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The Game and the Candle.

A reader's review of Hank Whittemore's *The Monument*.

> **"But both Spenser in his *Amoretti*, and Sir Philip Sidney, in his pioneering sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, were overshadowed by the mysterious, unorthodox, untitled collection we know as the *Sonnets of Shakespeare* [*Shake-speare's Sonnets*]."**
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> **----- William Rose Benet, *The Reader's Encyclopedia***

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The greatest puzzle.

It hardly seems possible to object to the statement that the introductory dedication to *Shake-speare's Sonnets* constitutes "the greatest puzzle in the history of English literature." [attributed to A. L. Rowse in Streitz (2001). As for the overall meaning of the entire *Sonnets* collection, taken as a whole, we must agree with Paul Streitz's own summary to the effect that "*the sonnets are the greatest puzzle because the Author was trying both to communicate and disguise his message at the same time*." [Streitz, Paul, *Oxford* (2001), p. 265.]

Amen, and thanks to the connotative faculty of human language which is unique to the poetic experience, it has been possible for the poet to succeed at the selfsame, self-contradictory endeavor. We both understand, and we don't: we think we do, and we're really not sure.

William Rose Benet put it like this:

> **But both Spenser in his *Amoretti*, and Sir Philip Sidney, in his pioneering sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, were overshadowed by the mysterious, unorthodox, untitled collection we know as the Sonnets of Shakespeare [*SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS*].**
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[Benet, William Rose, *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, second edition, 1965, (Harper and Row), Thomas Crowell Publishers, New York, previous editions, copyright 1948, 1955, Thomas Y.

Crowell Co., pp. 1118, p. 309.]

Part I, the Competition.

In England, most everyone has heard of the great Tennis Court Quarrel. In the year, 1579, two courtiers of the Court of Elizabeth I, namely Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford and Sir Philip Sidney, got into a quarrel over possession of a tennis court at Whitehall. In the course of the dispute, Oxford called Sidney "a puppy," and, somewhat incredibly, taking the slight as a slur on his parentage, Sidney challenged Oxford to a duel, even sending a servant to make arrangements on the following day. Queen Elizabeth, however, hearing of the matter and citing the disparity of rank, would not allow the duel to actually take place. Sidney was then given the choice of apologizing to the Earl or withdrawing from Couirt. Sidney chose the latter, retiring to his sister's home at Wilton House, and there writing his *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, his *Defense of Poetry*, and also most of the *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet sequence, consisting of 108 individual poems, all inspired by Sidney's loss of the true love of his life, the sister of the Earl of Essex, Penelope Devereux, who married another, wealthier suitor during the period when Sidney was in disgrace. Because Sidney was banned from Court, he no longer looked like the heir apparent of his uncle, Lord Leicester, and his prospects for the future seemed significantly diminished.

However, the rift between Oxford and Sidney was healed in the following year, signalized by their competing on the same side at a Tournament in honor of the Queen's birthday at which the team took first-prize. The competition between them would continue behind the scenes, however, as the two men were each founders of separate literary schools. The Romantic school was headed by Sidney, and Oxford's followers were called Euphuists, meaning literally "well-formed," but the Greeks had a word for it.

Five years after their successful Tournament performance, Oxford was appointed Commander of the Horse over Her Majesty's forces in the Netherlands, but it would be a brief six-week term of actual service. When Lord Leicester was chosen as Commander in Chief, he insisted on appointing his nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, to Oxford's position. Oxford returned to England without incident, but a supply ship carrying his horses, wardrobe, money, commission, and provisions was captured by the Spanish. Meanwhile, Sidney sailed for the Netherlands, and served there valiantly for a year before being mortally wounded in battle at Zutphen.

Having thus achieved a measure of glory on the battlefield, Sidney's reputation would be raised even higher when his writings began to be published some five years after his death. In 1591, his *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet century was published, firmly establishing the sonnet-form as a measure of literary greatness in England. The man may have died, but his words remained. Literary immortality was his.

Part II, the Courtship.

It was just about this time that Lord Oxford's father-in-law and former guardian, Lord Burghley, was seeking a suitable marriage for Oxford's eldest daughter, Elizabeth de Vere, then 15, who was being brought up in Lord Burghley's household, following the death of Oxford's first wife, Anne Cecil, in 1588. Burghley's choice had fallen on the young 3rd Earl of Southampton, then 17, who was also being brought up in Burghley's household as a royal ward, just as Lord Oxford had been. Oxford approved of the proposed match, as did Southampton's mother, and even the Queen seemed to be in agreement.

It cannot be doubted that it was at just this juncture that the first 17 of the hundred and fifty-four sonnets which were eventually published as *Shake-Speare's Sonnets*, came to be written. In each of these singular poems, the poet is urging a younger man to marry and beget children, thus perpetuating his "beauty." It was no accident that these sonnets, later dubbed the "Marriage Sonnets," totaled exactly seventeen. Southampton had been 17 years old when the marriage had been proposed, and Oxford was the 17th Earl of Oxford in his own direct line, beginning with the first Earl of Oxford in the era of William the Conqueror and his sons.

It cannot be inconsequential, either, that in 1591, Oxford was beginning to think about the next century, the 17th, in which his grandchildren, by daughter Elizabeth and her two younger sisters, Bridget and Susan, would in fact bear children, and in which these grandchildren would live out their lives. Nor, apparently, was Oxford the only poet somewhat taken with the aura of the number "17." Gabriel Spenser, England's newest Poet Laureate, wrote 17 introductory sonnets for the publication of the first three books of his epic poem, *The Faerie Queen*. Each of these was dedicated to a different member of the nobility, and among these, one to the Earl of Oxford. Then, acknowledging the primacy of the sonnet form as a way of taking the measure of the English poet, Spenser added his own 88-sonnet sequence, *Amoretti*, which anticipated his marriage to Elizabeth Boyle which took place in 1594. While *Amoretti* is considered a "century of sonnets," exactly as is Sidney's 108 sonnet sequence, it may not be an accident that Spenser's *Faerie Queen* sonnets, when added to those of *Amoretti*, and Spenser's four-sonnet set, *Four Hymns to Love and Beauty* first published in 1595, add up to exactly 109, just one more sonnet than Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*. It was an intentional virtuoso performance, but one which would eventually be bested by Lord Oxford, being published posthumously under the "Shake-Speare" label as SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS.

Meanwhile, a rather surprising narrative poem was published in 1593 with a dedication by a poet who was at the time an unknown quantity. The poem, which the poet calls '"the first heir of my invention" is *Venus and Adonis*, and the unknown poet's name is given as "William Shakespeare." The strange story of lust, seduction, and pagan domination of a mortal youth by the Roman goddess of love is dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton, who is eulogized in the Introduction by the poet as "the world's hopeful expectation."

The prurient story culminates in the eventual seduction of Adonis, and his subsequent

death after being gored in the groin by a wild boar. It must have set many tongues in England a wagging. Was this resurrected Roman myth somehow meant as an object lesson to the Earl? And, if so, for whom does Venus stand? And who is this poet who praises Southampton to the skies, yet does so in such a confident and familiar fashion that one might almost imagine the poet to have been a person of equal or even of higher rank in the nobility. Especially because Southampton was still a royal ward at this time, some may have suspected that the "Venus" of the poem may have stood for Southampton's royal mistress, the Queen of England, though, of course, it would never do to say so aloud. As if to allay such thoughts, another long narrative poem based on Roman legend, was published by the same poet and dedicated to the same young Earl in the very next year. The poem was the *Rape of Lucrece*, and the message seemed to be that the honor of a Roman noblewoman could not be desecrated with impunity, but that such an outrage must be avenged at any cost. Thus, the previous year's story of lust and seduction was ameliorated by one steeped in moral righteousness.

By the time these two narrative poems were published, the courtship of the 3rd Earl of Southampton as a husband for Elizabeth de Vere was long over. The sixth Earl of Derby, William Stanley, had entered the picture, and the couple was wed at Greenwich in 1595 in the presence of the Queen and all the royal Court. This Earl of Derby was one of the wealthiest men in England, and seemed inclined to be generous to his young bride. Moreover, he and his new father-in-law, Lord Oxford, had much in common and would soon become the fastest of friends for the balance of Oxford's life.

In the meantime, Southampton, perhaps taking the moral of *Venus and Adonis* to heart, skillfully avoided the prospect of another arranged marriage by courting and wedding one of the Queen's Maids of Honor, Elizabeth Vernon. The marriage was for love, and if the pagan goddess of *Venus and Adonis* had represented Queen Elizabeth, the lusty love goddess had been skillfully out-maneuvered by true love in real life.

Part III, the Troubled Times.

The only trouble was that Southampton, barely 22 years old at the time, had neglected to consult with the Queen before the courting of Elizabeth Vernon. This sort of offence generally got a very unfavorable response from the Queen, and Southampton was no exception.

To make matters worse, it was at just this time that the 2nd Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, was appointed by the Privy Counsel to be Commander in Chief of Her Majesty's armed forces in Ireland, amounting at this time to just about 17,000 men under arms. Essex had accepted the commission as a way of earning his way back into the Queen's good graces, but his term of service did little to please the monarch. Instead of defeating the rebel, Tyrone, on the battlefield, he negotiated with him, instead. Instead of being cautious about creating new knighthoods in the field, Essex knighted his officers freely without restraint. Even worse, he appointed Southampton who was still in Her Majesty's disfavor,

as Commander of the Horse: in effect, as his Second in Command.

Recalled to England, Essex made his apologies to the Queen and Privy Council, but his explanations had been only marginally acceptable. His popularity as a military hero who had distinguished himself on the same field of battle as Sidney was at an all-time high, but his status with his monarch was at an all-time low. When his ten-year monopoly on the sale of sweet wines expired that September, it looked as though the Queen was not inclined to renew it, and Essex faced financial ruin.

As the weeks leading up to this inevitable catastrophe wore on, Essex House on the Strand became a meeting-place for various ambitious, discontented, and desperate men, and so, apparently, did Drury House, Southampton's London residence. Essex was determined to turn his public popularity into some kind of political advantage, and his ally, Southampton, was never far from his side.

Things came to a head on a Saturday afternoon, when Southampton paid the Lord Chamberlain's men an extra 40 shillings for a special performance of Shakespeare's play, *Richard II*, in which a weak monarch is overthrown by his cousin. It was known to be one of Essex's favorite plays, and there was already a Cambridge scholar in jail for including the story in a book which he had dedicated to Essex with extravagant praise while Essex was still leading the troops in Ireland. The 300 or so Essex supporters who attended the Saturday performance probably didn't realize it at the time, but they were about to be part of an attempted 'revolution' which would be born and die on the following morning. Because the "stir" had begun, as it were, at the Globe Theater, it would be known ever after as "The Globe Rebellion."

On that Sunday morning, Essex, after taking four members of the Privy Council prisoner at Essex House, had hit the London streets with 300 excited men, many of them carrying swords, and had headed for the royal Court, hoping to rouse the citizenry along the way. The Privy Council, however, had sent a herald ahead of the parade to denounce Essex as a traitor. The aroused demonstrators were met by royal forces in the vicinity of Lud Gate, and were soundly whipped, sending the Essex partisans scattering. Essex escaped to enter Essex House by the Water Gate, and,. doubtlessly after freeing the Privy Council members, set about burning incriminating papers.

A few days later, Essex would be on trial for his life, for allegedly trying to raise the City of London to arms, and seize control of the Court and its Queen. Lord Oxford would be senior noble at Essex's trial, a trial which ultimately would result in Essex's beheading. Meanwhile, Oxford would work effectively behind the scenes to obtain a lighter sentence for Southampton on account of his youth. At the time of the rebellion, Southampton had been 27 years old.

So it was that the "fair youth" and "world's hopeful expectation" of the Sonnets was imprisoned in the Tower of London where he would stay for the last three years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. It was the most lenient of Her Majesty's houses of penal correction, but it

was still a prison. This was clearly to be a difficult and perilous time for both the younger nobleman, Southampton, and his senior admirer, Oxford.

The Creation of the Sonnets.

And so it was that Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, kicked his sonnet-making machinery into high gear, and produced the greatest collection of Sonnets the English language is ever likely to see, that "mysterious, unorthodox, untitled collection, which we know as *Shake-Speare's Sonnets*" which has "overshadowed all the rest," in the words of William Rose Benet.

In his epoch-making 843-page volume, *The Monument*, author and actor Hank Whittemore not only substantiates the story above, but documents everything to follow on a blow-by-blow basis; including the entirety of Southampton's imprisonment in the Tower; his survival to the death of Queen Elizabeth I; and his restoration and elevation in the reign of the new King, James I of England.. The whole of the story is told in the 154 *Sonnets* which we call Shakespeare's, and it's not hard to follow once you have the key. Whittemore demonstrates beyond all reasonable doubt that Lord Oxford, Edward de Vere, intentionally engineered the structure of the *Shake-Speare Sonnets* to serve as his lasting memorial and Monument to the young nobleman, Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, whom he loved like a son.

The pattern of *The Monument* has been there all along, but it took Mr. Whittemore's insight and diligence to draw it out, and tie it down.

Truth really is stranger than fiction sometimes, and full of more surprises than are dreamt of in our philosophy. You may have never thought that excitement and high drama could be found in a book of literary criticism, but after reading just the Introduction of Whittemore's *The Monument*, you are likely to realize that your view of literature, of the Elizabethan era, and of William Shakespeare, will never be the same.

---Carl Caruso

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Hank Whittemore's The Monument.

Sex, Politics, and Power in the Age of Queen Elizabeth I.

"The greatest mistake, I felt, was viewing these intensely autobiographical poems only or primarily as literature, when they are meant to be perceived as entries of a diary recording real events in real time. My hypothesis included the Sonnets not only as autobiographical, but also, within each series, as arranged by the poet in chronological order. To me it was clear the verses are nonfiction dressed as fiction, adding up to a genuine historical document; and beyond that, in my view, this unique sequence of poems must have been Shakespeare's magnum opus in terms of what he wanted us to know about his life....

...My take is that *nothing* in the verses is fictional."

---Hank Whittemore, Introduction to *The Monument.*

The volume known as "Q" to literary historians, entitled SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS, is literature, certainly enough, but it is also far more than just literature. That is the premise which actor and author Hank Whittemore sets out to prove in this epic work of literary criticism, *The Monument.*

The hundred and fifty-four sonnets in the Shakespeare format which comprise "Q" were in a sense "hidden under a bushel," almost from the day of their ostensible publication in 1609. Either because the book was suppressed from the start, or because "Q" was intended to be a private printing from the very beginning (opinions vary), it almost immediately disappeared from public view for a period of 40 years, reappearing only in a mangled form with sonnets by other authors mixed in; with some of the original sonnets missing; and, somewhat incredibly, with the gender of the Fair Youth and Dark Lady of the collection actually inter-changed in more than one instance Talk about rampant revisionism..

Time, however, could not make false, that sublime poetry which once was true. In 1711, SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS, appeared again in its pristine form, the first of many editions over the next three centuries, and what William Rose Benet would one day call "the

mysterious, unorthodox, untitled collection" eventually overshadowed all the rest, becoming the consummate expression of the sonnet-form in English, and perhaps the unequaled example of poetic skill in any language, period.

That is not to say that the Sonnets have ever been completely understood, or ever understood at all in the context which Mr. Whittemore's book proposes: as a literary chronicle of "les sentiments les plus intimes les plus secrets de le rein," to borrow a few words from early twentieth-century French commentator, Feuillerat.

We are not speaking here of secret romances in the royal court of Elizabeth, although they, too, play a role, but of secret concentrations of forbidden political power, which currents ran underground for thirty years or more, broaching the surface only briefly in what was called at the time 'the Essex revolt,' but which became known to history as 'the Globe Rebellion,' because the 'stir,' as it was called, began in a sense at the doors of Globe Theater, when one of the earliest 'Shakespeare' plays, *Richard II*, was given a fateful one-time performance and revival.

Essex may not have conceived it so, but the Privy Council was firmly convinced---having had four of their number detained by force at Essex House---that the 2nd Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux, with 300 men, many of them carrying swords, had attempted to raise the City of London, and storm the Court of Elizabeth, in effect taking the Queen captive by forcefully separating her from her councilors. Essex rather correctly believed that the Queen's ministers were embarked on a plan to destroy him. At the time, Essex was a celebrated military hero and at the high-point of his popularity with the common people, but whether popular or not, few or none were prepared to join what could credibly be called a Treason. The consequences of a failed rebellion---being hung, drawn, and quartered--- were just too onerous. Despite widespread admiration for Essex, most citizens were sober enough to remember that Elizabeth was still their Queen.

Essex and his supporters were graphically reminded of that fact, when royal troops met them in force at Lud Gate on the fateful Sunday morning after the Saturday afternoon performance of *Richard II* at the Globe. Soundly beaten and overpowered in a brief fracas, the Essex faction quickly scattered, and Essex retreated in despair to Essex House, presumably to let go his captive ministers, and begin burning incriminating papers. His revolution, if such it was, had miserably failed.

Before the week was out, a summary public trial was held before 25 commissioners. Some call the legal proceedings a travesty, but Essex was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. His twenty-seven year old comrade-in-arms, the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, may well have accompanied him to the headsman's ax, had not Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, who was senior nobleman at the trial, intervened to obtain clemency. With the approval of Robert Cecil and the Queen, mercy was granted, ostensibly on account of Southampton's youth. Southampton, then, was imprisoned in the Tower of London. The Tower was the most lenient of Her Majesty's houses of penal correction, but it was still a prison, and Southampton could expect to languish there for as

long as the reign of Elizabeth I lasted.

As "Q" would, ultimately and far-in-the-future, demonstrate, Lord Oxford was strongly attached to the young Southampton, some 23 years his junior. It happened that both men had, in different time-frames, grown to manhood in the same household: that of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, who was both Lord Treasurer and Master of Royal Wards. At Cecil House, each had been educated and trained in Courtly manners as well as in the military arts. Each had been groomed, then, to take a leading role in the governance of the sceptered isle, and Burghley, while he lived, never let them forget it. This shared history, then, had forged a deep bond of brotherhood which had made itself felt in the days leading up to the Essex revolt, and even more so afterwards.

But Southampton had gown up at Cecil House during the same time period that Oxford's three daughters, Elizabeth, Bridget, and Susan, were being raised there: their mother, the former Anne Cecil, having died at age 31 in June of 1588. Possibly, this alone would have accounted for the fact that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who was 38 years old when Anne died, felt a strong and distinctly paternal attachment towards the younger Earl from Southampton's youth. He was growing up, after all, as the adoptive sibling of Oxford's own daughters.

In 1571, Oxford had married Anne Cecil, the daughter of Lord Burghley, at the age of 21, and had done so at the pleasure of both Cecil and Oxford's royal Mistress, the Queen,. Now, Oxford and Burghley attempted to interest the young Southampton in marrying Oxford's eldest daughter, Elizabeth de Vere. During the year 1590, the plan won the approval of the Queen and of Southampton's mother, but Southampton was only 17 at the time, and Oxford's daughter only 15. The young Earl pleaded his youth, and nothing ultimately became of the proposal.

Nothing became of it, except that, according to Whittemore's premise and that of other Oxfordian commentators, the first seventeen of the SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS, the so-called Marriage Sonnets, probably came to be written at just this time. In each of the seventeen poems, the poet urges a younger man to marry and beget children, thus perpetuating his 'beauty' in the next generation.

Whittemore was not the first to see the paternal motivation behind these seventeen Sonnets. "It is hard to think of any real situation in which it would be natural," C. S. Lewis famously declared in 1954. "What man in the whole world, except a father or potential father-in-law cares whether any other man gets married," he concluded, although perhaps not pursuing the implication to its logical conclusion. Previously, back in 1938, Louis P. Benezet, a Professor at Dartmouth College published a slim book entitled, *Shakspere, Shakespeare, and De Vere*. The book gained widespread and even international attention for the "test" it offered to critics of English literature. These were challenged to distinguish between lines from the known poems of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, as compared to lines from Shakespeare. It is not known what percentage of English scholars and professors 'passed' the test, but Benezet had made his point, nevertheless. On the face of it, it was

almost impossible to tell the poetry of one from the other. But Benezet's other premise, that the older poet of the Sonnets is actually to be understood as the *father* of the Fair Youth was almost forgotten, until someone, namely Mr. Whittemore, took pen in hand to chase the proposition to its logical conclusion, and some will say, even beyond.

No one can credibly deny that the mysterious poet and playwright whom we call 'Shakespeare,' bore a powerful and long-standing affection for the younger Earl of Southampton. In 1593 and 1594, the first works ever to appear under the 'Shakespeare' name appeared in the bookseller's shops of London: namely, the two, long narrative poems entitled *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* respectively. Each was dedicated to the 3rd Earl of Southampton in the most laudatory terms, and the first of the two, *Venus and Adonis*, was curiously related to the theme of the Marriage Sonnets, containing as it did a rather shocking moral object lesson for the younger Earl, whether or not he was still considering a marriage with Oxford's daughter. In the poem, as in its ancient classical model, the handsome mortal youth, Adonis, is ultimately seduced by the lustful and domineering goddess of love, Venus, while subsequent to this seduction, Adonis is fatally gored in the groin by a wild boar.

It has never taken a rocket-scientist to figure out that, despite adulation and adoration of Southampton in the dedication, the fair Adonis of the poem stands as a figure for Southampton's own 'fair youth;' for in the year when *Venus and Adonis* was printed and published, Southampton at 20 was just a year short of his majority. Moreover, if Southampton saw through the guise of the poet's pseudonym, he may well have recognized the Earl of Oxford in the relevant heraldic fauna; for upon Edward de Vere's coat-of-arms as the Viscount of Bulbec ---a title which Oxford held since his twelfth year--- there is emblazoned a standing lion, symbol of royalty, brandishing, and, conceivably, 'shaking' a spear. And on Oxford's coat of arms as scion of the ancient De Vere family, there was likewise emblazoned a blue boar, tusks in evidence and looking deadly. Was Oxford, in this first work published under the 'Shakespeare' name, warning the young Earl not to fall under Her Majesty's power to quite the same extent that Oxford previously had done? For if the Adonis of the poem stood for Southampton, who could the lustful Venus represent if not the Queen of England, Elizabeth herself? By this time, we speculate that Oxford had given up hoping Southampton would marry his daughter, and may even have been warning the younger man against such a union, since that or some other arranged marriage was evidently the Queen's intention for him.

Be that as it may, and whether or not Southampton understood it to be so, it would seem that, on some level, he took the object-lesson implicit in *Venus and Adonis* very much to heart. At twenty-two, without asking anyone's permission, he courted and wed Court beauty, Elizabeth Vernon, one of the Queen's Maids of Honor. It was clearly a victory for self-determination and true love, but it would not be without its darker consequences.

The marriage was a happy one, according to Antonia Fraser writing in her biography of *Mary, Queen of Scots*, but Queen Elizabeth did not take such raids on her household lightly. Moreover, Elizabeth Vernon was a cousin of the Earl of Essex, and when a child of the new

union was born, which happened rather sooner than many would have expected, Southampton and his new bride would name the daughter "Penelope," after Essex's sister. This Penelope had been the model for Sidney's Stella of the *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet sequence, so that, in a sense, the old Romantic/Euphuist rivalry was continued, now in a non-literary arena.

By marrying for true love, Southampton had placed himself firmly in the orbit of the Earl of Essex, and Essex, once a great favorite of the Queen, was now already in the twilight of Her Majesty's good graces. This was an attachment which would have serious consequences for both men. Southampton had already angered the Queen by impregnating one of her Maids of Honor. A man could be beheaded for less, possibly because the Maids of Honor were privy to some of *le plus intimate* matters of the kingdom. In Southampton's case, he was clearly in her disfavor, and matters were not at all improved when Essex took him to Ireland, and appointed him Commander of the Horse. He was now effectively Second in Command of Her Majesty's forces in rebellious Ireland.

While heading a force of 17,000 English soldiers in Dublin, Essex and Southampton infuriated the Queen by failing to engage the rebellious Earl of Tyrone in the field, choosing to negotiate instead. Even more displeasing but unknown to her, they were in secret communication with King James VI of Scotland about the Stuart king's possible succession to the English throne in event of Elizabeth I's death. Elizabeth's most trusted minister, Robert Cecil, was engaged in secret correspondence with James on this head as well, and so was a nobleman known only by his code name of "Forty," whom some have putatively identified as none other than Lord Oxford, himself.

But amongst all these various transgressions of her wishes, Queen Elizabeth would hold Southampton and Essex most responsible, and upon their return to England, Essex in particular would be led, step by step, along the royal road to financial ruin. At the height of his popularity with the people, Essex was at low ebb in the affections of his Queen, and, in the end, it was her royal will, and her will only, which would prevail. Essex and Southampton would ultimately be provoked to rash action, resulting in Essex's eventual execution, and to Southampton's being stripped of his high noble title, disgraced and imprisoned in the Tower.

In accordance with Mr. Whittemore's premise, the major portion of the SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS collection is the poetic chronicle of that three year imprisonment, all written to and about Southampton during his disgrace which lasted until the death of Queen Elizabeth in March of 1603. It was clearly a time of anguish for both Oxford and Southampton, but it would end with an unexpected burst of sunshine: to wit, Southampton's eventual liberation from the Tower and reinstallation as Earl of Southampton. In fact, his release from prison, ordered from Edinburgh, was King James VI of Scotland's first act as soon-to-be King of England.

No poet will tell you that sonnets are easy to write. The classic "Shakespearean' sonnet, consists of three four-line stanzas of alternate-rhyming iambic pentameter, capped by a two-

line self-rhyming couplet, comprising fourteen lines in all. It may be no accident that the most probable dates of composition for the major portion of the *Shake-Speare Sonnets*--- from 1600 to 1603---coincide with and closely follow some of the most intensive creative activity of the famously-mysterious playwright, 'Shakespeare.' For who was better equipped to earn the poetic laurels, if not the playwright with the 50,000 word vocabulary, who had written, literally *acres* of blank verse, dramatically traversing the full gamut of problematic scenarios and intense human emotions?

That brings us to another characteristic of the Sonnet form, namely the fact, generally speaking, every true sonnet finds its genesis in some strongly-felt emotion. The milk-toast poet does not create great sonnets, no matter how diligently he plys his craft: men of passion do. Patience, persistence, and technical excellence all play their part, but only to the extent that they master the primal fire which burns in the truly poetic breast. The writer of great sonnets is a tamer of lions and tigers, and even more fearsome beasts. His literary greatness —if the truth about this rare breed be known— lies in his consummate skill with the whip, the chair, and the occasional pistol shot.

We don't know why William Rose Benet ---brother by-the-way of the American poet Stephen.Vincent Benet--- calls SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS "*mysterious,*" but we have a pretty good idea of why he calls the collection "*unorthodox*." Even the casual reader of the Sonnets will realize that they are distinguished from the two great sonnet-sequences which preceded them ---namely Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* and Gabriel Spenser's *Amoretti*--- by the fact that they are occasioned, not by the emotions of romantic love: that is, by the love between a man and a woman; but rather by the emotions which may sometimes be experienced by one man for another: by what may be best characterized as the kind of love felt by a father for his beloved son. Both C. S. Lewis and Louis Benezet recognized this unique feature of SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS, and Mr. Whittemore has crafted this paternal affection ---sometimes complicated by an eternal, if not an Oedipal, love-hate triangle--- into a key which effectively unlocks the Sonnet's many secrets, which ultimately bring even the Dark Lady into the light.**

It is perhaps a sign of the poet's genius, and of Mr. Whittemore's genius as well, that the Sonnets can be read and appreciated on any or all of several distinct levels. That paternal love may be natural and even biological, or its most fundamental nature may be literary and Platonic. Similarly, the conflicted feelings engendered by the love of both the older and younger men for the unnamed Dark Lady may be understood as carnal in its essence, or as entirely metaphorical: the entire poetic sequence ultimately distilling itself down to a complex allegory of the struggle for personal identity, and that amidst the unreasonable demands of public policy and the harsh realties of *realpolitik*.

If the reader of Mr. Whittemore's *The Monument* is able to keep his mind on the lofty parameters of Plato's Realm of Ideas and even upon that Heaven which is the reward of Christian virtue, even as the author delineates the very real and earthly---not to say, earthy---material world in which the original occasional events were embedded, he will, himself, have achieved a measure of genius which is not vouchsafed to every reader in the present

age.

As complete and compelling as *The Monument* is, and as monumental as it must be in its 843 folio-sized pages, it will very probably not appear on this year's best-seller list ---and indeed, if it did, its publisher, Meadow Geese Press, would be hard put to locate enough paper and ink to produce it. And yet, epoch-making as the volume undoubtedly is, we cannot imagine but that it will eventually appear in smaller, more portable editions, and, if we had to pick one book which lovers of the English language will be reading in 100 or 200 or 300 years, Whittemore's *The Monument* would be our guess.

As for SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS, themselves, we are pretty certain why William Rose Benet calls them "*untitled*." For what can be assumed from the appellation but that the "title" has been added to the collection as a kind of label by the publisher: an approximation of the truth, but not truly the poet's own "title" for his greatest poetic Masterpiece.

The truth of that view is signalized by the fact that on every extant copy of "Q" ---there are only thirteen individual copies in 3 versions, all copies in very good condition---the space between the two parallel lines on the title-page, just under the ersatz 'title,' has been pointedly left blank in every version.

The message of the publisher, then and now, is clear: the true name of the book's author has not been given.

This omission now becomes a defect which author, Hank Whittemore, and Steven Aucella, the publisher of the Meadow Geese Press, have remedied in the present volume. THE MONUMENT by Hank Whittemore in its First Edition, First Printing, February 2005, Reference Edition. The impressive volume bears a front-cover which is a kind of facsimile of the original SHAKE-SPEARE'S SONNETS tile-page, and there, beneath that title, which William Rose Benet would not recognize as a title; below the subscript, "Never before Imprinted;" and between Whittemore's modern additions with, "THE MONUMENT," above and his own name "Hank Whittemore" below: just there, at long last, are the two parallel lines bearing the true name of the true author of the SONNETS of SHAKE-SPEARE, nicely sandwiched between them:

By *Edward de Vere*, 17*th* Earl of Oxford.

It is this observer's belief that the truly superior person will focus his or her attention on the real story, as it is contained in the SONNETS and illuminated by the poetic spirit of the inimitable SHAKE-SPEARE. The earthly-minded man will focus on the material circumstances from which the real story may or may not have arisen.

In both Edward de Vere's consummate collection of *Shake-Speare's Sonnets*, and in Whittemore's superb volume, *The Monument*, the choice is the same.

A handful of immortality, or a handful of dust. Take whichever appeals to you most.

Respectfully submitted,

---William. Bronnegal

New Canaan. **July 26, 2005**

Notes:

***[Feuillerat, p. 148, quoted in Bernard M. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (1928), p. 277.] Feuillerat was writing, not of the *Shake-Speare's Sonnets*, volume, but of two of the Court comedies of the mid-1580's, *Sapho* and *Phao*, ostensibly credited in the *Stationer's Register* to John Lyly, but which Feuillerat and Ward clearly believe to have been written anonymously by the Edward de Vere.**

The third of Ward's six reasons for crediting Oxford for these and others of the Court comedies is given as follows.

> **" [Reason #] 3. The allegorical character of the plays, especially of *Sapho and Phao-,* is quite out of keeping with Lyly's social position. Given the subject matter, it is unlikely he would have dared to be so bold, nor would such boldness on his. part have been likely to pass censorship. *Sapho and Phao* is a thinly veiled, romanticized version of the Queen's relationship with Duc d' Anjou. That it did pass censorship suggests that it was viewed as coming from Lord Oxford, rather than from Lyly. Feuillerat sums up the matter in impeccable French: "*Comment peut-on admettere qu'un dramatiste ait ete assez audacieux pour mettle a la scene les sentiments les plus intimes les plus secrets de le reine!*" [Feuillerat, p. 148. Ward, p. 277.] The "most intimate and secret sentiments of the reign" should not have been Lyly's domain."**

**** Stephen Vincent Benet (1898-1943), author of the American Civil War epic, *John Brown's Body*, and numerous collections of poetry and short stories, as well as several novels. *Western Star*, the first part of an American epic was left unfinished at his death, but was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize. *John Brown's Body*, his most famous poem, also won a Pulitzer. Among his best known stories, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, was included in his *Thirteen O'Clock* collection published in 1937.**

William Rose Benet (1886-1950) was Stephen's elder brother. A writer of much poetry himself, it was collected in volumes published from 1913 to 1951. His verse autobiography, *The Dust Which is God* (1941) won a Pulitzer Prize. He was one of the founders of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, serving on its editorial board and writing a column called "The Phoenix Nest" for many years. He was the original editor of The Reader's Encyclopedia, first published by Thomas Y. Crowell Publishers, est. 1834, New York, in 1948 and 1955. [Second edition copyright 1965, Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., Illustrations Editor: Robert H. Snyder, Jr. Preface by William Rose Benet, 1118 pp.] -- W.B.