

THE PRISON YEARS
SECOND ANNIVERSARY
OF THE REBELLION
THE QUEEN IS NEAR DEATH

Sonnet 104
Three Winters Cold
8 February 1603

Oxford marks the second anniversary of the Rebellion and Southampton's imprisonment. Although only two full years have elapsed since Southampton was arrested and imprisoned, "three winters" have transpired – the first winter of 1600-1601, the second winter of 1601-1602, and the present winter of 1602-1603. Before these three winters, Henry Wriothesley had been "the world's fresh ornament" as announced in Sonnet 1 and all during "thy golden time" of Sonnet 3; but that period ended in the year 1600, marked by Sonnet 26. Now the Queen is virtually on her deathbed; her death on March 24, 1603, will be marked in the very next sonnet.

Sonnet 104

Translation

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still: Three Winters
cold
Have from the forests shook three summers'
pride,

Three beauteous springs to yellow *Autumn*
turned,
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green

Ah yet doth beauty, like a Dial hand
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived,
So your sweet hew, which methinks still doth
stand,
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived.

For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred:
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

To me, royal son, your claim can never die,
Because you're the same as when born!
Such seems your blood always: Three winters
Have passed along with three summers,

Three springs have turned to fall,
And as we've neared the succession, I've seen
Three Aprils and three Junes
Since the end of royal hope that is still royal.

Ah, yet does Elizabeth's ever-waning life
Steal from your royal presence without notice,
So your royal self, which in my view remains,
Is disappearing – and I can't see it with my eye.

Therefore hear this, you people of the future:
Before you were born, Elizabeth's dynasty died!

Sonnet 104

1 TO ME, FAIR FRIEND, YOU NEVER CAN BE OLD,

FAIR FRIEND = Southampton, royal son; "From *fairest* creatures we desire increase" - Sonnet 1, line 1; **NEVER** = echoing Edward de Vere, *Ever or Never*; in my view of you, my royal son, you can never lose your golden summer of royal blood, you will always be the prince who is "fresh" and "green" with youth and hope for the throne; **YOU NEVER CAN BE OLD** =

2 FOR AS YOU WERE WHEN FIRST YOUR EYE I EYED,

FIRST = from the beginning, originally, and all during the golden time (1574-1600) prior to the Rebellion of February 8, 1601; (*first* is repeated in line 8 below); "With April's *first-born* flowers" – Sonnet 21, line 7; (numerically, the ordinal of *one*, alluding to Southampton, *One for All, All for One*); "that which is in time or order before any other" – Schmidt; "the *first heir* of my invention" – dedication of *Venus and Adonis* to Southampton; "That God forbid, that *made me first* your slave" – Sonnet 58, line 1; "Even as *when first I hallowed thy fair name*" – Sonnet 108, line 8; "And ruined love when it is built anew/ Grows *fairer than at first*, more strong, far greater" – Sonnet 119, lines 11-12; *first* also refers to "before all others" as in "And for a woman (Elizabeth) wert thou *first* created" – Sonnet 20, line 9

O, twice my father, twice I am thy son!

The life thou gav'st me *first* was lost and done *1 Henry VI, 4.6.6-7*

Also a term of heraldry, denoting a particular form of dividing the shield from the highest part to the lowest: "Two of the *first*, like coats in heraldry, due but to *one* and *crowned with one crest*" – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2.213-214; "For I am all the subjects that you have, which *first* was mine own King" – *The Tempest*, 1.2.343-344; "I'll rail against all the *first-born* of Egypt" – *As You Like It*, 2.5.57-58, with most commentators taking this expression to mean "high-born" persons; echoing "first begotten ... first fruits ... firstling"; **YOUR EYE** = royal sun, eye of Heaven, kingly eye; "that *sun thine eye*" – Sonnet 49, line 6; "Flatter the mountain tops with *sovereign eye*" – Sonnet 33, line 2; **YOUR EYE I EYED** = a play on the sounds of "eye" and "I" coming together to join Oxford and his son in one

3 SUCH SEEMS YOUR BEAUTY STILL. THREE WINTERS COLD

YOUR BEAUTY = your blood from Elizabeth; **STILL** = constantly, always, forever; "Why write I *still* all one, ever the same" – Sonnet 76, line 5; "To one, of one, *still* such, and ever so" – Sonnet 105, line 4; the sequence of 100 sonnets contains a three-year cycle:

THREE WINTERS = the three winters since the Rebellion began in late 1600:

(1) December 1600 - February 8, 1601

(2) December 1601 - February 8, 1602

(3) December 1602 - February 8, 1603

WINTERS COLD = this ever-darkening, tragic time; perhaps it should read "*winters'* cold" as in "*summers'* pride" in the next line below; "Now is *the winter of our discontent*" – *Richard III*, 1.1.1; "Four lagging *winters* and four wanton springs end in a word: *such is the breath of kings*" – *Richard II*, 1.3.214-215

4 HAVE FROM THE FORESTS SHOOK THREE SUMMERS' PRIDE,

SHOOK = "Rough winds do *shake* the darling buds of May" – Sonnet 18, line 3; "Upon those boughs which *shake* against the cold,/ Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" –

Sonnet 73, lines 3-4; **SUMMER** = golden royal time; “Shall I compare thee to a Summer’s day?” – Sonnet 18, line 1; **PRIDE** = royalty; royal splendor; related to birth; “Why is my verse so barren of new pride?” – Sonnet 76, line 1; “For *time* hath set a *blot* upon my *pride*” – *Richard II*, 3.2.81

THREE SUMMERS’ PRIDE = three years of golden royal time “wasted” as in Sonnet 106, line 1: “When in the Chronicle of wasted time”: starting in the summer of 1600, when Southampton fell completely from Her Majesty’s royal favor, and then helped lead the Rebellion of February 8, 1601, as a result of which he became a prisoner, up to this date (February 8, 1603); the Queen’s death will occur the following month, to be marked by Sonnet 105.

5 THREE BEAUTEOUS SPRINGS TO YELLOW AUTUMN TURNED

BEAUTEOUS = royal; filled with your “beauty” or Tudor blood from the Queen; **THREE BEAUTEOUS SPRINGS** = three seasons of hope that your blood from Elizabeth could still be translated into your royal succession; spring 1600; spring 1601; spring 1602, when in fact all hope withered away; “Seeking that *beauteous roof* (Elizabeth’s dynasty, the House of Tudor) to ruin” – Sonnet 10, line 7; **YELLOW AUTUMN** = (*Q* has *Autumne* italicized); this time of decay and approaching death for Elizabeth and her dynasty; “When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang/ Upon those boughs” – Sonnet 73, lines 2-3

6 IN PROCESS OF THE SEASONS HAVE I SEEN

IN PROCESS OF = royal procession or royal progress; in the progression of; during this series of events; the tragic path that your claim to the throne has traveled or proceeded, in life and in the diary of these sonnets; **PROCESS** = legal proceeding, course of law (resulting in “misprision” of treason); “Proceed by *process*” – *Coriolanus*, 3.1.313; “Showing their birth, and where they did *proceed*” – Sonnet 76, line 8; the royal “process” or mandate for Southampton, dictating the death of his claim to the throne: “*Our sovereign process*, which imports at full, by letters congruing to that effect, the present death of Hamlet” – the King in *Hamlet*, 4.3.66-68; echoing the “process-server” or bailiff who delivered the orders summoning Southampton to face trial and summoning Oxford to sit on the tribunal (“process-server” – *The Winter’s Tale*, 4.3.93); “Come, we go in procession” the King in *Henry V*, 4.8.113

7 THREE APRIL PERFUMES IN THREE HOT JUNES BURNED,

APRIL PERFUMES = sweet smell of the royal Tudor Rose; “Thou art thy mother’s glass, and she in thee/ Calls back the lovely April of her prime” – Sonnet 3, lines 9-10; **HOT JUNES BURNED** = time when the flame of your royal blood burned hottest; (“thy light’s flame” – Sonnet 1, line 6; Southampton as “the General of *hot* desire” in Sonnet 154, line 7, referring to his fresh royal blood).

8 SINCE FIRST I SAW YOU FRESH, WHICH YET ARE GREEN.

Since that first period of time, 1574-1600, when I saw you as “*fresh*” or young, green, golden and filled with royal hope; “Of all exploits since *first* I follow’d arms” – *2 Henry VI*, 2.1.43

Father: I gave thee life and rescued thee from death.

Son: O, twice my father, twice I am thy son!

The life thou gav’st me *first* was lost and done *1 Henry VI*, 4.6.5-7

Who taught thee *first* to sigh, alas, my heart? - Oxford’s sonnet, circa 1573

WHICH YET ARE GREEN = you, who are yet (still) green or fresh; “I cannot but find a great grief in myself to remember the Mistress which we have lost, under whom both you and myself from *our greenest years* have been in a manner brought up” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, of the deceased Elizabeth, on April 25/27, 1603, the eve of her funeral procession to Westminster Abbey; “His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,/ And they shall live, and *he in them still green*” – Sonnet 63, lines 13-14

FRESH

The Golden Time: *Fresh*: “Thou that art now *the world’s fresh ornament*” – Sonnet 1, line 9 (1590-1600)

The Prison Years: *Not Fresh*: “Since first I saw you *fresh*” – Sonnet 104, line 8, this verse (1601-1603)

Upon Liberation: *Fresh*: “My love looks *fresh*” – Sonnet 107, line 10 (April 10, 1603 – to the future)

9 AH YET DOTH BEAUTY LIKE A DIAL HAND

BEAUTY = royal blood in Southampton, inherited from Elizabeth; also, the Queen herself, as Venus, Goddess of Love and Beauty; “That thereby *beauty’s Rose* might never die” – Sonnet 1, line 2; “But now is black *beauty’s successive heir*,/ And *Beauty slandered with a bastard shame*” – Sonnet 127, lines 3-4; **DIAL HAND** = the hand of the sundial or clock that reflects the withering of Time and of Elizabeth’s life; “Thy *dial* how thy precious minutes waste” – Sonnet 77, line 2, addressed to Southampton in dedicating the Book of Sonnets to him

10 STEAL FROM HIS FIGURE, AND NO PACE PERCEIVED:

Take away from my son’s royal claim, i.e., from his kingly figure or image, while (like a shadow gradually creeping over a sundial) no one perceives this erosion.

Poor key-cold *Figure* of a holy king *Richard III*, 1.2.5

In the same *figure* like the King that’s dead *Hamlet*, 1.1.44
A *figure* like your father *Hamlet*, 1.2.199
What would your gracious *figure*? *Hamlet*, 3.4.105

But, alas, to make me
The *fixed figure for the time of scorn*
To point his slow and moving finger at! *Othello*, 4.2.54-56

Now thou art an O without a *figure* - to the King in *King Lear*, 1.4.183

Anne: I would I knew thy heart.
Richard: ‘Tis *figured* in my tongue *Richard III*, 1.2.196-197

What’s in the brain that ink may character
Which hath not *figured* to thee my true spirit? Sonnet 108, lines 1-2

NO PACE PERCEIVED = all this occurring in secret: in our lives, in these private sonnets that are not perceived by the public; “Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity/ Shall you *pace* forth” – Sonnet 55, lines 9-10; the attempt to “keep pace” with Time or Elizabeth’s ever-dwindling life span; “Then can no horse with my desire keep pace” – Sonnet 51, line 9

11 SO YOUR SWEET HEW, WHICH METHINKS STILL DOTH STAND,

SWEET = royal; **HEW** = Henry Wriothesley, his appearance; “A *man in hew* all *Hews* in his controlling” – Sonnet 20, line 7; **STILL DOTH STAND** = constantly remains; appears to stand motionless, as Time rushes by

12 HATH MOTION, AND MINE EYE MAY BE DECEIVED:

Time is running out, but it feels frozen; “Commanded by *the motion* of thine eyes” – Sonnet 149, line 12, to Queen Elizabeth, whose royal eye (point of view) makes all the difference; **MOTION** = the motion of the Sun (royal son) as it rises, progresses over the sky, and sets; “For as the Sun is daily new and old” – Sonnet 76, line 13; “There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st but *in his motion like an angel sings* ... but whilst this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it” – *The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.60-65; the motion of the Moon, i.e., of the

Queen on her waning progress toward death and eternal life; **MINE EYE MAY BE DECEIVED** = Oxford's own attempt to keep his son's royal blood alive; "To entertain the time with thoughts of love (royal blood),/ Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth *deceive*" – Sonnet 39, lines 11-12; "Let not my love be called Idolatry" – Sonnet 105, line 1, answering his own accusation, against himself; but he will continue this debate: "Or whether doth my mind, being crowned with you,/ Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery?/ Or whether shall I say *mine eye* saith true" – Sonnet 114, lines 1-3, winding up with the conclusion that, yes, he is deceiving himself, but "*mine eye* loves it (the deception)" and so he will continue this diary to its end, preserving his son's royal blood in the process.

13 FOR FEAR OF WHICH, HEAR THIS, THOU AGE UNBRED:

HEAR THIS = now Oxford suddenly addresses readers of the future who are not yet born, with a note of defiance against Time; **AGE UNBRED** = new generations yet unborn; also, those born without royal blood; "Finding the first conceit of love there *bred*" – Sonnet 108, line 13; "Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty *breedeth* beauty;/ Thou wast *begot*, to get it is thy duty" – *Venus and Adonis*, lines 167-168; "That's for thyself to *breed* another thee" – Sonnet 6, line 7; "Than public means which public manners *breeds*" – Sonnet 111, line 4, referring to both himself and Southampton as having been "bred" or brought up by the Queen as the first and the last of Her Majesty's eight royal wards; "a Bohemian born, but here nursed up and bred" – *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.135; echoing "true-bred" or genuine; Southampton himself is being "bred" again in the Book of Sonnets: "the dainties that are bred in a book" – *Love's Labour's Lost*, 4.2.25; "This happy *breed* of men ... this teeming womb of royal kings, feared by their *breeding*, and famous by their *birth*" – *Richard II*, 2.1.45-52

14 ERE YOU WERE BORN WAS BEAUTY'S SUMMER DEAD!

ERE YOU WERE BORN = before you, people (and readers) of the future, were born; **WAS BEAUTY'S SUMMER DEAD** = was my royal son's golden time (with his "beauty" or blood from the Queen) taken away; in fact Elizabeth is dying now.

**The Queen is Taken Ill
February 1603**

Elizabeth is taken ill at Richmond Palace. She cannot bear the thought of going to bed, instead sleeping in her chair or on cushions on the floor and "complaining of a fiendish dryness in her mouth and the miseries of insomnia," Neville Williams writes. At one point she blurts out a strange remark to Lord Admiral Howard:

*"My Lord, I am tied with a chain of iron about my neck ...
I am tied, I am tied, and the case is altered with me."*

**Oxford & Lincoln
On the Eve of Elizabeth's Death
March 21, 1603**

On March 21, 1603, three days before the death of Elizabeth, the Earl of Oxford invited Henry Hastings, Earl of Lincoln, to be a dinner guest at his home in Hackney, a few miles northwest of London. During this meeting Oxford directed their conversation toward Lincoln's great-nephew Lord Hastings, who was considered a possible threat as a contender for the throne in opposition to King James of Scotland.

Oxford had made his bargain with Robert Cecil in support of James. In return for Southampton promising to relinquish his claim to the throne (and for Oxford promising to bury his identity as Southampton's father and as "Shakespeare"), James had agreed to release Southampton from the Tower as soon as he was proclaimed king. The goal now was to help Cecil engineer a peaceful

succession. To that end, Oxford had arranged the dinner meeting in order to sound out Lincoln's own loyalties; the way he did so was to pretend that he himself favored Hastings over James.

Lincoln stood fast, demonstrating his loyalty, and undoubtedly Oxford reported this good news to Cecil. Meanwhile, however, the horrified Lincoln went to Sir John Peyton, Lieutenant of the Tower of London, and told him of Oxford's apparently disloyal conversation. Exactly why Lincoln went to see Peyton is unclear; his most famous prisoner in the Tower was Southampton, who may have been regarded as a continuing threat to a peaceful succession. The Tower itself was filled with other prisoners (many of them loyal to Southampton) who posed potential threats.

Lieutenant Peyton reported on the affair after James's accession:

"The Earl of Lincoln about some six days before her Majesty's death (as I remember) coming to visit me at the Tower, discoursed of her Majesty's weakness, concluding there was no hope of her recovery ... In the end he concluded, protested, and vowed that, next her Majesty, he would maintain and defend the just right of our gracious sovereign (James) that – by God's merciful providence for the universal good of the Britain kingdom – doth now reign over us..."

"About four days after ... my Lord of Lincoln came to me again, and as I remember, lodged in the Tower that night, being as I take it, two days before her Majesty's decease. He then told me it was time to look about us, for he had discovered an opposition against his Majesty's title, and that there was a great nobleman (Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain) had opened himself upon that point, and had dealt with him to join as a party in the action..."

"That he had been invited (the day before, as I remember) by a great nobleman (Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford) to Hackney, where he was extraordinarily feasted, at the which he much marveled, for that there was no great correspondence between them, this nobleman (Oxford) having precedence of him in rank, whereby he told me I might know him, there being only but one of that quality dwelling there [Hackney]. This nobleman and he being (after dinner) retired apart from all company, began (as the Earl of Lincoln said) to discourse with him of the impossibility of the Queen's life, and that the nobility, being peers of the realm, were bound to take care for the common good of the state in the cause of succession – in which he himself, meaning the Earl of Lincoln, ought to have more regard than others because he had a nephew of the blood royal, naming my Lord Hastings, whom he [Oxford] persuaded the Earl of Lincoln to send for, and that there should be means to convey him over into France, where he should find friends that would make him a party, of the which there was a precedent in former times.

"He also, as the Earl of Lincoln said, inveighed much against the nation of the Scots, and began to enter into question of his Majesty's title..."

(Although Oxford was playing a role to test Lincoln's loyalty, no doubt he was also expressing his real feelings about "the nation of the Scots" as well as his genuine opinion that James did not actually deserve to be King of England. By now, though, Oxford was resigned to the Scottish monarch and, for the sake of Southampton, he was committed to James' succession.)

"...whereupon my Lord of Lincoln (as he told me) brake off his discourse, absolutely disavowing all that the great nobleman had moved, in such sort as he desisted from any further speech in the matter... At the first apprehension of my Lord of Lincoln's discovery, I was much moved and troubled, but *when he had made me understand what great person [Oxford] it was whom he meant, I knew him [Oxford] to be so weak in body, in friends, in ability, and all other means to raise any combustion in the state, as I never feared any danger to proceed from so feeble a foundation*; but added a more vigilancy and care unto the safety of *the place* (the Tower) under my charge..."

("As soon as think *the place* where he would be" – Sonnet 44, line 8)

“...I being also at that instant to give order for the brining in of wine, beer, meat, butter, fish & other provisions for the victualling of such extraordinary assistants as were to be drawn into the Tower, for that it was certainly informed *both to myself and to my Lord of Southampton, from whom I did not conceal in discourse, that her Majesty could not live 24 hours.*

(Clearly Peyton treated Southampton specially and was aware of his great prestige, though not of his identity as Elizabeth’s son. Given that he “did not conceal” from Southampton, but, rather, kept him informed, Peyton likely knew that King James was going to release him from the Tower.)

The Earl of Lincoln also made a report. Without giving the details of their conversation at Hackney, he mentioned “speeches of the Earl of Oxford’s, that if any were sent into France” on behalf of his great-nephew Hastings. Lincoln confirmed that he went to the Tower to visit with Peyton. Both the Peyton and Lincoln reports were delivered to Robert Cecil and to King James himself, but nothing whatsoever happened to Oxford – confirming they knew all along of the earl’s loyalty and that he had been working in their behalf. (It’s also conceivable that Cecil and James realized Oxford was so “weak in body, in friends, in ability” that he was harmless; and, if he was in poor health and likely to die soon anyway, why not let nature take its course?)

(The Peyton and Lincoln reports are on Alan Nelson’s website)

It would have been quite uncharacteristic of Elizabeth to have indicated James as her successor to her Councilors round her bed at Richmond; she could not at the end have named him, for by then she had lost all power of speech.

- Neville Williams, *The Life & Times of Elizabeth I*

Elizabeth died in her sleep at about three o’clock in the morning on March 24, 1603.

**King James (“30”)
To Robert Cecil (“10”)
March 1603**

“... not being able to express my thankfulness for your so great care to furnish a guard unto me, and *recommending me most heartily to my most faithful 40* [Oxford?], I end with renewing unto you the assurance of the constant love of Your most loving friend, 30.”

- Akrigg, *Letters of King James*, p. 205

