



# Shakespeare Matters

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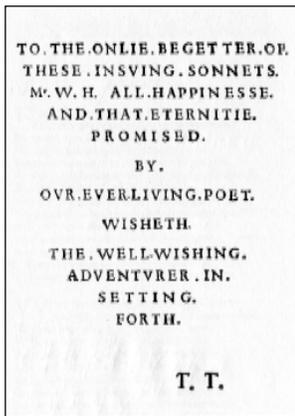
"Let menot to themarriage of trueminds admit impediments..."

Summer 2004

## With the *Sonnets* now solved...

*is the debate resolved?*

By William Boyle



*The notoriously enigmatic dedication seems to cry out cipher (and there is one there), but in the end the Sonnet solution is revealed only when individual words and phrases are viewed in their correct historical context.*

In the 395 years since the 1609 quarto of *Shake-speares Sonnets* was published more than 1,800 books have been written about them. The biggest problem in achieving an understanding has been that most of the authors have had the wrong Shakespeare, which immediately precluded ever determining the actual circumstances under which they were written. Even among Oxfordians (who assume of course that they *do* have the correct author) the Sonnets have been a contentious conundrum, with various Oxfordian authors over the years going in various directions searching for the ever-elusive "correct" answer to the Sonnet enigma.

It has occurred to me in recent years that there is perhaps something that almost everyone involved in Shakespeare studies (Stratfordians and anti-Stratfordians alike) could agree on—first, that there must be a correct answer to the enigma, and, second, that it must be comprised of three components: 1) the correct author, 2) the correct Fair Youth and Dark Lady, and 3) the correct context of time and circumstance that led to their creation. Most of us are quite familiar with the debates over Who is the author?, Who is the Fair Youth? and Who is the Dark Lady? But this last component—What is the correct context?—has eluded everyone who has ever tackled the Sonnets. Many commentators and theorists have gone right from the Who into *creating, rather than finding*, a historical context into which the Who might fit.

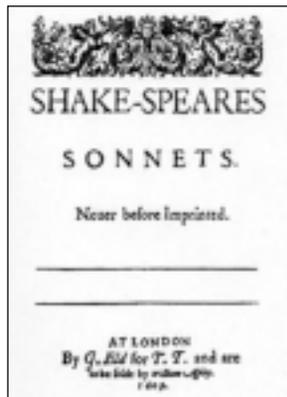
However, I now believe that this heretofore elusive historical context has been found, and that with it in place reading and understanding the Sonnets is transformed. It is a theory that was

*(Continued on page 11)*

*A year in the life*

## 1601: "authorize thy trespass with compare..."

By Hank Whittemore



*The most famous title page in literary history, announcing to the world the poetry with which Shakespeare both unlocked his heart and told his story. In fact, these poems are more like letters that can be read to help write history.*

This column ordinarily looks at contemporary events of a given year in the life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and the present chapter focusing on 1601 is no exception. This time, however, we also draw upon the collection entitled *Shake-Speares Sonnets*, first printed in 1609, as a genuine historical and political document that complements and supplements the official record. In doing so the column introduces some of the themes and data compiled in my forthcoming book *The Monument*, a new edition of the Sonnets that sets forth (for the first time, we believe) a coherent explanation of the form and content of the 154 consecutively numbered verses.

Some of the themes are these:

- The Monument: The Sonnets comprise a "monument" of verse written and constructed by Oxford for Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton, to be preserved for posterity.
- The Living Record: The monument contains "the living record" of Southampton in the form of a diary of real events unfolding in real time by the calendar.
- The 100-Sonnet Center: The carefully designed structure contains a sequence of precisely 100 sonnets (27-126) positioned at the exact center.
- The Entrance: Oxford explains his form and structure in a pair of unique instructional sonnets (76-77) at the exact midpoint of the central 100-sonnet sequence, serving as the entrance into the monument.
- The Invention: Edward de Vere records this chronicle by

*(Continued on page 16)*

*Year Life* (cont'd from p. 1)

an “invention” or special language (created in response to a repressive regime that has “tongue-tied” his art) that acts to conceal yet reveal the true story being told.

- **Love and Time:** The key words of the invention, which convey one image on the surface while simultaneously recording the progress of an entirely different topic, are “Love,” representing Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and “Time,” representing Elizabeth Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I of England.

- **The Timeline:** The chronological timeline of Southampton’s living record is literally the ever-dwindling organic Time left in the life and reign of the Queen, leading to her death and the royal succession (the way time itself was measured in regnal years and other writers, including Oxford, referred to “her Majesty’s time”), followed by the days leading to Elizabeth’s funeral that brought the Tudor dynasty to its official conclusion.

The opening Fair Youth series (1-126)—in which “time” appears on 78 occasions (but nowhere in the final 28 Sonnets)—is divided into two distinct parts. The first segment (1-26) spans the years 1590-1600 and comes to an abrupt end; but the second segment (27-126), which is also the 100-verse sequence at the center of the monument, comprises the heart of *Shake-Speares Sonnets*. This is where the real action is. Here, in effect, is a book of 100 chapters beginning with Sonnet 27 on February 8, 1601 (in response to Southampton’s immediate imprisonment for the Essex Rebellion), and continuing to Sonnet 125 upon the funeral of Elizabeth on April 28, 1603 (when the Tudor dynasty officially ended), with Sonnet 126 in farewell.

Precedents for a 100-sonnet sequence include the 100 poems scattered within the anonymous collection *A Hundredth Sundry Flowres* in 1573, with which Oxford has been associated, and the 100 consecutively numbered verses of *Hekatom-*

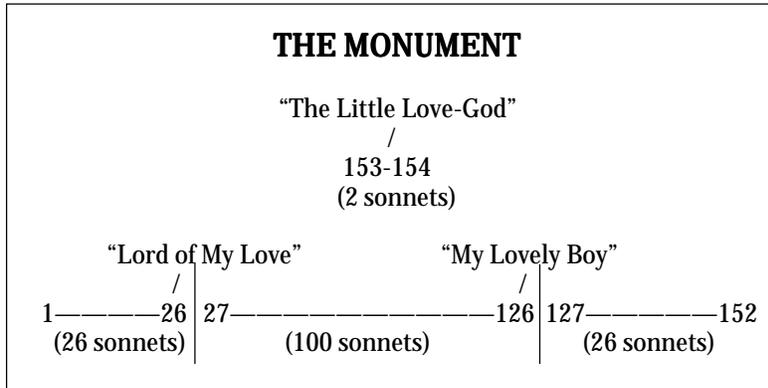


Figure 1

*pathia* or *The Passionate Century of Love*, which Thomas Watson dedicated to Oxford in 1582.

This extraordinary 100-verse core sequence is itself divided into two parts:

- **The Prison Years:** The first 80 sonnets (27-106) cover the two years and two months that Southampton spent in the Tower of London, from the night of February 8, 1601 to his last night of confinement on April 9, 1603.

- **The Final Days:** The final 20 verses (107-126) commence with the liberation of Southampton by King James on April 10, 1603 (107), and continue—with exactly 20 sonnets for 20 days—until the “envoy” of Sonnet 126 that abruptly follows the Queen’s funeral on April 28, 1603.

In terms of the monument as a whole, the sequence of 100 chronological verses begins to emerge when Sonnets 153-154 about “The Little Love-God” are recognized as the epilogue or prologue of the collection. The remaining 152 sonnets contain the Fair Youth series (1-126) and the Dark Lady series (127-152), with Sonnet 126 to “My Lovely Boy” as the “envoy” ending the first series. But the structure of the monument also includes Sonnet 26 to “Lord of My Love” as an envoy, so that Sonnets 26 and 126 bring discrete segments to their conclusions. The result is a three-part design (Figure 1) that includes the 100-sonnet central sequence; and a closer view (Figure 2) shows how these 100 verses are divided into two sections of 80 and 20 sonnets.

All 80 “prison” verses (more than half the total of 154 sonnets!) are addressed to Southampton in the Tower for two years and two months. Oxford undoubtedly drew

upon and/or revised some previous writings, but nonetheless fashioned and arranged them to correspond with Henry Wriothesley’s imprisonment. From the night of the Rebellion onward, setting down the most intense outpouring of sustained poetical confession the world has known, he tried to make sure future generations would be able to comprehend his role and how—by

paying “ransom” for the life, freedom and pardon of Southampton—he agreed to bury his identity as Shakespeare.

Beginning with Sonnet 27 on the night of February 8, 1601, Oxford wrote 60 sonnets (27-86) matching the first 60 days of Southampton’s incarceration, when the younger earl faced trial for high treason, was sentenced to death, withstood a fearful waiting period, learned that his life was spared, and finally faced a future of perpetual confinement in shame and disgrace so long as Elizabeth remained alive. (The 60 day-by-day sonnets recall the 60 consecutively numbered verses of *Tears of Fancy* attributed to Watson in 1593, wherein No. 60 is a revised version of Oxford’s early Shakespearean sonnet “Love Thy Choice,” written circa 1573 to express his loyalty to the Queen.) The remaining verses (87-106) cover the next two years of confinement ending with Sonnet 106 on April 9, 1603, when Oxford sums up the long dark prison segment as “the Chronicle of wasted time.”

This 80-sonnet prison section begins with the failed revolt and includes the two subsequent anniversaries, thereby covering the “three winters” noted in Sonnet 104:

27	Essex Rebellion	Feb 8, 1601
97	First Anniversary	Feb 8, 1602
104	Second Anniversary	Feb 8, 1603

Immediately following the prison segment is Sonnet 107, known as the “dating” verse because of its topical allusions. Here Oxford celebrates the liberation of his “true love” after he had been “supposed as forfeit to a confined doom” in the Tower. Now at the peak of his artistic powers and maturity, 53-year-old Edward de Vere opens Sonnet 107 with a single, sweeping sentence of four lines:

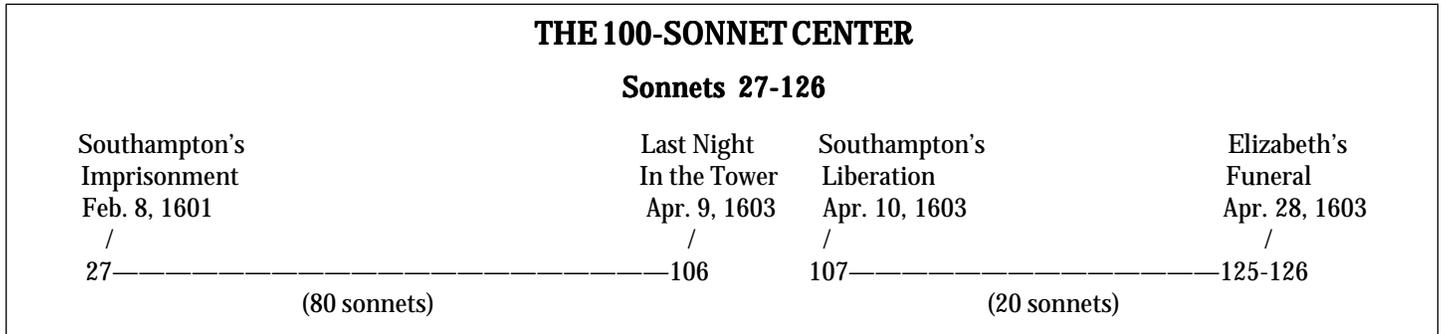


Figure 2

Not mine own fears nor the prophetic soul  
Of the wide world dreaming on things to  
come  
Can yet the lease of my true love control,  
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.

Southampton has gained his liberty because of the recent death of Elizabeth, known as Cynthia or Diana, goddess of the Moon, whose mortal body has succumbed although her eternal self, as a divinely ordained monarch, will endure. The Queen's death on March 24, 1603, has led to the swift proclamation that James of Scotland will be crowned King of England amid domestic peace rather than the civil war around succession to the throne that had been so widely predicted and feared:

The mortal Moon hath her eclipse  
endured,  
And the sad Augurs mock their own  
presage,  
Incertainties now crown themselves  
assured,  
And peace proclaims Olives of endless age.

But the most rewarding result is that, on orders sent by James five days earlier from Edinburgh to London, 29-year-old Southampton has walked back through Traitor's Gate into the sunshine of restored freedom and honor.

"My love looks fresh," Oxford declares of Henry Wriothesley, while claiming his own triumph over death through this private diary:

Now with the drops of his most balmy time  
My love looks fresh, and death to me  
subscribes,  
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor  
rhyme,  
While he insults o'er dull and speechless  
tribes.

Finally Oxford reaffirms his commit-

ment to preserve Southampton within this monument of verse. Recalling the late Queen as a "tyrant" who had kept the young earl as a prisoner, he alludes to plans for Elizabeth's body to be laid temporarily near the great brass tomb in Westminster Abbey of her grandfather Henry VII, who founded the Tudor dynasty in 1485:

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,  
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass  
are spent.

All events recorded in the 100-sonnet sequence lead up to, and then away from, the high point of Southampton's liberation on April 10, 1603.

In 1866 Gerald Massey offered the first persuasive identification of Southampton as the poet's "true love" of Sonnet 107:

We may rest assured that Shakespeare was one of the first to greet his 'dear boy' over whose errors he had grieved, and upon whose imprudent unselfishness he had looked with tears, half of sorrow, and half of pride. He had loved him as a father loves a son ... and he now welcomed him from the gloom of a prison on his way to a palace and the smile of a monarch.<sup>1</sup>

Most scholars continue to agree with the dating in relation to Elizabeth's death and the accession of James in the spring of 1603. G. P. V. Akrigg recalls in 1968 how H. C. Beeching proclaimed 107 the only verse "that can be dated with absolute certainty" and declared it must belong to 1603. Akrigg recounts his own experience of coming to the "sudden complete conviction" that it refers to spring 1603 "almost as if it had the date visibly branded on it," adding: "This is what Shakespeare had to say to Southampton upon his release from imprisonment."<sup>2</sup>

More recently editor John Kerrigan in 1986, noting the poet's joyous statement

that his love "looks fresh," comments further:

In the light of the secondary sense of My love looks fresh, it is remarkable that one of the first acts of the newly-crowned King was to release the Earl of Southampton – often thought the addressee of Sonnets 1-126 – from the prison in which he had languished ever since his participation in the ill-fated Essex rebellion of 1601. If Wriothesley was indeed, to some emotional extent, the you and thou and love of Sonnets 1-126, both he and the poet's affection for him would have been refreshed and renewed by the events of 1603 ... On the basis of allusions, in short, 1603 seems the obvious date—with all which that implies for the dating of the sequence.<sup>3</sup>

Editor G. Blakemore Evans writes in 1996 that "the majority of recent critics strongly favors 1603 as the most likely date," adding: "Indeed, the case for 1603 (or a little later) is so brilliantly presented by Kerrigan that one is dangerously tempted to cry 'Q. E. D.'"<sup>4</sup>

Kerrigan's final words are emphasized to show how close he comes to perceiving the chronological framework revealed by the structure and language of the monument. One thing this view of 107 "implies for the dating of the sequence [i.e., the Fair Youth series of 1-126]" is that the diary must extend at least to April 10, 1603; but a far more crucial implication, once these sonnets are viewed as chapters of a cohesive narrative story, is that all the preceding 80 verses have been recording events during Southampton's incarceration and leading up to this dramatic high point when he gains his freedom from the Tower.

Another implication is that, just as only Henry Wriothesley can be the Fair Youth of the Sonnets, the powerful, deceitful, tyrannical Dark Lady who held him captive during 1601-1603 can only be Oxford's  
*(Continued on page 18)*

*Year in the Life* (continued from page 17) and Southampton's sovereign Mistress, Queen Elizabeth I of England. In addition, as no other writers in England were seeking or competing publicly for Southampton's attention during his imprisonment, the so-called Rival Poet of the Sonnets can only be the printed name "Shakespeare" with which Henry Wriothesley was uniquely associated.

This column narrows the focus to key events of 1601 within just the first 20 entries (27-46) during Southampton's captivity, with the diary of the Fair Youth series (Figure 3,) contributing to the evidence:

#### **January 9: Southampton Attacked**

Lord Gray, supporting Secretary Robert Cecil, attacks Southampton in the street. The earl draws his sword in combat, but his houseboy has a hand lopped off.

#### **February 2: Southampton Leads**

A committee at Drury House headed by Southampton plans a palace coup to remove Cecil from power and gain access to Elizabeth.

#### **February 3: Southampton Demands**

When others question the plans to seize the Court at Whitehall, Southampton shouts back: "Then we shall resolve upon nothing, and it is now three months or more since we first undertook this!"<sup>5</sup>

#### **February 6: Shakespeare's Company**

Conspirators bribe the Lord Chamberlain's Men into staging *Richard II*, to rouse support by showing how King Richard handed over his crown in 1399 to Bolingbroke, who became Henry IV of England. Essex and Southampton intend to remove Cecil and gain access to Elizabeth, now in her 68th year.

#### **February 7: *Richard II* Performed**

Shakespeare's acting company stages the play at the Globe as followers of Essex and Southampton cheer the scenes of an English monarch losing his crown. Oxford may have added the powerful deposition scene (not printed until 1608) to help their cause, as Massey in 1866 suggested that "at the pressing solicitations of Southampton, the drama of King Richard II was altered by Shakespeare on purpose to be played seditiously, with the deposition scene newly added!" The evidence, he argued, is that "if Shakespeare was not hand-in-glove with the Essex faction, he fought on their side pen-in-hand."<sup>6</sup> In the new scene Richard gives up the throne with Bolingbroke in his presence, which is what Essex and

Southampton hope to persuade the aging Elizabeth to do:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,  
With mine own hands I give away my crown,  
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,  
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.<sup>7</sup>

It appears informers for Cecil helped get *Richard II* performed on this day, to trigger the revolt prematurely.<sup>8</sup> Now the Secretary sends an emissary ordering Essex to face the Council at Court, sending him into confusion even as he refuses. During dinner with Southampton and others, the earl expresses confidence that the Sheriff of London will supply a 1000 men in support, but this appears to be disinformation planted by a Cecil agent.<sup>9</sup>

#### **February 8: The Rebellion**

The revolt begins after the Crown sends officials to Essex House and the conspirators hold them captive, already an offense against the state. Essex sets off in panic to find the Sheriff along with Southampton and 300 men, insufficiently armed, who follow him through the streets as he cries: "For the Queen! For the Queen! A plot is laid for my life!" Confused citizens stay behind windows and doors; none of the Sheriff's support emerges; and well-prepared agents under Cecil's orders already enter the city gates proclaiming Essex and his cohorts as traitors.

With all routes to the Palace blocked, and after fighting with bloodshed, Essex returns home to find the Crown prisoners have been released. Government officials surround the house and demand surrender.

"To whom should we yield?" Southampton retorts. "Our adversaries? That would be to run upon our ruin! Or to the Queen? That would be to confess ourselves guilty! But yet if the Lord Admiral will give us hostages for our security, we will appear before the Queen! If not, we are every one of us fully resolved to lose our lives fighting!"

At ten this evening Essex and Southampton fall on their knees and deliver up their swords. They are taken first to Lambeth and then carried by boat to the Tower after midnight; and Oxford records in Sonnet 27 that, in the darkness, his thoughts "intend a zealous pilgrimage" to

Southampton, who appears in "my soul's imaginary sight" as a "shadow" transformed into "a jewel (hung in ghastly night)" that "makes black night beautiful, and her old face new."

So begins the 100-sonnet sequence, the first 60 verses corresponding with the first 60 days and nights of Southampton's imprisonment, as Oxford indicates this pace in 28 by recording that "day doth daily draw my sorrows longer" and "night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger." Identifying with the younger earl's plight, he records in 29 that he himself is "in disgrace with Fortune [the Queen] and men's eyes" in the same way Southampton is suffering in the Tower.

#### **February 11: Summons to the Sessions**

Oxford records in 30 that the Privy Council will summon him to the Sessions or treason trial of Essex and Southampton, to sit as highest-ranking earl on the tribunal of peers who will judge them:

When to the Sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past...

*("Summon a session," King Leontes commands in The Winter's Tale, 2.3.200, calling for a treason trial, and referring to it in 3.2.1 as a "sessions")*

Southampton, facing death, is "precious friends hid in death's dateless night" and in 31 he becomes "the grave where buried love doth live." The first words of the next verse to him ("If thou survive") indicate his expected execution while 33 refers to the "stain" he has brought upon himself.

Oxford records his personal sorrow in 34, writing of Southampton as the sun that dries the "rain" (tears) on "my storm-beaten face" but "cures not the disgrace" of the crime, for which he, Oxford, will pay by sacrificing himself (i.e., his identity) in the spirit of Christ paying with his life for the sins of mankind:

Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;  
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss,  
Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief  
To him that bears the strong offence's loss.<sup>10</sup>

*(Southampton writes to the Privy Council*

soon after the trial as “a poor condemned man who doth, with a lowly and penitent heart, confess his **faults** and acknowledge his offences to her Majesty.” He refers to his “sins” as an “offender” and adds that his soul is “heavy and troubled for my offences.”<sup>11</sup>

Oxford follows with the particular information that a “rich” price or fine will be paid to “ransom” the younger earl for his “ill deeds” against the state:

Ah, but those tears are  
pearl which thy love  
sheeds,  
And they are rich, and  
ransom all ill deeds.

(John Chamberlain will write in *May*: “There is a commission to certain of the Council to **ransom and fine** the Lords and Gentlemen that were in the action” of the Rebellion.)<sup>12</sup>

Oxford accuses himself in 35 of “authorizing” Southampton’s “trespass” or treason by “compare” or by dramatizing the deposition of Richard II:

All men make faults, and even I, in this,  
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing these sins more than these  
sins are.

(In his letter to the Council noted above, Southampton refers to his “faults”; when James orders him released in April 1603, the king notes that “the late Queen our Sister, notwithstanding his **fault** toward her, was moved to exempt [him] from the stroke of Justice.” The plays of royal history are filled with “fault” for treason: “Their **faults** are open,” the King declares of traitors in Henry V, 2.2.142, adding: “Arrest them to the answer of the law.” (Trespass and treason are equated, as in: “And by his **treason** stand’st not thou attainted, corrupted, and exempt from gentry? His **trespass** yet lives guilty in his blood” – 1 Henry VI, 2.4.92-94; the Oxford English Dictionary for “trespass” cites “offence, sin, wrong, a fault.” The Tudors including Elizabeth had expanded treason to cover “rebellion of all types,” Bellamy writes in *The Tudor Law of Treason*, so that even “assemblies of a riotous nature became synonymous with treason.”<sup>13</sup> (Southampton in his letter to the Council

**THE FAIR YOUTH SERIES**

Golden Time	Sonnets 1-26	26 Sonnets
Sonnet 1	Marriage Proposal Begins	1590
Sonnet 25	Irish Military Campaign	1599
Sonnet 26	ENVOY to Southampton	1600

**The 100-sonnet sequence**

Prison Years	Sonnets 27 – 106	80 Sonnets
Sonnet 27	Rebellion & Prison	Feb 8, 1601
Sonnet 105	Death of Elizabeth I	Mar 24, 1603
Sonnet 106	Last Night in the Tower	April 9, 1603

Final Days	Sonnets 107 – 126	20 Sonnets
Sonnet 107	Southampton’s Liberation	April 10, 1603
Sonnet 125	Funeral of Elizabeth I	April 28, 1603
Sonnet 126	ENVOY to Southampton	April 29, 1603

Figure 3

refers to his “sins”; and before submitting to the axe at his execution, Essex will call the Rebellion “this my last **sin**, this great, this bloody, this crying, this infectious **sin...**”<sup>14</sup>

Oxford goes on to record that behind the scenes he is counterbalancing the younger earl’s “sensual fault” or willful, riotous crime with “sense” or lawful reason. First he must do his duty to the state as an “adverse party” or judge at the trial, which will mean finding him guilty and condemning him to death; but he is also his “advocate” or legal defender entering a “lawful plea” or argument (to Cecil) on Southampton’s behalf and against himself:

For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,  
Thy adverse party is thy Advocate,  
And ‘gainst myself a lawful plea  
commence

(William Cecil Lord Burghley had equated “sensual” with “willful” in writing of Catholic traitors: “Ifavor no **sensual** and **willful** Recusants.” The second line above is glossed as “Your legal opponent is also your legal defender” by Duncan-Jones. “I never did incense his Majesty against the Duke of Clarence, but have been an earnest **advocate** to plead for him” – Richard III, 1.3.85-87)<sup>15</sup>

**February 17: Indictments**

Indictments are produced accusing Essex of attempting to usurp the Crown and charging him and Southampton with conspiring to depose and slay the Queen

and to subvert the government.<sup>16</sup> Oxford in 36 announces terms of the “ransom” he will pay to save Southampton from execution:

I may not ever-more acknow-  
ledge thee,  
Lest my bewailed guilt should  
do thee shame

Because he has linked Henry Wriothesley (and him alone) to “Shakespeare” by the public dedications of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593 and *Lucrece* in 1594, he must sever all ties to him and never claim credit for works attributed to Shakespeare. On

the eve of the trial, Oxford likens himself in 37 to a “decrepit father” looking upon “his active child” and tells Southampton, using his own lameness as metaphor:

So I, made lame by Fortune’s  
[Elizabeth’s] dearest spite,  
Take all my comfort of thy worth and  
truth.

**February 19: The Trial**

Oxford sits silently on the tribunal as Attorney General Edward Coke prosecutes for the Crown with vicious help from Francis Bacon, during a daylong travesty of justice the outcome of which has been preordained.

When J. Thomas Looney presented his evidence in 1920 that Oxford wrote the Shakespeare poems and plays, this historic event took on huge significance:

It is clear, from the point of view of the problem of Shakespearean authorship, that the famous trial of the Earl of Essex assumes quite a thrilling interest. Standing before the judges was the only living personality that ‘Shakespeare’ has openly connected with the issue of his works, and towards whom he has publicly expressed affection: Henry Wriothesley. The most powerful force at working in seeking to bring about the destruction of the accused was the possessor of the greatest intellect that has appeared in English philosophy: one to whom in modern times has actually been attributed the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays – Francis Bacon. And sitting on the benches amongst the judges

(Continued on page 20)

*Year in the Life* (continued from page 19)

was none other, we believe, than the real 'Shakespeare' himself, intent on saving, if possible, one of the very men whom Bacon was seeking to destroy.<sup>17</sup>

For students of Oxford ever since, however, the 80-sonnet "prison sequence" has remained in a limbo of obscurity, mainly because the "three winters" of Sonnet 104 have seemed to suggest a three-year relationship between Oxford and Southampton beginning just before or after *Venus and Adonis* in 1593. Once this huge block of verses is positioned within Southampton's confinement during 1601-1603, however, a window is opened and any previous perception of the poet and his subject matter is transformed. In terms of the authorship question, acceptance of this chronology of the Sonnets is equivalent to placing the poet as directly involved in the trial and confirming Oxford as Shakespeare.

Now the historical record illuminates the sonnets while the sonnets illuminate the same history. The events on the calendar and the "numbers" of the sonnets need no rearrangement; when these two fixed entities are brought into alignment, they combine to produce the story of what happened as Elizabeth's life and reign dragged to their bitter end with Southampton a prisoner referred to as the commoner "Mr. Henry Wriothesley" and in legal terms as "the late earl." Here is the explanation for the terrible wave of emotional darkness abruptly descending upon the verses at Sonnet 27 and continuing all the way to the triumph of Sonnet 107.

Here, too, is the reason for the torrent of legal terms relating to crime, treason, disgrace, trials, imprisonment, royal pardon and much more. An alphabetical sampling would include:

*Absence of Your Liberty, Accessory, Accusing, Action, Adverse Party, Advocate, Arrest, Attaint, [convict], Attainted, Bail, Bars, Blame, Confess, Confine, Commits, Crime, Defendant, Defense, Excuse, False [false-traitor], Fault [crime], Faults, Gate, Gates of Steel, Guard, Guilt, Empannelled [a jury at a court], Imprisoned, Judgment, Key, Lawful Plea, Lawful Reasons, Laws, Locked Up, Misprision [of treason], Offence, Offender, Pardon, Plea, Plea Deny, Plead, Prove, Purposed Overthrow, Quest [jury], Ransom, Releasing, Repent, Revolt, Sessions [trial], Summon [to trial], Suspect [suspect-traitor], Term of Life, Trespass [treason], Up-Locked, Verdict, Wards [guards]...*

Henry Wriothesley's confinement in the Tower also explains the prolonged "absence" of Oxford and Southampton from each other:

*Things Removed (31), O Absence (39), When I Am Sometime Absent From Thy Heart (41), Where Thou Art (41), Injurious Distance (44), Where Thou Dost Stay (44), Removed From Thee (44), Present-Absent (45), Where Thou Art (51), The Bitterness of Absence (57), Where You May Be (57), Where You Are (57), Th'imprisoned Absence of Your Liberty (58), Where You List (58), Thou Dost Wake Elsewhere (61), All Away (75), Be Absent From Thy Walks (89), How Like a Winter Hath My Absence Been From Thee (97), This Time Removed (97), And Thou Away (97), You Away (98)...*

Oxford is forced to find Southampton guilty and condemn him to death. Reacting to the "pain" of the trial in 38, he refers to "these curious [anxious] days" being recorded:

If my slight Muse do please these curious days,  
The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.

The sacrifice of his link to Southampton proceeds in 39 with instructions to "let us divided live." By his crime the younger earl has stolen himself from both England and Oxford, who tells him in 40: "I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief." He warns him in 41 that "still temptation follows where thou art" [in the Tower] and to avoid those who would "lead thee in their riot even there" by urging new revolt. (Bellamy notes how Attorney General Coke's success "in getting various popular riots and assemblies classified as treason brought the Tudor era to a close with the establishment of a markedly royal interpretation of the scope of treason").<sup>18</sup>

Oxford reminds him in 42 that for now he is stuck with Elizabeth as his sovereign and that he himself had "loved her dearly" or served her with devotion, but now his "chief wailing" or sorrow is that she has Southampton in her prison fortress:

That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,  
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.  
(*"Wailing Chief" echoes "the common term 'chief mourner,' the nearest relative present at a funeral"—Booth; i.e., anticipating Southampton's execution.*)<sup>19</sup>

"All days are nights to see till I see thee," he writes in 43, again reflecting the daily pace of his diary (and the daily nature of Southampton's prison life), "and nights bright days when dreams do show thee me."

### February 25: Execution of Essex

Essex is beheaded and Oxford writes to Southampton in 44 of their "heavy tears, badges of either's woe." If he could do so, he would fly with his thoughts to "the place" where Southampton is confined:

As soon as think the place where he would be

And although his reference to "the place" might appear to be a casual one, in fact he uses a term commonly employed to signify the Tower:

*"You both shall be led from hence to the place from whence you came"—the Lord High Steward to Essex and Southampton at trial's end; "The safety of the place under my charge"—John Peyton, Lieutenant of the Tower; "Because the place is unwholesome"—King James, ordering Southampton's release; "I do not like the Tower, of any place"—Richard III, 3.1.68*

Meanwhile Oxford notes in 45 that messengers are riding back and forth between the Tower and his home [in Hackney] to bring news of Southampton's health battles, which, according to the Council, "he hath had before his trouble":<sup>20</sup>

By those swift messengers returned from thee  
Who even but now come back again assured  
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.  
(*"Whereas we do understand that the Earl of Southampton, by reason of the continuance of his quartern ague, hath a swelling in his leggs and other parts"—the Privy Council to John Peyton, Lieutenant of the Tower, March 22, 1601*)<sup>21</sup>

In Sonnet 46 Oxford pulls out all stops to convey the nature of this private diary as a document of contemporary political history. He recreates the trial itself, writing how his heart "doth plead" while "the defendant doth that plea deny," but a "quest" or jury will be "impaneled" in a courtroom [actually in a private room of the Palace] and "by their verdict" the outcome will be "determined." As we shall see in our next column, he will promise Southampton in 49 to literally "guard the lawful reasons

on thy part"; he will pledge in 57 to "watch the clock for you"; and, in 58, suffering through this "imprisoned absence of your liberty," he will assure Henry Wriothesley that, by agreeing with the ransom to be paid for his life, "to you it doth belong yourself to pardon of self-doing crime." Oxford is working with his brother-in-law Robert Cecil, who now has all power over the government, to produce a "better judgment" in the form of "misprision" of treason, whereby once James is crowned Southampton will gain his release from the Tower along with a royal pardon for his crimes. The announcement that his "great gift" of life will grow anew is to be made in Sonnet 87:

So thy great gift upon misprision  
growing,  
Comes home again, on better judgment making.

This column will continue the story in upcoming editions of *Shakespeare Matters* while further describing elements of the solution to the Sonnets as set forth in *The Monument*. Meanwhile we are reminded of a prediction by Hyder Rollins in 1944:

The question *when* the sonnets were written is in many respects the most important of all the unanswerable questions they pose. If it could be answered definitely and finally, there might be some chance of establishing to general satisfaction the identity of the friend, the dark woman and the rival poet (supposing that all were real individuals); of deciding what contemporary sources Shakespeare did or did not use; and even of determining whether the order of Q is the author's or not. In the past and at the present, such a solution has been and remains an idle dream.<sup>22</sup>

We also recall Sir George Greenwood's declaration of 1908: "The real problem of the Sonnets is to find out who 'Shakespeare' was. That done, it might be possible to make the crooked straight and the rough places plane – but not till then." And to this we add his further comment that, by the same token, "If we could only know who wrote the Sonnets we should know the true Shakespeare."<sup>23</sup>

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Massey, Gerald, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted* (London, 1866), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Akrigg, G. P. V., *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 255.

<sup>3</sup> Kerrigan, John, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint* (London: Penguin, 1986; reprinted in Penguin Classics, 1999), 317 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> Evans, G. Blakemore, *The Sonnets* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996-98), 216-17.

<sup>5</sup> Camden, William, *Annales of Elizabeth R* (hypertext edition by Dana F. Sutton, University of California Irvine, <http://e3.uci.edu/~papyri/camden/>; "Anno Domini 1601," 5.

<sup>6</sup> Massey, op. cit., 107; and in *The Secret Drama of Shakespeare's Sonnets Unfolded*, 1872, the new Supplement to the 1866 edition, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> The first quarto of *Richard II* was registered in 1597. The deposition scene (IV.1.154-318) was printed first in the fourth quarto in 1608. Most editors use the scene as it appears in the Folio of 1623.

<sup>8</sup> The culprit appears to have been Lord Monteaule, who arranged for the *Richard II* performance but was never put on trial; Massey, Supplement, op. cit., 51.

<sup>9</sup> The agent may have been Sir Henry Neville. See Camden, *Annales*, op. cit., 17, recounting that Neville was "shunning the name of an Informer" while among the conspirators at Drury House.

<sup>10</sup> In Sonnet 34 the second "loss" is usually emended to "cross."

<sup>11</sup> Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael, *The Life of Henry, Third Earl of Southampton* (New York: AMS Press, 1969, reprinting the 1922 edition), 225; Salisbury Papers, Vol. XI, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Stopes, 233; (D. S. S. P., CCLXXIX, 91).

<sup>13</sup> Bellamy, John, *The Tudor Law of Treason* (Great Britain: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Akrigg, op. cit., 127.

<sup>15</sup> The O. E. D. cites Burghley's "sensual and willful Recusants" from 1584; Duncan-Jones, Katherine, editor, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (England: Thomas Nelson, 1997; Arden edition), Sonnet 35, p. 180.

<sup>16</sup> Also indicted on the same charges are Rutland and Sandys; see Akrigg, op. cit., 120.

<sup>17</sup> Looney, John Thomas, "*Shakespeare*" *Identified in Edward de Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975, for Minos Publishing Co., Jennings, LA), 332.

<sup>18</sup> Bellamy, op. cit., 48 (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> Booth, Stephen, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 202.

<sup>20</sup> Stopes, op. cit., 245.

<sup>21</sup> Stopes, op. cit., 224.

<sup>22</sup> Rollins, Hyder Edward, *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Sonnets*, (Philadelphia & London: J. B. Lippincott, 1944), 53, with my emphasis added to "when."

<sup>23</sup> Greenwood, Sir George, *The Shakespeare Problem Restated*, 1908, pp. 83 & 36.

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