself; although his works are the very "frippery of wit": old writings trimmed-up and sold. We have seen how cheap and trivial are Crispinus's rhymes: "Rich was thy hap, sweet dainty cap," etc. Later in the play we find him imitating Shakespeare in an asinine song, made up of "shreds" of *Venus and Adonis.* "From brokage," he has "become so bold a thief," says Jonson, that the playwrights no longer feel "rage," but only "pity" for the "poor Poet-ape."

We have seen how Crispinus, his vanity inflated by the polite praise he had received after singing Hermogenes's song, hurried away to "enghle some broker for a poet's gown and bespeak a garland," remarking presently that Hermogenes himself (the best musician in Rome) "envies" him. He was the typical upstart, brash in his conceited assumptions.

"At first he made low *shifts.*" We had this fully demonstrated for our edification in *Every Man Out,* when *Shift* "set up [his] bills without discovery." Then he bought "the reversion of old plays," and thus, achieving "a little wealth and credit" in the theatrical world, he grew bolder, "takes up all, makes each man's wit his own": that is, appropriates other men's work. Later, in *The Poetaster,* Jonson calls Crispinus "that Pantalabus there"—Pantalabus meaning *to take up all.*[16] When the Shepherd finds "the child," in *The Winter's Tale,* he says to the Clown:

. . . *take up, take up,* boy, open 't.

[16] *Pantalabus* derives from a Greek expression meaning *to take all* or *to take up all.* Sir George Greenwood gives it as πάντα λαμβάνειν. *The Sh. Prob. Rest.:* p. 458.

The pedantic Jonson is not above parading his knowledge of Greek, while showing he was aware of Oxford's full meaning.

Upon being challenged for doing these things—"told of this"—the "Poet-ape" is insensitive—"slights it"—precisely as Crispinus had been impervious to Horace's excruciating boredom. He can get away with his pretensions and his thefts because "the sluggish, gaping auditor"—the audience—"marks not whose" work the plays were, in the first place, and in "aftertimes" will really believe it to be as much Crispinus-Shaksper's as the true author's.

The final couplet stresses the identification of the "Poet-ape" with Shaksper of Stratford so pointedly and emphatically that it is impossible to see how anyone could question Jonson's intention. Whether or not the Elizabethans used our slang expression, "to fleece," we cannot say. (Tibullus, in *The Poetaster,* V.1, orders the defendants to "nominate a spade a spade," and Shakespeare uses a number of phrases which one might have supposed to be modern slang.) But when the playwrights who knew Shaksper of Stratford speak of "wool," we begin to look sharp. In *The Winter's Tale,* the Clown tots up the wool (IV.2.32-4):

> Every 'leven wether tods; every tod yields pound and odd shilling; fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the *wool* to?

So Jonson is using an apposite illustration when he says that with half an eye one ought to be able to tell a whole "fleece" from "locks of wool, or shreds." In other words, the "frippery of wit"—these second-hand catch-phrases Crispinus-Shaksper quotes as his own, and also, we take it, the garbled memory-versions of Shakespeare's plays—ought to fool no one. He bluntly calls the Poet-ape a "thief." He does not mince matters. Perhaps he thought the *alert* "auditor," who ought to be a cut above the "sluggish, gaping" one, would be able to take the hint and understand.

Jonson's Epigram No. 58 is somewhat similar to, though less famous than, No. 56. It is entitled, *To Groom Idiot* and may or may not be levelled at the same man, although we seem to recognize the smiling, amiable fool willing to attempt anything—in this case, to recite Jonson's lines, precisely as Crispinus-Shaksper, the Poetaster, volunteered to sing Hermogenes's song.

To Groom Idiot

Idiot, last night, I pray'd thee but forbear
To *read* my verses; now I must to *hear:*
For offering with thy smiles my wit to grace,
Thy ignorance still laughs in the wrong place.
And so my sharpness thou no less disjoints
Than thou didst late my sense, losing my points.

So I have seen at Christmas-sports, one lost,
And hood-wink'd, for a man embrace a post.

(By the time this was written, Shaksper, if he is the person meant, must have acted parts on the stage: hence the "Groom" of the title; but in *The Poetaster,* we are told that he was not an actor.)

One editor, writing in 1875, had the following to say in a footnote to Epigram 56:

> [*Poor Poet-Ape*] Mr. Chalmers will *take it on his death* that the person here meant is Shakespeare! Who can doubt it? For my part, I am persuaded, that Groom Idiot in the next epigram [He means the next but one, No. 57 being to Beaumont] is also Shakespeare; and, indeed, generally, that he is typified by the words "fool and knave" so exquisitely descriptive of him, wherever they occur in Jonson. (Original italics.) [17]

This strikes us as an astounding statement. Could any literate man really believe that "fool and knave" are "exquisitely descriptive" of the author of *Romeo and Juliet,* of *Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear,* of *As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice, Love's Labour's Lost,* or of any other play, for that matter, or a single one of the Sonnets? Such is the fruit of Jonson's strange malice. The plant which grew from the seed of *The Poetaster* has proliferated like the poisonous weed that it is. It will be hard to kill.

But again Jonson himself, in his collected works, has given us a valuable lead; this time probably unconscious. Epigrams 56 and 58 are placed almost midway between two others addressed to *Robert Earl of Salisbury.* We need hardly remind the reader that this ruthless betrayer of his friends, this unscrupulous politician, elevated to an earldom by King James in 1605, was the son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley (and unfortunately, we are afraid, at least the partial prototype of Shakespeare's Richard III). Jonson's Epigrams upon this influential personage are sycophantic and insincere; no sane man could have considered Robert Cecil "virtuous, noble, selfless, modest," as Jonson extols him for being. They are Nos. 43 and 63, with another, No. 64, written in congratulation *Upon the Accession of the Treasuryship to Him*—where, in piously disclaiming flattery, the poet doth protest too much. This last belongs to the year 1608, the first to 1605, at the earliest; thus we are enabled to date the group with which we are concerned within a period of three years, 1605–1608.

The arrangement of the Epigrams is especially interesting, for those *On Poet-ape* and *On Groom Idiot* are placed, as we have said, nearly midway between the first one and the last two addressed to Robert Cecil. There is no shadow of doubt that Jonson was sedulously currying favor with the most powerful statesman of the realm and

[17] *The Works of Ben Jonson,* by W. Gifford, Esq.; vol. VIII, p. 319.

that the sequence of these Epigrams was purposeful. They were published with his complete works in 1616, the year Shaksper died. But even if they had not been previously printed, they would certainly have been shown Cecil in manuscript. After Cecil's death, Jonson lost no opportunity to ingratiate himself with his nieces. "Exquisitely descriptive of Shakespeare" as he was willing to have them seem, these verses contrasted strikingly with those addressed to the eminent Earl of Salisbury and would have pleased him well—would, in fact, have afforded him considerable satisfaction. The affair had been disposed of with masterly finesse. This man Jonson could be counted upon.

Here we see the links of the chain meet, snap together, manacling the great name of the supreme poet of the race, and sinking it fathoms deep into the waters of oblivion.

Not one out of more than a hundred Epigrams is addressed to the most distinguished literary patron of the age, the Earl of Oxford, Lord Bolebec, etc., Lord Great Chamberlain of England. Not one is addressed to William Shakespeare, whom Jonson "loved . . . on this side Idolatry"—not even a brief Epitaph, although the Stratford "genius" had died in the very year of publication. Dozens of other earls and titled gentlemen come in for fulsome attention, and a few gentlewomen, including one of Lord Oxford's daughters. Several writers are singled out for commendation. But no; regarding the "Soul of the Age, the applause, delight, the wonder of our Stage," not a breath. All is silence, a dense, impenetrable silence.

Merciful heavens, do we have to be bound and gagged before we realize that we are in the hands of knaves and villains?

One can only infer that Robert Cecil decided that when the Epigrams should come to be published as part of the complete edition of Jonson's Works, the true Shakespeare would have been sufficiently obliterated to permit the preservation of his Works with a dummy set up as author. No wonder even the phony Droeshout portrait looks astonished! It was a piece of the most crass and shameful charlatanry ever perpetrated upon credulous mankind.

And yet, had it not been for Jonson's double-dealing which won the Cecilian approval, we might never have had the immortal dramas at all. The Sonnets had already slipped through, in 1609. But the dramas might have been expunged from the record, as Lord Oxford's "good name" had so effectively been.

For the sake of maintaining the hollow legend of Elizabeth's virginity and the authorized and equally false tradition of the Great Lord Burghley, the authorities of England might have deprived us of the noblest literary heritage a country has ever, in modern times, been able to bestow upon the human mind and heart.