

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR



SUNNET 33, punning on "sun" and "son," with the "region cloud" standing for Regina's dark fiat of disavowal, which "masked" the son, her heir and Oxford's, tells the story with graphic simplicity:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with *sovereign* eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy,
Anon permit the *basest* clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so *my sun* one early morn did shine
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out! alack! *he was but one hour mine:*
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.

The choice of words, we may feel sure, is far from being unstudied. "Basest clouds" alludes to the stigma of bastardy; and certainly Elizabeth, the *roi soleil*, had found herself "stealing unseen to west with this disgrace." For, although the facts connected with his birth have been too well-concealed for us to ascertain them, the son—or sun, the hereditary *roi soleil*—was indubitably "a little western flower." The expression "suns of the world" makes the pun unmistakable.

Here again is the familiar "stain," applied to both the son and Regina. And one recalls a speech made, strikingly enough, by the Dauphin, in *King John*, which employs similar word-play:

The *shadow of myself* form'd in her eye;
Which being but the *shadow of your son*,
Becomes a *sun*, and makes your *son a shadow*. (II.1.498-500.)

In this connection it is interesting to find Gilbert Talbot signing a letter to his father, of May 25, 1573, "Yor. Lo' most humble and obedient Sun."¹

¹ Nicholas: *Progresses*, vol. I, p. 331.

There is no question that Oxford, as well as other writers, continually used the word "sun" with a double meaning.² He was punning in the opening lines of *Richard III.*:

Gloucester. Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this *sun* of York.

Two more examples will suffice. The first the scene (I.H.IV.; II.4.14-18) in which Falstaff impersonates the King chiding Prince Hal:

If then thou be *son* to me, here lies the point: why, being *son* to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed *sun of heaven* prove a mitcher and eat blackberries? . . . Shall the *son of England* prove a thief and take purses?

The other, Sonnet 43:

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unsuspected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
Then thou, *whose shadow shadows doth make bright*,
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with *thy much clearer light*,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!
How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,
When in dead night *thy fair imperfect shade*
Through heavy sleep on *sightless eyes doth stay*!

Here he writes of the youth as the sun, whose shadow makes even shadows bright. When the poet, the father, closes his eyes, the brightness, like that of the real sun, is reflected on the retina, making bright dark and dark bright; which is the effect of gazing fixedly at the sun. "Thy much clearer light" (than daylight) is of course sunlight. And "thy fair imperfect shade" refers again to the kind of image left upon closed eyes after they have looked intently at the sun.

Phaeton, to prove that he was the true son of Phoebus, the sun, drove his chariot too near the earth and stained the Ethiopians black. The "little changeling boy" was black with the stain of the sun—the "stain" of the *roi soleil*, as well as with that of his father, who was the knight of the Tree of the Sun. Fantastic; but it all fits together.

After considerable reflection, we have concluded that No. 26 is probably the first sonnet in a second group, when the boy has emerged from childhood; it may follow 126. Lord Oxford is thinking of the "white star or molette" which guided his ancestor at the time of the Crusades, and which was thereafter emblazoned on the Vere crest.

² Chapman, after James's accession, wrote *An Amigram of the name of our dread Prince . . . Henry, Prince of Wales, Our Sonne, Heir, Peace, Life*.

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
 To thee I send this written ambassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit:
 Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
 May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,
 But that I hope some good conceit of thine
 In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it,
Till whatsoever star that guides my moving
Points on me graciously with fair aspect
 And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,
 To show me worthy of thy sweet respect.
 Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
 Till then not show my head where thou mayst prove me. (26.)

Who else but Edward de Vere, with his special history, with his sensitiveness and pride, and his feudal background, could have written this to any young nobleman? So wrote the author of *Lucrece* in his dedication to Southampton. The youth does not yet know that the poet is his father. It is "thy merit" which "hath my duty strongly knit."

No. 27, belonging to this same early period and showing the Earl's preoccupation with the boy whom he now has for his own, was evidently written in 1585, when he set forth for Flanders:

Wearied with toil, I haste me to my bed,
 The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
 But then begins a journey in my head
 To work my mind, when body's work's expired.

He sees his son in his mind's eye:

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

His son was always like a sun shining at night. (The "jewel" phrase suggests *Romeo and Juliet*, which also belongs to the early 1580's.)

Night is "ghastly" to him because he suffers from insomnia. He returns from his expedition in late summer, as No. 97 indicates; (Oxford returned from Flanders in early September, 1585;) yet because his sun has not been near, he has felt chilled. Of course these had been dark days for him in other respects too.

How like a winter hath my absence been
 From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
 What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen,
 What old December's bareness every where!

³ "The star to every wandering bark" of No. 116 is the same Vere mentioned star. It is of course the Fair Youth's, as well as his father's. In *Cyn. Rev.* (V.2), Amorphus says: "Here is a hair too much. . . . Where are thy *multitudes*?"

And yet this time removed was *summer's time*,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
 Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
 Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decrease.
 Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
 But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;
 For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
 And, thou away, the very birds are mute. . . . (97.)

Nos. 98 and 99 seem, as we have said, to belong with this. In the summer of 1588, Oxford left London to command his ship, the *Edward Bonaventure*, in the battle of the Armada. It may well have been at this time that he wrote several of the sonnets to the youth, who was then in his fifteenth year.

How careful was I when I took my way,
 Each trifle under truest bars to thrust,
 That to my use it might unused stay
 From *hands of falsehood* in sure wards of trust!
 But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
 Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
 Thou, best of dearest and mine only care,
 Art left the *prey of every vulgar thief*.
 Thee have I not lock'd up in any chest,
 Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,
 Within the gentle closure of my breast,
 From whence at pleasure thou mayst come and part;
 And even thence *thou wilt be stol'n*, I fear,
 For *truth proves thief*ish for a prize so dear. (48.)

This was written by a man possessed of jewels, who kept his valuables in chests—like Lord Oxford, who had written Bedingfield, in 1573, that his work was far too excellent to be "murdered . . . in the waste bottom of my chests." He is leaving his son behind as he starts on a journey, though apprehensive that he may be corrupted by the "vulgar" playthings who have already begun to court his favors. If they learn the "truth" of his identity, or even of his worth, they will wish to steal his favors for themselves.

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
 Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,
 The which he will not every hour survey,
 For *blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure*.
 Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare:
 Since, seldom coming, in the long year set,
 Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
 Or *captain jewels in the carnel*.
 So is the time that keeps you, as my chest,
 Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide,
 To make some special instant special blest
 By new-unfolding his imprison'd pride.
 Blessed are you whose worthiness gives scope,
 Being had, to triumph, being lack'd, to hope. (52.)

As Canon Rendall observes, in this sonnet, "peer speaks to peer." Although not to be overstressed, there is evidence in *line* 4 that this sonnet was, indeed, written in 1588, since *Macbeth*, which belongs also to 1588-89, expresses the same idea (III.1.42-4):

... to make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till supper-time alone.

No. 50 begins,

How heavy do I journey on my way . . .

He had a long, fatiguing journey, his horse, responsive to his mood, seeming to plod dully; but he reflects that it will be different when he returns:

Since from thee going he went wilful slow,
Towards thee I'll run and give him leave to go. (51.)

No. 61 may belong to the same series, while he is still absent from the beloved youth, or it may have been written later, when Southampton was on the Continent. And none of the intensely paternal sonnets is more touchingly so than this:

Is it thy will thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows, like to thee, do mock my sight?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home into my deeds to pry,
To find out shames and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenure of thy jealousy?
O, no! *thy love*, though much, is *not so great*:
It is *my love* that keeps mine eye awake,
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play the watchman *ever* for thy sake;
For thee watch I whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near. (61.)

This could only have been addressed by a parent to a child, for the parent's love and care is always the greater, and implicit with anxiety.

It may be well to observe here, parenthetically, that No. 89 is equally characteristic of parental love. The poet will do anything for his son's happiness, to the extent of complete self-effacement:

I will acquaintance strangle and look strange,
Be absent from thy walks, and in my tongue
Thy sweet beloved name no more shall dwell,
Lest I, too much profane, should do it wrong,
And haply of *our old acquaintance* tell.

If, as we suppose, the above sonnets were written at the time the Earl was preparing for his part in the great naval battle, No. 60 must belong with them. He had reached the coast now—probably at Dover—and had time for meditation.⁴

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end. (60.)

Meditation brings melancholy in its train. He broods upon the "crooked eclipses" which have darkened his own glory and upon what Time will do to the youth in his turn.

One feels almost irresistibly tempted to explore all the alluring pathways revealed by the Sonnets, but that cannot, of course, be done here. There are others written during times of separation, some when the older man was away, some when the younger had gone either to the Continent or to Ireland with Essex; and the father attempts to console himself with his son's portrait. (Nos. 46-47.)

The eternizing sonnets speak for themselves. Interestingly enough, as Canon Rendall remarks, "The craving for immortality nowhere takes the form of religious conviction or belief, yet it persistently haunts the imagination of the writer." But, we may well ask, is not this natural? The Earl of Oxford had, in his dramas, perpetuated the memory of many of the kings of England: why should he not wish that of his son, a rightful king, to be immortal? He was concerned with the perpetuation of his own honour too. It was when he had lost his reputation that Cassio said, "I have lost the immortal part of myself."

Sleeping as he was in the philosophy of Plato, this great poet knew with Socrates that men "are ready to run all risks" for "an immortality of fame."

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It seems that Lord Oxford was to find his fears realized. The playwrights lost no time in spoiling the youth with their flattery, the poets began singing his praises in fulsome verse, some bad, some too good for the father's comfort. He himself had been a great innovator, but at times now he felt he was slipping. He seems to have been a merciless critic of his own work, as is demonstrated by his frequent revision of the plays, to say nothing of his "true-fled lines" and the high excellence of all his poems and dramas. Though he knew in his heart that the Sonnets would live, he had moments of black misgiving, times of dejection and gloom—

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,

⁴ A tantalizing speculation arises in this connection from the scene between Gloucester and Edgar at Dover, in *King Lear*, written within the next few years.

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope (19)—

moments when he reminded himself, as Ulysses reminds Achilles (*T. and C.*: III.3) that

... time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
Grasps in the comer.

He did not underrate the Rival Poet—or poets—who had been courting Southampton's patronage. (The young Earl was, in fact, to become the most distinguished patron of literature of his day.) But he felt he had a right above all others to celebrate the Fair Youth's worth in verse, and he does so in No. 76 with that "certain recklessness" which marked Hamlet, the exemplar of Castiglione's perfect courtier. Wordsworth said of the Sonnets, "With this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart." We might be more specific and add that with *this* key, No. 76, he unlocked what, as Hamlet, he called "the heart of my mystery." He clearly says that he cloaks his invention in such a well-known garment that every word he writes almost reveals who he actually is.

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?
O! know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent;
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love, still telling what is told.

There is so much packed into these lines that it is difficult to know where to begin. His "verse" (and also his family, of Veres) is "barren of new pride" (although recognition of the Fair Youth would bring abundant "new pride" to the name.) He prefers to harp in his verse on the same theme: it is a conscious choice. "Ever the same" is E. Vere, the same, and "every word" (E. Ver-y word) practically tells his name. (His name must be hidden, then, if it is only thus tacitly revealed.)

But there is more in this line than that. "Still all one" is a pun on Southampton's motto: *Ung par tout, tout par ung*. And "Ever the same" is, literally, the motto on Elizabeth's armorial badge: *Semper eadem*. So here he brings the august trio together: himself, the Queen, and their son.

Moreover, he confesses that the subject of his invention is always his and their story. We could have no more emphatic corroboration of our interpretation of the poems and dramas than this; for his "invention" is, of course, his creative imagination. He "always" writes of his love and of the Fair Youth (who is one with himself)—he tells us plainly—dressing the same story in new words, rather than telling a new story.

At the close, he uses the sun-son image again (a "noted weed" this, to be sure.) And he says his "love" is like "the sun"; that is, his love for the boy is constantly renewed as the sun is, and his love, the boy himself, is really "the sun": *le roi soleil*.

It is arresting to find, in connection with the play on his name, that Chapman wrote an appeal for the relief of Horatio Vere, besieged at Mannheim, *Pro Vere Autumnae Lachrymae*, calling for the rescue "Of this full Spring of Man, this Vere of Veres."

Whether he is the Rival Poet or not, it is obviously Chapman to whom Oxford alludes in Nos. 21 and 85, prompted by his *Amorous Zodiac* (which title may be a jibe at the Earl's "sun" and "moon" imagery) to protest:

So is it not with me as with that Muse
Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse,
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse,
Making a complement of proud compare
With sun and moon, with earth's and sea's rich gems,
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.
O! let me true in love but truly write,
And then believe me, my love is as fair
As any mother's child, though not so bright
As those gold candles fix'd in heaven's air:
Let them say more that like of hear-say well;
I will not praise that purpose not to sell. (21.)

This is somewhat disingenuous, since he had called his love a "sun," but his distaste for poetic flattery is understandable; and it is amiable satire. An expression of Chapman's was "painted light," and the word "rondure" twits the pedantic poet for his predilection for substantives in -ure: "extensure," etc. But in *Love's Labour's Lost*, in the final revision of which Chapman may have shared with Harvey the honor of being Holofornes, Oxford is more tart:

Princess. Good Lord Boyet, my beauty, though but mean,
Needs not the *painted* flourish of the eye,
Not utter'd by base *sale* of *chapman's* tongues. (II.1.13-6)

Since Chapman's poems were not published, and put on "sale," before the mid-1590's, this sonnet must belong to the latter part of the decade. The satirical word or phrase went round, reverberating in the work of other writers. Jonson, in one of his jealous fits, seized on Oxford's "painted beauty," saying in his role of Crites,

O vanity,
How are thy *painted beauties* doted on
By *light* and *empty* idiots! how pursued
With open and extended appetite! (*Cyn. Rev.*: I.)

He pretends to scorn the poets who were suing for Southampton's favor; but no man was more sycophantic than Jonson himself in seeking patronage. He pretends to look down upon courtiers, and when Crites presents Amorphus-Oxford to Asotus-Southampton, he speaks of them aside as "a brace of butterflies."

In No. 85 the reference is to Chapman's Hymns, *In Noctem*, and *In Cynthium*—the latter in praise of Sir Francis Vere—when Oxford says:

I think good thoughts, while others write good words,
And, like unletter'd clerk, still cry "Amen!"
To every *hymn* that *able spirit* affords,
In polish'd form of well-refined pen.

He was generous, and he respected Chapman's learning.

The "able spirit" seems not to be the "better spirit" of No. 80. For No. 80 evidently complements No. 86, which we believe refers to Marlowe, suggestive as it is of his rather grandiose style, notably in *Tamburlaine*, where the description of a Turkish galleon affords the beautiful metaphor in the first two lines of this sonnet:

Was it the *proud full sail* of his *great verse*,
Round for the prize of all too precious you,
Was it his *spirit by spirits taught* to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
No, neither he, nor his conceits by night
Giving him aid, my verse astonished.
He, nor that *affable familiar ghost*
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
As victors of my silence cannot boast;
I was not sick of any fear from thence;
But *when your countenance fill'd up his line*,
Then lack'd I matter: that enfeebled mine. (86.)

The allusion here has been thought to be aimed at Chapman, with the "affable familiar ghost" Roydon, a close friend of Raleigh's, who

kept him informed of affairs. But, in our opinion, while the poet pays deference in No. 85 to Chapman, who had recently translated Homer—so scholarly a performance that he calls himself an "unletter'd clerk" in comparison—it is Marlowe to whom he refers in 86 and 80, and the "affable familiar ghost" is Mephistopheles to Marlowe's Faustus. There would seem to be some corroboration of this in the following passage from *Every Man Out of His Humour* (III.1):

Fastidious. Mass, yonder's the knight Puntarvolo.
Deliro. And my cousin, Sogliardo, methinks.
Maciente. Ay, and his *familiar* that *haunts him*, the *devil with the shining face*.

As for the statement, "But when your countenance fill'd up his line," the reference is undoubtedly to Marlowe's description of Tamburlaine (*Tam*, Pt I.: II.1.21-30), which seems to be a flattering picture of Southampton.

While he felt genuine intellectual humility in confessing

My saucy bark inferior far to his,
it was in bitterness that Oxford added,

Then if he thrive and I be cast away,
The worst was this:—my love was my decay. (80.)

Chapman is indubitably the poet referred to in No. 78:

So oft have I invok'd thee for my Muse
And found such fair assistance in my verse
As *every alien pen* hath got my use
And under thee their poesy disperse.
Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to sing
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have *added feathers* to the *learned's wing*
And given grace a double majesty.

But thou art *all my art*, and dost advance
As *high as learning* my *rude ignorance*.

Several points must be made here. First, the "fair assistance" has a double meaning. The Youth is the fair subject of his verse—gives him, that is, a fair subject for his pen; but he is a patron of the other poets and gives them tangible assistance. As for the writer's "rude ignorance,"⁵ he merely meant—perhaps not without irony—that he had not the academic scholarship of which the pedantic Chapman and Jonson, especially, were so smugly conscious. "Added feathers to the learned's wing" glances at Chapman's:

⁵ The learned commentator, T. W. Baldwin, has the following to say, apropos of this sonnet: "Shakespeare [sic] has no Art, only rude ignorance, but with his patron as muse, he has been equal to learning, even when that learning itself was inspired by the patron."—*William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Less Greeke*; vol. I, p. 16.

Never shall my friendless verse envy
 Muses that *Fame's loose feathers* beauty.
 Muses that *Fame's loose feathers* beauty,
 And such as scorn to tread the theatre,
 As ignorant. . . .

It may be Chapman and Marlowe, but more likely Chapman and himself, whom he singles out when concluding No. 83:

There lives more life in one of your fair eyes
 Than both your poets can in praise devise.

No. 32 must have been one of the last of this series. The father ad-
 jures the youth, if he should, after his "lover's" death, chance to look
 over these verses and find them "Exceeded by the height of happier
 men," to remember that, had he lived, he might have kept up with
 the times, bidding him say to himself,

But since he died, and poets better prove,
 Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.

We are bound to observe that Lord Oxford, like several of the char-
 actors who represent him in the dramas, was inclined to be, if—as
 Othello puts it—"not easily jealous, when wrought, perplex'd in the
 extreme." He is very gracious about it here: as in No. 79, for instance;
 he tries to reason fairly in No. 82. But apart from this, he was nat-
 urally concerned about the fact that his own influence, as well as the
 environment into which he had introduced the attractive young gal-
 lant, had led to his being spoiled and somewhat soiled too.

He warns his son not to be taken in by flattery:

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
 I love not less, though less the show appear;
 That love is *merchandiz'd* whose rich esteeming
 The owner's tongue doth publish every where. (102.)

And he reminds him of his own constancy and their essential oneness
 in a sonnet replete with identity-clues—"ever, verse, true"—with puns
 on "one" and "wondrous" pointing up a suggestion of Southamp-
 ton's motto again, *Ung par tout, tout par ung*, in lines 3 and 4:

Let not my love be call'd idolatry,
 Nor my beloved as an idol show,
 Since all alike my songs and praises be
 To one, of one, still such, and ever so. (105.)

Jonson has this sonnet in mind when Amorphus speaks of being "the
true idolater of your beauties" (*Cyn. Rev.*: V.2.)

In No. 56, the poet exhorts the youth to keep himself fresh, not
 become jaded: "Sweet love, renew thy force. . . ." There has been
 comment here and there, he says, upon the "shame" of voluptuous-
 ness which spots "the beauty of thy budding name";

Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege;
 The hardest knife, ill-used, doth lose his edge. (95.)

You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
 Being fond on praise, which makes your praises worse. (84.)

In No. 94, he seems to be holding up Horatio Vere, who is so
 clearly the temperate Horatio of *Hamlet*, as an example:

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
 That do not do the thing they most do show,
 Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
 Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow;
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
 And husband nature's riches from expense;
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,
 Others but stewards of their excellence.
 The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
 Though to itself it only live and die,
 But if that flower with base infection meet,
 The basest weed outbraves his dignity:

For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.⁶

He repeats this idea in No. 69, which concludes with,

But why thy odour matcheth not thy show,
 The soil is this,—that thou dost common grow.

The Sonnets are full of such word-play as this: "common, weeds, soil,
 grow."

Evidently the Fair Youth retorted that his life was his own, as
 youths are prone to do. For the father winces, and responds with dig-
 nified humility:

Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
 The *charter of thy worth* gives 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 fair gift in me is wanting,
 And so my patent back again is swerving.
 Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing,
 Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
 Comes home again, on better judgment making.
 Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
 In sleep a king, but waking, no such matter!⁷ (87.)

⁶ This final line occurs in *Edward III* (II.1), which is unquestionably an early play
 of Oxford's.

⁷ Cf. *Cymbeline*: V.1.127-9; and also Bottom's dream.

He has spoken before of the youth's charter,⁸ in No. 58:

Be where you list, your *charter* is so strong
'That you yourself may privilege your time
To what you will. . . .

Both these sonnets indicate the exalted status of the Fair Youth.

There would seem to have ensued a temporary estrangement, the young Earl having resented being shown up in his pride and vanity. The poet probably suffered more than his son did, and he was far more vulnerable besides, partly from experience in suffering. Soon, however, they were friends again.

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
Distill'd from limbes foul as hell within,
Applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win!
What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never!
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted,
In the distraction of this madding fever!
O benefit of ill! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better;
And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.

So I return rebuk'd to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent. (119)

But apparently he kept apart from the young man for a while after this, for he had been deeply hurt. It would seem to be in response to the youth's advances that he wrote 118 and 117. No. 116 belongs to a later date and a more serious situation.

It may be at this time that he confesses, in 110,

Alas! 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
God's mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new. . . .

Here we are reminded of the boar, the "invisible commander," his creative genius, which forced him to sell cheap what was "most dear" and should have been kept private, goring his thoughts. He puns on his name and the responsibility it entails when he continues:

Most *true* it is that I have look'd on *truth*
Askance and strangely. . . .

And he may also refer to his habit of dramatizing "truth" and "Vere." But he has found himself revitalized by doing so. Which is much the same thing he says in No. 119.

⁸ The Oxford Dictionary defines *charter* as, "Written grant of rights by sovereign or legislature. . . . privilege, admitted right."

No. 111 glances back at No. 66:

O! for my sake do you with *Fortune* chide,
The guilty goddess of my *harmful deeds*,
That did not better for my life provide
Than *public means* which *public manners* breeds.
Thence comes it that my *name* receives a *brand*,
And almost thence my *nature* is *subdu'd*
To what it *works in*, like the dyer's hand;
Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd. . . .

He could scarcely be more outspoken than this. His great name has been sullied by his work in the theatre. Like Romeo, he is "Fortune's fool."

No. 112, in the same vein, is infinitely moving. His genius has made him a pariah. (Nos. 71 and 72, though written later, stress this fact.)

Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
.

You are so strongly in my purpose bred
That all the world besides methinks are dead. (112.)

This was composed in a time of great melancholy by a man who was acutely sensitive.

It was, of course, impossible that the love of the two Earls should "run smooth." Both were too temperamental, and both too wilful—one too demanding, the other too much sought after. It was not long before the Fair Youth was being courted by someone else. The Dark Lady had come into the picture.

As to her identity, Anne Vavasor, the "dark wanton," perfectly fulfills the requirements. She had fascinated Oxford from the first, and there is reason to believe that she continued to do so. She was a siren who never lacked admiring suitors and was, in 1618, actually fined for bigamy, though the fine was afterwards remitted. She is the witty "dark Rosaline" of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and she is Phebe, of *As You Like It*, enamoured of the "fair youth," Rosalind, while tormenting the shepherd (poet) Silvius, who loves her, precisely as the Dark Lady torments the poet of the Sonnets.

Oxford has said frankly in the plays that he had been a libertine. In sonnet 142 he tells the Dark Lady that she has been no better than he:

O! but with mine compare thou thine own state,
And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;
Or, if it do, not from those lips of thine,
That have profan'd their scarlet ornaments
And seal'd false bonds of love as oft as mine,
Robb'd others' beds' revenues of their rents. . . .

One day he finds that she has been exercising her seductions upon his son, who, like the father at his age, has become fascinated by an older woman, not only schooled in the ways of love but also possessing unusual wit. Deeply distressed, he communes with himself in 144:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman, colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd fend
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell:
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (144.)

We hope a digression may be pardoned here. It is especially interesting that in 2 *Henry IV* (II.4.345-7), Falstaff, speaking of the Page, says:

For the boy, there is a *good angel* about him; but the *devil* outbids him too.

This passage was evidently added in a revision. And Jonson, ever alert to satirize Oxford and the Fair Youth, did not miss his chance, after he had seen, or heard about, Sonnet 144. Moreover, he had seen *Titus Andronicus* played in the theatres and had not failed to grasp the implications concerning the son of Aaron and Tamora—"Is black so base a hue?" He was bold, indeed, in his allusion to all this in *Cynthia's Revels* (V.2), where Mercury addresses Amorphus:

Mercury. Signior, your scholar might have played well still, if he could have kept his seat longer. . . . He is a mere piece of *glass*.⁹ I see through him by this time.
Amorphus. You come not to give us the scorn, monsieur?
Mercury. Nor to be frighted with a face, signior. I have seen the *lions*. You must pardon me. I shall be loth to hazard a reputation with one that has not a *reputation* to lose.
Amorphus. How!
Mercury. Meaning your pupil, sir.
Anaides. This is that *black devil* there.
Amorphus. You do offer a *strange affront*, monsieur.
. . . .
Asolus. Slight, monsieur, *meddle with me*, do you hear; *but do not meddle with my master*.
. . . .

⁹ Sonnet 3: "Thou art thy mother's *glass*." And see Nos. 77 and 103.

Amorphus. . . I will prosecute what disgrace my hatred can dictate to me.
Critas. How tender a *traveller's* spleen is! Comparison to men that deserve least is *ever* most offensive.

We have no doubt that it was in angry resentment of such impudence as this that Oxford took up *Troilus and Cressida* again, making Jonson Ajax and also partially Thersites. He had been kind to "honest Ben," helping him to get his start in the theatre,¹⁰ but if this were the way it was to be, he would play the game with vigor.

We return to the Dark Lady. The poet is aware that more is going on than meets the eye. He prefers for the time being not to learn the worst. He writes the youth:

Thou mayst be false, and yet I know it not (92);
and

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband; so love's face
May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:
For there can live no hatred in thine eye.
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change. (93.)

But presently it becomes too flagrant to ignore. The older man tries to make the best of it: he cannot face another break with the beloved youth. And so he writes No. 40 to him, in the forbearing spirit of the fond father giving way once more:

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all;
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?
No love, my love that thou mayst *true* love call;
All mine was thine before thou hadst this more.
Then, if for my love thou my love receivest,
I cannot blame thee for my love thou ushest;
But yet be blam'd, if thou thyself deceivest
By wilful taste of what thyself refusest.
I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;
And yet, love knows it is a greater grief
To bear *love's wrong* than *hate's known injury*.
Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
Kills me with spite, yet *we must not be foes*. (40.)

The young Earl evidently took him at his word, *carte blanche*, and went so far as to spend a while with *la Vavasor* at one of Lord Oxford's country estates, or seats.¹¹ (In *Timon of Athens*, Flavius says of Timon: IV.2.44-6:

¹⁰ Shakespearean tradition says so; and there is corroboration in a passage in *Volpone*, Chap. Seventy-five.

¹¹ The seat in question here may have been either Wivenhoe or Lord Oxford's estate in Warwickshire, Milton, on the Avon, which a hundred years later was to belong to Addison.

Alas! kind lord,
He's flung in rage from this ingrateful seat
Of monstrous friends.)

His father rebukes him gently, in No. 41:

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits,
When I am sometimes absent from thy heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well befits,
For still temptation follows where thou art.
Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd;
And when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till she have prevail'd?
Ay me! but yet thou might'st *my seat* forbear,
And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth,
Who lead thee in their riot even there
Where thou art forc'd to break a twofold truth:
Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee,
Thine, by thy beauty being false to me. (41.)

(The editor, Malone, not being able to envisage the provincial Stratford man with a country seat to which the Earl of Southampton might take his mistress, arbitrarily changed the words to "my sweet!")
In No. 42 the poet is still trying to make the best of it:

That *thou hast her*, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said *I lov'd her dearly*;
That *she hath thee*, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
Thou dost love her because thou know'st *I love her*
And for *my sake* even so doth *she* abuse *me*,
Suffering my friend for *my sake* to approve her.
If *I lose thee*, my loss is *my love's* gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for *my sake* lay on me this cross.
But here's the joy: *my friend and I are one*;
Sweet flattery! then *she loves but me alone*. (42.)

(This and No. 40 afford examples of Oxford's punning on ideas, as well as words: "my love," etc.)

It must have been at this time that he wrote 133 and 134 to Anne Vavasor:

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me!
Is't not enough to torture me alone,
But slave to slavery my sweetest friend must be?
Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,
And *my next self* thou harder hast engross'd;
Of him, myself, and thee I am forsaken;
A torment thrice threefold thus to be cross'd. . . . (133.)

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So now I have confess'd that he is thine,
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will;
Myself I'll forfeit, so that *other mine*
Thou wilt restore, *to be my comfort still*.
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
For thou art covetous, and he is kind;
He learn'd but surety-like to write for me,
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
Thou usurer, that put'st forth all to use,
And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.

Him have I lost; *thou hast both him and me*;
He pays the whole, and yet am I not free. (134.)

"My next self" and "that other mine," his son, had been his "comfort," and he longs to have him released.

Certainly it is this insatiate "dark wanton" who is the recipient of Nos. 135, 136, and 143, the "Will" sonnets, which are still concerned with her seduction of the Fair Youth. For interpretation of the poet's meaning, the play on words must, of course, be taken into account. The capitalized "Will's" stand usually, though not every time and not in the first line, for Will, the poet, afterwards Will Shakespeare, and also for the Fair Youth, who seems to have used the name to cloak his own identity in the theatre. "Will" was not only a pun on Vere, it was besides an Elizabethan synonym for "desire." It is used in this sense in a poem from *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, which puts a certain amorous lady's case as follows:

What plant can *spring* that feels no force of *Vere*?
and continues,

Now, ladies, you that know by whom I sing
And feel the wynter of such frozen *wylls*:
Of curtesie yet cause this noble *spring*
To send his sunshine above highest hills.¹²
Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in over-plus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet *will* making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose *will* is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my *will* in thine?
Shall *will* in others seem right gracious,
And in my *will* no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou, being rich in *Will*, add to thy *Will*
One *will* of mine, to make thy large *Will* more.

¹² See Appendix, note 4 (1).

Let no unkind "No" fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.¹³ (135.)

The meaning is fairly obvious. The sonnet is, at best, a *jeu d'esprit*, probably titillating to Elizabethan taste.

No. 136 is quite plain-spoken, no more delicate, and employs further word-play, this time on the poet's initial, O, which is also zero, or "nothing."

If thy soul check thee that I come so near,
Swear to thy blind soul that I *was* thy *Will*,
And *will*, thy soul knows, is admitted there;
Thus far for love, my love-suit, sweet, fulfil.
Will will fulfil the treasure of thy love,
Ay, fill it full with *wills*, and my *will* one.
In things of great receipt with ease we prove
Among a number one is reckon'd *none*:
Then in the number let *me* pass untold,
Though in thy stores' account I *one* must be;
For *nothing* hold me, so it please thee hold
That *nothing* me, a something sweet to thee:
Make but my *name* thy love, and love that still,
And then thou lov'st me,—for my name is *Will*. (136.)

"My name," that is, which is "nothing," or begins with O, and which is also "Will."

No. 143, the least admirable of the Sonnets, is concerned with the chase of the poet's mistress after his son, while he himself, who depends upon her, is left behind and begs to be noticed again.

It is of this amoral lady, who has a "large will," and in whose number of lovers the poet asks to "pass untold," that he writes in disgust at himself in No. 137:

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
.
.
.
Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?

But apparently he cannot leave her alone.

Many of the Dark Lady Sonnets must have been written long before the Fair Youth attracted her attention. Oxford was probably in her toils during a considerable part of the 1580's. No. 151, for instance, was undoubtedly a rather early one and may indeed belong to his youthful affair with the Queen, as Nos. 153 and 154 obviously

¹³ Cf. the first line of this sonnet with *Cymbeline*: II.3.19-35, which concludes:

... yet 'tis greater skill
In a true hate to pray *they* have *their* will.

do.¹⁴ We should arrange them tentatively in the following order, irregularly spaced as to date: 132, 141, 139, 137, 150, 131, 149, 140, 148, 147, 142, 144, 133, 134, 135, 136, 143, 152. In several one is shown a counterpart of Phebe in *As You Like It*; notably in 140, 141, 142, 143. His mistress is no longer the exquisite and loyal Juliet of their early love; but he still cannot see her realistically.

No. 148 expresses his torment with moving eloquence:

O me! what eyes hath Love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight;
Or, if they have, where is my judgment fled,
That censures falsely what they see aright?
If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so?
If it be not, then love doth well denote
Love's eye is not so true as all men's, *no*.
How can it? O! how can love's eye be true,
That is so vex'd with watching and with tears?
No marvel then, though I mistake my view;
The sun itself sees not till heaven clears.

O cunning Love! with tears thou keep'st me blind,
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find. (148.)

An interesting feature here is the play on words even in a passage fraught with strong feeling: "Love's eye"—or ay—"is not so true as all men's no." And "how can Love's eye"—or ay, or I—"be true?"¹⁵ Doubtless the Fair Youth became contrite in time. And again the father tried to make the best of things.

No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done;
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing *thy trespass* with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;

¹⁴ There is an anecdote told by several historians concerning Elizabeth and one of her courtiers, whose identity is unknown: one supposes he was Leicester, another thinks Raleigh; but he would seem surely to have been the young Oxford, since he speaks of climbing and falling at court, a subject upon which he touches many times in both plays and Sonnets and may be lewdly punning on in No. 151. The story goes that a certain courtier, while wooing his Royal Mistress, wrote with a diamond ring upon a window-pane:

Fain would I climb,
But that I fear to fall;

whereupon the Queen, seizing the ring, etched the following reply:

If thy heart fail thee,
Do not climb at all.

¹⁵ The Sonnets abound with these "phonetic jingles," as Canon Rendall calls them; for example, wit-witness (26); ruin-rutinous (64); pen-penny (84); you-youth (98); lie-lives (112); morning-mourning (132).

For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,—
Thy adverse party is thy advocate,—
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence;
Such civil war is in my love and hate

That I an accessory needs must be
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me. (35.)

The metaphorical allusions are unmistakable. By now, however it had happened, the young Earl knew who both his parents were. He may have been aware that Oxford was his father long before he suspected the identity of his mother. But there is no secret here. "Roses have thorns" refers to Elizabeth's *Rosa sine spina*, giving her motto the lie. "Silver fountains" come from a spring (Ver), and unfortunately, they are sometimes muddled, not pure. "Clouds and eclipses stain both moon [Elizabeth] and sun" (Phoebus-Oxford). The "loathsome canker" is the Fair Youth's stigma of illegitimacy, or non-recognition. (In *The Dream*, Puck speaks of "Dian's bud" and "Cupid's flower"; IV.1.75; while Sonnet 153, which, together with 154 and *Dan Bartholmew of Bath*, tells the early part of the story of Oxford and Elizabeth, begins:

*Cupid lay by his brand and fell asleep;
A maid of Dian's this advantage found.*

Moreover Dan is Cupid's first name.)

The remainder is clear enough. The poet brings common sense to bear upon the boy's "sensual fault"; and the "civil war" in his own emotions is so disrupting that he is forced to take sides against himself and become "an accessory" to the "sweet thief" who robs him of his mistress.

It seems evident that No. 138 was written to the poet's second wife, Elizabeth Trentham, who was much younger than he when they were married, in September 1591. The tone of this Sonnet is gentle, affectionate, a little shamed, and perfectly fits the situation.

No. 139 was written in mocking vein. The Earl was bored with the luccubrations of contemporary poets and sonneteers and was not above having a little fun with them. It is the same spirit he shows in No. 21, when commenting on Chapman's elaborate usage of celestial imagery. Only this time he is glancing playfully at Spenser's *Amoretti*, IX and LXIV. The sonnet would seem to be impersonal, with no individual "mistress" as its subject, although if Spenser's "dark spright" was Anne Vavasor, who had been his "Rosalind" for a time, the allusion is of course complicated.

Amoretti IX reads:

Long-while I sought to what I might compare
Those powerful eyes, which lighten my *dark spright*,
Yet found I nought on earth, to which I dare

Resemble th' ymage of their goodly light.
Not to the Sun, for they doe shine by night. . . .

And *Amoretti* LXIV:

*Her lips did smell lyke unto Gillyflowers;
Her ruddy cheekes, lyke unto Roses red;
Her snowy browes, like budded Bellamours;
Her lovely eyes, like Pincks but newly spred;
Her goodly bosome, lyke a Strawberry bed;
Her neck, lyke to a bunch of Cullambynes;
Such fragrant flowers doe give most odorous smell;
But her sweet odour did them all excell.*

Thus Spenser's friend, the Earl, in Sonnet 130:

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes there is more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. . . .*

In *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI, Canto X, Spenser inquires:

*Whether a creature or a goddess graced
With heavenly gifts from heaven first enraced?*

And Oxford observes:

*I grant I never saw a goddess go,—
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.*

We have shown that No. 121 belongs definitely to 1584, since it is merely a versified form of a protest Lord Oxford wrote Burghley in October of that year. We believe that No. 104 was also written at about that time.

No. 145 must be one of the earliest. It could have been addressed to the Queen or to any other flirtatious lady of the court.