

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## ‘Sheep-skin-weaver’: Ben Jonson in Thomas Dekker’s *Satiromastix*

P. B. Roberts

Cardiff University

peterbrynmorroberts@hotmail.com

*Satiromastix* (printed in 1602) is Thomas Dekker’s contribution to the ‘Poets’ War’ that raged between 1599 and 1602, with Ben Jonson on one side and Dekker and John Marston on the other.<sup>1</sup> Jonson held contrasting opinions of his two antagonists. He and Marston had a tempestuous relationship, with reconciliations, public avowals of friendship and respect, and renewed fallings-out.<sup>2</sup> For Dekker, he seems only to have had blunt contempt. William Drummond’s record of his conversations with Jonson in 1619 reflects this disparity: Jonson makes multiple digs at Marston, but dismisses Dekker once in passing as one of several writers he considers ‘rogues’.<sup>3</sup> Posterity has taken its cue from Jonson: beginning with Gerard Langbaine in 1691, critics have passed rapidly over *Satiromastix*, even though out of all the plays associated with the ‘Poets’ War’, it is the only unequivocal attack on Jonson, with direct verbal quotations from his works.<sup>4</sup> In this article I will redress this imbalance.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a chronological guide to the main events of the quarrel, see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 265-76. I presented this article as a paper at Warwick University’s *Laughter and Satire, 1500-1800* conference at Venice in 2014. Many thanks to the other delegates for their questions, and to Professor Catherine Belsey (Swansea University) for all her help, generosity and encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> See C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds), *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), xi, pp. 373-4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, gen. ed. by David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), v, p. 362. Unless otherwise stated, all further references to Jonson’s works are to this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Langbaine curtly calls the play ‘far inferior to’ *Poetaster*, since Dekker’s ‘abilities in Poetry were no ways comparable’ with Jonson’s (*An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* [Oxford: by L. L. for George West and Henry Clements, 1691], p. 123). Scholars do not agree on the extent of Marston’s contributions. According to Edward Gieskes, his supposed additions to *Histrionastix*, a play first attributed to him in 1878, ‘represent Marston’s intervention in the Poet’s War’, while Bednarz treats it as one of several plays by him attacking Jonson, and Roslyn Lander Knutson denies that it is by Marston at all. Moreover, the play

As it will appear, a dialectic of elite versus popular art is central to the Poets' War.<sup>5</sup> Dekker's play was performed late in 1601, by the boy players of Paul's and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, while Jonson was working for the rival children's company at Blackfriars.<sup>6</sup> So *Satiromastix* reached not only a wealthier audience at Paul's; the Chamberlain's Men played on what Jonson in *Cynthia's Revels* contemptuously calls 'common stages' like the Globe, whose capacity was much bigger than the private playhouses like Blackfriars but who charged a much lower admission price.<sup>7</sup> *Hamlet* (first printed in 1603) conveys the impression the literary slanging match made on contemporaries, when Guildenstern reports to the Prince on the fortunes of 'the tragedians of the city' and the threat to their popularity from the boy actors.<sup>8</sup> Significantly for my argument, Guildenstern envisages the 'Poetomachia' as a battle between literature (as

---

does not appear in print until 1610, and this quarto text is anonymous, whereas Jonson and Dekker's plays were available to buy soon after their first performance, as if to capitalize on the quarrel's notoriety. Gieskes, "'Honesty and Vulgar Praise': The Poet's War and the Literary Field", *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 18 (2005), 75-103 (p. 85); Bednarz, *passim*; Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 75-82. I will concentrate in this article on *Satiromastix*.

<sup>5</sup> Here I take issue with Gieskes, who rejects readings of the Poetomachia in terms of 'an opposition between high and low culture or between types of theater' (83). Gieskes is partly reacting against an earlier critical tradition that stressed the contrasting nature of Jonson and Dekker's audiences and playing companies. This perhaps reaches its apex in Robert Boies Sharpe, *The Real War of the Theaters: Shakespeare's Fellows in Rivalry with the Admiral's Men, 1594-1603* (Boston, MA: Heath; London: Oxford University Press, 1935), where the feud between authors is almost entirely subsumed into a hypothetical feud between acting troupes and courtly factions.

<sup>6</sup> Cyrus Hoy estimates the time of performance as the autumn: at 5.2.243, *Satiromastix* refers to *The Whipping of the Satyre*, entered in the Stationers' Register on 14 August 1601, and the play itself was entered on 11 November (*Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker'*, 4 vols [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], I, pp. 180-1). The title-page of *Satiromastix* declares it was 'presented publikely, by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his Servants; and privately, by the Children of Paules' (reproduced in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 4 vols [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-61], I, p. 299. Unless otherwise stated, all further references to Dekker's plays are to this edition).

<sup>7</sup> One of the speakers in the Induction to *Cynthia's Revels* wishes that playwrights 'would not so penuriously glean wit from every laundress or hackney-man, or derive their best grace with servile imitation from common stages' (*Jonson's Works*, I, p. 450; see also 4.3.94-6). For estimates on the respective sizes of the playhouses, see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 4th edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 142-3.

<sup>8</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 2.2.324-60 (all references are to the folio text as given here). I follow the traditional and most persuasive interpretation of this passage: for an overview of the substantial commentary, and another interpretation, see Knutson, pp. 103-26.

represented by poetry) and commercial entertainment (embodied in the public theatre): he describes it to Hamlet as a conflict between ‘the poet and the player’ (2.2.353).<sup>9</sup>

The close relationship between Jonson’s and Dekker’s plays has obscured some fundamental differences. *Satiromastix* responds directly to *Poetaster*, where Jonson had made himself Horace, embodiment of integrity and poetic virtue, and caricatured Marston and Dekker as the envious and mediocre Crispinus and Demetrius. All three characters reappear in *Satiromastix*, but *Poetaster* ends with Crispinus and Demetrius ‘arraigned’ before Caesar for their crimes against literature generally and Horace particularly, and *Satiromastix* retaliates by having Horace ‘untrussed’ in front of the King for his arrogance and self-promotion. Furthermore, Jonson sets *Poetaster*, his manifesto about literature, in Rome during the reign of Augustus, ‘When wit and arts were at their height’;<sup>10</sup> *Satiromastix* takes place in eleventh-century England, and the apparently arbitrary nature of this setting is part of the reason scholars have dismissed Dekker’s play as undistinguished hackwork.<sup>11</sup> But the clash between the two concerns more than superficial matters of setting. Jonson asserts equivalent status for his texts with the ultra-canonical literature of Greece and Rome, while Dekker’s claims for his festive, celebratory satire are opposed.

As often in early-modern satire, each author picks up on external details about the other to suggest something about their moral or intellectual status.<sup>12</sup> Dekker concedes in his preface that in preparing his satirical portrait of Jonson he has not restricted himself to ‘his *mindes Deformatie*’,<sup>13</sup> and the play takes potshots at Jonson’s physical appearance, including his clothes: the stage-direction at the start of 2.2 reads ‘Enter *Horace* in his true attyre’. In fact, images of clothing recur throughout the ‘Poets’ War’ plays, but the only scholar to have noticed this is Tom Cain, and he merely infers two things about *Poetaster*: that contemporary costumes will have heightened the play’s conflation of ancient Rome and Elizabethan London, and that Jonson’s original Inns of Court audience might have

---

<sup>9</sup> Dekker uses the Latin word (apparently his own coinage) in his preface to *Satiromastix*: ‘that terrible *Poetomachia*, lately commenc’d betweene *Horace the second*, and a band of leane-witted *Poetasters*’ (*Dramatic Works*, I, p. 309).

<sup>10</sup> *Jonson’s Works*, II, p. 173.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Larry S. Champion, *Thomas Dekker and the Traditions of English Drama* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 28-35.

<sup>12</sup> In libels that circulated on Elizabeth and James’s chief minister Robert Cecil, for example, Cecil’s hunchback acts as a metaphor for his deformed soul, and the sores he suffered from in his final months signify his internal corruption; for the full text of these, see ‘Early Stuart Libels: An Edition of Poetry from Manuscript Sources’, ed. by Alastair Bellany and Andrew Macrae, *Early Modern Literary Studies Text Series 1* (2005) <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/>> [accessed 24 July 2016].

<sup>13</sup> *Dekker’s Dramatic Works*, I, p. 309.

recognized the individuals satirized onstage by their clothes.<sup>14</sup> I will propose another way of reading this detail, one that roots it in the issues of class and aesthetics at the heart of the quarrel.

Because the authors render these pointillist portraits of each other, the ‘Poets’ War’ used to be thought of as purely an exercise in personal satire.<sup>15</sup> Nineteenth-century scholars read the plays cryptanalytically, concentrating on identifying each character as a contemporary literary personality, sometimes fancifully. In 1864, for instance, Robert Cartwright identified William Rufus in *Satiromastix* as Shakespeare, on the basis that Shakespeare’s nickname was ‘William the Conqueror’, and saw a caricature of the English courtier-playwright John Lyly in Dekker’s *Sir Vaughan ap Rees*, the comical stage-Welshman who speaks a heavy dialect.<sup>16</sup> More recent critics have looked at the plays conceptually. Richard Helgerson has read Jonson’s contributions in relation to his conscious self-presentation as ‘laureate’, distinguishing himself both from trifling amateurs and cynical professionals with his exalted notion of the role of art and the artist.<sup>17</sup> In the most recent monograph on the quarrel, James P. Bednarz has argued that it concerned differing concepts of authorship, with Shakespeare and Marston festively critiquing the humanist programme Jonson sets out in his ‘comical satires’. Bednarz, however, copies his predecessors in almost entirely ignoring *Satiromastix*; instead he concentrates on the duelling authorial personas of Jonson, Marston, and Shakespeare, even though Marston’s involvement in the ‘Poets’ War’ is indeterminate and Shakespeare’s is entirely conjectural.<sup>18</sup> In this article I will initially focus on a passage in

---

<sup>14</sup> *Poetaster* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 9, 32-3.

<sup>15</sup> For the primary examples of the older tradition, see Josiah H. Penniman, *The War of the Theatres* (Boston, MA: Ginn; Halle: Niemayer, 1897); Roscoe Addison Small, *The Stage-Quarrel between Ben Jonson and the so-called Poetasters* (Breslau: Marcus, 1899).

<sup>16</sup> *Shakspeare and Jonson: Dramatic, versus Wit-Combats* (London: John Russell Smith, 1864), p. 52. William Rufus (William II) was the son of William the Conqueror (William I).

<sup>17</sup> *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 21-54, 101-84 passim.

<sup>18</sup> For over a century, commentators have built a great deal on one line in *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus*, where Will Kemp describes Shakespeare giving Jonson ‘a purge that made him beray his credit’ (J. B. Leishman [ed.], *The Three Parnassus Plays, 1598-1601* [London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1949], p. 337). In 1886, F. G. Fleay, identifying the ‘purge’ as Shakespeare’s supposed caricature of Jonson as Ajax in *Troilus and Cressida*, initiated a line of enquiry whereby scholars have ransacked Shakespeare’s plays of the ‘Poets’ War’ era for critiques of Jonson. For some recent examples, see Grace Tiffany, “‘That Reason Wonder May Diminish’: *As You Like It*, Androgyny, and the Theater Wars”, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 57 (1994), 213-39; Cain, pp. 36-8; Bednarz, pp. 32-52. Sidney Lee once suggested that the phrase merely means that Shakespeare had outdone Jonson in popularity (*A Life of William Shakespeare* [New York: Macmillan, 1898], pp. 218-20), and perhaps we should not dismiss this, or the similar possibility that Kemp’s meaning is that Shakespeare excels Jonson as an author. In the *Parnassus* scene,

*Satiromastix* that has largely passed without notice, but that illuminates Jonson's self-image as an author, as seen in the distorting mirror of Dekker's satire. From the minutiae of this I will then zoom out to the bigger picture, where Jonson's patrician concept of drama contrasts with Dekker's populist one. And while, as Edward Gieskes has recently pointed out, Jonson and Dekker's statuses were ultimately the same, this, I will conclude, is also Dekker's argument.<sup>19</sup>

## I

The textual crux I want to look at first of all appears in *Satiromastix*, 1.2. The swaggering soldier Captain Tucca, another character who carries over from *Poetaster*, enters the lodging of his enemy Horace, eager to settle a score with the poet who has libelled him: offered tobacco by Horace's crony Asinius Bubo ('Morrow Captaine *Tucca*, will you whiffe this morning?'), he replies,

Art thou there goates pizzel; no godamercy Caine I am for no whiffs I, come hether sheep-skin-weaver, s'foote thou lookst as though th'adst beg'd out of a Jayle: drawe, I meane not thy face (for tis not worth drawing) but drawe neere: this way, martch, follow your commaunder you scoundrell: So, thou must run of an errand for mee Mephostophiles. (1.2.292-8)

E. A. J. Honigmann used the phrase *sheep-skin-weaver*, which he called 'a nonce-word, and [. . .] clearly coined for a purpose', as evidence for his theory that Asinius was a caricature of the poet John Weever, whose diminutive size, fondness for smoking and devotion to Jonson Honigmann believed are satirized throughout the play.<sup>20</sup> I would like, first, to explain why Honigmann's theory is untenable; second, to advance a theory of my own; and finally, to explain how this is part of a pattern of imagery in the 'Poets' War' plays, that illustrates the personas Jonson and Dekker use.

Honigmann's interpretation of this (admittedly unusual) phrase rests on false assumptions. First, it seems to me that Tucca addresses only the first two clauses of this speech to Bubo, and the rest to Horace: 'Art thou there goates pizzel; no godamercy Caine

---

the player is amplifying his comment in the previous sentence on the inadequacy of university-educated authors, 'Why heres our fellow *Shakespeare* puts them all downe, I and *Ben Jonson* too'.

<sup>19</sup> Gieskes, esp. 83-4.

<sup>20</sup> *John Weever: A Biography of a Literary Associate of Shakespeare and Jonson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 42-4.

I am for no whiffs I' refuses Bubo's offer, and with 'come hether', Tucca turns back to Horace. Here the punctuation of the 1602 quarto may have obscured the meaning: Elizabethan pointing is famously governed not by syntax but by rhythm. The comma after 'whiffs I' seems to have misled Honigmann, who cites Fredson Bowers's conservative old-spelling edition, into thinking that Tucca's brief tirade at Bubo runs on here; significantly, though, Dekker's editors Thomas Hawkins and Josiah H. Penniman, who both modernize the play's punctuation, make the comma a colon, highlighting the impression that there is a change in subject-matter and, as I think, in the person being addressed.<sup>21</sup> Tucca has to direct the reference to his interlocutor's face at Horace, whom a few lines earlier he has called a 'copper-face [faced] rascal' (1.2.285), and whose ruddy, pock-marked visage he will continue to comment on until the play's end;<sup>22</sup> 'thou must run of an errand for mee' Horace interprets as addressed to him, as he replies, 'To doe you pleasure Captayne I will' (1.2.299). And whereas Honigmann feels that Tucca addresses 'this way, march, follow your commaunder you scoundrell' to Bubo, whose 'commander' is his idol Horace,<sup>23</sup> I think it is more natural to assume that after a few words Tucca dismisses Bubo and devotes his attention to Horace, who is the sole reason for his visit.

Furthermore, there are problems with Asinius Bubo as a caricature of Weever. Dekker emphasizes in several places that Bubo is illiterate: books are things he likes to be seen striking poses with in public but which he can't actually read. When Horace asks Bubo to 'read some booke, and give us leave' while he talks to Crispinus and Demetrius, Bubo asides, 'marry for reading any book [. . .] tis out of my Element' (1.2.185-8); in the climactic punishment-scene, Sir Vaughan makes Bubo swear 'you shall not carry Lattin Poets about you, till you can write and read English' (5.2.274).<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the gloves-off, wide-swinging nature of much Elizabethan personal satire, this would be a strange way to represent a Cambridge graduate and printed author.<sup>25</sup> Quite possibly the detail of Bubo's size is incidental, like the detail of Sir Adam Prickshaft's baldness in the

---

<sup>21</sup> See Hawkins (ed.), *The Origins of the English Drama*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press for S. Leacroft, 1773), III, p. 114; Penniman (ed.), *Poetaster' by Ben Jonson and 'Satiromastix' by Thomas Dekker* (Boston, MA; London: Heath, [1913]), p. 294.

<sup>22</sup> Tucca calls him 'perboylde-face', 'his face puncht full of Oylet-holes like the cover of a warming-pan' (5.2.253, 258), etc.

<sup>23</sup> Honigmann, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> See also *Satiromastix*, 1.2.114-20, 1.2.261-73, 4.1.196-200.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of Weever's early career, see Honigmann, pp. 21-41.

same play, and is not an indication of personal satire.<sup>26</sup> Bubo's idiocy, his foppishness, his love of oaths and tobacco all seem to be part of a generic Character of a foolish, fashionable gentleman.<sup>27</sup> Even Bubo's illiteracy is part of this stock figure, as the preface to Dekker's *The Gvls Horne-booke*, an ironic manual for vacuous young men-about-town, attests: Dekker addresses his readers, 'I know that most of you (O admirable *Gvls!*) can neither write nor reade.'<sup>28</sup> George R. Price, writing before Honigmann, says that Bubo's 'historical identity has not been decided', but makes an admission of sorts when he later comments, 'Tucca and Bubo are certainly comparable, if not equal, to Shakespeare's Pistol and Aguecheek'.<sup>29</sup> Bubo and Aguecheek are both types, just as Tucca and Pistol are lineally descended from the *miles gloriosus*.

Other than Honigmann's theory, the phrase *sheep-skin-weaver* has remained unexplained and unemended in all the scholarly editions of *Satiromastix* from 1773 onwards.<sup>30</sup> The fact that it makes no sense (animal skins can, of course, be tanned or dressed but not woven) seems not to have troubled editors.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Elizabethans seem to have associated weavers with Puritanism, perhaps because of the number of Calvinist weavers who had emigrated to England from the Low Countries owing to Spanish persecution.<sup>32</sup> This would hardly be an appropriate association for Jonson, who wrote anti-Puritan satire in *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*; at the time of *Satiromastix* he was a Catholic, and Dekker taunts him with this in several places (4.2.89-91, 4.3.126, 198-9).<sup>33</sup> As a reading, *sheep-skin-wearer* would yield more obvious sense. Since the colourful epithets Tucca throws at Horace are generally abusive, sheepskin would need to be understood as a cheap substance or as the garment of poor people, and Tucca uses it in just this sense

---

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Bate identifies Sir Adam as Shakespeare, but this is implausible; part of his argument is that 'Prickshaft is a bad amateur writer, a foolish aspirational gentleman poet', which is incorrect (*Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and Work of William Shakespeare* [London: Viking, 2008], p. 378).

<sup>27</sup> See the Characters of 'A Gallant' and 'A Tobacco-seller' in John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie* (London: W[illiam] S[tansby] for Edward Blount, 1628), sigs [D11]<sup>r</sup>-E<sup>r</sup>, [G12]<sup>r</sup>-v.

<sup>28</sup> *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1884-6), II, p. 197.

<sup>29</sup> *Thomas Dekker* (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 57, 60.

<sup>30</sup> Hawkins, III, p. 114; *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols (London: John Pearson, 1873), I, p. 200; Henry Morley (ed.), *English Plays* (London: Cassell, [1878]), p. 200; Hans Scherer (ed.), *Satiromastix or the Vntrussing of the Humorous Poet* (Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1907), p. 21; Penniman, 'Poetaster' and 'Satiromastix', p. 294. No editor is credited for the 1873 *Dramatic Works*. W. H. Williams (ed.), *Specimens of the Elizabethan Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), pp. 163-9, reproduces an excerpt from *Satiromastix*, 1.2 that ends before Tucca's entrance.

<sup>31</sup> For details of the early-modern skin trade, see M. Channing Linthicum, *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), pp. 238-41.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> See Hoy, I, p. 279; Bednarz, p. 157.

later in the play: wooing Mistress Miniver, he promises her riches and fine clothes, adding ‘and this shipskin-cap shall be put off’ (3.1.223). Similarly, in *Patient Grissil*, co-written by Dekker, the rustic servant Babulo tells a gentleman who has summoned him to attend on the Marquess, ‘Clownes [peasants] are not for the Court [. . .]: you eate good cheere, and wee eate good bread and cheese: you drinke wine, and we strong beare: [. . .] you weare silkes, and wee sheepe-skinnes’ (5.1.72-9). Mentions of the textile elsewhere in the period reinforce this impression. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the account of Petruchio’s shabby entrance at his own wedding, complete with an equally shabby horse, includes the detail that his mount has ‘a headstall of sheep’s leather which [. . .] hath been often burst and now repaired with knots’ (3.2.56-8); Barbara Hodgdon notes the use of sheepskin instead of ‘the stronger, more common, pigskin or cowhide’.<sup>34</sup> The strongest and most durable leather was made from oxhide. The comparative flimsiness of sheepskin is presumably the reason that in 1557, the Stationers’ Company fined Richard Tottell ‘for byndynge of bokes in shepes lether / contrary to our ordenaunces’. The most commonly used material for covering books in the sixteenth century was calfskin or cowhide; it was only much later that sheepskin became customary as a binding for what Philip Gaskell calls ‘the cheapest work’.<sup>35</sup> The mistake in *Satiromastix*, if that is what it is, would be an easy one for a compositor to make: in fact, the very same crux appears in Gabriel Harvey’s *Fovre Letters, and certaine Sonnets* (1592), during an elaborate simile comparing writing to the manufacture of clothes. In the first edition, Harvey declares, ‘I appeale to Poules Churchyard, whether lines be like unto seames: [. . .] There may be a fault in the Reader, aswell as in the wearer’; the second edition either corrects or corrupts ‘wearer’ to ‘weaver’.<sup>36</sup>

The reading I am suggesting would be consonant with the representation of Horace throughout *Satiromastix*. The play insists on Jonson’s sartorial as well as moral shabbiness: Tucca tells him, ‘like a lowsie Pediculous vermin th’ast but one suite to thy backe’ (1.2.310), mocks him by saying that now they are reconciled Crispinus can lend

---

<sup>34</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010), p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> Linthicum, pp. 239-40; Edward Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640 A.D.*, 5 vols (London: [n. pub.], 1875-94), I, p. 70; Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, rev. edn (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1995), pp. 151-2. I am grateful to Iwan Bryn James of the National Library of Wales for discussing this with me.

<sup>36</sup> Harvey’s editor J. E. Biller chooses the first-edition reading (‘A critical edition of Gabriel Harvey’s Fovre letters, and certaine sonnets, 1592’ [Columbia University, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1969], pp. ciii, 98). Clearly the 1602 quarto of *Satiromastix* is not without textual flaws. In addition to the seven substantive corrections given in the ‘short Comedy of Errors’ included in a later issue of the 1602 quarto, Fredson Bowers lists 207 accidentals which he emends (*Dekker’s Dramatic Works*, I, pp. 306-7, 392-5).



him some decent clothes (1.2.333-52), jeers that everything he wears has been bought on credit and is in danger of being repossessed (4.3.233-41), and so on. Bednarz summarizes the figure cut by Horace as ‘a lean frame covered in shabby black clothing’.<sup>37</sup> Like the descriptions of Horace-Jonson’s face, it appears this had a basis in reality. In the seventeenth century, an actor who had known Jonson recalled of his dress sense: ‘his habit was very plaine [. . .] he was wont to weare a coate like a coach-man’s coate, with slitts under the arme-pitts’;<sup>38</sup> the only authentic image of Jonson, the painting (c. 1617) by Abraham van Blyenberch that forms the basis for all subsequent prints and engravings, shows him plainly dressed in black.<sup>39</sup> Dekker may not have been the only one of Jonson’s literary enemies to seize on these details: Anne Barton cites the fact that the character Chrisogonus in *Histriomastix* is ‘[p]lainly or shabbily dressed even in periods of pride and plenty’ as evidence that he represents Jonson, and states that Lampatho Doria in Marston’s *What You Will*, ‘that “ragg’d satirist” and “scrubbing railer” in sullen black, looks very like a Jonson figure’.<sup>40</sup>

The deliberately simple clothing worn by Jonson, even in his years of prosperity, fits his self-image as demonstrated in his contributions to the Poets’ War, *Cynthia’s Revels* and *Poetaster*: as an austere, detached, scholarly observer, not given to show.<sup>41</sup> Dekker identifies not only Horace in *Poetaster* but also Criticus in *Cynthia’s Revels* as Jonson’s surrogates.<sup>42</sup> *Cynthia’s Revels* is an allegory set at the court of the virginal moon-goddess.

---

<sup>37</sup> Bednarz, p. 216. See also *Satiromastix* 4.2.1. When Horace’s clothing leads Sir Quintilian to mistake him for a soldier (3.1.54), the point of this seems to be how plain or tattered it is: for the characteristic dress of the disbanded Elizabethan soldier, see *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow, 2nd edn, rev. by F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), I, p. 204; Leishman, p. 181.

<sup>38</sup> The source for this is John Lacy (d. 1681), the actor and playwright who advised Jonson about Yorkshire dialect (John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. by John Buchanan-Brown [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000], pp. 171-2, 173, 184).

<sup>39</sup> For a reproduction of this, see <<http://www.npg.org.uk>> [accessed 24 July 2016].

<sup>40</sup> *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 59, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Jonson’s first ‘comical satire’, *Every Man Out of his Humour*, has one scene featuring characters parodying Marston and, possibly, Dekker (3.1), but this has no relation to the play’s main plots, and Bednarz calls it a late interpolation (pp. 87, 137, 265). The character Clove’s fantastic parade of neologisms echoes some of Marston’s vocabulary, but his vacuous companion Orange merely repeats the same few phrases again and again, and could be a caricature of anyone (although this may, of course, be Jonson’s point).

<sup>42</sup> See *Satiromastix*, 1.2.149-58, 309-14, 340-1. Bednarz accepts the identification (pp. 159-64), following Penniman (*War of the Theatres*, p. 76) and Small (pp. 27-8). Oscar James Campbell thinks Criticus is ‘representative of the author’s satiric point of view’ and ‘Jonson’s notion of an ideal critic of manners and morals’ but not a representation of Jonson specifically (*Comical Satyre and Shakespeare’s ‘Troilus and Cressida’* [San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1938], pp. 84-6). C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson support this, and the play’s later editors, Eric Rasmussen and Matthew Steggle, are similarly cautious (Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, IX, pp. 486-7; *Jonson’s Works*, I, pp. 434-5). Whatever the truth

The spa-waters that become fashionable here come from the Fountain of Self-Love, and magnify the self-besotted behaviour of all who drink them, until a climactic masque restores humoral balance. The play's moral centre is the indigent poet-scholar Criticus, the masque's author; Criticus is literally the servant of virtue, as he attends on the nymph Arete, Virtue personified.<sup>43</sup> In a play set among courtiers, with a corresponding emphasis on clothing and general finery, the audience is not allowed to forget the dour simplicity of Criticus's dress. One of the attendant ladies calls him 'the little, poor, plain gentleman i'the black there' (4.1.64); one of the play's foppish, superficial gentlemen thinks the court-ushers should 'better distinguish the silken disposition of a courtier than to let such terrible coarse rags [as Criticus] mix with 'em' (3.2.25); another calls him 'that rag there [. . .] An impecunious creature [. . .] this fellow i'the black stuff'.<sup>44</sup>

In *Poetaster*, Jonson similarly dramatizes his ideas about the transformative potential of literature and the author's social role. Among the various kinds of writer consequently represented – hacks like Demetrius; dilettantes and plagiarists like Crispinus; talented but amoral writers like Ovid – Jonson's ideal poet is embodied in Horace and Virgil. He attempts the trick of making Horace a figure whose ascetic lifestyle and stoic indifference to the vagaries of fortune the audience is invited to admire, while also emphasizing his fortune in receiving support from the wealthy and powerful. The career-choice of poet means being poor and poorly dressed – Tucca calls poets 'a sort of poor, starved rascals, that are ever wrapped up in foul linen, and can boast of nothing but a lean visage peering out of a seam-rent suit' (1.2.169) – and the text reiterates Horace's poverty and that Caesar

---

of this, Criticus still embodies Jonson's personal ideal of the author in ways that are peculiar to him. Scholars have never questioned that Horace is Jonson, and the similarities between the two characters are arresting. Like Horace's satire, Criticus's art is corrective and medicinal; their roles draw on both men the attacks of the malicious, who misrepresent their deep learning as plagiarism. Criticus's tart commentary leads other characters to think him 'sour' (1.4.34), and the same word is used of Horace in *Poetaster*: the satirist says, 'There are to whom I seem excessive sour' (3.5.1). Ultimately, however, both are vindicated by the endorsement of their sovereign. The association of Jonson with plagiarism was to become conventional, as was his bitter envy of Shakespeare's genius: see Ian Donaldson, "'The Fripperie of Wit": Jonson and Plagiarism', in *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. by Paulina Kewes (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 119-33; Lynn S. Meskill, *Ben Jonson and Envy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-3, 36-9.

<sup>43</sup> The 1616 folio renames the character 'Crites' (*Jonson's Works*, I, p. 432): as Dekker is responding to the earlier version (see *Satiromastix*, 1.2.311-2, etc.), I cite the quarto text unless otherwise stated.

<sup>44</sup> *Jonson's Works*, V, pp. 54-5. As the Cambridge editors make clear, Anaides and Hedon are mocking Criticus's homely garb when they call him a 'poor grogram rascal' and 'a piece of serge or perpetuana' (3.2.5, 23-4): the Horace of *Satiromastix* wears a suit of perpetuana (4.3.235), and Herford, Simpson and Simpson believe that this detail is based on Jonson's actual dress (IX, p. 507). Perpetuana was a woollen material that could be bought cheaply, and as an English product was not highly fashionable (Linthicum, pp. 83-4).

admires him not for his success but for his virtue.<sup>45</sup> So, in their clothing as in everything else, Criticus and the Horace of *Poetaster* both represent Jonson's ideal of the scholarly author unconcerned with worldly matters. This is something Jonson himself was not able to realize until he secured patronage, hence John Manningham's description of him and Sir Robert Townshend in 1602: 'Ben. Johnson the poet nowe lives upon one Townesend and scornes the world'.<sup>46</sup> I will return later to the issue of patronage, and to the significance of Horace-Jonson's clothing. First, though, some context on Dekker's play.

## II

Critics have largely ignored *Satiromastix*, partly because its generic inconsistency is thought to make it a failure. In 1908, Algernon Charles Swinburne spoke for generations of classically informed commentators: 'It may be assumed, and it is much to be hoped, that there never existed another poet capable of imagining – much less of perpetrating – an incongruity so monstrous and so perverse.'<sup>47</sup> Scholars generally agree that Dekker had begun a tragedy set in William Rufus's reign, and then, when approached to write an attack on Jonson, hurriedly welded onto the unfinished play the satirical 'subplot' which overwhelms it.<sup>48</sup> This would explain the jarring presence of Horace in Norman England, and why Sir Walter Terill, the King's historical murderer, ends the play by reconciling with his sovereign. Dekker devotes so little time to the tragic strand of the plot that scholars have not thought it worthwhile to investigate his sources for it, but he could have read, for instance, in Holinshed of the 'sensuall lust' of the King, who 'kept many

---

<sup>45</sup> *Poetaster*, 3.1.11-2, 5.1.75-98.

<sup>46</sup> *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603*, ed. by Robert Parker Sorlien (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), pp. 187, 380-1. Horace's dress and his status as scholar are linked: when Tucca calls him 'that Judas yonder that walkes in Rug' (*Satiromastix*, 1.2.283), Hoy comments, 'Rug, a rug-gown, made of hairy frieze and worn by scholars' (I, p. 219). At this historical moment, the university system was still in the process of evolving from the monastic system, and the idea that scholarship should involve a renunciation of the world was residual. In Latin verses describing his experiences teaching in Paris in the 1520s, the humanist George Buchanan includes shabby dress along with spare diet and celibacy as part of the conventional lot of the scholar. See 'Quàm misera sit conditio doctentium literas humaniores Lutetiae', in *Georgii Bvchanani Scoti, Franciscanus et Fratres...* ([n. p.]: [n. pub.], 1594), pp. 60-3. Later, a lost ideal of the simply and sombrely dressed scholar is implicit in the complaints of John Caius and William Harrison about the dissipated, gaudily dressed undergraduates of their day (quoted in J. B. Mullinger, *The University of Cambridge*, 3 vols [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1873-1911], II, pp. 98-9).

<sup>47</sup> *The Age of Shakespeare* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908), p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> See Small, pp. 121-2; Swinburne, pp. 66-7; Mary Leland Hunt, *Thomas Dekker: A Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), pp. 64, 66; Hoy, I, p. 180; Champion, pp. 2, 28; Cain, p. 54.

concubines, and waxed verie cruell and inconstant in all his dooings’, as also of his death at the hands of ‘sir Walter Tirell a French knight’, and decided to combine the two facts in a revenge plot in which Terill kills the tyrant for the rape of his virginal bride.<sup>49</sup> Critical neglect has continued to our times. Julia Gasper, in her 1990 monograph on Dekker, gives it only brief and desultory attention, as it does not fit the image she wants to create of the playwright as a militant Protestant.<sup>50</sup> Bednarz’s verdict on *Satiromastix* is that Dekker, unlike Marston or Shakespeare, has fundamentally the same humanist philosophy of authorship as Jonson, and that therefore the play has little more to offer than some entertaining *ad hominem* abuse.<sup>51</sup> Along the same lines, Gieskes states that *Poetaster* brought the Poets’ War to an end, making *Satiromastix* a meaningless appendage where Dekker merely retaliates on Jonson’s own terms.<sup>52</sup> This can be challenged, as there are significant differences between the two which Bednarz and Gieskes overlook.

Jonson’s and Dekker’s satirical models are sharply different. Jonson’s frames of reference are, famously, classical; Dekker, by contrast, invokes indigenous and demotic traditions of festive comedy. This dialectic is the case even when *Satiromastix* follows closely on *Poetaster*, or when Jonson’s play is at its most coarse and boisterous. The moment near the end of *Poetaster* where Crispinus-Marston is made to vomit up his arcane vocabulary is based on a satire by Lucian.<sup>53</sup> The climactic punishment-scene in *Poetaster* is a quasi-legal ‘arraignment’, where Crispinus and Demetrius have their crimes formally read to them (5.3.180-95). Judgement comes from on high, from the Emperor, and with both legal and cultural authority: Augustus Caesar is Renaissance humanism’s archetype of the great ruler patronizing great art.<sup>54</sup> Near the end of *Satiromastix*, by contrast, the assembled company agree to toss Horace in a blanket (4.3.164-8), a fate reminiscent of the ‘Skimmington’ and other informal ceremonies in which scolds, cuckolds, and other offenders against community standards were punished by the community; when, in the fifteenth-century mystery play *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, the shepherds toss the sheep-stealing villain in a blanket, Susan E. Deskis calls this an ‘extra-judicial punishment’.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols (London: for J. Johnson and others, 1807-08), II, pp. 30, 44-5.

<sup>50</sup> *The Dragon and the Dove: The Plays of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> Bednarz, pp. 203-4, 224.

<sup>52</sup> Gieskes, esp. 94, 89-91.

<sup>53</sup> *Jonson’s Works*, II, p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, see George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), pp. 16, 55.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Canvassed, or Tossed in a Blanket: Tracing a Motif from the *Second Shepherds’ Play* through the Seventeenth Century’, *Notes and Queries*, 252 (2007), 325-8 (p. 327). On the ‘Skimmington’, see Martin Ingram, ‘Ridings, Rough Music and the “Reform of Popular Culture” in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 105 (1984), 79-113.

All the characters onstage in this scene of *Satiromastix* speak their judgement of Horace in unison (4.3.166, 172, 245, 259): here Dekker enacts a repeated motif in festive comedy, the climax in which a community punishes, humiliates and drives from it a figure who contravenes its values, something C. L. Barber believes has roots in the folk ritual of the scapegoat.<sup>56</sup>

Even the arbitrator at the play's finale is less lofty than *Poetaster's*. Horace and Bubo's 'untrussing' is overseen by William Rufus, whose lechery has almost brought on tragedy, and this unavoidably alters the tone of the ending. The humanist dictum 'Arts nourished by Kings make Kings more great' (5.2.136) rings hollow in the mouth of the rapacious William, who in Holinshed's words 'was so much addicted to gather goods, that he considered not what pertained to the majestie of a king'.<sup>57</sup> After supervising Horace and Bubo's 'untrussing', King William presides over the festivities at the play's end – the last lines are him calling for a dance (5.2.364-5) – and perhaps a case could even be made for seeing the libidinous, tyrannical, usurping William as a lord of misrule, since he travesties kingship and embodies uninhibited appetite.<sup>58</sup> Never depicted as involved even briefly in the quotidian business of government, William Rufus seems to be King-for-a-day every day, leading a life devoted to pleasure, a holiday idea of monarchy. Dekker explicitly invokes this festive tradition in the play, in opposition to Jonsonian notions of elite entertainment: Sir Vaughan promises Horace, 'I have some cossens Garman at Court, shall beget you the reversion of the Master of the Kings Revels, or else be his Lord of Mis-rule nowe at Christmas' (4.1.188).

Reading the play in this light explains its recurrent emphasis on the young Jonson's scrawny physique: Tucca calls Horace a 'starv'd rascal' and a 'hungrie-face pudding-pye-eater' (1.2.309, 368), telling him when he contrasts Horace-Jonson with the Augustan figure whose identity he has stolen, '*Horace* was a goodly Corpulent Gentleman, and not so leane a hollow-cheekt Scrag as thou art' (5.2.261).<sup>59</sup> This assimilates Jonson to the Lenten figures pilloried in early-modern festivity, with its ethos of robust physicality. Dekker's great role-model Thomas Nashe explicitly does this when mocking his enemy

---

<sup>56</sup> See especially Barber's reading of the function of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (*Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959], pp. 163-91).

<sup>57</sup> *Holinshed's Chronicles*, II, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> For a similar figure, see Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI* who, in François Laroque's reading, also embodies festivity in its more sinister aspects (*Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, trans. by Janet Lloyd [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], pp. 249-53).

<sup>59</sup> Famously obese later in life, at this point Jonson was in deep poverty (see Cain, p. 31).

Gabriel Harvey for his penurious gauntness: ‘so leane and so meagre [. . .] he is such another pretie *Jacke a Lent* as boyes throw at in the streete.’<sup>60</sup> In the words of François Laroque, the ‘universal rotundity’ of revellers at carnival time, ‘which is the counterpart to the skeletal emaciation of the observers of Lent, is a sign of renewed abundance and a promise of births to come’.<sup>61</sup> Jonson may have had some Pythagorean ideal in mind when, in the Induction to *Every Man Out of his Humour*, he has Carlo Buffone describe the author and his ‘philosophical diet’ of ‘beans and buttermilk’.<sup>62</sup> In the festive economy of *Satiromastix*, though, this leanness makes him a figure of contempt.

But Dekker’s Horace is a Lenten figure in another sense. He produces words with great difficulty, as at his first appearance, straining over a poem, in a scene which mocks him for his laboured, costive composition (1.2.1-20). Terill’s servant Blunt asks Horace about the wedding ode he has been commissioned to write, ‘A pox ont, not done yet, and bin about it three dayes?’ (1.2.287). Jonson claimed he had written *Poetaster* in fifteen weeks,<sup>63</sup> and Dekker clearly finds Jonson’s belief that this constituted lightning speed hilarious: Tucca asks Blunt, ‘has he not writ Finis yet *Jacke*? what will he bee fifteene weekes about this Cockatrices egge too?’, and later tells Horace, ‘you and your Itchy Poetry breake out like Christmas, but once a yeare’ (1.2.362, 5.2.202).<sup>64</sup> In direct contrast to this is the arterial spray of colourful insults, lies, grandiose or outlandish words, and references to romance and ballad literature that streams from the mouth of the Captain himself. The Tucca of *Satiromastix* is distinctly different from Jonson’s: whereas Price states that Dekker transfers the Captain from *Poetaster* ‘with no change except an increase of his villainy and fantastic scurrility’, R. A. Small more accurately calls Jonson’s Tucca ‘radically different from that of’ *Satiromastix*, although he does not discuss this at length.<sup>65</sup> In *Poetaster* Tucca is a liar and swindler, and however entertaining he is, Tom Cain thinks him too deliberately contemptible to be a properly Falstaffian figure.<sup>66</sup> But Dekker’s play expands his duplicity to heroic levels: he takes money from two separate suitors for Mrs Miniver’s hand on the pretext of furthering their cause, then pockets it and

---

<sup>60</sup> *Nashe’s Works*, III, pp. 93-4. For Dekker’s avowed admiration for Nashe, see Price, pp. 118-20.

<sup>61</sup> Laroque, p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> *Jonson’s Works*, I, p. 275.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 26.

<sup>64</sup> Jonson embraces Dekker’s charge in the ‘Apologetical Dialogue’ appended to *Poetaster*: when one of the Author’s friends tells him, ‘they say you are slow, / And scarce bring forth a play a year’, he replies, ‘’Tis true. / I would they could not say that I did that’ (*ibid.*, II, p. 177). Lest the audience think Horace’s slowness to write the result of any meticulous craftsmanship, Dekker makes clear that he can come up with the goods rapidly enough once he has been paid an advance (*Satiromastix*, 1.2.366-70, 387-93).

<sup>65</sup> Price, p. 57; Small, p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> Cain, p. 13.

successfully woos her for himself. He is less villainous and more roguish: the King is clearly delighted by ‘this jolly Captaine’ (5.2.167). In effect, the character becomes the traditional trickster figure of festive comedy. According to Lorna Hutson, the trickster is part of festivity’s world of abundance, because he generates words and ideas. In festive comedy’s more literary forms his linguistic plenitude can make him a surrogate for the author, and Dekker’s Tucca demonstrates the same off-the-cuff ingenuity when lying his way out of trouble as the poet Crispinus does in the following scene when called on to defend a paradox extemporally (4.2.110-44, 4.3.28-68).<sup>67</sup> It is not only that the Tucca of *Poetaster* is ultimately punished along with Crispinus and Demetrius, and Dekker’s Captain ends the play rewarded with the hand of the rich widow and endorsed by the King, who promises to dance at his wedding: Dekker makes him the most dynamic and generative figure in the play, chief mouthpiece of its anti-Horace satire,<sup>68</sup> and significantly, he gives this role not to a poet but to a tavern loudmouth.

In short, Jonson’s idea of satire is literary, and Dekker’s ludic.<sup>69</sup> The climax of *Satiromastix*, where Horace and Bubo, dressed as satyrs, are ‘*pul’d in by th’hornes bound*’, tied to stakes and baited, is explicitly staged like a bull- or bear-baiting, the kind of aggressive but undemanding spectacle that plays had to compete with for Elizabethan audiences.<sup>70</sup> And this perhaps indicates how Jonson and Dekker position themselves differently in relation to a broader idea of ‘high’ culture.<sup>71</sup> At a moment when literature (like all other aspects of English life) is moving from feudalism to capitalism, Jonson allies himself with patronage and coterie literature, and Dekker with literary commerce. In *Poetaster*, Crispinus-Marston and Demetrius-Dekker do not have the access to elite

---

<sup>67</sup> On the trickster, see Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 72-99 passim.

<sup>68</sup> See Hoy, I, p. 194.

<sup>69</sup> Gieskes unwisely stresses the literary nature of Dekker’s response to Jonson (89-90). He cites as evidence of this the reappearance of Tucca in *Satiromastix*: ‘he appropriates Jonson’s literary weapons for use against him [. . .] Like Jonson, he uses specifically literary tools to fight a literary battle’ (89). This ignores the fact that Tucca is explicitly based not on a character from literature but a real-life person, a ‘Capten *Hannam*’ who may have been an associate of Philip Henslowe (see Cain, pp. 48-9). Other critics have seen contempt for the carefully-wrought literariness of *Poetaster* in *Satiromastix*’s carefree splicing of genres (Marie-Thérèse Jones-Davies, *Un Peintre de la Vie Londonienne: Thomas Dekker (circa 1572-1632)*, 2 vols [Paris: Didier, 1958], I, p. 44; Hoy, I, p. 181).

<sup>70</sup> See *Satiromastix*, 5.2.159-61, 185-6.

<sup>71</sup> Here I follow the dialectic between Jonson and Dekker suggested by Kathleen E. McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 3-5. I cannot agree with Gieskes’s claim that in *Poetaster* Jonson prioritizes ‘independence over clientage, professionalism over amateurism’; later in the same article, he acknowledges that ‘Jonson exploits the cultural capital still associated with the patronage system’ (83, 88).

literary salons that the heroic Horace has. Demetrius, whom a company of actors have ‘hired [. . .] to abuse Horace and bring him in in a play’ solely to ‘get us a huge deal of money’, is finally made to confess that his only cause of animosity towards Horace is ‘that he kept better company (for the most part) than I; and that better men loved him than loved me’ (3.4.262-5, 5.3.396). As we have seen, the circumstances of *Satiromastix*’s staging are inclusive, those of *Cynthia’s Revels* and *Poetaster* exclusive. Dekker addresses the epistle before *Satiromastix* ‘To the World’; *Cynthia’s Revels* seems to have been performed at Court early in 1601, and Jonson dedicates the play ‘To the Special Fountain of Manners: The Court’.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, Jonson’s self-image as a writer only appreciated by the discerning few, despised by the ignorant multitude, is on display in all his ‘comical satires’. If he finally acknowledges defeat in the Poets’ War, it is in terms of box-office takings, not literary quality, which he assumed to be mutually exclusive.<sup>73</sup> In the epilogue to *Poetaster*, he explicitly equates popularity with debasement, bewailing:

But that these base and beggarly conceits  
Should carry it by the multitude of voices  
Against the most abstracted work opposed  
To the stuffed nostrils of the drunken rout!<sup>74</sup>

A hostility to theatre, in various forms, runs throughout Jonson’s career. Specifically in the case of *Poetaster*, contempt for the acting profession permeates the play. Its degraded main representatives are *Histrion*, who reels punters in with the boast ‘We have as much

---

<sup>72</sup> Dekker’s *Dramatic Works*, I, p. 309; for the epistle to the revised *Cynthia’s Revels*, see *Jonson’s Works*, V, p. 11. The title-page of the quarto, entered in the Stationers’ Register in May 1601, declares that it was ‘sundry times privately acted’ by the Children of Blackfriars (*Jonson’s Works*, I, p. 431): they performed at court on Twelfth Night and 22 February 1601, and E. K. Chambers, Herford, the Simpsons, and Ian Donaldson take the first of these as a performance of *Cynthia’s Revels*. See Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), II, pp. 42-3, III, p. 364; Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, IX, pp. 188-9; Percy Simpson, ‘A Modern Fable of Æsop’, *Modern Language Review*, 43 (1948), 403-5 (p. 404); Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 165). Bednarz, Rasmussen, and Steggle query this, but concede that it would explain Dekker’s charge in *Satiromastix* that a play of Jonson’s has been ‘misse-lickt at Court’ (5.2.325) and offer no alternative (Bednarz, pp. 269-70; *Jonson’s Works*, I, p. 431).

<sup>73</sup> In *Discoveries*, Jonson prefaces his notoriously bitter account of the players’ ignorant praise of Shakespeare by saying, ‘the multitude commend writers as they do fencers or wrestlers, who if they come in robustiously, and put for it with a deal of violence, are received for the braver fellows [. . .] But in these things, the unskilful are naturally deceived [. . .]’ (ibid., VII, p. 521). Gieskes infers from Marston’s conventional praise of Jonson in the dedication to *The Malcontent* ‘both Jonson’s victory in this war and his opponents’ acceptance of that victory and its terms’ (83), although this runs counter to the textual evidence.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., II, p. 178. Here the nostril functions as a metaphor for intelligence, as in *Sejanus*, 3.247-50.



ribaldry in our plays as can be' (3.4.158), and Aesop, who falsely informs on Horace to Caesar. Not only does Tucca jeer about the 1598 statute giving players with no patrons the status of vagabonds (1.2.41-3, 3.4.143), but the infinitely more authoritative Virgil inveighs against 'Players, or suchlike buffon, barking wits' (5.3.328). One of the scenes featuring the venal troupe who employ Demetrius even alludes to the practice of boy actors being pimped out by the players: Jonson wants us to see something literally meretricious about the public stage.<sup>75</sup>

Dekker, by contrast, is happy to self-identify as a professional writer. The preface to his pamphlet *Lanthorne and Candle-light* suggests a pragmatic approach to authorship: he sides with those who 'every new moon (for gaine onely) make 5. or 6. voiages to the Presse, and every Term-time (upon Booksellers stalles) lay whole litters of blinde invention' against non-financially motivated authors who write 'out of a Meere and Idle vaine-glory [. . .] a very poore, and foolish ambition'.<sup>76</sup> Where Jonson declared contempt for actors, Dekker declares fellowship with them. He dedicates *If This Be Not a Good Play, the Devil is in It* not to an aristocratic patron but 'To my Loving, and Loved Friends and Fellowes, the Queenes Majesties Servants' (the Queen's Men, who had staged the play), acknowledging their collaboration:

I have cast mine eye upon many, but find none more fit, none more worthy, to Patronize this, than you, who have Protected it. Your Cost, Counsell, and Labour, had bin ill spent, if a Second should by my hand snatch from you This Glory.<sup>77</sup>

The Poetomachia dug up a barnstorming tragedy of blood that Dekker and Marston had collaborated on, but it was not Jonson but Dekker himself, in self-mocking mode, who reminded the audience of this: in *Satiromastix*, Horace alleges that Demetrius, '(to make the Muses beleeve, their subjects eares were starv'd, and that there was a dearth of Poesie) cut an Innocent Moore i'th middle, to serve him in twice; and when he had done, made Poules-worke of it' (2.2.39). Cyrus Hoy suggests that this alludes to the play printed as *Lust's Dominion*, identified as the same 'spaneshe mores tragedie' that Philip Henslowe, manager of the Admiral's Men, seems to have paid Dekker, Marston and others for in

---

<sup>75</sup> When *Histrion* offers to take on Tucca's pageboys as apprentice actors, the Captain replies, 'No, you mangonizing slave, [. . .] you'll sell 'em for ingles' (3.4.227-8). Margaret Jane Kidnie notes that *mangonizing* has 'overtones of pimping', and glosses *ingle* as 'catamite' (*The Devil is an Ass and Other Plays* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], pp. 438, 526); see also Bednarz, pp. 239-40. Public playhouses had equivalent status to brothels, being situated in the same areas of London, and William Prynne wrote, 'many Players, if reports be true, are common Panders' (Gurr, p. 15).

<sup>76</sup> Dekker's *Non-Dramatic Works*, III, p. 178.

<sup>77</sup> Dekker's *Dramatic Works*, III, p. 119.

1599/1600.<sup>78</sup> Many scholars believe that Dekker and his fellow-authors revised an existing play on the Marlowe-Kyd model; Hoy additionally takes *to serve him in twice* to mean that, in the manner of Joseph Fiennes's Shakespeare, Dekker sold the play to two separate companies simultaneously. In either case, Dekker in *Satiromastix* is cheerfully acknowledging the exigencies of being a working writer: *Paul's work*, according to Bednarz, meant a botched job.<sup>79</sup> Even when Dekker mocks Jonson in *Satiromastix* for how slow he is to write, discernible in this is the professional author's pride in being able to produce 'copy' to a deadline. According to Henslowe's diary, Dekker was involved in writing 15 separate plays in 1598 alone; the title-page of Dekker's *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* claims he wrote it in seven days.<sup>80</sup>

But ultimately, while Jonson is keen to make distinctions between his position and Dekker's, Dekker is keen to collapse them. The emphasis on Horace's shabby apparel in *Satiromastix* is something that equalizes him with Crispinus and Demetrius: Tucca reminds him that he has mocked their tattered clothing, as in *Poetaster* Jonson had indeed. The Captain tells him, 'Thou wrongst heere a good honest rascall *Crispinus*, and a poore varlet *Demetrius Fannius* [. . .] thou sayst *Crispinus* Sattin dublet is Reavel'd out heere, and that this penurious sneaker is out at elboes' (*Satiromastix*, 1.2.322-5); 'they have sowed up that broken seame-rent lye of thine, that *Demetrius* is out at Elbowes, and *Crispinus* is falne out with Sattin heere' (4.3.228). This echoes *Poetaster*, where Horace has said to Crispinus, 'Your satin sleeve begins to fret at the rug that is underneath it, [. . .] and your ample velvet bases are not without evident stains of a hot disposition' (3.1.51-3); Jonson's Crispinus, for all his affectations, is chronically impecunious, and Tucca calls him 'a gent'man of quality, [. . .] though he be somewhat out of clothes' (5.3.101-2).

The ramifications of this are specific: Horace's clothing in *Satiromastix* emblemizes the kinship Jonson has, whether he wants it or not, with Dekker and Marston as a professional writer. When the players introduce Demetrius to Tucca in *Poetaster*, his threadbare appearance is linked to his status as hack: 'Oh, sir, his doublet's a little decayed; he is otherwise a very simple, honest fellow, sir, one Demetrius, a dresser of plays about the town' (3.4.260).<sup>81</sup> Tucca's response to the actors invokes the collecting of money for a

---

<sup>78</sup> Hoy, IV, pp. 71-2; K. Gustav Cross, 'The Authorship of "Lust's Dominion"', *Studies in Philology*, 55 (1958), 39-61.

<sup>79</sup> Bednarz, p. 139.

<sup>80</sup> Price, p. 23; *Dekker's Non-Dramatic Works*, II, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Much of Dekker's work as a playwright was collaborative, completing or revising others' works; by calling him 'a dresser of plays', Jonson seizes on this to make him seem a mediocrity (although judging by Henslowe's diary he was involved in this practice himself).

writer or performer, making Demetrius seem like a beggar: ‘I’ll know the poor, egregious, nitty rascal, [. . .] I’ll make a gathering for him, I: a purse, and put the poor slave in fresh rags’ (3.4.276-8). In *Satiromastix*, Dekker returns the compliment. Horace-Jonson’s modest garb is associated with his involvement with the professional stage: Tucca says to Horace, ‘thou hast forgot how thou amblest (in leather pilch) by a play-wagon, in the high way’ (4.1.130).<sup>82</sup> Specifically, Jonson is reminded of his past as an actor, and that one of his parts had been the ranting Hieronimo in Thomas Kyd’s popular but much-mocked *The Spanish Tragedy*, a play he had sneered at as crude, outmoded bombast in *Cynthia’s Revels* and *Poetaster*, and which he would go on to sneer at in *Bartholomew Fair* (alongside *Titus Andronicus*).<sup>83</sup> Tucca tells him:

I ha seene thy shoulders lapt in a Plaiers old cast Cloake, like a Slie knave as thou art: and when thou ranst mad for the death of Horatio: thou borrowedst a gowne of *Roscius* the Stager, (that honest Nicodemus) and sentst it home lowsie (*Satiromastix*, 1.2.354).

The Horace of *Satiromastix* is a hack: he leases out his poetic talent to paying customers, writing verses for Sir Walter Terill and a diatribe against baldness for Sir Vaughan ap Rees. In this respect he is no different from Crispinus and Demetrius. What differentiates them is that Horace is a hack with pretensions; he is dishonest about his status. Dekker’s Horace, parodying his original in *Poetaster*, likes to situate himself in the world of claques and cenacles, aloof from the public stage: furious that Crispinus and Demetrius are planning to satirize him in a play, he threatens, ‘Ile starve their poore copper-lace workmasters, that dare play me [i.e. the actors]: I can bring [. . .] a prepar’d troope of gallants, who for my sake shal distaste every unsalted line, in their fly-blowne Comedies’ (1.2.141-4).<sup>84</sup> But Tucca reminds him of his dependency on the stage: despite Jonson’s ‘arraigning’ of Marston and Dekker in *Poetaster*, ‘thou art the true arraign’d Poet, and

---

<sup>82</sup> As Hoy explains, a pilch is a coarse outer garment that the audience would recognize as ‘the dress of a laborer’ (I, p. 264).

<sup>83</sup> See *Jonson’s Works*, I, p. 451; IV, p. 280. Tucca’s page recites a speech from the play in *Poetaster*, 3.4.174-81, and as Campbell notes, ‘Jonson has deliberately rearranged’ Kyd’s lines ‘to heighten their absurdity’ (p. 122). Jonson’s career as player is not very well-documented (he was not eager to record it), and as Bednarz says, the passage in *Satiromastix* is the sole evidence that he had played Hieronimo (p. 220). Fredson Thayer Bowers builds on this when attempting to reconstruct Jonson’s acting career, conjecturing that he played the part for Pembroke’s men between 1592 and 1596 (‘Ben Jonson the Actor’, *Studies in Philology*, 34 [1937], 392-406 [pp. 395-8]), but more important than whether or not it’s true is the image of Jonson that Dekker conveys.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Copper lace’ is the imitation gold or silver lace that forms part of the Elizabethan actor’s characteristic dress (Hoy, I, p. 214); Jonson’s Tucca calls Histrio’s company ‘copper-laced scoundrels’ (*Poetaster*, 3.4.161).

shouldst have been hang'd, but for one of these part-takers, these charitable Copper-laced Christians, that fetcht thee out of Purgatory, (Players I meane) Theaterians pouch-mouth, Stage-walkers' (4.3.202). Ian Donaldson infers from this that some testimony from Jonson's colleagues in the Lord Chamberlain's Men had secured his release from custody after his murder of Gabriel Spencer in 1598.<sup>85</sup> A persistent theme of *Satiromastix* is that Horace-Jonson affects to despise the entertainment industry that he is simultaneously a part of. Dekker, by contrast, accepts Jonson's description of him in *Poetaster* as a literary 'journeyman':<sup>86</sup> he sees authorship as less of a vocation and more of a job. Dekker and Jonson had actually collaborated on plays for the impresario Henslowe,<sup>87</sup> and in *Satiromastix*, Dekker reproachfully reminds Jonson that he and Marston were 'bretheren in thine owne trade of Poetry' (1.2.323).

So if, as I have argued, the crux in *Satiromastix* that I started with relates to Horace's clothing, it would be one of a great many such passages in the Poets' War plays. But this detail signifies different things in Jonson's works and in Dekker's. To Jonson, it illustrates his self-image as the poet living in quasi-monastic seclusion and voluntary poverty, devoted to his art at the expense of all other considerations. In the epilogue to *Poetaster*, the Author appears in his garret-like study; he calls himself

I, that spend half my nights and all my days  
 Here in a cell, to get a dark, pale face,  
 To come forth worth the ivy or the bays,  
 And in this age can hope no other grace [...]<sup>88</sup>

In the context of *Satiromastix*, however, it represents the gap between this self-image and the reality of Jonson's status as former actor and mercenary playwright for the public stage. By September 1601, after the theatre-going public had rejected his 'comical

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ben Jonson: A Life*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>86</sup> *Poetaster*, 4.7.22, 5.3.158; *Satiromastix*, 1.2.137, 4.1.127-8.

<sup>87</sup> *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 123-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Jonson's Works*, II, p. 179.

satires’,<sup>89</sup> Jonson was once more working for Henslowe, writing additional scenes for a revival of *The Spanish Tragedy*.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> At the close of *Satiromastix*, Horace is made to swear ‘when your Playes are misse-lik’t at Court, you shall not crye Mew like a Pusse-cat, and say you are glad you write out of the Courtiers Element’ (5.2.324); Herford, Simpson, and Simpson infer the failure of a court-performance of *Cynthia’s Revels* from this and from the disgruntled tone of Jonson’s dedicatory epistle (IX, p. 189; see *Jonson’s Works*, v, p. 11). In the epilogue to *Poetaster*, Jonson responds to (apparently voluminous) criticism of the play, expresses bitterness ‘that these base and beggarly conceits / Should carry it by the multitude of voices’, and announces his decision to switch to tragedy ‘since the comic muse / Hath proved so ominous to me’ (*Works*, II, pp. 178-9). By contrast, Price detects in Dekker’s epistle before *Satiromastix* ‘the gaiety of complete triumph’ (p. 55). Donaldson calls Dekker’s play ‘one of the genuinely amusing texts in the often rather barren and baffling’ Poets’ War (*Ben Jonson: A Life*, p. 171), and perhaps contemporary audiences agreed.

<sup>90</sup> *Henslowe’s Diary*, p. 182.