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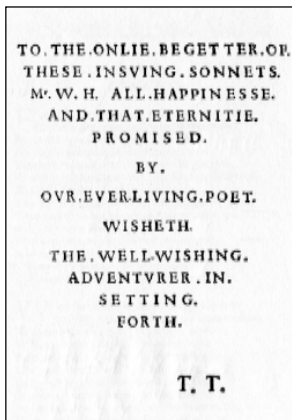
"Let menot to themarriage of true minds admit impediments..."

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.

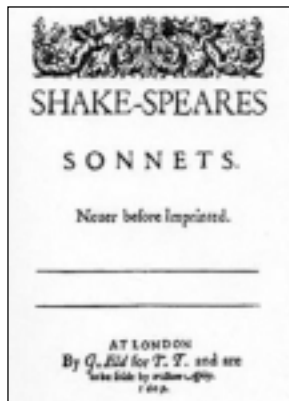
However, I now believe that this heretofore elusive historical context has been found, and that with it in place reading and understanding the Sonnets is transformed. It is a theory that was

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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

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Sonnets solved (continued from page one) first postulated by Hank Whittemore in 1999, outlined in his article “Dynastic Diary” in the Summer 1999 *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*, presented in part at the 1999 Shakespeare Oxford Society Conference in Newton (MA), and again at the Shakespeare Fellowship Conference in Cambridge (MA) in October 2002.

So, while the theory itself has been “out there” and available “piecemeal” for five years, the book Whittemore has been working on has not been ready for publication until now. (See the ad on page 21 for details about *The Monument* and how to order a copy.) To my knowledge, none of the previous 1,800 books on the Sonnets (including those by Stephen Booth, Helen Vendler and Katherine Duncan-Jones) even comes close to the breadth and depth of Whittemore’s analysis—an analysis that glosses each and every word in each and every sonnet. And only one—Gerald Massey’s 1866 *Shakespeare’s Sonnets Never Before Interpreted*—gets close to the true historical context.

Essex Rebellion is the context

Briefly, his theory is that all 154 sonnets are in authorial order, that nearly all were written or rewritten in the last three years of Oxford’s life, that they are addressed to the Fair Youth Southampton and the Dark Lady Queen Elizabeth, and they are concerned almost exclusively with the politics and aftermath of the Essex Rebellion—its purpose, its disastrous failure, the treason trial, Southampton’s death sentence, his reprieve from the death sentence, his eventual release from prison and pardon, the poet’s observations on their shared guilt and shared shame over Southampton’s “crime,” the poet’s bitter-sweet advice and admonitions on how Southampton should now live his “second” life, and finally—in the Dark Lady sequence—his bitter (without the sweet) rage at their mutual betrayal by Elizabeth. It’s all politics, mixed in with the personal views of the writer and expressed through the grand language and philosophy we all know as “Shakespearean.”

The “Year in the Life” column in this issue of *Shakespeare Matters* (see page one) incorporates this Sonnet theory into Part I of his analysis and commentary of the year 1601—the year of the Essex Rebellion. Those familiar with previous authorship publications from Whittemore

know that he believes that Southampton was seen by Oxford as a royal son who deserved to succeed Queen Elizabeth. This theory—aka the “Prince Tudor” theory—has been a schism in Oxfordian circles since the 1930s, nearly as old as the movement itself. When “Dynastic Diary” was published in 1999, the opening sentence read, “I wish to present a structure for *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* based on the hypothesis that Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was the son of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford and Queen Elizabeth.”

In hindsight both Whittemore and I (who was then the editor of the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter*) agree that this opening sentence was a big mistake, because it actually shortchanged the real nature of his breakthrough theory, waving the red flag of Prince Tudor controversy in everyone’s face before delving into what his breakthrough thinking on the *authorial structure* of the 1609 quarto was all about.

The quarto structure is, simply, a *chronological* sequence that tells a story, the most significant sequence being the 100 sonnets from 27 to 126, which turn out to be a *perfect match* with actual historical events as they occurred between Feb. 8, 1601, and April 28, 1603. This middle sequence is both the center and centerpiece of the 1609 quarto. The rest of the structure is comprised of the first 26 sonnets (17 on the Fair Youth and marriage, plus nine others dated 1592-1600), the last 26 (all Dark Lady), plus the final two “Bath” sonnets (153 and 154—which virtually all sonnet commentators have seen as separate and seemingly “added on” for some reason to the sequence of 152). Everything is explained in much greater detail in *The Monument*.

I’d like to explain why I have come to believe that the Whittemore solution to the Sonnets is absolutely correct, and to share some insights into how I have viewed the sonnets over the 25 years I’ve been an Oxfordian, and how the Whittemore solution has made crystal clear what was once mysterious and opaque.

In short, once one has 1) the correct author (Oxfordians do), 2) the correct Fair Youth and Dark Lady (Southampton and Queen Elizabeth), and, finally, 3) the all-important correct historical context, then reading the Sonnets becomes as clear and uncomplicated as reading a signed, dated letter to a known addressee about the events of the day. In this case, of course,

the “events of the day” are “your crime, your trial, your death sentence, my anguish, my attempts to save you, I have saved you!, she has betrayed us both, and now we both must live in this new post-crime world, and here’s my advice on how you should now live your second life.” It’s that easy.

Language is the key

The key to understanding Whittemore’s “Monument” theory of the Sonnets form and content can be found in the language of the Sonnets, and in the extensive research that has been done to gloss each and every word and uncover not just the standard dictionary definitions of these words, but—as no one else has ever done—what these words meant to Shakespeare. And where else to look for what a word meant to Shakespeare than in his plays—specifically, his chronicle plays of English royal history? This may seem like an astoundingly simple proposition, and surely, one may ask, someone, somewhere over the past two centuries had thought to do it. But, so far as we know, no one ever has.

Given this new semantic context, one finds that the language of the sonnets begins to reveal real answers as to the time and place of their references and as to the nature of the relationship between the poet and the youth. The most important observation about the large picture that comes out of this new context and analysis is that the oft-acknowledged wealth of legal terms used in the sonnets can now be seen as directly tied to their primary subject matter—the criminal offense, trial, death sentence, reprieve and release of the Fair Youth. Another well-known sonnet theme—shame and guilt—can now also be seen as direct commentary on the shame and guilt of the youth’s criminal offense on Feb. 8, 1601—a shame and guilt that the poet takes to be as much his own as the youth’s.

In considering the Sonnets in light of this proposed Essex Rebellion context, I believe that there are two extremely important words to focus on: “trespass” and “fault,” words which appear in six of the Fair Youth sonnets—“trespass” twice and “fault” eight times. These words are generally glossed as an “offense” of some sort, usually personal and most likely sexual (e.g., “sensual fault” in Sonnet 35). They have in turn been linked up to words such

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Sonnets solved (cont' from p. 11) as “shame” and “guilt” to help create theories about hot love triangles, bed trysts and homosexual encounters.

Robert Giroux in his 1982 *The Book Known as Q* notes (p. 22) about Sonnet 35 (in which both words appear) that “something serious has occurred, but the language of the poem is unspecific and open to many interpretations.” He continues that “it may have been a crisis over the young man’s seduction by the poet’s mistress.” Without the correct historical context Joseph Sobran in *Alias Shakespeare* (1997) also goes astray with his homosexual theory of the relationship between the poet and the youth, though—interestingly—he does make note (p. 201) of the wealth of legal terminology used in the sonnets, but then has nothing to say about why such language might be so prevalent in a series of love sonnets. Joseph Pequigney’s *Such is My Love* (1985) is another example of analysis that creates rather than finds a context, resulting in another theory having to do with homosexuality and the “shame” and “guilt” that must go along with it.

But when one looks closely at Elizabethan history and Shakespeare texts, one finds that the words “trespass” and “fault” are both associated closely with “crimes,” in particular crimes against the state—treason. Shakespeare especially, in his history plays, uses the words “treason” and “trespass” interchangeably. For example, in *1 Henry VI* (II.iv.92-94) we find

And by his treason stand'st not thou attainted,
corrupted, and exempt from gentry? His
trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood.

Just as important as Shakespeare’s usage is the fact that, as documented in Prof. John Bellamy’s 1979 *The Tudor Law of Treason*, offenses such as “trespass” had, under a century of Tudor rule, slowly become equated with “treason.” On page 20 Bellamy writes about the 1517 riots in London directed against foreigners, which the state then, in acting against some of the rioters, treated as high treason against the king in disposing of the cases (13 were convicted of treason, and then hanged, drawn and quartered). Bellamy notes:

In the fifteenth century disturbances of the

35

NO more bee greeu'd at that which thou haft done,
Roses haue thornes, and filuer fountaines mud,
Cloudes and eclipses flaine both Moone and Sunne,
And loathsome canker liues in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and euen I in this,
Authorizing thy trespas with compare,
My selfe corrupting falsuing thy amisse,
Excusing their fins more then their fins are:
For to thy sensuall fault I bring in feince,
Thy aduerse party is thy Aduocate,
And gainst my selfe a lawfull plea commence,
Such ciuill war is in my loue and hate,
That I an accessory needs must be,
To that sweet theefe which sourely robs from me,

The words “fault” and “trespass” appearing together in Sonnet 35 are the tipoff to the true historical context of the whole series.

type which occurred in 1517 would probably have been dealt with as riot (which was trespass) ...

The case for the meaning of “fault” is much easier. Southampton himself spoke of his “fault” in writing to the Privy Council begging for mercy sometime in late February or early March 1601, and when King James sent a message ahead to London in April 1603 ordering Southampton’s release, he wrote that, “the late Queen our Sister, notwithstanding his fault toward her, was moved to exempt [him] from the stroke of Justice.”

Once one understands that “trespass” and “fault” are both words that can refer to treason, then the Sonnets in which they appear are transformed. In particular, reading “trespass = treason” in Sonnets 35 and 120 has enormous significance for understanding the real subject matter of both these sonnets and the entire middle sequence of 100 sonnets. Equally important is how the meaning of other words in other sonnets suddenly becomes clearer.

Foremost among such other words is “misprision” in Sonnet 87, glossed by all commentators for two centuries as a “misunderstanding” of some sort (which is, correctly, one of its definitions and usages). But in the Elizabethan era there existed a legal concept that had been carefully refined over a century of Tudor rule: “misprision of treason.” Misprision of treason was defined as a crime just short of treason (i.e., having known of treason and having failed to stop it and/or report it to the authorities). Where a treason conviction meant the death penalty, a finding of “misprision of treason” meant life in prison

and loss of all titles and properties. Again, Bellamy’s book is important in understanding how these legal concepts evolved under a century of Tudor rule as the state consolidated its power by expanding the concept of “crimes against the state.”

The difference between the two charges (treason vs. misprision of treason) became a subjective life and death, cat and mouse game played between the authoritarian state and its subjects. Two of the most well-known trials of the era have treason vs. misprision of treason at their center: Sir Thomas More in the mid-1530s, and Sir Walter Raleigh in 1603-1604. In both cases charges against each man swung back and forth between misprision of treason and treason, finally ending for both in treason convictions and death.

In the case of Raleigh, he was convicted of treason in 1604, which was then commuted to misprision—prosecutor Sir Edward Coke having said that a conviction for misprision of treason was all he had been going for anyway. Then, incredibly, his original 1604 treason conviction was resurrected in 1618 for the sole purpose of disposing of him as a political sop to King Philip of Spain!

In looking at the Sonnet’s story of the Poet Shakespeare/Oxford and the Fair Youth Southampton this gloss is of great significance because the entire meaning of Sonnet 87 really hinges on this one word—misprision. As Tudor law operated, the legal basis for sparing Southampton’s life *had to have been* a commutation from treason to misprision of treason—from death to life in prison and loss of all titles and property. Yet there is no official record of such a legal finding, and Southampton’s major biographers (Stopes, Rowse and Akrigg) can only say that “he was spared.” But it is interesting to note that Rowse does state flatly that “there was almost a conspiracy between the Queen and Cecil to save [him],” and a little later he says, “Southampton’s life had really been saved by Cecil” (p. 164, *Shakespeare’s Southampton*).

So when Shakespeare writes in Sonnet 87 “thy great gift, upon misprision growing,” what he is really saying is that your life has been saved, and now your “great gift”—a second life—must “grow upon”

the foundation of your “misprision of treason” commutation. We should also note here that Shakespeare himself, in Sonnet 68, directly refers to this second life (“to live a second life on second head”). In discussing this interpretation of Sonnet 87 over the past five years with fellow Oxfordians it has been said, in rebuttal, “well, who says ‘thy great gift’ means ‘life?’ Couldn’t it be a reference similar to ‘Thy gift, thy tables’ (Sonnet 122)?”

As it turns out, Sir Walter Raleigh himself used the same phrase in the same circumstances just a few years later. In a 1604 letter to the Privy Council (as cited in Martin Hume’s 1926 *Sir*

Walter Raleigh, p. 199) pleading for his life following his treason conviction (i.e., in effect pleading to get commuted from treason to misprision of treason) Raleigh writes, “For a greater gift none can give, or receive, than life...” It’s enough to make me think that he may have even seen Sonnet 87 or some version of it.

These are just a few observations—based on just three words—on what the Sonnets are really all about; and as can be seen, it’s a story about the real life and death situation of the moment, without even having to consider the more contentious matter of the precise relationship between the poet Shakespeare/Oxford and the condemned youth Southampton.

The case for authorial order

Another important matter in understanding the Sonnets that all commentators have struggled with, and none have solved until Whittemore, is whether they are in authorial order. In reconsidering all these sonnets over the past five years in light of the Monument theory I noted in particular one sonnet sequence that is as meaningless and opaque as can be—until one understands the context within they were written and what historical events are being referenced.

I am speaking here of Sonnets 63 to 67, a sequence which also covers several important moments in my own evolution as an Oxfordian. It was 25 years ago, while reading Sonnet 66 (having just finished reading Ogburn’s 1962 *Shakespeare: the Man Behind the Name*), that I looked up and said, “Oh my God, they’re real.”—an

87

Farewell thou art too deare for my possessing,
And like enough thou knowst thy estimate,
The Character of thy worth giues thee releasing:
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting,
And for that riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this faire guilt in me is wanting,
And so my pattent back againe is swearing,
Thy selfe thou gau’st, thy owne worth then not knowing,
O mee to whom thou gau’st it, else mistaking,
So thy great guilt vpon misprision growing,
Comes home againe, on better iudgement making.
Thus haue I had thee as a dreame doth flatter,
In sleepe a King, but waking no such matter.

The word “misprision” in Sonnet 87 has never been glossed as “misprision of treason” since no one ever had the correct context.

Oxfordian epiphany from which I’ve never looked back.

“They’re real.” Indeed. That describes the entire authorship debate, the plays, the poems, the Hamlet-Shakespeare-Oxford comparisons—all of it. Yet I never understood how real the Sonnets were until April 1999, when Whittemore was trying gamely to explain his new theory to me. For a while I wasn’t getting it, but kept nodding agreeably, figuring sooner or later I would get it or Hank would give up. And then suddenly, we were looking at Sonnet 63 and the lines

For such a time do I now fortify,
Against confounding age’s cruel knife,
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love’s beauty, though my lover’s
life.

His beauty shall in these black
lines be seen,
And they shall live, and he in them
still green.

And just as suddenly I got it. I saw in my mind a picture of Southampton being led to the block, about to have the “confounding [Elizabethan] age’s cruel knife [the headsman’s ax]” cut his “life” [head] off, even as the poet, picturing the same thing and “fortifying” himself through his writing, swears he shall never be cut from memory because “he ... still green” [he shall live forever] in “these black lines” [my verse]. This is certainly not the la-de-da, lovey-dovey stuff that all too many Shakespeare commentators (Stratfordians and anti-Stratfordians) usually speak of. This was real life and death anguish as it must have really happened—as both Southampton and Shakespeare must have

experienced it: a day-by-day countdown to his execution.

But only in recent years have I come to appreciate how these sonnets (63 and 66) fall right in line with those surrounding them and form a coherent sequence. In fact the brief sequence from Sonnets 63 to 67 can *only* be understood to make sense if one considers them to document what we know happened in March 1601. Therefore, they *must* be in authorial order, which is the cornerstone of Whittemore’s entire thesis. “How so?” the wary reader may at this point be asking.

Well, the real events of March 1601 were that Southampton was scheduled to be beheaded, and

that at the last moment he wasn’t. Instead he began serving a life sentence, stripped of all titles and property. In Sonnets 63 to 65 we find the same theme of the poet anticipating the youth’s death and swearing he shall live on in my verse. Abruptly, we then come to Sonnet 66, in which the poet now says “I’m so depressed I wish I were dead, but I can’t go, because then *I’d* be leaving *you* behind.” It’s the reverse of what he has just been saying in the previous three sonnets.

Now here’s the kicker. In Sonnet 67 the poet begins by asking

Ah, wherefore with infection should he live
And with his presence grace impiety,
That sin by him advantage should achieve
And lace itself with his society?

There is no further talk of the youth dying—only talk of *why* should he have to live this way (67), that he has “a second life on second head” (68), that he “dost grow common” (69), that he should be grateful for his great gift [life] and build on it (87), and how he should now live [this second life] (e.g., Sonnet 94). Consider how the actual events of March 1601—the impending doom followed by the sudden moment when he is reprieved—match these sonnets. In real time there had to have been the anguish leading up to the expected execution, followed by mixed feelings of depression (66) and resignation (67) to the reprieve and the new reality of serving a life sentence. Sonnet 67 ends by remarking on “these last [days] so bad.” And what could have been so bad as what the two of them—poet and youth—had just

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Sonnets solved (continued from page 13)
lived through? What other known historical context could even come close to making sense of the emotions expressed in this sequence from Sonnets 63-67?

Sonnets as historical evidence

Next, I want to touch on the historical implications of the Monument theory. Eighty years ago J. Thomas Looney predicted that, if he was right, future scholarship would find new information that would fit the Oxfordian hypothesis and none that would displace it. In that same spirit I believe that the five years spent since the publication of "Dynastic Diary" in the *Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* have proven that point. The book Whittemore is now publishing has greatly enhanced (for both of us) our appreciation of the basic correctness of his thesis, and along with it has come the realization that something we once only suspected is, in fact, absolutely true: the Sonnets are not just poetry. They are the author's message in a bottle to posterity—they are real, they are documentary evidence every bit as important and potent as any letters, any diary, or anything to be found in the Calendar of State Papers. In fact, in some instances the Sonnets provide historical information that exists nowhere else (e.g., "misprision" in Sonnet 87).

For another example, let's take a look at Sonnet 120. Here, even after spending years immersed in this new point of view about the sonnets, and having talked with Whittemore for hundreds if not thousands of hours about them, it was only last summer (2003) that I had yet another Oxfordian epiphany. It came while looking up the word "rascal" in the dictionary on Hank's back porch (another story for another day), and on the opposite page my eyes noticed the word "ransom: payment made for release from captivity." I immediately thought of the couplet in Sonnet 120, and then we both read the entire sonnet together. Remember, in this sonnet the poet recalls "our night of woe" and how he "once suffered in your crime." He concludes with the couplet:

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

Note that the all-important word "trespass" recurs, referring undoubtedly to the "treason" Southampton committed on

February 8, 1601, a point further reinforced by the poet's bemoaning in the sonnet about "once [suffering] in your crime." So, in keeping with the thesis that everything in the middle sequence of 100 sonnets is real *and* related to the Essex Rebellion and its aftermath, what are we to make of this final couplet? The answer, I think, is obvious. The poet is saying to the youth that your crime has become a "fee" [price] that we *both* must pay—in the form of a ransom, a payment for release from captivity. Such a deal could have only been negotiated with Robert Cecil and approved by the Queen.

It should be noted here that Whittemore's current draft at that time did have the "payment-release" meaning glossed, but for both of us there was a sudden realization that the Sonnet 120 couplet could well be, in itself, the whole authorship mystery encapsulated in two lines. The import of this for both Shakespeare and Shakespeare authorship studies cannot be overstated, because what we then realized was that the "price" [i.e. "ransom," "fee"] that the poet must have paid was not just to give up all title to his works, but in fact, *to give up everything*, even his name and his place in history.

This in turn would then explain the certainty that is spoken of in Sonnets 72 ("My name be buried where my body is") and 81 ("I, once gone, to all the world must die"). This certainty about his anonymity has always been a puzzle, even for Oxfordians. Was it his choice, or someone else's imposed upon him? But now, seen in this new context of a deal to save Southampton—of a ransom paid—then everything becomes clear. It was imposed. His certainty is that of someone who has signed a contract from which there can be no turning back.

As we noted earlier, even orthodox scholar A.L. Rowse concluded that Cecil alone saved Southampton's life. But left out by Rowse (and by Stopes and Akrigg) is any reason why. Just because the kid was young, pretty and had long hair? Because his wife and mother wrote such wonderful, pleading letters? Because Southampton's own letters to Cecil and the Privy Council were so damn good? No good reason for the sparing of Southampton has ever been offered. But, outside of Shakespeare authorship circles, it has never been seen as an important question even to ask—let alone to answer.

It should also be noted here that it is a

well-documented fact that the payment of "ransom and fine" was routine for prisoners in this era as a means to mitigate their sentences or avoid imprisonment altogether. Records show that the majority of Essex Rebellion conspirators did in fact pay "ransoms and fines." Charles Danvers even offered to pay £10,000 to escape his death sentence, but was turned down! But for Southampton there is no record of any ransom or fine paid as part of the process by which he was reprieved from his death sentence. No record, that is, until now, and our new view of Sonnet 120 as historical evidence.

So then, what we have here could well be the literary ground zero of the entire Shakespeare authorship mystery. The mystery is the result of the ransom paid to save Southampton's life—a ransom paid by the poet Oxford/Shakespeare not in cash, but as a political deal. And a deal being a deal, especially in England where under the Official Secrets Act a secret is a secret forever, the mystery about who Shakespeare really was endures to this day.

"Such virtue hath my pen"

But Oxford/Shakespeare had no intention of going quietly into that good night of oblivion. He still had his pen, and I am sure that he spent his final days rewriting and refining much, with a keen eye on his new situation. His top priority would certainly have been writing and carefully planning the sonnet sequence, but I think that an accompanying plan would have been to sprinkle the plays with as many clues, final comments and parting shots as possible (surely he had always been given to name clues and puns, but now that the end was near and—if we are right—a deal consigning him to oblivion was in place, then name clues and puns were all he had left).

Thus it may be, for example, that certain scenes in *As You Like It* (e.g., railing at the interloper William in V.i, or talking with Jacques in III.iii) were either written or carefully rewritten post-1601 to remind posterity that "When a man's verse cannot be understood ... it strikes a man more dead than a great reckoning in a little room" (Marlowe references aside, might there have been an actual "little room" in March 1601, with just a desperate Oxford and a smug Cecil in it?). Or perhaps he inserted the incredibly inflammatory "Hast thou a daughter" and "Jephthah" ex-

changes with Polonius in *Hamlet* (II.ii), implying that your daughter's pregnancy is like maggots in a dead dog—lovely thought, but had it ever really been performed at court, in front of Cecil and the Queen?). Or perhaps the ultra-bitter dark comedy *Troilus and Cressida* was finished, in which Polonius has now morphed into Pandarus, who has the final line in the play: "I'll ... bequeath you my diseases" (perhaps a parting shot at the Cecils—father and son—depicting the father saying to posterity, "Meet my son")?

How he actually spent his final years is pure speculation, but I can't help but think that Oxford—who bragged in Sonnet 107 that "Death [now] subscribed [to him]" because he would live on in his verse—must have been busy putting his affairs and his verse in order—to ensure just that.

A theory in progress

Finally, it is only in recent weeks as I prepared this essay that I had yet again another evolutionary moment in my thinking on the Sonnets and the all important question: "Just how real are they?" Over these last five years Whittemore and I have had innumerable conversations about the implications of his theory and just what the Sonnets are telling us if they are—as contended—historical testimony. It has been an intriguing process of focusing on key words and phrases and mulling on possibilities. So what occurred to me in these recent weeks is one more step on a journey that it is hoped all Oxfordians will soon take—to take the Sonnets as true, historical testimony and to see where that leads. As Whittemore and I have already found, analysis of the Sonnets from this new perspective consistently comes up with significant fits between the text and the known history of the period (e.g., "trespass," "fault," "misprision" and "ransom").

So, in this instance what occurred to me was a possible answer to what the second half of that final line in sonnet 120 ("...yours must ransom me.") might be about, for it does seem to say that Southampton is expected to ransom Oxford. For a while I wondered what captivity was Oxford in that he needed to be ransomed. And then it came to me: he was

120

THAT you were once vnkind be-friends mee now,
And for that sorrow, which I then didde feele,
Neeedes muft I vnder my transgression bow,
Vnleffe my Nerues were braffe or hammered Steele.
For if you were by my vnkindnesse shaken
As I by yours, y'haue past a hell of Time,
And I a tyrant haue no leasure taken
To waigh how once I suffered in your crime.
O that our night of wo might haue remembered
My deepeft sence, how hard true sorrow hits,
And soone to you, as you to me then tendred
The humble falue, which wounded bofomes fits!
But that your trespaffe now becomes a fee,
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransome mee,

The second and final appearance of "trespass" occurs in Sonnet 120, coupled with the provocative mentions of "fee" and "ransom."

"captive good attending captain ill [i.e., Cecil]" (Sonnet 66), and would remain so until "released." He was a captive of his fate, his anonymity. And a release from that captivity would only come if his verse could someday be understood (Touchstone's line in *AYLI*), which in turn could only come about if the author's true identity—and true story—became known.

Sending hidden messages

It was the publication of the 1609 quarto that launched what we now know was a carefully crafted message in a bottle to posterity. Without the quarto, the entire state of Shakespeare studies and biography (including the authorship debate) would be vastly different. We must remember that its publication was undoubtedly suppressed and there were no subsequent printings. There was not even any contemporaneous discussion about them, in an age obsessed with discussing who likes which poet and poetry. Only 13 copies survived, and without them all we'd know of Shakespeare's sonnets would be the 1640 John Benson version, which in effect butchers the original and obliterates what we now know was the carefully planned structure of the whole. Without the 1609 quarto there would be no such thing as *Shakespeare's Sonnets* as we know them.

The quarto was published in spring 1609 (registered on May 20th), almost simultaneously with the quarto of *Troilus & Cressida*. Both works contain enigmatic introductions with "never" and "ever" in play (the "Never Writer to an Ever Reader" in *T&C* and the *Sonnet* dedication—

correctly deciphered by John Rollett—revealing the hidden message, "These sonnets all by ever"). But what good are hidden messages unless they are sent?

Even with the political risks that had to have been involved in defying the "grand possessors," I have now come to think that Southampton must have been behind the publication of both; it was the "fee" he knew he had to pay to release the poet and his verse from oblivion, the ransom that had to be paid in exchange for the ransom paid to save his life.

Further, if the theory about there being a deal to save him is correct, then his fulfillment of the request to "ransom me" (cf. Hamlet to Horatio: "tell my story") would be more than just taking a risk—it would be actually violating that deal. But duty called, just as it had once called Hamlet to release his father from purgatory.

Whittemore notes in *The Monument* (citing Akrigg's *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*, p. 144-145) that in the summer of 1609 King James, while visiting Southampton at Beaulieu, apparently panicked and guards were called out. One of the first known instances of a James "panic" occurred on June 24, 1604—the day of Oxford's death—when Southampton and other Essex Rebellion survivors were arrested, held overnight, and then released the next day, with no official record as to why they were arrested in the first place. These two "panics" provide uncanny parallels in considering to what extent political danger may have surrounded the Southampton-Shakespeare-Oxford connections.

After 1609 there were no new Shakespeare publications for 14 years. And when the First Folio was published in 1623, it made no mention of *any* Shakespeare poetry, and certainly not the 1609 quarto of *Shakespeare's Sonnets. Troilus and Cressida* only made it in at the last minute and is not listed in the table of contents. The Folio is full of obfuscation about the true author, where 14 years earlier both 1609 publications cried out, "It was eVer."

It's taken 400 years—perhaps longer than anyone back then would have dared guess—but we are now close. With the mystery of the Sonnets now solved, that ransom will soon be paid in full, and Oxford shall at last be released.

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-*

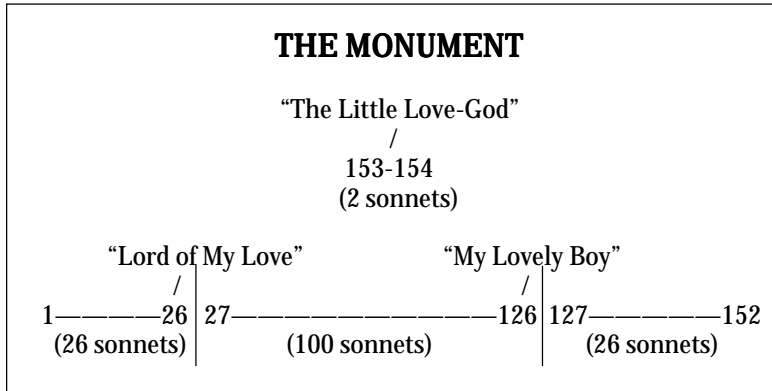


Figure 1

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:

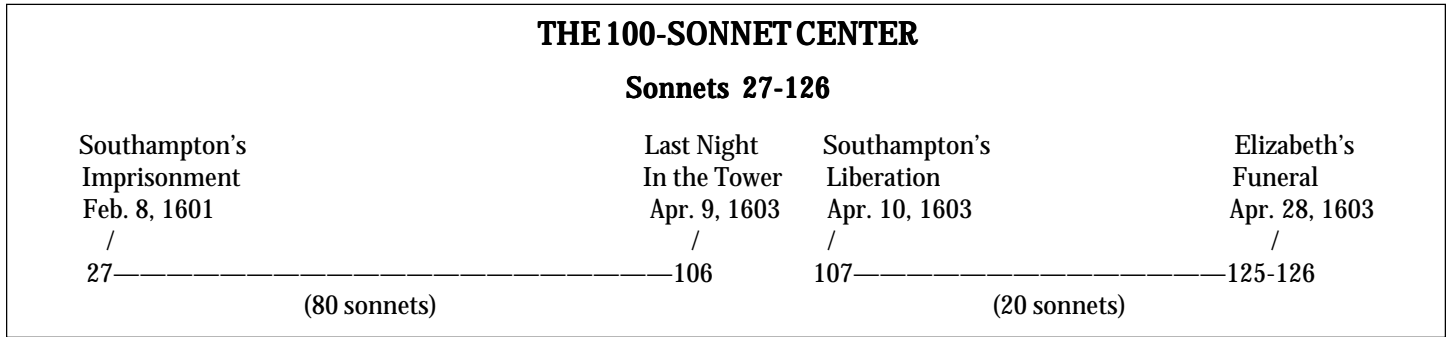


Figure 2

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.¹

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."²

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.³

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.'"⁴

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!"⁵

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."⁶ 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.⁷

It appears informers for Cecil helped get *Richard II* performed on this day, to trigger the revolt prematurely.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰

(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.”¹¹

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.)¹²

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.”¹³ (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...**”¹⁴

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)¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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").¹⁸

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.*)¹⁹

"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":²⁰

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*)²¹

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.²²

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."²³

Endnotes:

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

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

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

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

⁵ 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.

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

⁷ 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.

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

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ In Sonnet 34 the second "loss" is usually emended to "cross."

¹¹ 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.

¹² Stopes, 233; (D. S. S. P., CCLXXIX, 91).

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

¹⁴ Akrigg, op. cit., 127.

¹⁵ 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.

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

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Bellamy, op. cit., 48 (emphasis added).

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

²⁰ Stopes, op. cit., 245.

²¹ Stopes, op. cit., 224.

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

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

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