

Column  
A year in the life  
By Hank Whittemore

# 1601(V): “Your trespass now becomes a fee”

When J. Thomas Looney identified Edward de Vere as “Shakespeare” in 1920, he was thrilled to find Oxford coming out of his decade-long retirement from Court to sit as the highest-ranking earl on the tribunal at the treason trial of Essex and Southampton on Feb. 19, 1601:

“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,” he wrote. “And sitting on the benches amongst the judges was none other, we believe, than the real ‘Shakespeare’ himself,” who was “intent on saving” Southampton, the younger man whom most scholars have identified as the Fair Youth addressed in the Sonnets.<sup>1</sup>

By the time of Looney’s writing, the majority of commentators also agreed that the poet had written Sonnet 107 to celebrate the liberation of Southampton by King James on April 10, 1603, after the earl had been imprisoned for more than two years and was “supposed as forfeit to a confined doom” in the Tower. But the British schoolmaster went further by suggesting that Oxford also went on to write Sonnet 125 in reaction to the funeral procession for Queen Elizabeth on April 28, 1603, when several noblemen “bore the canopy” over her coffin from London to Westminster Abbey.<sup>2</sup>

If Looney had paused to count the days from April 10 to April 28 and then counted the sonnets from 107 to 125, he would have noticed nineteen sonnets matching nineteen days and concluded, no doubt, that he was staring at a seamless sequence of *Shake-Speares Sonnets* arranged as a poetical diary. Moreover, he would have realized that the entire Fair Youth series up to Sonnet 126 (an “envoy” addressed to Southampton as “my lovely Boy”) had been leading to that solemn occasion when the Tudor dynasty officially ended—after which the King of Scotland entered London to claim the English crown.

Demonstrated in my edition of the

Sonnets entitled *The Monument* is that the previous eighty sonnets (27 to 106) had been arranged as a single sequence, coinciding with Southampton’s imprisonment, and that the final twenty verses (107 to 126) march in their own solemnity to conclude Oxford’s record of history. These two sequences produce the 100-sonnet center of an elegant “monument” for “eyes not yet created” in posterity.

“And thou in this shalt find thy monument,” Oxford promises Southampton in the concluding couplet of Sonnet 107, “when tyrants’ crests and tombs of brass are spent.”

His final word for the Queen is “tyrant”—the opinion of her that Southampton and others of the Essex faction had held—while alluding to Elizabeth’s temporary resting place next to the brass tomb of her grandfather, Henry VII, who had begun the dynasty of the Tudor Rose. The joyous opening of 107 is thereby transformed into the bitter and tragic pronouncement that Elizabeth, “the mortal Moon” whom Oxford had served, had turned her back on him and Southampton and even England to the end of her life.

Here, then, day by day, begins Edward de Vere’s own solemn march leading to the funeral procession—the final, somber dirge of this meditation on the loss of kingship, which becomes a dynastic diary, a religious hymn and a sacrificial offering. In the next entry, Sonnet 108, he wonders to Southampton what might be “new to speak, what now to register, that may express my love, or thy dear merit?” And answers: “Nothing, sweet boy, but yet, like prayers divine, I must each day say o’er the very same, counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine, even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.”

The fact that these “prayers divine” are being said “each day” is an echo of their day-by-day progression; and with the phrase “hallowed thy fair name” he invokes the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name.”

To gain Southampton’s release from the Tower with a royal pardon, Oxford had to support the ambitions of his brother-in-law, the all-powerful Secretary Robert Cecil, by helping him engineer the succession of James. In the same breath he had agreed to glue the mask of “Shakespeare” to his face, because he had uniquely linked the younger earl to that pen name; and by the same token, Southampton had been forced to deny his Tudor blood and renounce any royal claim. No wonder, then, that Oxford begs his forgiveness:

“O never say that I was false of heart,” he begins Sonnet 109, admitting he will “bring water for my stain” (perform his ceremonial role as Lord Great Chamberlain by bringing water to the King at his coronation); but nonetheless he refuses to “leave for nothing all thy sum of good,” because:

For nothing this wide Universe I call,  
Save thou, my Rose, in it thou art my all.

Father and son are separated forever, yet they remain inseparable by blood and spirit within their hearts and minds; Southampton is no longer the Tudor heir, yet he remains the only Tudor Rose in the “universe” (as well as in this unified verse of sonnets); and in number 110 of this painful, spiritual sequence, Oxford calls him “a God in love, to whom I am confined.” They have reversed roles, with Edward de Vere paying for the younger earl’s freedom and becoming trapped within “a confined doom.”

Cecil had held Southampton hostage in the Tower until James was proclaimed king, but Oxford ultimately blames Elizabeth as “the guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,” as he calls her in Sonnet 111, so that “thence comes it that my name receives a brand” akin to Hamlet’s wounded name. In this living hell, their hopes gone, he asks his son to “pity” him, explaining in Sonnet 112 that he cares only for his judgment: “You are my All the world, and

I must strive to know my shames and praises from your tongue.”

Oxford suggests that he personally greeted Southampton on the early morning of his emergence from the Tower. “Since I left you,” he begins Sonnet 113, “mine eye is in my mind.” Only in imagination can he see the truth of his son and cancel out the reality that his waking mind sees: “Incapable of more, replete with you, my most true mind thus maketh mine untrue.”

But he asks in Sonnet 114 whether his inward mind, “being crowned with you,” is merely a slave to “the monarch’s plague, this flattery?” Yes, he admits, “’tis flattery in my seeing, and my great mind most kingly drinks it up ... and to his palate doth prepare the cup.” He will drink the poison of his own illusion that his son is a king (echoing Hamlet’s poisoned cup); and, with harsh irony, he again anticipates his role at the coronation, when he will offer the “tasting cup” to a monarch whose succession he had been forced to support.

Now he breaks through the façade of poetical lines, coming closer to naming his subject matter directly. In Sonnet 115 he recalls the tyranny of “reckoning time, whose millioned accidents creep in ‘twixt vows, and *change decrees of kings*, tan [darken] sacred beauty, blunt the sharp’st intents” and “divert strong minds to *the course of all’ring things*.” Elizabeth, whose ever-dwindling life was the time line of this diary, had broken her vows and changed her decrees, telling Admiral Charles Howard before her death: “I am tied, I am tied, and the case is *altered* with me.”<sup>3</sup>

“Alas,” Oxford continues, “why, fearing of time’s tyranny, might I not then say now I love you best, when I was certain o’er uncertainty, crowning the present, doubting of the rest,” adding: “Love is a babe, then might I not say so, to give full growth to that which still doth grow.” Southampton will continue to grow in life and within the tomb that is also a womb creating the “living record” of him to be preserved by the monument.

The tenth verse of this sequence, Sonnet 116, sums up the theme that Oxford and Southampton are bound together by the spiritual truth of the “love” or royal blood that continues to live despite the alteration of the succession:

“Let me not to *the marriage of true minds* admit impediments! *Love is not*

*love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove*. O no, it is an *ever-fixed* mark that looks on *tempests* and is *never* shaken! It is the star to *every* wandering bark...”<sup>4</sup>

Robert Cecil, who *bends* under his crooked back, was also the *remover* of the true claim to the throne; but the love and blood shared by the “true minds” of Oxford and Southampton will neither bend nor be removed, not *ever*.

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***“Having sealed  
the ‘marriage’ of  
their ‘true minds’  
for eternity,  
Oxford begins  
the final march  
akin to Christ’s  
bearing  
of the cross...”***

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(“Tempests” echoes both *The Tempest* and Oxford’s letter to Cecil this week, when he refers to “this common shipwreck” of which “mine is above all the rest.”)<sup>5</sup>

“Love’s not Time’s fool, though *rosy* lips and cheeks [of a Tudor Rose] within his *bending* sickle’s compass come. *Love alters not* with his brief hours and weeks, but bears it to the edge of doom,” Oxford continues, ending with a version of the “Never Writer to an Ever Reader” who penned the epistle of *Troilus and Cressida*, printed in 1608, shortly before the Sonnets:

If this be error and upon me proved,  
I *never* writ, nor no man *ever* loved.

This signature concludes the first “chapter” of ten sonnets (107-116) within the final sequence of 20 (107-126) leading to the funeral procession and Oxford’s farewell to Southampton as “my lovely Boy, who in thy power...”

Having sealed the “marriage” of their “true minds” for eternity, Oxford begins the final march akin to Christ’s bearing of the cross, to perform a sacrificial offering by carrying out his promise to Southampton: “Your name from hence immortal life shall have, though I (once gone) to all the world must die.”

“Accuse me thus,” he opens Sonnet 117, citing his own “willfulness and errors” that include having “given to time your own dear purchased right” to the succession and the throne. Oxford blames himself for this tragic result; and also among the faults of which Southampton may accuse him is having “hoisted sail to all the winds which should transport me from your sight”—another nautical metaphor, echoing “every wandering bark” of Sonnet 116 and possibly alluding to his intention to “die” by leaving England by sea.

In effect, Oxford sets up a treason trial in reverse of the one for which he pronounced Southampton guilty for the Essex Rebellion. This time the younger earl gets to “accuse” him instead, with Oxford pleading: “Bring me within the level of your frown [the frown of a monarch], but shoot not at me in your awakened hate, since my appeal says I did strive to prove the constancy and virtue of your love.”

Southampton’s possession of “love” is the consistent topic.<sup>6</sup> Without diminishing any of its various literary reverberations, “love” in the context of the Sonnets refers throughout to the royal blood that flows within Henry Wriothesley and gives him his “dear purchased right” to become King of England—now irretrievably and tragically lost, having been “given to time” by Oxford’s agreement with Cecil. The only way Oxford can atone for this loss is by means of “the living record” of Southampton, to be preserved within the Sonnets, wherein he has been striving “to prove the constancy and virtue of your love” for posterity.

Continuing his “appeal” to the jury of future generations, Oxford in Sonnet 118 blames “policy in love” (state policy

*(Continued on page 30)*

*Year in the Life* (continued from page 29) regarding royal blood and succession), which turned Southampton's "ills" into "faults assured" or treasons dictated by official decree; and yet, ironically, it was by this "rank" or poisonous "medicine" that the state was "cured" and made "healthful" without civil war over the throne:

Thus policy in love t'anticipate  
The ills that were not grew to faults assured,  
And brought to medicine a healthful state,  
Which rank of goodness would by ill be cured.

Oxford now claims in Sonnet 119 that, if England's ills are cured by the sickness of policy, he will turn the situation inside out. He will create a resurrection by building this monument to the "ruined love" or destroyed royal blood of his son:

O benefit of ill, now I find true  
That better is by evil still made better,  
And ruined love when it is built anew  
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.

So I return rebuked to my content,  
And gain by ills thrice more than I have spent.

Elizabeth was the original "tyrant" (along with the tyranny of her ever-dwindling Time leading to succession), but Oxford in Sonnet 120 applies that word to himself as he bears the guilt and punishment for Southampton's crime. His son has "passed a hell of Time, and I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken to weigh how once I suffered in your crime," he writes, adding, "O, that our night of woe might have rememb'ed how hard true sorrow hits..."

Southampton's crime was a "trespass" that Cecil and the state turned into treason; and Oxford blamed himself for supporting the Rebellion with *Richard II*, which had been performed on the eve of the rising. "All men make faults," he wrote to Southampton in Sonnet 35, "and even I in this, *authorizing thy trespass with compare*, myself corrupting, salving thy amiss, excusing their [thy] sins more than their [thy] sins are"—and in Sonnet 120 he brings these events full circle by referring to the "fee" [or "ransom"] he is paying for his son's freedom:

But that your trespass now becomes a fee,  
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must

ransom me.

Oxford's fee to ransom Southampton is the obliteration of the truth and the burial of his identity, both as "Shakespeare" and as the younger earl's father; and Southampton must pay a fee to "ransom" or liberate Oxford by getting these verses printed so they will outlast the contemporary world. Just as Hamlet implores Horatio to "draw thy breath in

crooked state that worked against him:

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,  
When not to be receives reproach of being,  
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed  
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.  
For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?  
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,  
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?

"No," he replies, "*I am that I am*"—the words God spoke to Moses about Himself and that Oxford once used to Lord Burghley to complain about interference by spies and others beneath him:

No, I am that I am, and they that level  
At my abuses reckon up their own.  
I may be straight but they themselves be bevel,  
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown.<sup>8</sup>

Oxford stands the world on its head, daring those who lie (Cecil and James) to either tell the truth or admit that, if Southampton has no right to the throne, then those who *do* reign (Cecil and James) are "bad" or without legitimacy as well:

Unless this general evil they maintain:  
All men are bad and in their badness reign!

The day after April 24, 1603, to which Sonnet 121 corresponds, Oxford began writing to Cecil: "In this common shipwreck mine is above all the rest, who least regarded, though often comforted of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the *alterations of time and chance*, either without sail whereby to take the advantage of any prosperous [echoing "Prospero"] gale, or with anchor to ride till the storm be past," adding about James, "There is nothing left to my comfort but the excellent virtues and deep wisdom wherewith God hath endued our new Master and sovereign lord, who doth not come amongst us as a stranger but as a natural prince, *succeeding by right of blood and inheritance*, not as a conqueror, but as the true shepherd of Christ's flock to cherish and comfort them."

At first it may seem hypocritical, but, in fact, he was honoring the bargain that allowed him to pay the "fee" to "ransom" Southampton from captivity and virtually

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pain to tell my story," so Oxford calls upon his son to "ransom me" by setting forth these private verses—as a message in a bottle, drifting on the sea of time to the distant shores of the future.<sup>7</sup>

But does Oxford submit meekly to this fate, without rising up in defiance? Oh, no! From here on, beginning with the mighty Sonnet 121, he is a despairing but powerful poet filled with bold insolence and even deliberate sedition. Not with a whimper will he go down with art made tongue-tied by authority! Summoning all the haughtiness of a Prince, which had been his own posture in the past, he defies the abuses wrought by the Cecils and the

certain death. His son's own "right of blood and inheritance" from Elizabeth had been eliminated from the official record; therefore, it had ceased to exist, so the Scottish king could claim the crown for the Stuart line without contradiction.

By now Southampton has gone ahead to greet the new monarch prior to his entrance into London. With the Queen's funeral about to take place, he joins the triumphant progress at Burghley-by-Stamford and is ushered into the presence of King James, who gives him the Sword of State to bear before him. For those who knew the truth, here is a real-life enactment of the "alteration of the succession" from one prince to the other.

But Southampton's great "gift" of life and blood continue to grow, filling the "tables" or writing tablets of these private verses; and in fact Oxford is about to hand them over to his royal son for safekeeping. "Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain, full characterized with lasting memory," he begins Sonnet 122, adding, "Thy record never can be missed." Having already given him individual verses, he admits that "to give them from me was I bold," but "to keep an adjunct to remember thee were to import forgetfulness in me"—to retain the Sonnets for himself would suggest he could forget him.

Hopefully the monument will withstand the ravages of Time, but each verse is also a "pyramid" akin to the ancient Egyptian pyramids built to measure time while preserving dynastic rulers (pharaohs) until they attained eternal life. So Oxford roars his defiance in Sonnet 123 by referring to the sonnets as pyramids written "with the time" of this diary that is also "the Chronicle of wasted time"<sup>9</sup>:

No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change,  
Thy pyramids built up with newer might  
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,  
They are but dressings of a former sight.

While proclaiming ultimate victory over universal time, Oxford specifically attacks the government-controlled "registers" or "records" of contemporary events that will be used to create official versions of this history: "Thy registers and thee I both defy," he writes to Time, not wond'ring at the present, nor the past, for *thy records and what we see doth lie*"—as clear an indictment of the perpetrators

(Elizabeth, James and Cecil) as possible within this "noted weed" or familiar costume of poetry. "This I do vow and this shall ever be," he continues, concluding: "I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee!"

All that's left now in this grand summation is, first, to restate the subject matter in no uncertain terms. In doing so he refers to his royal son as "my dear love" who was a "child of state" (prince by birth) who might have been "fortune's bastard"

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***"King James has  
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---

(Elizabeth's unacknowledged son and heir) had not Oxford himself taken pains on his behalf:

If my dear love were but the child of state,  
It might for fortune's bastard be unfathered...

No, the memory of Southampton's blood right has been carefully preserved by the building of this monument; therefore it will withstand all forces that attempt to dictate what is true or untrue:

No, it was builded far from accident,  
It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls

Under the blow of thrilled discontent,  
Whereto th'inviting time our fashion calls

Because of this monument, the truth of his life has no fear of being destroyed by the government's lies according to any political strategies of the moment:

It fears not policy, that *Heretic*,  
Which works on leases of short numb'red hours,  
But all alone stands hugely politic...

King James has succeeded to the throne at the expense of Southampton, the divinely ordained prince, so this "policy" is sacrilegious or "that Heretic." Nonetheless he will live "all alone" (echoing his motto *One for All, All for One*) in posterity as "hugely politic" or as rightful king; and now Oxford calls upon all parties involved in the treason trial—those who died because of the well-meaning Essex Rebellion and those who committed the more serious "crime" against England's royal-sacred blood:

To this I witness call the fools of time,  
Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

The above sonnet is arranged to correspond with April 27, 1603, the day before the scheduled funeral of Elizabeth and as he was simultaneously completing his letter to Cecil about "this common shipwreck." To his former brother-in-law he expresses different and even contradictory emotions, but they are nonetheless genuine, reflecting his religious or spiritual view of England's great change of both reign and dynasty:

"I cannot but find a great grief in myself to remember the Mistress we have lost, under whom both you and myself from our greenest years have been in a manner brought up; and although it hath pleased God after an earthly kingdom to take her up into a more permanent and heavenly state, wherein I do not doubt but she is crowned with glory, and to give us a Prince wise, learned, and enriched with all virtues," he tells Cecil, adding on a more personal note that because of "the long time which we spent in her service, we cannot look for so much left of our days as to bestow upon another, neither the long acquaintance and kind familiarities

*(Continued on page 32)*

*Year in the Life* (continued from page 31)  
wherewith she did use us, we are not ever  
to expect from another prince..."

Oxford has been a captive party to the transaction bringing James to the throne. It's a result he never wanted, but one he nonetheless views as legitimate and in England's best interests—however bitter his private feelings reserved for these verses. And in Sonnet 125, corresponding to the funeral for the late Queen, he glances at "the canopy" borne in procession over Elizabeth's effigy and coffin; but he does so by way of scoffing at all "outward" forms of "honoring" that have proven to be "more short [less strong] than waste or ruining." His real purpose, however, is to reject such ceremonies in favor of this inward "oblation" or sacrifice made for his beloved son:

No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,  
And take thou my oblation poor but free,  
Which is not mixed with seconds, knows  
no art,  
But mutual render only me for thee.

From now on, Southampton must act as a "suborned informer" bearing false witness against his own royal blood:

Hence, thou suborn'd *Informer*, a true  
soul  
When most impeached stands least in thy  
control.

Sonnet 126 concludes the 100-sonnet center of this "monument" to preserve "the living record" of Southampton. Oxford delivers his final envoy to "my lovely Boy, who in thy power dost hold time's fickle glass, his sickle hour, who hast by waning grown"—continued to grow in real life and within these sonnets, according to the constant waning of the Moon or Elizabeth. Her life, reign and dynasty have served as the ever-dwindling Time of this chronicle; and she was also Nature, because her mortal body was always eroding and leading to her death, the critical moment of succession; but after all her long delay, ultimately even the late Queen ("sovereign mistress over wrack") will have to "render" Henry Wriothesley as King Henry IX of England:

If Nature (sovereign mistress over wrack)  
As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee  
back,  
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her

skill  
May time disgrace, and wretched minute  
kill.  
Yet fear her O thou minion of her pleasure,  
She may detain, but still not keep her  
treasure.  
Her *Audit* (though delayed) answer'd must  
be,  
And her *Quietus* is to render thee.

So ends the Chronicle of the Sonnets  
addressed to Southampton as the Fair

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***"...but after all her***

***long delay, ultimately***

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***Wriothesley as***

***King Henry***

***IX of England."***

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Youth, to be followed by the increasingly bitter verses to Elizabeth as the Dark Lady; and here we take a break from our ongoing column, *A Year in the Life*, in hopes that the true history within Oxford's monument of gentle verse will be recognized—at least by 2009, upon the four hundredth anniversary of the 1609 quarto, which continues its long journey to us on the sea of time.

(For those who would like to stay in touch  
with the story of the sonnets, visit us at:  
[www.ShakespearesMonument.com](http://www.ShakespearesMonument.com)—HW)

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Looney, J. Thomas, "*Shakespeare Identified* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975, for Minos Publishing Co., copyright 1920), 332.
- <sup>2</sup> Looney, *Ibid.*, 335, writing that Sonnet 125 "seems to be pointing to De Vere's officiating at Queen Elizabeth's funeral." Probably, however, Oxford was not among those who "bore the canopy" but was simply marking the occasion of the funeral procession. Sonnet 125 "may be taken as his last sonnet," Looney added, "for 126 is really not a sonnet but a stanza composed of six couplets, in which he appears to be addressing a parting message to his young friend."
- <sup>3</sup> The anonymous author of *Treatise of Treasons* in 1572 had referred to "the alteration of the succession of the crown."
- <sup>4</sup> Their father-son bond is a metaphorical "marriage" of souls, as when the Spanish monarch in *King John* tells the Pope's legate: "This royal hand and mine are newly knit, and in the conjunction of our inward souls, *married in league, coupled and linked together*" – 3.1.152. Oxford had written to Cecil in May 1601 and had referred to "words in *faithful minds*" – Chiljan, Katherine, *Letters and Poems of Edward, Earl of Oxford*, 1998, 65, citing Cecil Papers 181.80.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Chiljan, 77, Oxford to Cecil, April 25/27, 1603. By "common shipwreck" Oxford refers to the Queen's death and, undoubtedly between the lines, to the "alteration" of the succession.
- <sup>6</sup> "O know, sweet love, I always write of you, and you and love are still my argument" – Sonnet 76, line 10.
- <sup>7</sup> It's my conviction that Southampton himself carried out Oxford's wishes, with the help of publisher Thomas Thorpe and printer George Eld, by getting the Sonnets printed in 1609.
- <sup>8</sup> Oxford had written a postscript to William Cecil, Lord Burghley in his own hand on October 30, 1584, reminding him, "I serve Her Majesty, and I am that I am, and by alliance near to your Lordship, but free, and scorn to be offered that injury to think I am so weak of government as to be ruled by servants..." And here is a good example of how, especially in these latter verses of the Fair Youth sonnets, he appears to be reaching back into the past for greater resonance.
- <sup>9</sup> "Why is my verse so barren of new pride/ So far from variation or quick change?/ Why with the time do I not glance aside/ To new-found methods, and to compounds strange" – Sonnet 76, lines 1-4; "When in the Chronicle of wasted time" – Sonnet 106, line 1.