

THE PRISON YEARS
DAY/NIGHT OF REBELLION
FIRST NIGHT IN THE TOWER

Sonnet 27
A Jewel Hung in Ghastly Night
8 February 1601

Now it is long past midnight, after the Essex Rebellion has failed, and Southampton is imprisoned in the Tower of London. No more is he “the world’s fresh ornament” but, rather, “a jewel hung in ghastly night.” A great darkness has descended over the private verses of the Sonnets; Oxford will write the next sixty sonnets to correspond with the day-by-day circumstances as they unfold. His royal son has committed high treason; as a ranking earl, Oxford knows he must sit on the jury and must find him guilty; as his father, he must also do all he can to save him from execution. Already he has begun to “toil” or argue on his son’s behalf. Henry Wriothesley has lost his claim to the throne; and in the darkness at his Hackney home, Oxford’s “ thoughts” begin a “journey” or “zealous pilgrimage” to his royal son in the prison.

Sonnet 27

Translation

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travail tired,
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind, when body’s work’s
expired.
For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eye-lids open wide,
Looking on darkness, which the blind do see.

Save that my soul’s imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which like a jewel (hung in ghastly night)
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face
new.

Lo thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for my self, no quiet find.

Weary from these events, I haste to my bed,
The dear rest for limbs tired from their work,
But then begins a journey inside my head
To work my mind when other work is over.

For then my thoughts (traveling far from here)
Make an intense journey to you [in the Tower],
And I keep my eyes open wide,
Looking at the tragic crime that most others see.

Except that the eyes of my soul, in imagination,
Reveal to my unseeing eyes the shadow of you,
Who, a royal prince hung in ghastly disgrace,
Transforms the shame into royal blood again.

Behold, by day I use my limbs, by night my mind,
For you – my son, my self – I find no rest.

Note: Sonnet 27 is chronologically aligned with Sonnet 127 of the Dark Lady series.

Sonnet 27

1 WEARY WITH TOIL, I HASTE ME TO MY BED,

WEARY, etc. = Oxford attempts to sleep tonight; “For to tell truth I am *weary* of an unsettled life” – Oxford to Burghley, May 18, 1591; “Whereupon I may upon reason *quiet* myself, and not upon *weariness*” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, May 22, 1602; “How *weary*, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world!” – *Hamlet*, 1.2.139-140

TOIL = work, labor; but *OED* defines “toil” first as a verb “to contend in a lawsuit or an argument; to dispute, argue; to contend in battle; to fight, struggle”; this legal sense may be the primary meaning, referring to his arguing on Southampton’s behalf, indicated by the use of “toil” in the first line and twice more in the next sonnet; “Your faithful service, and your *toil* in war” – *I Henry VI*, 3.4.21; “Princes have but titles for their glories, an outward honor for an inward *toil*” – *Richard III*, 1.4.78-79; “When I was dry with rage, with extreme *toil*, breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword” – *I Henry IV*, 1.3.30-31

So service shall with steeled sinews *toil*,
And labour shall refresh itself with hope
To do your grace incessant services. *Henry V*, 2.2.36-38

Winding up days with *toil* and nights with sleep,
Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king. *Henry V*, 4.1.275-276

WEARY/TOIL:

I still do *toil* and never am at rest,
Enjoying least when I do covet most;
With *weary* thoughts are my green years oppress’d,
To danger drawn from my desired coast.

Harleian MS 7392, ff. 52-53, signed “Lo. Ox” (Chiljan, 188, 200)

2 THE DEAR REPOSE FOR LIMBS WITH TRAVAIL TIRED:

DEAR = royal, related to his feelings for Southampton; “one *dear son* shall I twice lose” – *The Tempest*, 5.1.176; “Those lines that I before have write do lie,/ Even those that said I could not love you *dearer*” - Sonnet 115, lines 1-2; “If my *dear* love were but the child of state,/ It might for fortune’s bastard be unfathered” - Sonnet 124, lines 1-2; **DEAR REPOSE**: place of repose; a suggestion that his preferred place of rest is in the grave; Milton in *Paradise Lost* will write of “my harbour and my ultimate repose” – 3.210; Oxford is speaking of the resting place he so dearly needs to find, but he also reflects his “dear son’s” repose in the Tower; “Your Highness shall *repose* you at the Tower” – *Richard III*, 3.1.65; **TRAVAIL** = often glossed as “travel” but in this sonnet meaning “work” or “painful labor” during this day of turmoil; “Yet I am one that hath long besieged a fort and not able to compass the end or reap the fruit of his *travail*” – Oxford to Burghley, June 25, 1585; “But now, having received this comfortable message of furtherance and favor from your Lordship, although Her Majesty be forgetful of herself, yet by such a good mean I do not doubt that, if you list, but that I may receive some fruit of all my *travail*” – Oxford to Burghley, March 20, 1595; “I do well perceive how your Lordship doth *travail* for me in this cause of an especial grace and favor” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, June 19, 1603

“What they *travail* for” – *Timon of Athens*, 5.1.15-16; “I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument/
Deserves the *travail of a worthier pen*” – Sonnet 79, lines 5-6; of course, Oxford’s “travail” also
included “travel” by horse between his home in Hackney and the Court at Whitehall

3 BUT THEN BEGINS A JOURNEY IN MY HEAD

JOURNEY IN MY HEAD = a mental journey to the Tower; this is the “travel” aspect of the
verse, i.e., the traveling of Oxford’s thoughts, at night, to his son in the Tower

4 TO WORK MY MIND, WHEN BODY’S WORK’S EXPIRED.

WORK MY MIND = labor to form a mental vision of Southampton in prison; “work” is related
to “travail” in the above line, confirming the meaning of “travail” as labor; i.e., first there was the
physical work, and now the mental work begins.

5 FOR THEN MY THOUGHTS, FROM FAR WHERE I ABIDE,

His thoughts are at the Tower, not where he is; “*Think on the Tower and me*” – *Richard III*,
5.3.127; Oxford’s home in Hackney in about three miles northeast of Whitechapel and the Tower
of London, which is on the River Thames

MY THOUGHTS = “Was it the proud full sail of his (“Shakespeare’s”) great verse,/ Bound for
the prize of all too precious (royal) you./ That did *my ripe thoughts* in my brain inhearse,/ Making
their tomb the womb in which they grew?” – Sonnet 86, lines 1-4

6 INTEND A ZEALOUS PILGRIMAGE TO THEE,

INTEND = “set out upon ... have in mind a fixed purpose” – Booth

ZEALOUS PILGRIMAGE TO THEE = his thoughts go on a royal (and holy) progress to
Southampton in the Tower; also, a religious pilgrimage to Southampton as a king or god on earth;
in this line Oxford echoes the theme of Sonnet 7, in which he compares Southampton with “his
sacred majesty,” a prince or king: “Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,/ Attending on his
golden *pilgrimage*” - Sonnet 7, lines 7-8

ZEALOUS = related to religious fervor, i.e., his thoughts (expressed in these sonnets) are akin to
hymns or prayers to a god on earth; “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” - Sonnet 108, lines 5-8; “When holy and devout religious men are at their
beads, ‘tis much to draw them thence, so sweet is *zealous contemplation* ... thy devotion and *right
Christian zeal*” – *Richard III*, 3.7.91-93,102, i.e., Oxford is contemplating his royal son as a king
or “god on earth” as in “the little Love-God” of Sonnet 154, line 1, and a “God in love” in Sonnet
110, line 12; “With hearts create *of duty and of zeal*” - *Henry V*, 2.2.31

PILGRIMAGE = “In *prison* hast thou spent a *pilgrimage* and like a hermit overpass’d thy days”
– *1 Henry VI*, 2.5.116

7 AND KEEP MY DROOPING EYELIDS OPEN WIDE,

Keeping his eyes open in the dark, while forming a mental vision

8 LOOKING ON DARKNESS, WHICH THE BLIND DO SEE.

LOOKING ON = “*Looking on* the lines of my boy’s face” – *The Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.153-154;
“What might I have been, might I a son and daughter now have *look’d on*: - *The Winter’s Tale*,
5.1.175-176; “The sun *look’d on* the world with glorious eye,/ Yet not so wistly *as this Queen on
him*” – *The Passionate Pilgrim*, No. 6, 1599; “Were it not pity that this goodly boy should lose his
birthright by his father’s fault ... Ah, what a shame were this! *Look on the boy*” – *3 Henry VI*,
2.2.34-39; “A son who is the theme of honour’s tongue, amongst a grove the very straightest plant,
who is sweet Fortune’s minion and her pride; whilst I by *looking on* the praise of him see riot and
dishonour stain the brow of my young Harry” – *1 Henry IV*, 1.1.80-85

“But the world is so cunning, as of a *shadow* they can make a substance, and of a likelihood a truth” – Oxford to Burghley, July 1581

“A dream itself is but a shadow” – *Hamlet*, 2.2.261; “The shadow of myself formed in her eye; which, being but the shadow of your son, becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow” – *King John*, 2.1.498-500; “But Henry now shall wear the English crown and be true King indeed; thou but the shadow” – *3 Henry VI*, 4.3.49-50; “He hath no more worthy interest to the state than thou the shadow of succession” – *1 Henry IV*, 3.2.98-99

Must he be then as *shadow* of himself?
Adorn his temples with a coronet,
And yet, in substance and authority,
Retain but privilege of a private man? *1 Henry VI*, 5.4.133-136

No, no, I am but *shadow* of myself:
You are deceived; my substance is not here *1 Henry VI*, 2.3.49-50

I am the *shadow* of poor Buckingham,
Whose figure even this instant cloud puts on
By darkening my clear sun *Henry VIII*, 1.1.224-226

SIGHTLESS = “Poor grooms are *sightless night*, kings glorious day” – *Lucrece*, 1013

11 WHICH LIKE A JEWEL (HUNG IN GHASTLY NIGHT)

WHICH = the shadow of Southampton, presenting his image; **A JEWEL** = Southampton now appears like a jewel or ornament (royal prince) as he was “the world’s fresh *ornament*” in Sonnet 1, line 9; “As on the finger of a throned Queen/ The basest *Jewel* will be well esteemed” – Sonnet 96, lines 5-6, Oxford referring to Southampton; “As for *my sons*, say I account of them as *jewels*” – *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.198-199; “Had *our prince (Jewel of children)* seen this hour” – *The Winter’s Tale*, 5.1.115-116

No son of mine succeeding...
And *mine eternal jewel*
Given to the common Enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! *Macbeth*, 3.1.63, 67-69

(In the above passage, *eternal jewel* = *immortal soul*, according to the Riverside edition of the Shakespeare works; and this soul is carried or passed on by his seed; meanwhile, Oxford will say to Southampton: “What can *mine own* praise to *mine own self* bring,/ And what is’t but *mine own* when I praise thee” – Sonnet 39, lines 2-4; and “My *spirit* is thine, *the better part of me*” – Sonnet 74, line 8); so the “jewel” of this sonnet is Southampton and his immortal soul as both the son or “better part” of Oxford and as the immortal royal prince of England)

For *princes* are
A model which *heaven* makes like to itself:
As *jewels* lose their glory if neglected,
So *princes* their renowns if not respected *Pericles*, 2.2.10-13

HUNG = image of a hanging, i.e., Southampton’s impending execution; also as trophies are “hung” over memorials for the dead; “Thou art *the grave where buried love doth live, /Hung* with the trophies of my lovers gone” – Sonnet 31, lines 9-10; as on a tomb: “And *hang* more praise upon deceased I” – Sonnet 72, line 7; to be “hung” or “hanged” or executed by the halter; “To confess and be *hanged* for his labour! First to be *hanged*, and then to confess” – *Othello*, 4.1.38-39; “Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive” – *Macbeth*, 5.5.39; suspended in the air, like a hovering apparition

GHASTLY NIGHT = the terrible (and terrifying) darkness of his son's disgrace, yet his shadow glitters in the sight of Oxford's soul; "Where now *his son's like a glow-worm in the night*" – *Pericles*, 3.2.43; "O, I have passed a *miserable night*, so full of fearful dreams" – *Richard III*, 1.4.2-3, i.e., Clarence, speaking of his night in the Tower; suggesting ghostlike, as Hamlet's dead father appears as a ghost in the night; "I am *thy father's spirit, doomed* for a certain term to walk *the night*" – *Hamlet*, 1.5.9-10

"Unto the kingdom of perpetual night" *Richard III*, 1.4.47

12 MAKES BLACK NIGHT BEAUTEOUS, AND HER OLD FACE NEW.

MAKES BLACK NIGHT BEAUTEOUS = introduction of *black* in the Sonnets, the opposite of his "Summer's Day" of the Golden Time in Sonnet 18, the previous series of the "old" time; also, Elizabeth, the "dark" lady, is "old" at age sixty-seven; in Oxford's view, however, Southampton turns this *blackness* into the sight of his son's royal blood inherited from "beauty" or Elizabeth. Southampton, because of the Rebellion, is suddenly changed from the "fairest" of Sonnet 1, line 1, to the opposite; i.e., he has been changed from *fair* to *black* as reflected by the parallel verse of Sonnet 127, opening the Dark Lady series: "In the *old age black* was not counted fair,/ Or if it were it bore not beauty's name;/ But now is *black* beauty's successive heir,/ And Beauty slandered with a bastard shame" – Sonnet 127, lines 1-4; and at the end of that sonnet, the Queen is pictured as in mourning for her royal son, whom she may execute very soon:

*Therefore my Mistress' eyes are Raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem...
Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe* Sonnet 127, lines 9-10, 13

A few verses later in the Dark Lady series, Oxford further insists:

*Thine eyes I love, and they as pitying me...
Have put on black, and loving mourners be...
And truly not the morning Sun of Heaven
Better becomes the gray cheeks of the East,
Nor that full star that ushers in the ev'n
Doth half that glory to the sober West
As those two mourning eyes become thy face.
O let it then as well beseem thy heart
To mourn for me, since mourning doth thee grace* Sonnet 132, lines 1, 3, 5-11

*Shall we go throw away our coats of steel,
And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns?* 3 Henry VI, 2.1.160-161

"I arrest thee of *high treason*, in the name of our most sovereign King ... It will help me nothing to plead mine innocence; for that dye is on me which *makes my whitest part black*" – *Henry VIII*, 1.1.200-202; 208-209; "And took his voice who should *be prick'd to die in our black sentence and proscription*" – *Julius Caesar*, 4.1.16-17; "And from his bosom purge this *black despair!*" – 2 *Henry VI*, 3.3.23; "I'll join with *black despair* against my soul, and to myself become an enemy" – *Richard III*, 2.2.36-37; "Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a *black matter for the king* that led them to it" – *Henry V*, 4.1.141-143; "For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres, acts of *black night*, abominable deeds, complots of mischief, *treasons*, villainies" – *Titus Andronicus*, 5.1.63-65; "**Black** is the badge of hell, the hue of *dungeons* and the school of *night*" – *Love's Labour's Lost*, 4.3.250-251

13 LO THUS BY DAY MY LIMBS, BY NIGHT MY MIND,

LO = Lord Oxford; **BY DAY ... BY NIGHT** = Oxford will now write day-by-day or night-by-night until there is some resolution. "Day" is the "Summer's day" or time of royal hope in Sonnet 18, line 1, while "night" is this entire time of utter despair

After Southampton's release, Oxford will recall "how once I suffered in *your crime*," adding, "O that *our night of woe* might have remembr'ed" – Sonnet 120, lines 8-9); "No; *dark shall be my light, and night my day*" – 2 *Henry VI*, 2.4.40); Southampton will be called soon to trial

Call him to present trial; if he may
Find mercy in the law, 'tis his; if none,
Let him not seek't of us. ***By day and night,***
He's traitor to th'height! *Henry VIII*, 1.2.211-214

Black night o'ershade *the day*, and *death thy life* *Richard III*, 1.2.135

Winding up ***days with toil and nights with sleep,***
Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king. *Henry V*, 4.1.275-276

14 FOR THEE, AND FOR MY SELF, NO QUIET FIND.

FOR THEE, AND FOR MY SELF = Oxford equates his son with himself; he is attempting to transfer all the pain and grief and guilt from Southampton to himself; (I can find no peace – not for you, and, therefore, not for me); "Not for *myself*, Lord Warwick, but *my son*" – 3 *Henry VI*, 1.1.198; "O how thy worth with manners may I sing,/ When thou art *all the better part of me*?/ What can mine own praise to mine own self bring,/ And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?" – Sonnet 39, lines 1-4

NO QUIET FIND = "I shall not sleep in *quiet at the Tower*" – *Richard III*, 3.1.142; "'Tis *thee, my self*, that for my self I praise" – Sonnet 62, line 13; "My spirit is thine, *the better part of me*" – Sonnet 74, line 8. "Whereupon I may upon reason *quiet* myself, and not upon *weariness*" – Oxford to Robert Cecil, May 22, 1602

Sonnet 27 begins the 100-Sonnet Center of the Monument that Oxford is constructing for Southampton, as a memorial to preserve him and his "love" or royal blood ("And *you and love* are still *my argument*" – Sonnet 76, line 10) for future generations. Although Southampton and Essex claim they were attempting only to remove Robert Cecil from his control over the Queen, they are accused of having committed high treason against the Crown itself. Essex will die for his sins; Elizabeth will spare the life of her royal son, but his claim of succession has been lost.

