CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

LET US NOW RETURN TO *The Poetaster,* where Jonson was deliberately misleading "the sluggish, gaping auditor" of his own and Shakespeare's time, who marked not whose plays Shakespeare's were originally and would afterwards judge them to be Shaksper's, simply because he claimed them.

In the midst of the altercation about Crispinus's debt, Tucca enters with his Pyrgi and takes the debtor's part (as he always took the true Crispinus's part in *Satiromastix*). Thus encouraged, the latter says to the apothecary:

> Yes; and as I am *a gentleman and a reveller,* I'll make a piece of poetry, and absolve all, within these five days.

Tucca presently embarks upon a wordy speech, in the midst of which he addresses Crispinus,

> Dost thou hear, poetaster?

Hailing an actor who is passing, he endeavors to extract money from him to help pay Crispinus's debt.

> *Tucca.* Dost thou not know that Pantalabus there?

Histrio disclaims acquaintance: a point worth noting, since Histrio himself is a player.

> *Tuc.* Go, and be acquainted with him then: he is *a gentleman, parcel poet,* you slave; *his father was a man of worship,* I tell thee. Go, he pens *high, lofty, in a new stalking strain, bigger than half the rhymers in the town again;* he was born to fill thy mouth, Minotaurus, he was, he will teach thee to *tear and rand.* . . . If he pen for thee once, thou shalt not need to travel with thy pumps full of gravel any more, after a blind jade and a hamper, and stalk upon boards and barrel heads to an old crack'd trumpet.

Now, what is Jonson up to? Crispinus-Pantalabus is, he says "a gentleman" (which may mean one recently become so through the acquisition of a coat-of-arms), then that his father was "a man of worship"; and this, if the "man of worship" is Lord Oxford—and he is sometimes called that—makes the "parcel-poet" Southampton again,

who is to be immortal by the name of "William Shakespeare." It is, we suspect, Oxford's perennially popular plays Tucca is referring to, now being published for the first time as "Shakespeare's" which, if Histrio could be employed in them, would improve his condition immensely, so that he would not have to travel here and there like a vulgar player. Jonson is sour and transparently jealous. Incidentally, he expresses the inveterate scorn of the realist for the romanticist, as he does later, in his *Discoveries,* where he not only intimates that Shakespeare brings in his characters "robustiously," but also speaks of "the Tamerlanes and the Tamer-*Chams,* of the late age, which had nothing in them but scenicall strutting, and furious vociferation."

After more pointed talk on the part of the garrulous Tucca, in which he says to Histrio, "I hear you'll bring me o' the stage . . . play me," etc., he calls his Pyrgi—a pair of tumbling-boys—and bids them speak "in King Darius' doleful strain"; whereupon the first launches into a verse parodying the humorous euphuisms of *Romeo and Juliet* and Pyramus and Thisbe of *The Dream.*[1]

> *1 Pyr.* O doleful days! O direful deadly dump!
> O wicked world, and worldly wickedness!
> How can I hold my fist from crying, thump,
> In rue of this right rascal wretchedness!

Then in response to Tucca's demand for one "in a more amorous vein," he gives the following travesty of Oxfordian imagery used when the Earl is writing of the Queen, including an allusion to the haggard hawk, the wanton's cruelty, reason *versus* desire, and so on. It is astonishingly bold.

> *1 Pyr.* O, she is wilder and more hard, withal,
> Than beast, or bird, or tree, or stony wall.
> Yet might she love me to *uprear her state:*
> Ay, but perhaps she hopes *some nobler mate.*
> Yet might she love me to *content her fire:*
> Ay, but *her reason masters her desire.*
> Yet might she love me as her *beauty's thrall:*
> Ay, but I fear *she cannot love at all.*[2]

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1 *Nurse.* O woe! O woeful, woeful woeful day,
That ever, ever I did yet behold . . . (*R. and J.*: IV.5-49 *et seq.*)
Pyramus. But stay, O spite!
But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole is here!
Eyes, do you see?
How can it be?
O dainty duck! O dear . . . etc. (*M.N.D.*: V.1.274 *et seq.*)

In bringing these together in his parody, Jonson showed that he understood the connection of one with the other.

2 Cf. Oxford's early signed poem, *Love and Antagonism.* The allusion is obviously to Oxford's affair with the Queen. There is an especially reckless one in *l.* 5 to the poem in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* about the Queen's lust.

Tucca orders:

> The ghost, boys!
> *1 Pyr. Vindicta!*
> *2 Pyr. Timoria!*
> *1 Pyr. Vindicta!*
> *2 Pyr. Timoria!*
> *1 Pyr. Veni!*
> *2 Pyr. Veni!*
> *Tuc.* Now thunder, sirrah, you the rumbling player . . .
> Cry, sirrah, cry.
> *1 Pyr. Murder, murder!*
> *2 Pyr. Who calls out murder? lady, was it you?*

This is, of course, a mockery of *Hamlet,* with the Ghost demanding revenge—countered by an expletive of terror—and beckoning Hamlet, who followed him ("Veni"—I came), then the shriek of "Murder," and the 2d Pyrgi paraphrasing Hamlet's, "How is it with you, lady"—this coupled with the Queen's exclamation (*2 H.VI*:I.3.140) when she boxes the Duchess's ears: "I cray you mercy, madam, was it you?"

Coming almost immediately after Tucca's speech about the playwright who "pens high, lofty, in a new stalking strain . . . born to fill thy mouth . . . will teach thee to tear and rand" (evidently a combination of rend and rant), its reference is unmistakable. And Jonson's intention of confusing the public mind, of making "the sluggish, gaping auditor" believe Crispinus-Shaksper is the author of *Hamlet* shows up as bright as polished brass.

The 2d Pyrgi announces:

> Now you shall see me do *the Moor:* master, lend me your scarf a little. . . . (*Exit . . . to make himself ready.*)

Tucca is inordinately proud. A moment later he says to Histrio, using an expression characteristic of Pandarus, Polonius, and Hamlet:

> Well, *go thy ways . . . my Poetaster shall make thee a play . . .*

Before the ensuing scene (IV.1) is over, Horace enters, catches sight of Crispinus, and, when Gallus urges him to stay, cries:

> What, and be tired on by yond' *vulture!* No: Phoebus defend me! (*Exit hastily.*)

It is striking that he twice exhorts "Phoebus" to defend him against Crispinus.

In a subsequent conversation with Demetrius (Dekker), Tucca remarks of Horace:

> . . . 'tis all *dog,* and scorpion: he carries poison in his teeth, and a sting in his tail. . . . I'll have the slave whipt one of these days for his *Satires* and his *Humours.* . . .
> *Cris.* We'll undertake him, captain.

Dem. Ay, and tickle him i' faith, for his *arrogancy,* and his *impudence, in commending his own things;* and for his *translating,* I can trace him, i' faith. O, he is the most open fellow living. . . .

"Translating" is Jonson's word for his parodying and plagiarizing. Then he steals his enemies' thunder, calling Crispinus and Demetrius "plagiaries!"

* * * * * * *

In *Act* IV, *scene* 1, a banquet is planned, at which the guests will disguise themselves as various gods. Ovid will be Jupiter: the princess Julia, Juno. Ovid is now Oxford. Crispinus sings a song of his own composition: he has turned poet—"parcel-poet," of course. And here we come head-on into *Venus and Adonis* again:

Love is blind, and a wanton;
In the whole world, there is scant one
—Such another:
No, not *his mother.*
He hath plucked her *doves and sparrows,*
To feather his sharp *arrows,*
And alone prevaileth,
While *sick Venus* waileth.
But if Cypris once recover
The wag; it shall behove her
To look better to him:
Or she will undo him.

Since "sick-thoughted" Venus-Elizabeth did "undo" both Adonis-Oxford and Adonis-Southampton, there is more in this than a poet-aster's imitative trash. It is a recognizable parody of some of Oxford's verse, attributed to Lyly (in *Campaspe,* etc.) and it is rendered all the more pointed because Quince's (Lyly's) Prologue, in *The Dream,* is copied in the awkward phraseology here.[3] And the analogy between the "clod," and "essential clown," Sogliardo-Crispinus-Shaksper, is inescapable.

Chloe asks Tibullus what god Crispinus will represent at the party.

Tib. Mercury, Mistress Chloe.
Chloe. Mercury! that's a poet, is it?
Gallus. No, lady, but somewhat inclining that way; he is *a herald at arms.*[4]

The masque which follows is a kind of counterpart of that in *Satiromastix.* Ovid gives orders *du haut en bas* to Crispinus; and when he speaks, the latter responds eagerly: "A good jest, i' faith. . . .

[3] Prologue. If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think, we come not to offend,
But with good will. To show our simple skill, etc.

[4] The "herald at arms," who is also Mercury, suggests Sogliardo, of course, and —oh, so innocently—Mercutio-Oxford.

Another good jest! . . . Ay, and an excellent good jest!"—showing the same affable deference Sogliardo had for Puntarvolo[5] and, for that matter, the same William had for Touchstone.

Hermogenes. What, *have you hired Mercury to cry your jests you make?*
Ovid. Momus, you are envious.

When the merriment is at its height, Augustus Caesar enters, with Mecaenus, Horace, Lupus, Lictors, etc. Caesar inquires the names of the guests who are strangers to him.

Cae. And you, good sir?
Cris. Your *gentleman parcel-post, sir.*
Cae. O, that *profaned name!*

Is this the name Shakespeare "profaned" by one Shaksper, recalling the Clown's exclamation to Autolycus-Oxford, "I' the name of me"? Of course, the ostensible reference is to the name, "poet," which Crispinus disgraces.

Caesar is outraged that his daughter, Julia, and her friends are impersonating the high gods. He turns upon Ovid and, in a long passage, which contains inferences regarding Oxford's love-affair with Elizabeth, he banishes Ovid from the court, precisely as Oxford, in the persons of Romeo, Valentine, who had aspired "to guide the heavenly car," and others had been banished:

Licentious Naso, for thy violent wrong,
In soothing the *declined affections*
Of our base daughter, we exile thy feet
From all approach to our imperial court,
On pain of death. . . .

Mecaenus and Horace-Jonson nobly intercede:

Mec. O, good my lord, forgive! be like the gods.
Hor. Let royal bounty, Caesar, mediate;—

which, on the whole, seems almost too smug on the part of our author.

There follows a long scene in blank verse (IV.7) in which Julia "appears above at her chamber window" and talks to Ovid who stands below, like Romeo, and like Valentine, risking death to make love to her. Wisps of Shakespearean phrases appear in their speeches, which otherwise are quite lacking in magic: ". . . to such poor *shadows as myself."* (Compare, *"shadows like myself": The Passionate Pilgrim: st.* 14; Sonnet 61: "While *shadows, like to thee,* do mock my sight"; also Nos. 27, 37, 43, 53.) Again, "And let me breathe *my soul into thy breast."* (Compare Sonnet 109: "As easy might I from

[5] *Sog.* O, good cousin, I am a little busy. . . . I am to walk with a knight, here.

myself depart, As from *my soul which in thy breast* doth lie.") Further Shakespearean phrases are: "But know, my princely love"; "my dear love"; "thy dear beauty"; etc.

Act V takes place in *An Apartment in the Palace,* with Caesar, Mecaenus, Gallus, Horace, *et al.* Horace seems to be Caesar's right-hand man; and here we have another evidence of Jonson's egoistic naiveté, and an expression of what we of the twentieth century have learned to call wishful thinking.

Caesar embarks upon a pompous oration, in the course of which he observes,

> Sweet poesy's sacred garlands crown your gentry,

and concludes with,

> Caesar shall reverence the Pierian arts.

Mecaenus lauds his "majesty's high grace to poetry"; then Horace makes a windy speech about "Phoebus himself" kneeling "at Caesar's shrine"—Phoebus being of course Oxford, as well as the sun—and bringing in another of those Shakespearean turns of phrase, which reveal how steeped Jonson was in the plays:

> . . . and, by their excess
> *Of cold in virtue, and cross heat in vice:*

which recalls the initial speech of King Claudius (*Hamlet:* I.2.12):

> *With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage.*

An Equestrian enters and announces:

> Virgil [6] is now at hand, imperial Caesar.

And so Jonson, who could not in decency allow his final judgment of Shakespeare to be Tucca's dictum of "high, lofty, in a new stalking strain," makes amends—at least to the poet of the Sonnets; for the *Aeneids* patently stand for the Sonnets. Perhaps as a playwright, he was too jealous of the dramas to give them more acknowledgement than his constant quarrying for their fine metal tacitly did.

At this time, Oxford had been living in retirement in the country, his health failing. Caesar alludes to this:

> *Cae.* Rome's honour is at hand, then. Fetch a chair,
> And set it on our right hand, where 'tis fit
> Rome's honour and our own should ever sit.
> *Now he is come out of Campania,*
> I doubt not he hath *finish'd all his Aeneids,*
> Which, like another soul, I long to enjoy.

[6] Virgil was reputed in the Middle Ages to be a magician; and Oxford was referred to as "the sorcerer," at the festivities at Gray's Inn. As Prospero, he was a conjurer, with appurtenances of the magician—the cloak and hat.

> What think you three of Virgil, gentlemen,
> That are of his profession, though rank'd higher;
> Or, Horace, what say'st thou, that art *the poorest*
> *And likeliest to envy, or to detract?*

(This reference to Jonson's poverty—he does not mean the poverty of his art—shows how touchy he was and gives him an opportunity for another wallow in self-vindication.)

> *Hor.* Caesar speaks after common men in this,
> *To make a difference of me for my poorness;*
> *As if the filth of poverty sunk as deep*
> *Into a knowing spirit,* as the bane
> Of riches doth into an ignorant soul.
> . . . . . .
> *But knowledge is the nectar that keeps sweet*
> *A perfect soul,* even in this grave of sin;
> And, for my soul, it is as free as Caesar's,
> For what I know is due I'll give to all.
> *He that detracts or envies virtuous merit*
> *Is still the covetous and ignorant spirit.*[7]
> *Cae.* Thanks, Horace, for thy free and wholesome sharpness,
> Which pleaseth Caesar more than servile fawns.
> . . . . . .
> Say then, loved Horace, thy true thought of Virgil.
> *Hor.* I judge him *of a rectified spirit,*
> By many revolutions of discourse,
> (In his bright reason's influence), refined
> From all the tartarous moods of common men;
> Bearing the nature and similitude
> Of a right heavenly body; *most severe*
> *In fashion and collection of himself;*
> *And then as clear and confident as Jove.*
> *Gal.* And yet *so chaste and tender is his ear,*
> *In suffering any syllable to pass,*
> That he thinks may become the honour'd name
> Of issue to his *so examined self.*
> *That all the lasting fruits of his full merit,*
> *In his own poems, he doth still distaste,*
> *As if his mind's piece, which he strove to paint,*
> *Could not with fleshly pencils have her right.*

This is an extremely important passage and requires examination. It means that Shakespeare-Oxford-Virgil is not only severe in self-criticism but has so delicate and fastidious an ear that he can never be satisfied with what he writes but must ever strive to improve it. (Such an attitude was known to have been characteristic of Virgil.) Here is the very same comment Gabriel Harvey wrote in his

[7] He has not been doing this, of course, in disparaging Shakespeare's dramas; for see, he is praising the great poet in the character of Virgil!

Marginalia upon Oxford-Shakespeare, whom he called Axiophilus. And in *Palladis Tamia* Meres gave the same testimony:

> So I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeares *fine filed phrase,* if they would speake English.

Jonson himself will one day say of him, again, that he tirelessly revised and improved his lines, just as we have demonstrated his periodical revision of his plays. In the introductory poem to the First Folio, Jonson uses the same expression Meres did.

Now, compare all this, which is accurate and thoroughly applicable to Shakespeare's work, with the nonsense about the manuscripts "received without a blot" and with Ben Jonson's own gratuitous criticism, published in 1641, for "posterity," as he himself clearly states: "would he had blotted a thousand [lines]. . . . His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too"; which means nothing if not that it was undisciplined—exactly the opposite of what he says, not only in the introductory poem in the First Folio, but in the passage from *The Poetaster* which we have just quoted. Compare it also with the statement to Drummond: "Shakspear wanted Art." If Jonson is not thus convicted by his own testimony of an intention to deceive posterity, what can we regard as evidence?

We are bound to take Virgil as a representation of Oxford—and in this we have the corroboration of several eminent scholars—not only because there was no other poet to whom such high praise could conceivably have been given, but also because of the unmistakable allusions embodied in Virgil's own speech, which connect him not only with Hamlet but also with Oxford as the lover of Queen Elizabeth. We are told in the beginning that this play is an "allegory" with a "hid sense."

To the praise given by Horace and Gallus, the lawyer Tibullus adds his:

> That which he hath writ
> Is with *such judgment labour'd, and distill'd*
> Through all the needful uses of our lives,
> That could a man remember but his lines,
> He should not touch at any serious point,
> But he might breathe his spirit out of him.
> *Cae.* You mean, he might repeat part of his works,
> As fit for any conference he can use?
> . . . . . .
> What thinks *material* Horace of his learning? [8]
> *Hor.* His learning savours not the *school-like gloss,*[9]
> That most consists in echoing words and terms

[8] Jonson has here hit upon an apt epithet for himself; for, learned and clever as he was, he lacked emotional depth and had not the divine *afflatus.*

[9] I.e., is not pedantic.

> And soonest wins a man an empty name;
> Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance
> Wrapp'd in the curious generalties of arts;
> But a direct and analytic sum
> Of all the worth and first effects of arts.
> *And for his poesy, 'tis so ramm'd with life,*
> *That it shall gather strength of life with being,*
> *And live hereafter more admir'd than now.*

Here Jonson was speaking with sincerity and true intellectual humility. These are prophetic words, generous and true. He matched them in the First Folio when he said:

> *He was not of an age, but for all time!*

If only Ben Jonson could have afforded to tell the truth—but the truth was banned by Authority, and after the *Isle of Dogs* scandal playwrights took a grave risk even in making allusions and giving hints—we might in the end have had a worthy record of the greatest genius of them all. But since he could not afford to give open praise to the man who deserved it, he used the restriction to bolster his own reputation. Naturally jealous as he was, he made the occasion serve and prostituted his honest admiration to the necessity for deceit, in which he showed himself a past master. Easily inflated as he was, he was beguiled by the prominence conferred upon him, as impresario of the First Folio, into taking a distorted view of his own superiority (precisely as Ajax did when his vanity was flattered). We might do him the credit of noting that, throughout his introductory poem, he gives one a feeling that he expects one to see through the blind—were it not for the fact that his self-conceit and ambition impelled him to say what he did for posterity in his prose pronouncements, which come to us almost as his final word.

After the preliminary discussion of his merits, Virgil enters and is bidden by Caesar to take a place of honor and read his poems himself:

> *Cae.* Let us now behold
> *A human soul made visible in life.*[10]
> . . . . . .
> Read, read thyself, dear Virgil; let not me
> Profane one accent with an untuned tongue.
> . . . . . .
> *Virtue,* without presumption, place may take
> Above best kings, whom only she should make.

Virgil responds in a passage which invites careful scrutiny:

> *Virg.* It will be thought a thing ridiculous
> To present eyes, and to all future times
> A gross untruth, that any poet, *void*

[10] Shakespeare's—Lord Oxford's—soul is, indeed, "made visible" in the Sonnets.

Of birth, or wealth, or temporal dignity,
Should, with decorum, transcend Caesar's chair,
Poor virtue raised, high birth and wealth set under,
Crosseth heaven's courses, and *makes worldlings wonder.*

At casual glance, this apparent disavowal on Virgil's part of "birth, wealth, or temporal dignity" seems altogether inappropriate to the scion of the Veres whom he represents, and this effect was of course deliberate. But we take the key-word to be "void." The implication must be that he has been emptied of all his advantages of "birth, wealth, or temporal dignity"; which indeed he had (especially if we consider that his chiefest temporal dignity was his rightful position as the Queen's consort.)[11] And this action on the part of the Queen—or Authority—made "worldlings wonder." Others' "poor virtue" had been "raised," as it happened,[12] while de Vere's "high birth and wealth" had been "set under."

Jonson indicates in Virgil's ensuing rendition that he understands it well enough. Disguised though he makes the poet's words, the implications are clear. The satirist was never more subtle and effective in innuendo in all his career. For, observe, Virgil's poem begins with the description of a crashing *storm;* and it is thus that Oxford always, in the plays, describes his own catastrophes:—"A storm or robbery, call it what you will. . . ." Then note that he gives the story of *Aeneas and Dido;* which, it will be recalled, is the subject of the speech Hamlet reminds the Player of (II.2.439 *et seq.*):

> I heard thee speak me a speech once; but *it was never acted;* or, if it was, *not above once* . . . 'twas *Aeneas' tale to Dido.* . . .[13]
>
> *Virg.* Meanwhile the skies 'gan thunder, and in tail
> Of that, fell pouring *storms* of sleet and hail:
> . . . . . .
> Whilst floods come rolling from the hills amain,
> Dido a cave, the Trojan prince the same
> Lighted upon. There *earth and heaven's great dame*

[11] When a contract becomes ineffective, it is said to be "void." Oxford's—that is, the poet's—great name and status had been nullified.

[12] One whose "poor virtue," certainly in the art of poetry, had been "raised" was Sir Philip Sidney.

[13] We have discovered here something which had escaped notice in our reading of *Hamlet.* For Hamlet says:

> I heard thee speak *me* a speech once, but *it was never acted;* or, if it was, *not above once;* for the play . . . [was] *caviare to the general.*

This seems to offer a strong hint that it was a play Hamlet himself had written. No doubt it was, and was found to be too exotically autobiographical for a general audience, so that it had only one private presentation. Oxford may well have represented himself and Elizabeth as Aeneas and Dido in a play. (Harvey states that many things he composed in "flowing fitts" may not be preserved.) For all we know, Jonson is referring to a drama he had seen. It will be noted that the speech made by the First Player at Hamlet's instigation describes a storm, just as Virgil's does.

That hath the charge of marriage, first gave sign
Unto his contract; fire and air did shine
As guilty of the match; and from a hill
The nymphs with shriekings do the region fill.
Here first began their bane; this day was ground
Of all their ills; for now, nor *rumour's* sound,
Nor nice respect of state, moves Dido ought;
Her love no longer now by stealth is sought:
She calls this wedlock, and with that fair name
Covers her fault. Forthwith the bruit and fame,
Through all the greatest Lybian towns is gone;
Fame, a fleet evil, than which is swifter none,
That moving grows, and flying gathers strength;
Little at first and fearful; but at length
She dares attempt the skies. . . .

Follows a long passage about "rumour," or "fame," which calls to mind the Prologue, *Rumour,* of *2 Henry IV,* and which concludes,

> As covetous she is of tales and lies,
> *As prodigal of truth:* this monster—

Here an interruption occurs in the forcible entrance of Asinius Lupus.[14]

It seems that Jonson went as far as he could go in this speech. Besides the analogies we have pointed out, there is the matter of the scandalized "shriekings" of "the nymphs," or Maids of Honor, while the line, "Her love no longer now by stealth is sought," is exceedingly plain-spoken, though hardly more so than "She calls this wedlock"; which is just what Elizabeth seems to have done, in the matter of her love-affair with the Earl of Oxford—the story which "rumour," or "bruit and fame," had, indeed, spread far and wide; hence the absolute effacement of Oxford's personality, the nullification of the poet's "birth, wealth, and temporal dignity."

Asinius Lupus has found "in Horace his study" a paper which he believes to be a libel against Caesar. (The implication is that thus Jonson's enemies had discovered his first version of *The Poetaster* and been moved to reciprocity.) There is, Asinius affirms, the picture of an eagle upon it.

> *Hor.* It is the imperfect body of an emblem, Caesar, I began it for Mecaenus.
> *Lup.* An emblem! right: that's Greek for libel. Do but mark how confident he is.

Horace declaims at some length a speech beginning,

> A just man cannot fear, thou foolish tribune.

And it turns out, after more histrionics, that the "eagle"—the "emblem"—was actually a "vulture." Thus it was Crispinus. Thus the

[14] Asinius Bubo in *Satiromastix.*

basis for the attack in *Satiromastix*. It is not only a vulture, says Horace, but "a vulture and a wolf. . . . Preying upon the carcass of an ass": the Poetaster, that is, whom Horace has already called a "vulture," and Asinius Lupus, the wolf, who was doubtless a composite of playwrights loyal to the true Crispinus.

Turning the tables upon his opponents, who had used their Crispinus-Shakespeare to take charge of the trial and make the *Arraignment* of Horace, at the King's motion, Jonson elects Virgil-Shakespeare to act, at Caesar's behest, as judge here. Jonson's conscience, if any, is now clear and free: he can insult Crispinus to the limits of his malice; and if the public—"the sluggish, gaping auditor," and "posterity" as well—take him to be the author of the plays, written "high, lofty," etc., "bigger than life," of which he should have "blotted a thousand" lines—why then, so much the worse for their stupidity.

The trial is too long and wordy even to summarize. The high points are as follows:

> *Virg.* Caesar hath done like Caesar. Fair and just
> Is his award against these brainless creatures.
> 'Tis not *the wholesome sharp morality*
> *Or modest anger of a satiric spirit,*
> That hurts and wounds the body of the state;
> But *the sinister application*
> *Of the malicious, ignorant, and base*
> *Interpreter;* who will distort and strain
> The general scope and purpose of an author
> To his particular and private spleen.[15]

Horace, when asked to state his case, nobly protests:

> I am the worst accuser under heaven.[16]
> . . . . . .
> I take no knowledge that they do malign me.
> . . . . . .
> *Tucca.* Body of Jupiter! what, will they arraign my brisk Poetaster and his poor journeyman, ha? . . . Take courage, Crispinus; would thy man had a clean band!
> *Cris.* What must we do, captain?
> *Cae.* What's he, Horace?

[15] In *Satiromastix*, Crispinus had spoken thus of Horace's offense against the Muse of Poesie:

> Thy pride and scorn made her turne Satirist,
> And not her love to vertue (as thou Preachest.)

[16] Is not this reminiscent of Henry V's protest, identical in rhythm?—

> But if it be a sin to covet honour,
> *I am the most offending soul alive. (H. V.:* IV.3.28-9.)

> *Hor.* I only know him for a *motion,*[17] Caesar.
> . . . . . .
> *Cae.* Do you know him, Cornelius?
> *Gal. He's one that hath the mustering, or convoy of a company now and then: I never noted him by any other employment.*

Here, in our opinion, we are given, on the best authority we can ever hope to have, a statement of the Stratford Shaksper's office in the theatre. Up to this time, at least, he had evidently not been a player.

Tibullus, the lawyer, reads the indictment, which is Jonson's grievance stated in full and formal terms:

> *Tib.* Rufus Laberius Crispinus, and Demetrius Fannius . . . alias Crispinas, poetaster and plagiary, the other . . . play-dresser and plagiary . . . have . . . maliciously gone about to deprave, and calumniate the person and writings of Quintus Horatius Flaccus, here present, poet, and priest to the Muses; and to . . . have mutually conspired and plotted . . . taxing him falsely, of self-love, arrogancy, impudence, railing, *filching by translation,* etc. . . . what answer you? Are you guilty, or not guilty?
> *Tuc.* Not guilty, say.
> *Cris. and Deme.* Not guilty.

The trial proceeds, and presently Virgil makes a long speech embodying the lines,

> Here-hence it comes our Horace now stands tax'd
> Of impudence, self-love and arrogance,
> *By those who share no merit in themselves,*

and concluding,

> This, like Jove's thunder, shall their pride control.
> "The honest satire hath the happiest soul."

Then to Crispinus:

> Caesar is careful of your health, Crispinus;
> And hath himself chose a physician
> To minister unto you: take his pills.

Horace, after some talk, forgives Demetrius, making a speech full of Jonsonian guile:

> If this be all, faith, I forgive thee freely.
> *Envy me still, so long as Virgil loves me,*
> Gallus, Tibullus, and the best-best Caesar,

[17] In *E.M.O.*, Sogliardo came to town "to see the motions"—puppet-shows. Now, in the early, rather fanciful part of *Groatsworth of Wit,* Greene speaks of a man who called himself "a player"—though Greene doubted his actually being one—who had informed Roberto (Greene) that he had been "for seven years apace . . . absolute interpreter to the puppets." To cap this, we have Horace's statement, above, regarding Crispinus-Shaksper: "I only know him for *a motion,* Caesar." If Shaksper had been, in 1592, "interpreter to the puppets" for seven years, he had begun at twenty-one.

My dear Mecaenus; while these, with many more,
Whose names I wisely slip, shall think me worthy
Their honour'd and ador'd society,
And read and love, prove and applaud my poems;
I would not wish but such as you should spite them.

This is not only more self-righteous than generous: it is the very essence of politic deceit. For Virgil is simply another presentment of the Knight whom Horace has been called a Judas for maligning. It is double-dealing so brazen as to insult the intelligence.

Suddenly Crispinus is sick, and all his terrible words begin to come up.

Cris. O—*retrograde*—*reciprocal*—*incubus.*
. . . . . .
O—*gibbery*—*lubrical*—*defunct*—O—!
. . . . . .
Spurious—*snotteries*—*chilblain'd*—*clumsie*—
. . . . . .
O—O—O—O—O!

This is a lengthy scene, with many long words and also with many O's, which may or may not stand for Oxford. Marston is really drawn into the character of Crispinus here, since he was accused by his colleagues of using long and sometimes fabricated words. It is, of course, designed to offset the *Arraignment* Crispinus makes against Horace in *Satiromastix,* which concludes:

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 *Insolencè* should we fetch up.

Or perhaps it was the other way round, and Jonson administered his pills first.

Virgil sums up in a speech which is replete with Jonsonian pedantry and classical reference, ending with,

And henceforth learn
To bear yourself more humbly; not to swell
Or breathe your insolent and idle spite
On him whose laughter can your worst affright.

The whole thing is gone over again, and Horace once more praised and vindicated, in a long speech by Tibullus. Caesar has the last word, or rather the last tedious speech. It closes with,

Envy will dwell where there is want of merit,
Though the deserving man should crack his spirit.

Blush, folly, blush; here's none that fears
The wagging of an ass's ears,
Although a wolfish case he wears.

Detraction is but baseness' varlet;
And apes are apes, though clothed in scarlet.[18]

The eight-and-a-half pages which follow the conclusion of the actio
contain, as we have elsewhere said, Jonson's justification, in the form
of dialogues between Horace and his friends, of his self-dedication to
the Muse of Satire.

If we were asked to sum up Ben Jonson's position, we could find
no better dictum than that Hamlet used in a different connection to
pose a not dissimilar truth:

. . . this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof.
(III.1.114-15.)