

SHAKESPEARE SONNETS

AND

EDWARD DE VERE

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But that same gentle Spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honnie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldness of such base-borne men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe ,
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell.

THALIA in Tears of the Muses.

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1930

The Sonnets were originally (1609) issued as
‘SHAKE-SPEARES
SONNETS.

A full conspectus and précis of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Studies of the Sonnets will be found in J. M. ROBERTSON, *The Problems of the Shakespeare Sonnets*.

In this volume the simple name of the Editor is used to denote the following Editions with Commentaries—

E. DOWDEN, *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare* (1882).

THOS. TYLER, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1890).

GEO. WYNDHAM, *The Poems of Shakespeare* (1898).

H. C. BEECHING, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare* (1904).

C. KNOX POOLER, *The Works of Shakespeare—Sonnets* (1918).

T. G. TUCKER, *The Sonnets of Shakespeare* (1924).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

ANOTHER volume on the Sonnets, especially from one to whom Shakespeare has been but literary recreation and not a serious study or pursuit, calls for apology. Forty years ago a perusal of Ignatius Donnelly's portentous volumes on the *Great Cryptogram* produced in me a reaction of acute revolt, and a conviction that if Bacon was the author of Shakespeare, all literary criticism was at an end : later vagaries and perversities of the Baconian sect did nothing to bring relief, and I do not propose to waste words on further confutation of this heresy, which might be brought from the Sonnets themselves.* On the other hand, Greenwood's argu-

* If any still feel a hankering attraction towards Baconian authorship, they will do well to realise how closely, in much of their outward setting, the lines of Bacon's life concur with those of Edward, Earl of Oxford. Bacon's mother (*née* Ann Cooke) was sister to Sir Wm. Cecil's wife (Lady Burleigh); from fourteen onwards, the Earl of Oxford was a member of the Cecil household; on his marriage with Ann Cecil (1571), he became first cousin by marriage to the young Francis Bacon. All their lives they moved in Cecil surroundings: both, by Lord Burleigh's influence, were entered as Law students at Gray's Inn; both from time to time held chambers there. Alike in pecuniary embarrassments (which were numerous) and in pursuit of public preferments, both turned habitually to Lord Burleigh, or later to his son and successor, Lord Robert (Marquis of Salisbury). Both travelled on the Continent, and had contact with the Court of France—Oxford from 1575 to 1578, Bacon from 1578 to 1579. Both made their homes in London or the environs, came under like literary influences, mingled in the same society and circles of the Court; even in their relations with the Queen there was marked similarity. At the Essex and Southampton trial, Bacon was foremost among Counsel for the prosecution, and the Earl of Oxford on the panel of Judges who gave sentence. In his personal re-setting of the Sonnets Mr. Randall Davies raises clever points; but he moves under the Baconian obsession, which leads him to strangely far-fetched inferences; and it is interesting to note how much more easily and completely the Oxford hypothesis satisfies his simpler postulates.

mentative and learned agnosticism leaves little but the sense of void. Hence, in 1920, I naturally turned with averted eyes from a volume entitled *Shakespeare Identified*, till the representations of a friend, Rev. W. A. Ferguson, of Colchester, to whose judgments in other departments of learning I attach great weight, induced me to try once more ; and in Mr. J. T. Looney's pages I found a very different order of treatment and reasoning from that which I anticipated. Following up the various lines of evidence—biographical, personal, and literary—combining clues of poetic output and authoritative testimony, of historic sympathies and reminiscences, of personal and of dramatic episodes and allusions, and broad and striking chronological correspondences, he seemed to succeed in concentrating them upon a single objective, Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. Startling and paradoxical as the thesis sounded, the case presented seemed to stand poles apart from the forced constructions, the baseless assumptions, the superficial verbal parallelisms, the cryptic ingenuities, with which Baconian polemics are infested. Nor did it come to a standstill in the *impasse* of negative conclusions, reached polemically by Sir G. G. Greenwood, intuitively by many devout Shakespeareans. After all, the Poems and Plays had an author, alive with personality ! And better William Shakspeare * of Stratford than a blank ! Here was a thesis, open to crucial and many-sided tests, whose walls could not fail to crumble, if built of lath or rubble.

Shakespeare equipment demands the study of a lifetime, and anything like critical and comprehensive appreciation of the Plays lies beyond the scope of any amateur ; but there is a corner of Shakespearean literature—a *hortus inclusus* of lovers of poetry—where the problems are second to none in fascination, the rewards

* For convenience, and without any wish to prejudge issues, I adopt a more or less current convention, and write Wm. Shakspeare for the Stratford player, and Shakespeare for the author.

delectable, and the materials for judgment within manageable compass. I decided to make the Sonnets my test of the theory proposed, to approach them with an open mind, and see whether the proffered key helped to unlock the riddle, which the best critics perhaps have been most tempted to dismiss as insoluble. The actual life and personality of Wm. Shakspeare are such a blank, that every critic can fill in the bare outlines, or leave them unfilled, almost at pleasure; but, on the other hand, the Sonnets themselves are so full of indications, hints and data, direct or indirect, that it ought to be possible to give a clear idea of the background and the scenery, the social atmosphere and assumptions, the quality and characteristics of the culture and the personal relationships, which combined to produce them; and thence, if fortune favoured, to deduce, and even to identify, the personality of the writer, and the circumstances under which they were produced. The primary question turns upon the Unity of the Sonnets themselves—its kind and its degree.

The first and indispensable unity is *unity of authorship*, as guaranteed by the circumstances of publication, and by the internal evidence and criteria, which comparative study and critical intelligence may be in a position to apply.

Next, given unity of authorship, is there also unity of plan? and is it of the artistic and creative kind, proceeding from the poetic imagination? or does it rest on actual experiences, inspiring poetic utterance and vision? Is there unity of address in the person or persons who called the Sonnets into being? Or do they reflect a wider unity of life, which through successive experiences found utterance in the forms dictated by the vicissitudes themselves? These are the questions we shall have to face. In all such issues the track-finder is guided by minute and delicate indications; and sometimes the most decisive are but ill fitted to carry conviction to irresponsive minds. Alternatives lie open, and one

cannot hope to carry the day against fixed prepossessions. But when once the right trail is hit, the circle of possibilities narrows, and re-examination discloses hints and clues and turns of utterance, which confirm identification and reveal unexpected coincidences of time, place, circumstance or personal relationship. In my study of the Sonnets I have not attempted to conceal the processes by which I have attained to my conclusions. I began with the single desire to get at the heart of the writer and his meaning, and so far as authorship was concerned to 'follow the argument, wherever it led.' In so far I hope my contributions may have permanent value and interest : little by little I was led, nay driven, to conclusions for which I can hardly look for immediate or popular acceptance. They are too far-reaching and subversive ; yet I hope to win the suffrages of fellow-students, not too much wedded or pledged to their own pronouncements, to entertain or reconsider new evidence, and that they will verify clues which I have only ventured to submit by way of suggestion or parenthesis. In my references to the Plays, I have hardly done more than call attention to parallels, which have personal or chronological, as well as literary, value for the determination of authorship. A volume might be written on this head, and decisive chronological inferences drawn, while on the personal side the whole body of the Plays may be re-studied to advantage. For determining the date of their composition, parallels in the Sonnets will prove at least as helpful as the accident of publication, which was governed by so many contingencies, and which for the majority of the Plays included in the First Folio gives no index at all.

The three personalities with which our inquiry will be most nearly concerned are those of Wm. Shakspeare of Stratford, Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, and Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford. It is needless to recapitulate the scanty records of the life, upbringing and career of William Shakspeare. They can be found in

every text-book, too often surrounded with a confusing halo of guesses and possibilities. Not one of them throws a ray of light upon the composition of the Sonnets; unauthorised publication in 1609, without a word of protest at the time or later, seems inexplicable; and still more difficult is it to reconcile the position and the doings of William Shakspeare with the interior evidence of the Sonnets themselves. In Emerson's phrase, it is impossible 'to marry the man to his verse.' It will be more convenient to defer our account of the Earl of Southampton till his entrance upon the stage of the Sonnets.

With Edward de Vere the case stands differently. Till recently, on the strength of eccentric traits, and a few partisan reminiscences, it was possible to regard him as a 'quarrelsome coxcomb,' or 'the coarse, brutal and overbearing' rival of Philip Sidney. To-day, the evidence marshalled by Mr. Looney in *Shakespeare Identified* and *The Poems of Edward de Vere*, and the far more exhaustive researches of Capt. B. M. Ward, in his *Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, have laid to rest that misconception, and restored him to his rightful place among the men of mark, of affairs and of letters, who shed lustre on the England of Elizabeth.* There could hardly be a better introduction to Elizabethan life and letters than a study of his various activities, and certainly for any just or final judgment upon the Sonnets an understanding of them is indispensable. I therefore preface our study of the Sonnets with a survey of his life, in which my debt to Capt. Ward is paramount.

* Yet in a very recent volume, *Elizabeth and Essex*, I find him dismissed in a single line as 'the scape-grace son-in-law of Lord Burleigh.'

CHAPTER II

EDWARD DE VERE

[B. M. Ward's *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*, for brevity I cite simply as *Ward*.

For Edward De Vere's *Poems*, I cite J. T. Looney's 1921 Edition.]

Section i: YOUTH, TRAINING, EARLY CAREER, MARRIAGE

THE life of Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, covers the whole Elizabethan period ; at her accession he was a child of eight, and he lived to witness and to share in the coronation of King James I. He was born on April 12, 1550, only son and heir of John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford, by his second wife Margaret Golding. His boyhood was passed on the family estates of Castle Hedingham, where on its scarped plateau the stately Norman keep, fenced round with towers and bailey-walls and moat, formed the central feature of the great group, which comprised not only the residential chambers, halls and offices, the Chapel Tennis-court and Butts, the court-yards, stables, barns and granges, but also the adjoining Priory and Nunnery, erected, endowed and adorned by the piety of preceding Earls. Here, amid the parks and pleasure-grounds and forest preserves, his father maintained baronial state, and filled with high distinction the parts of country gentleman, Justice of the Peace and Lord Lieutenant, sportsman and titled peer. As premier nobleman of the realm, and for generations hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain of England,* he had officiated at the funeral of Henry VIII and at the coronation of the boy king, Edward VI

* The dignity was first conferred by King Henry I on the third earl, Aubrey.

(1547), and bore the sword at Queen Mary's triumphant entry into London.

His will is a good index to his tastes and interests ; apart from landed estates and legacies to kith and kin he left :

to Lord Keeper Bacon, £10 and one of his great horses
,, Sir William Cecil, £10 and another of his great horses
,, Duke of Norfolk, £20 and one of my best horses or geldings
,, Lord Robert Dudley, £20 and one of my best horses or geldings
and liberal bequests (mostly of £20) to Henry Golding, to 20 other gentlemen servants, and to 46 yeomen and 22 grooms.

The boy's first associations were with the woodland and the chase, as seen under the rich autumnal colouring of dying feudalism. Under the Catholic regime of Mary (1558-8), Earl John kept in retirement, but was among the foremost to welcome the accession of Princess Elizabeth, and in August 1561, entertained his Sovereign for five days at Castle Hedingham. It must have been a memorable occasion for the young Edward—the most magnificent of boyish memories. Hospitality so lavish must have done much to embarrass his estate, which had already suffered irreparable losses from the ruthless forfeitures and fines imposed by Henry VII on the 13th earl.

Within a year, on August 3, 1562, the earl died, and was buried at Earls Colne, where the ancient Priory Church had become a mausoleum for the line of his noble ancestors. The Earls Colne Priory had been founded in 1100 by Aubrey de Vere, as a cell to the Benedictine Abbey at Abingdon ; but under special privileges of election and cooption had become an appanage of the De Veres ; and at the dissolution of monasteries in 1536 both it and the Nunnery fell naturally into their hands as their share of the plunder.

De Vere tradition had been intimately and often devoutly Catholic, but in the sixteenth-century struggle between Pope and Crown, Sir John, known as 'The Good Earl,' was among those who prepared the articles against Wolsey, enforced surrender of the Great Seal on Sir Thomas More, and in 1530 subscribed to the Royal Supremacy. During the Marian regime he was listed among those who were 'vehemently suspected' of anti-Catholic conspiracy.

In August 1562, Edward, a boy of twelve, hitherto known as Lord Bulbeck,* succeeded to the title, and was also named in the will as one of the executors to an estate heavily burdened with debts. As a Royal Ward he was placed under charge of William Cecil, Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth, who in 1561 had been appointed Master of the Court of Wards. During his minority he seems to have lived partly with the Cecil family, and partly in chambers at the Savoy. The domiciliary and pecuniary dependence which ensued resulted in ties and frictions which moulded his whole career. The boy's education was entrusted to his uncle Arthur Golding, half-brother to his mother, who had matriculated at Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1552, and was now an earnest and devoted scholar, about twenty-six years old.

Golding's original work is negligible, but as student and translator he had few equals in industry or ability. In 1563 he completed his translation of Cæsar, *De Bello Gallico*; and in 1564 dedicated to his young pupil his rendering of the excerpts from Trogus Pompeius made by the historian Justinus; these were intended to introduce him to the most inspiring figures in the history of Greece and Rome. But a far more memorable achievement was his poetic version of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, done into flowing and spirited fourteeners, rhyming

* The title was derived from Bolebec Castle, in Whitechurch, Bucks. It was retained as secondary title after his accession to the Earldom, and is often recited in dedications, etc.

in couplets. The first four books issued in 1565, to be followed by the complete fifteen in 1567, were presented as a New Year's gift to Lord Robert, Earl of Leicester, in a letter written from Cecil House on December 23, 1564. He prefaced his version with a Poetic Epistle covering thirteen pages to his Patron, and also a briefer Poetical Preface to the Reader, defending his choice of subject, and insisting on the typological value of the *Metamorphoses* as allegorising and enforcing the bestiality of carnal lusts.

With skill heede and judgement this work must be read
For else to the Reader it standes in small stead

is the motto on his title-page.

That the Version was used by Shakespeare is shown by Prospero's summons to the Elves in *Tempest* V, i. 33 ; but at a much earlier period it helped to inspire the *Venus and Adonis*, where the description of the Boar (l. 619 vv.) is closely modelled on Golding's *Metamorphoses* VIII. 376, and *Lucrece* too shows unmistakeable traces of its influence. The *Cæsar* and *Justin* and the *Metamorphoses*—to which later he added translations from Seneca *On Benefits* and from Pomponius Mela—must have been his chief pre-occupations during the tutelage of Lord Edward de Vere, but already his thoughts were more and more concentrating upon Reformation theology. By October 1571 he had completed his translation of *Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms* ; it is a very substantial volume, in which each of the two parts covers more than 500 pages ; and the Dedication is a prefatory valediction to 'his verie good Lord Edward de Vere, Erle of Oxinford, Lord Great Chamberlain of England, Viscount Bulbecke, etc., . . .', in the hope that it might minister to true Religion, true Godlynesse, and true Vertue.* 'God hath placed you upon a high stage in the eyes of all men as a guide, pattern,

* The few Bible references that occur in the Sonnets are echoes from the Psalms. Cf. Prothero, *Psalms in Human Life*. See on Sonn. § 116.

example and leader. . . . ' . . . if you should become either a counterfayt Protestant, or a perverse Papist, or a cold and careless newter (which God forbid), the harm could not be repressed.' By memories of Chyron and of Phoenix, he adjures the young Achilles or Ulysses of to-day to keep true to the precepts of that long-experienced Nestor [Lord Burleigh], with whom he was now 'linked by householde allyance,' and concludes by asking God 'to blisse him with plentiful and goodly issue by your vertuous and dear beloved Spouse.'

In the time-table of 'exercises,' scheduled by Cecil himself, two hours each morning and two hours each afternoon were allotted in equal parts to Latin and to French, and at the age of thirteen Lord Edward was able to pen a very creditable letter in French to his guardian. Generous provision was made for physical training in dancing, shooting and sword-play, and for the manual dexterities of penmanship, drawing and cosmography. In riding, fencing and tilting he attained the highest standards of accomplishment and skill.

His connection with Cambridge was honorary, not residential. At Midsummer 1558, when he was a little over eight years old, his name (in the form Edward Bulbeck) appears on the matriculation roll at Queens' College, as fellow-Commoner. It shows his father's intention, but the only note of graduation is connected with St. John's College and belongs to August 1564, the occasion on which Queen Elizabeth paid her State visit to the University. The young Earl of Oxford rode in her train, and the M.A. degree which he received was one of the ceremonial degrees, which Cecil, an alumnus of St. John's (1535-1541), and since 1559 Chancellor of the University, conferred in honour of the occasion. The same distinction was bestowed on his cousin, Thos. Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and on the Earls of Sussex, Warwick, and Rutland, and many other persons of distinction.* Two years later, in September

* The full list is given in Nichols, *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. I.

1566, a corresponding recognition was conferred upon him by Oxford,* when the queen paid her State visit to the sister University. On this occasion he must have met Richard Edwards, then Gentleman of the Royal Chapel and Master of the Singing Boys, who composed a play, *Palamon and Arcite*, for the occasion, and to whose anthology, *The Paradyse of Daynty Devices*, posthumously published in 1576, Lord Oxford contributed seven of his early poems.

Besides Latin, French and History, there was another subject which Cecil regarded as vital for the education of a Royal ward. To his thinking, Law was not merely an instrument of liberal culture, but a necessary part of the equipment for public life. It had been the means of his own advancement, and had become a mainstay of his public policy. In the reorganisation of local government, and the transfer of its direction to the hands of the nobility and gentry, he erected a bulwark against aristocratic pretensions and personal ambitions. For its efficient conduct a certain familiarity with Law was indispensable, and at this period almost all sons of noble families underwent a term of training at one of the Inns of Court. Lord Edward de Vere was admitted on February 1st, 1567, to Gray's Inn, and Philip Sidney's name appears on the same list. It was the Inn with which the Cecils and the Bacons were associated, and in which subse-

* Anthony Wood's reference to him as pensioner of St. John's College in Cambridge may be regarded as a mere record of his Academic qualification for admission to the Oxford M.A. In Ep. III of the *Four Letters* Gabriel Harvey gratefully recalls the gift of Angels, which the Earl of Oxford, then in 'the prime of his gallantest youth,' bestowed on him at Christ's College. The incident cannot belong to the 1564 visit, as G. Harvey did not matriculate at Christ's till 1566, and in 1570 migrated to Pembroke Hall as Fellow. The Essex connection—for Gabriel Harvey was of Saffron Walden by birth and schooling—is enough to account for the act of liberality. In Shakespeare 'the studious universities' belong to the setting of Verona (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I, iii) and the converse extravagances to Padua (*Taming of Shrew*, V, i), while the gibe inflicted on Polonius in *Hamlet*, III is possibly a personal hit at Lord Burleigh. There is no other reference to University training.

quently the Earl of Southampton, the Earl of Rutland and the Earl of Pembroke were all enrolled. His later letters regarding suits, claims and tenures show familiar acquaintance with the terms and even technicalities of the law of Real Estate. And legal training must have been of value in serving on the judicial Commissions appointed for the trial of Mary Queen of Scots (1586), of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel (1589), and of the Earls of Essex and Southampton (1601).

The years of tutelage formed and fostered his bent towards personal extravagance. His allowances for dress and accoutrements during the years 1562-6 have been preserved,* and show a yearly expenditure averaging over £1000 in modern value! Fantastic and sumptuous experiments in dress were part of his passion for spectacular display. From his father's funeral (in 1562) he rode to London 'with seven score horse, all in black.' At fourteen, and again at sixteen, he was conspicuous among the queen's train in her visits to Cambridge and Oxford. At fifteen he was wedding page to Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, on his marriage with Lady Anne Russell, celebrated with full tourney honours at Westminster. It was probably on his return from the North in 1570 that he rode 'to his house by London Stone (Vere House, known also as Oxford Court) with four score gentlemen in a livery of Reading tawny, and chains of gold about their necks, before him; and one hundred tall yeomen in the like livery to follow him, without chains, but all having his cognisance of the Blue Boar embroidered on their left shoulder.' †

He was no less lavish in his scale of giving. His New Year's present to the queen in 1574, designed it may be to secure Royal indulgences, was 'A very large jewel of gold, containing a woman holding a shippe of sparkes of dyamonds, four large rubyes, one large dyamond, and sundrye dyamonds, with three perles

* Ward, p. 82.

† Stow, *Annals*, p. 34; *Survey of London*, I. xxix.

pendante; and three small cheynes of golde sett with sparcks of dyamonds.' He had no sense of money values, or of husbanding expenditure: he incurred debts lightly, and for immediate satisfactions parted with large estates; while in speculation or investment he seems to have been uniformly unfortunate.*

In the physical exercises of the day—the fashionable aftermath of chivalry—in the tourney and the tilt, in horsemanship, hunting and hawking, in skill in fence and shooting with the bow, he had few equals. At the great three-day Triumph held at Westminster on May 1–3, a few days after his coming of age, he gained the highest award of honour at the tilt, the tourney, and the Barriers, and received from the queen's own hand a tablet of diamonds. 'There is no man of life and agility in every respect in the Court,' wrote one of the Defendants, 'but the Earl of Oxford.' It was a brilliant debut; and again next year at the royal tournament at Warwick Castle, as Defender of the fort in the company with Philip Sydney, he received the prize for valour from the queen's own hand. In the lighter accomplishments of Music and Poetry, he excelled, and his dancing was Queen Elizabeth's peculiar pride. There is a characteristic story of the queen desiring him to exhibit his skill for the delectation of the French ambassadors.† He declined, and on receiving a second message replied that he 'did not choose to amuse Frenchmen, or to mind any such message, and with that he left the room.'

The Royal Opening of Parliament on April 2nd, 1571, preceded by a few days his coming of age, and in the State Procession, as Lord Great Chamberlain, he bore the queen's train as she entered the House of Lords. From this time forward he had a seat in the House, but after 1572 was seldom present, and after February

* For his costly and losing ventures in the North-West Passage and kindred schemes, see Ward, *17th Earl*, pp. 236–243.

† Letter of Bern. de Mendoza, Spanish Ambassador, ap. Ward, 161.

1593 there is only one recorded attendance. But during these years the systematic policy of the Privy Council reduced the House of Lords to its low-water mark of influence or action. In other directions this year (1571) was decisive for his destinies. A letter dated July 28th from Lord St. John to the Earl of Rutland reports 'The Earl of Oxenforde hath gotten a wyffe, or at least a wyffe hath caught him,' and this reveals at any rate the view current in Court circles. The bride was Anne Cecil, daughter of the Secretary of State, a pretty, engaging 'Juliet' of fourteen—'the sweet little Countess of Oxford,' as she is described. At twelve years old she had been betrothed to Philip Sidney, at that time hardly more than a spirited and well-connected boy. Now that a more splendid quarry was sighted, the earlier proposal was set aside, and 'to the great weeping, wailing and sorrowful cheer' of many ladies about the Court, the choicest *parti* in the kingdom was captured for the daughter of the Cecils. Writing to the same Lord Rutland, first cousin to the earl, Sir William professes innocent though gratified surprise, and 'the wyffe that caught him' refers to the mother, rather than the maid. Her hopes, or plans, were crowned with brilliant success. Sir William himself was in this year advanced to the peerage, with the title of Lord Burleigh: already the queen's assent to the marriage had been secured, and on the day (December 19th)* when Anne entered her fifteenth year, the nuptials were 'celebrated with great pomp' at Westminster, and graced by the presence of the queen. On the side of Oxford the love match was a young man's 'desire for a star'; yet the auspices were not propitious for a happy union. The mother-in-law was managing and ambitious, the bride as yet an unfledged child. For years past, alike in domestic and pecuniary relations, both father and mother had been exposed to the frets and frictions which arise between a

* Men are April when they woo, December when they wed.
As You Like It, IV, i, may contain a touch of personal remembrance.

wilful and restive ward and his official guardian. And other irritants were quick to supervene. As mother-in-law Lady Burleigh thought fit on her daughter's behalf to take the queen herself to task for the gallantries which she invited from the young bridegroom, and received the tart retort that 'his lordship (Burleigh) winketh at these love affairs.' Whatever were the rights or wrongs, to Oxford himself such interference must have been most nettling.

In his relations with Burleigh, a far deeper rift brought rankling irritation to a head. Already, in September, Thos. Howard, Duke of Norfolk, had for the second time been placed under arrest for treasonable intrigues with Mary Queen of Scots, and in January 1572 the death sentence was pronounced against him. The duke's mother, Lady Frances Howard, was younger sister to John the 16th Earl of Oxford, and this tie of cousinship had ripened into warm personal attachment. He made passionate and even frantic attempts to secure remission of the sentence, and, while the queen still wavered, bitterly resented the dictates of policy which with Lord Burleigh perforce outweighed all personal considerations. When on June 2nd the duke was finally brought to the block, it was the knock-out blow in the long struggle between the Crown and the great Peers. That Oxford felt it deeply need not be questioned, but in August following we find him participating in the Royal progress in the Midlands, and victoriously 'holding the fort' in the mimic Assault at Arms, devised to celebrate the queen's stay at Warwick Castle.

A canard, started by his enemies and accepted guilelessly by subsequent writers,* that in a fit of 'most unnatural and outrageous resentment, he forsook his wife and made havock of his estate,' receives no countenance from his own letters; they are a complete disproof

* The Colchester MS. book cites authorities; the quotation is from Sir Wm. Dugdale, *Baronage*, I. 199. Other writers, e.g. Camden, *Hist. Engl.* II. 391, use much milder terms.

of any violent rupture with Lord Burleigh. There were far better reasons for that dismantling of Castle Hedingham, which may be referred to this period.* From the time of his migration to Cecil House in 1562, his interests centred in London and the Court, and he kept up no connection with Castle Hedingham. There is no trace of official correspondence with his mother, and not long after his father's death she contracted a second marriage with Sir Charles Tyrrell, but only survived till December 1568, when she was buried at Earls Colne. Her death placed her son Edward in sole control of the mansion and estates. His father appears to have left them heavily encumbered, and his own extravagances increased the burden. The establishment of Vere House (close to London Stone) as his London residence meant a new and heavy strain on income; and it is no wonder to find alienation of properties beginning in 1571 or earlier, and of mortgages contracted with or through Lord Burleigh as security for advances of ready cash.

In truth the day of feudal and baronial castles—of fosse and bailey, of portcullis and keep—was past. They might linger on as memories of vanished pomps; and it was the considered policy of the 'young' Elizabethans, to lure holders of titles and wealth, through the offices of Lord Lieutenant, County Sheriff, or Justice of the Peace, to assume the burdens of local administration, which relieved a lean exchequer and met the cost of Royal progresses and functions and receptions. //

* Direct evidence of date is not forthcoming; but neither he nor the countess ever resided there, and the mere fact that an infant son was buried in Castle Hedingham churchyard in 1583 is no kind of proof. Wivenhoe lay within easy reach of the family tombs.

Section ii: LITERATURE AND TRAVEL

But the aspirations of the young Earl of Oxford did not move within the limits of a provincial or parochial magnate. For him two impulses were dominant : (1) the urge of ambition, political and social, which in these later days could only find satisfaction through the various forms of 'employment'—military, administrative or diplomatic—at the disposition of the Crown and its advisers. This meant attachment to the Court. And (2) the second urge was that of literary interests, that 'love of the Muses' which was part of his natural genius and endowment. And here his range and versatility were surprising. His approach to the Classics, under Golding's guidance, had been through poetry and history, rather than the academic grooves of grammar, philology, and metrical technique. Through Ovid,* first and foremost, he 'drank of the Pierian spring' and formed his poetic tastes, while Cæsar, Cicero, and Justin were his guides in history. But already, in 1569, Thos. Underdounie dedicated to him his *Æthiopian History of Heliodorus*, and a little later Edmund Elvidere sought to enlist his countenance by his *Metaphorical Historie of Peisistratus and Catanea*. His linguistic facility was remarkable ; we have already seen it precociously displayed in French ; on much maturer lines it is shown in the flowing Latin appreciation with which, in January 1572, he prefaced Bartholomew Clarke's translation of *Il Cortegiano*.† As a literary performance the courtly Ciceronian periods

* For Shakespeare's debt to Ovid, see Baynes, *Shakespeare Studies*, 195 pp.

† Eulogised by Gabr. Harvey, who also testifies to his proficiency in Latin Verse, in his *Walden verses* to the queen in 1578.

would be hard to parallel from the ranks of the English aristocracy, but still more it is of interest as showing the bend of his thoughts towards Italian humanism rather than to insular developments of academic learning or religious debate. Castiglione's *Courtier* was a full-length delineation of the gifts, virtues and accomplishments of the ideal Renaissance Courtier shown at his best.* His 'singular delight' in books on Geography, Histories and other good learning is affirmed in Thos. Twyne's dedicatory Preface to *The Breviary of Britain*. But closer personal interest attaches to the prefatory epistle, and the poem, with which, in 1573, the Earl of Oxford commended to the public the version of Cardanus' *Comfort*, which his friend and comrade-in-arms Thomas Bedingfield had committed to his keeping.

It is evidence—one among many which recur in dedications—of the personal attention which he devoted to manuscripts or volumes which sought for his countenance. He was no mere titular patron; Cardanus' *Comfort* is a learned compilation, in three solid books, dealing somewhat in the manner of *De Amicitia* or the lost *De Consolatione* with the sources of comfort available for those who are brought face to face with sorrow, disappointments and disasters. It is full of quotations and illustrations drawn from the historians and moralists of Greece and Rome, from the Scriptures, and from medieval humanists. Sir Thomas did his work of translation well, but neither the subject nor the style makes light reading. That a young nobleman of twenty-two, amid the dizzy whirl of Court festivities and military training, should have perused and singled out and at his own expense passed through press a volume of this kind, is no small proof of literary interest and intuition. He supplemented his Commendation with a poem, valuable for its authentic date and signature, and also for the promise and the weaknesses which these his

* For Shakespeare's familiarity with the *Courtier*, see Wyndham on the *Poems*, p. cxx.

earliest stanzas display. The closing stanza exemplifies the untutored rhythms, the euphuistic and alliterative turns, but also the choiceness of phrase, characteristic of the author.

So he that takes the pain to pen the book
Reaps not the gifts of golden goodly muse ;
But those gain that, who on the work shall look,
And from the sour the sweet by skill shall choose ;
For he that beats the bush the bird not gets,
But who sits still and holdeth fast the nets.

E. de V., *Poems*, p. 14.

The manuscript, he writes, had lain for months 'in the waste bottom of my chests' ; now at last he had found time to peruse and deal with it 'among my new country Muses of Wivenhoe,' with whom he took refuge from the jars and turmoil of Town life. An earlier letter shows that he had already taken up residence there in October 1572, and helps to a closer date for the dismantling of Hedingham, which must have been taken in hand earlier. Demolition so extensive and systematic, making a clearance of mansion and quadrangles, courtyards, stables, granges and outbuildings, and leaving the central keep alone to commemorate past greatness, must have occupied considerable time, and he probably directed the work from his hermitage at Wivenhoe, not many miles away.

A poem of not much later date expresses with almost Shakespearean force the white heat of inward revenge.

My heart shall fail, and hand shall lose its force,
But some device shall pay Despite his due,
And Fury shall consume my careful corse,
Or raze the ground whereon my sorrow grew.
Lo, thus in rage of ruthless mind refus'd,
I rest revenged on whom I am abus'd. (*Poems*, p. 24.)

The occasion of writing is not certain, and the metaphor of l. 4 gives no conclusive ground for connect-

ing the poem with the destruction of Castle Hedingham ; but it is tempting to connect the two.

But literary recreations upon a background of Court gallantries were not enough to satisfy his ambitions. The Court itself was a hotbed of personal self-seeking and intrigue. Commissions which he coveted—administrative, military or diplomatic—were entrusted to rivals, who in rank or in years were his inferiors. His gifts were brilliant and various, but neither the queen nor Lord Burleigh could put much faith in his discretion. The promises with which they played him bore no fruit. In March 1574 he was in the queen's train at Lambeth ; but in July a bombshell exploded, when the news spread that, without leave asked or granted, Lord Oxford had slipped off in company with Lord Seymour to the Low Countries, to see and share in operations of actual war as conducted by the Duke of Alva in Flanders. The rebel earls of the North, Northumberland and Westmoreland, were still refugees in those parts ; and the queen taking instant fright despatched his friend and comrade, Thos. Bedingfield, to lure the haggard back to her wrist : his prompt return and apology allayed the queen's pique and apprehension, and during the summer Progress of August 5th to September 21st, he was singled out for marks of Royal favour. At its close he returned to Theobalds, and from thence in October to rooms assigned to himself and his wife at Hampton Court. But the time had clearly come when he could no longer be held in leash. Financial settlements and terms of entail were readjusted ; the queen's license was secured ; and early in January 1575 he started off on the Continental tour which was destined to alter all the currents of his life.

After two months' stay at Paris, he proceeded by way of Strasburg, where he enjoyed friendly conferences with Johann Sturm, the learned scholar and educationalist who presided over the University. We catch an unexpected glimpse of him, on his way through

Germany, in the *Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, sequel to the most renowned and impassioned of Chapman's tragedies (published in 1607-11).

I overtook, coming from Italy,
In Germany, a great and famous Earl
Of England, the most goodly fashion'd man
I ever saw, from head to foot in form
Rare and most absolute, he had a face
Like one of the most ancient honour'd Romans
From whence his noblest family was derived,
He was beside of spirit passing great,
Valiant and learn'd, and liberal as the sun,
Spoke and writ sweetly, or of learned subjects,
Or of the discipline of public weals,
And 'twas the Earl of Oxford.*

In early spring he crossed the Alpine barrier with his suite, and April found him at Padua, whose famous schools of Medicine attracted many English students at this time. Italy was the goal of his desires. There are times in the lives of individuals and of nations, when gathered powers of receptivity feel suddenly an impulse of the Spring, and burst into blossom with irrepressible vigour and variety. Such a season of expansion bloomed in the 'spacious' days of Queen Elizabeth. Religion, Literature, Music, many-sided enterprise—maritime and commercial—all tell the same tale. In literature and manners, the master stimulus came from Italy; it is astonishing to note and trace the impact of Italian culture upon English temperament and tastes. Its inspiration, drawn mainly from classical and pagan sources, alike for good and evil went like new wine to the head. To staunch old Roger Ascham 'the Italianate Englishman' seemed a portent of national decay. Seldom did accents so severe fall from that temperate pen, as when in 1570 he enlarged upon the Italian

* On this there will be much to say later. See on Sonn. § 78, pp. 220-2.

proverb *Inglese Italianato e un Diavolo Incarnato*, and deplored 'the enchantments of Circe' which intoxicate the youth whom 'virtue once made mistress over all the world, but vice now maketh slave to them that before were glad to serve it.' In his cautious way Burleigh was vexed with the same apprehensions. 'Suffer not thy sons to cross the Alps' finds a place among his maxims; and we cannot wonder at the misgivings with which he regarded his son-in-law's excursion. In Italy, writes Robert Greene, 'I learned all the villanies under the heavens.' *

For one of Lord Oxford's temperament and antecedents it was a hazardous enterprise. A scion of the bluest blood, second to none in physical prowess and courtly accomplishment, endowed with romantic and fantastic tastes, with rich artistic sensibilities and inbred passion for display, he was imbued with a Byronic † vein of extravagance and braggadocio, which the designing would find it only too easy to exploit. No formal record of his doings has survived, but valuable sidelights can be gleaned from business correspondence preserved by Lord Burleigh, and from fragmentary notices in other letters. At Padua, which he visited more than once, he was implicated in disorderly occurrences, and fell into the hands of creditors, Baptista Nigrone and Benedict Spinola, ‡ whose claims he could only satisfy by further sales of his estates. At Venice, in September, he first received tidings of the infant daughter, to whom Lady Oxford had given birth on July 2nd. An accident, followed by a fever, detained him there longer than he had intended, but on December 12th he was able to

* *Repentance*, XII. 175.

† It would be easy to elaborate the Byron parallel in detail, but such parallels are apt to become misleading.

‡ It is hard to believe that the correspondences of name with Baptista Minola, the 'rich gentleman of Padua' in the *Taming of the Shrew*, and again with Benedick the 'young lord of Padua,' in *Much Ado*, are purely accidental coincidences. But in this study I do not attempt to coordinate Italian references in the Shakespeare Plays, which need a chapter, or rather a volume, to themselves.

take the road again for Florence, and thence by way of Siena to Rome.

A curious letter from an English officer * tells us of the world-challenge to all and sundry, on horse or on foot, with whatsoever weapon his adversary might select, which he issued in Palermo, and which 'no man durst be so hardy' as to face.

* *Travels of Edward Webbe* (1590).

Section iii: RETURN TO ENGLAND (1576); DOMESTIC TROUBLES AND COURT LIFE

When at the end of his fifteen months' tour—twelve spent in Italy—the earl returned to Paris, a sudden storm-cloud broke. It is hopeless, and also needless, to unravel the tangled web of charges, suspicions, 'mislikings' and distrusts which resulted in estrangement, and more or less of permanent alienation, from his father-in-law and from his young wife. During the long months of absence scandal had made free with her name, mainly, it would seem, as a weapon of provocation against the earl himself; and he fell into the pit dugged for him. Affectionate and pliable, she had not the force of character to cope with a temperament so wayward, sensitive and undisciplined as his. She took refuge, with her infant child, under the wing of her parents—a new cause of offence. He refused to give her the status of wife, arranged for separate maintenance, and conjugal relations were not re-established till Christmas of 1581. Even after that date she seems frequently to have resided with her father, whose establishment was on a lordly scale.* Her father's letters and the elegy composed in her memory dwell pointedly on the sweetness, modesty and patience of her disposition, as daughter, subject and wife; and her own correspondence bears this out. Even if circumstances had been more favourable, the earl seems to have lacked the qualities which make for domestic happiness; he was absorbed in other pursuits and interests, and family affections have left no trace in his correspondence.

* Stow computes his Cecil House expenditure at about £2000 a year, with a household of eighty persons; and this does not include the magnificence of Theobald's.

Besides Elizabeth, the first child born on July 2, 1575, we hear of a son baptised on May 9, 1583, who died in infancy. A second daughter, Bridget, was born in April 1584, and eventually became the wife of Lord Norris, Earl of Berkshire. A third daughter, Frances, born in 1585, did not survive infancy (September 1587). Susanna or Susan, the youngest, was born on May 26, 1587, and nine days later her mother succumbed to puerperal fever at Greenwich. But both before and after his wife's death the earl seems to have left all effective care for the children to Lord Burleigh. To him the years of estrangement were perhaps a welcome relief. He resided chiefly at Vere House in London, having placed Wivenhoe at the disposal of his wife. During the first four years of this period he was constantly in attendance at Court, and seemed likely to outstrip all rivals in the queen's favour. But entanglements with Roman Catholic peers, and the charges and countercharges that followed, forfeited his position with the queen, and from the beginning of 1581 to the middle of 1583 he was in disgrace, and more than once placed under restraint in the Tower. In June of that year he was restored to Royal favour, which he continued to enjoy till the close of his life. The years are marked by characteristic episodes, which as society scandals received exaggerated notoriety—the Tennis Court quarrel with Philip Sydney in 1579, and the 1583 duel with Sir Thomas Knyvet, in which he received a dangerous hurt.

Section iv : ITALIAN REACTIONS ; POEMS AND LITERARY CONTACTS

Whatever the pretexts or the proofs advanced, the estrangement was, I believe, symptomatic ; he came back from his *Wander-jahre* a changed man, liberated from English insularity of outlook, divorced from many outstanding links and assumptions, baptised socially and intellectually into the spirit of the Italian Renaissance. In external manners and deportment he borrowed freely from Italian models, defying the dictates and proprieties of contemporary fashion. Socially he discarded the formulas of English feudalism, and the mannered etiquettes of the English Court. His cosmopolitan revolt against class and caste distinctions offended and alienated his compeers, provoked their jealous irritation, and inflicted fatal injury on his own reputation. On the historic and romantic side they retained a hold on his affections, but in life and practice he was accounted a traitor to his order.

Intellectually his earlier associations, as we have seen, had been with solid and established lines of classical learning ; henceforward he takes a lead in modernising movements and experiments, embodied in Euphuism or the literature of romance. His understanding of human nature, his insight into the varied and complex play of the passions and affections, his range of social sympathies, had been immensely widened ; they diverted his genius from the lighter exercises of song and madrigal, of pastoral or formal sonneteering, into the freer field of dramatic invention. There, alike in the vehicle of presentment, prose or verse, in the choice and treatment of themes and personages, in the abandonment of traditional unities, in the handling of motives, and in

the marriage of the Comic to the Tragic Muse, by the blending of realism with imagination, of mirth and farce with classical motives and ideals, he sympathised, so far as we can tell, with the creative and characteristic elements of the Elizabethan drama. On ethical or psychological developments, our evidence is scanty,* but there is no further trace of Puritan affiliations, which probably at no time laid much vital hold ; he responded but feebly to the moral or the scholastic seriousness of the English Renaissance ; he took no active part in religious controversies, and at one stage seems to have toyed for a time with Roman Catholic overtures. He sat loose to family ties and affections, and preferred the society of men, with occasional interludes of fashionable excitement, to the quieter routines of domestic intercourse. The evidence points to relaxation of moral sanctions, and to the heightened sexuality, which Italian surroundings were so apt to induce.

To begin with externals, in dress and toilet he affected extreme fashions, and was called derisively the '*Mirroure of Tuscanismo*.' He was the first to introduce into England the novelty of silk- and gold-embroidered gloves. Stow, in his *Annals*, records that 'from Italy he brought with him gloves, sweete bagges, a perfumed leather jerkin, and other pleasant things, and that yeare the Qucene had a payre of perfumed gloves trimmed onely with foure Tufts or Roses of culled silke ; the Queene tooke such pleasure in these gloves, that she was pictured with those gloves upon her hands, and for many years after it was called the Earle of Oxforde's perfume.' For touches of personal deportment we turn to the caricature sketch contained in Gabriel Harvey's *Speculum Tuscanisimi*, devised *à propos* of 'certain noble Anglo-French-Italians, who flutter hither and thither in our midst.' There is no reason to question T. Nash's allegation that the carica-

* Apart, of course, from any share he may have had in 'Shakespearean' literature. For references to *Puritanism*, see Index.

ture was modelled from the Earl of Oxford ; the terms in which G. H. himself fits the cap are obviously evasive, and merely show that at a later date (1592) the writer was among those who regarded the Earl of Oxford with deference and respect. Nor need we take too literally an academic skit from the pen of Gabriel Harvey ; it is evidence for little beyond his own idiosyncrasies of taste and banter ; he nursed his Rhetoric upon the gentle art of vituperation ; but in this case some of the touches are plainly drawn from life, and the following lines—in Harveian hexameter, it may be observed—are among the most in point :

A little Apish Hatte, couched fast to the pate, like an Oyster,
French Camarick Ruffles, deepe with a witsnesse,* starched to
the purpose,

Every one A per se A ; his term and braveries in Print,
Delicate in speach, queynte in aray, conceited in all poyntes ;
In Courtly guyles a passing singular odde man.

They preserve particular notes of affectation and of eccentricity, which might well come under the censure ‘ phantastical and lightheaded,’ applied by envious detractors, and said to result ‘ from one yeare’s practise of Italy.’ † But a little later, as University orator before the queen at Audley End (1578), Dr. Gabriel made lavish amends for his indiscretion, in the heroic verses in which he extolled the literary gifts and the martial promise of ‘ the Achilles of England,’ and called upon the young earl ‘ to drop the useless pen, to whet the sword and spear, and wield the mighty engines of war.’ ‡ However effusive and grandiloquent the terms, the appeal shows how deeply the earl was now immersed

* Whiteness.

† Puttenham, *Arte of Poesie*.

‡ Calamum, Memorande, pusillum
Exanguisque libros, usuque carentia scripta
Abjice ; nunc gladiis opus est, acuendus et ensis.

The four books of the *Gratulationes Waldinenses* may be read in Nichols’ *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, Vol. III., as well as in G. Harvey’s Works.

in literary activities, though his ambitions were still set upon service in the field.

From the time of the Earl of Surrey, Sir Thos. Wyatt and Lord Vaux, whose experiments in verse formed the backbone of Tottel's collected *Miscellany* (June 1557),* sonneteering, lyric and the lighter forms of verse had a recognised, though curiously shamefast and clandestine, position among Courtly accomplishments. Authorship was seldom avowed, but verses and *jeux d'esprit* passed round, and during the last thirty years of Elizabeth anthologies appeared, in which initials or mottoes or *noms de plume* revealed or masked the identity of the author. In the first of these, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, issued in 1573, the Earl of Oxford had some hand in the compilation, and it is possible that the motto *Meritum petere grave* attached to sixteen of the poems, and also placed upon the title-page, denotes his authorship.†

The next venture of the kind, *The Paradyse of Daynty Devices*, published in 1576, was based on extracts compiled by Rich. Edwards, M.A., Senior Student of Christ Church, and Master of the children of the Chapel Royal to Elizabeth, who died in 1566. Of the one hundred selected pieces about half were posthumous, fourteen by Thomas Lord Vaux, and fourteen by Edwards himself. Among the remainder, seven by E. O. the Earl of Oxford, are of outstanding force.‡

* Their dates are: Sir Thos. Wyatt, 1503–1542; Lord Henry Howard, 1517–1547; Lord Thomas Vaux, 1510–1556. Lord H. Howard married Frances Vere, aunt to the 17th Earl, in 1532.

† The latest editor, B. M. Ward, upholds this view; but the acrostic evidence, on which he lays most stress, seems precarious. But about Lord Oxford's close association with Geo. Gascoigne there can be no question.

‡ In 1576 edition, they appear as:

The judgement of Desire—‘The lively lark . . .’
His Good name being blemished he bewayleth—‘Framed in the
front . . .’
Love and Antagonism—‘The trickling tears . . .’
The Complaint of a lover, wearing Blacke and Tawnie—‘A crown
of bays . . .’
A lover rejected, complaineth—‘I am not as I seem to be . . .’

Three were withdrawn in the 1580 edition. Of the Complaints, all deeply felt, two '*The Trickling tears . . .*' and '*A Crown of bays . . .*' bear the impress of his domestic estrangement, but more passionate still is that which bewails 'the loss of his good name.' The motive incorporated in the refrain is well described in *Othello*, III, iii :

He who filches from me my good name
 Robs me of that which not enriches him,
 And makes me poor indeed

and recurs intermittently in the Shakespearean Sonnets. The cries of compunction and self-reproach, with their flood of invocations and alliterations, are not yet transmuted into poetic form, or 'recollected in tranquillity.' They reach their *crescendo* in the last stanza.

Help Gods, help saints, help sprites and powers that in the heaven
 do dwell,
 Help ye that are aye wont to wail, ye howling hounds of hell ;
 Help man, help beasts, help birds and worms, that on the earth
 do toil ;
 Help fish, help fowl, that flock and feed upon the salt sea soil,
 Help echo that in air doth flee, shrill voices to resound,
 To wail this loss of my good name, as of these griefs the ground.

For like vehemence of expression we might turn to Green's *Groats-worth* or *Repentance*, or to such a Sonnet as § 147. But without written records who could divine aright the throes that went to the making of Heine, Shelley or Byron, or in later days of Gissing, Francis Thompson, or O. Wilde ? The catastrophe, whatever it was, belongs to the year 1576, which left a lasting blight of isolation and of bitterness on his career. The key

His mind not quietly settled he writeth thus—'E'en as the wax
 doth melt . . .'
Of the mighty power of Love—'My meaning is to worke . . .'

The last was a slight and feeble piece ; the material of the last but one 'E'en as the wax . . .', was more effectively re-handled in the Dedicatory Poem to Cardanus' *Comfort*. For further details, see E. de Vere, *Poems* (ed. J. T. Looney), pp. 7, 22-32, 36.

may lie in some such scandal as that mentioned by Aikin. 'By gross misconduct he incurred from his sovereign a disgrace equally marked and public, being committed to the Tower for an attempt on one of her Maids of Honour.' *

Other dedications establish and illustrate his position among the minor poets of the day. Thos. Churchyard, who contributed to Tottel's *Miscellany* and later to the *Mirror for Magistrates*, was admitted to the Earl's household in 1569, and collaborated with him in the production of *Cardanus' Comfort* in 1572. Thos. Watson relied on his countenance for public favour to his *Hekatompathia* or *Passionate Centurie of Love* (1582). In 1584 John Soothern, Gentleman, dedicated his uncouth medley of odes and sonnets, entitled *Pandora*,† to 'the Rt. Hon. Edward Dever, Earle of Oxenforde, etc.,' and from *Galien of France* and the *Mirroure of Mutabilitie*‡ (1579) onwards, Anthony Munday dedicated to him product after product of his facile pen.§ The effusive dedications with which Robert Greene in 1584, and Angel Day in 1586, submitted to him their 'first-fruits of study,' the *Card of Fancy* and *The English Secretarie*, show the pre-eminence which he then enjoyed among the novices of Euphuism. Nor were these tributes of esteem mere passing or mercenary compliment. Forty years later, in the revised dedication of *Primalcion*, which fifteen years after the Earl's death Munday addressed to his son and successor, he writes to him as 'heir of your honourable father's matchless virtues . . ., in whom old Lord Edward is still living, and cannot die as long as you breathe.' But the lighter diversions of his Muse, like those of later date, were but by-products, pushed into publicity by

* *Memoirs of Queen Elizabeth*, II, 407.

† On this volume, see Lee, *Elizabethan Sonnets*, I, 1-li.

‡ It is prefaced by an anagrammatic poem to EDWARD DE VERE, and his posy (or motto) VERO NIL VERIUS.

§ Extracts from the *Zelauto* (1580) dedication are given by Ward, 17th Earl, pp. 187-8; those of Green and Day at pp. 197-9.

the zeal or meddlesomeness of enterprising editors.* His own magnetic poles of literary interest lay in the Euphuistic and dramatic movements of which he was the generous patron, and probably the moving instigator.

* E.g. in *Phœnix Nest* (1593), *England's Helicon* (1600), *England's Parnassus* (1600), to which may be added the *Fond Desire* colloquy, 'Come hither, Shepherd swain!' from Breton's *Bower of Delights* (1597), and stanzas printed among Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* series (see p. 56).

Section v : EUPHUISM ; J. LYLY

Euphuism derived its name and its fashion from John Lyly. During his somewhat erratic career at Oxford (1569–1574) he had been fortunate enough to secure the notice and patronage, if not the pecuniary assistance, of Lord Burleigh. On his coming to London in 1577 he was housed at the Savoy by Lord Burleigh, or more probably by the Earl of Oxford himself, who rented two sets of tenements there. Here it was that he composed, and in 1578 issued, *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit*, which met with so sensational a success. Ephemeral as it was, there is probably no volume in the whole history of English literature which in style and idiom combined so brilliant a debut with so contagious and lasting an influence. It ensured him the Earl's active support and patronage, and the second part of his work, *Euphues and his England*, issued in 1580, was dedicated 'To the Right Honourable my very good Lorde and Maister Edward de Vere, Earle of Oxenforde.' At this stage Lyly's one source of fixed income, so far as we know, was his secretarial and managerial work for the Earl; and his subsequent connection with the Revels office, and appointment as Vice-Master to the Chorister Boys at St. Paul's, were probably due to his influence. This also gave him touch with other literary coteries, such as the Gabriel Harvey circle at Cambridge, Thomas Watson of the *Hecatompathia*, and others.

Association with the Oxford Players gave a new direction to his literary vein. The slowness of movement, the lack of invention, and the crudity of plot displayed in *Euphues* are the best proof of new impulses at work when he turned his wits to drama. The plays are purged of the excesses and the pedantries of

Euphuism, while the colloquial prose retains its qualities of brightness and balance. In *Campaspe*, though the historical background is thin, the hero bloodless, and the philosophers (Diogenes excepted) mere stage puppets, romantic drama for the first time treads the English stage. The traditions of the Miracle and the Morality play are jettisoned, and the interest centres upon dialogue and repartee; and in the encounters of love a new and decisive place is assigned to woman's wit and fence. Though it masquerades still in Court costume, it is the prelude to a genuine Comedy of manners. Here, and yet more freely in *Endimion*,* lighter elements of home-bred humours are admitted, by the introduction of farcical types—pedants, braggarts or clowns—who serve as butts for the pranks and badinage of mischievous pages or serving-men. It may be said (not without truth) that the form of these diversions—the multiplication of women rôles, the tricks of sprites or *gamins*, the disguise of maidens in boy clothes, the accompaniment of songs and catches—springs out of the association of Court Revels, and the romantic cult of the Maiden Queen, with the 'Children' of the Chapel Royal or Paul's, who impersonated female parts. True, conditions were thus provided, which gave scope for such developments, but nothing is farther from the truth than that the conditions created the result. It needed originaive genius of a high order to perceive the opportunities inherent in conditions so abnormal, and to extract from seeming obstacles triumphant gains. Nothing in Lyly's work suggests originality of this kind: he was an intellectual opportunist, who had talent and wit in abundance, but little of creative impetus or grasp. He did not follow up the innovations which he introduced, or realise their possibilities, or co-ordinate their structure, or push them to success. 'We cannot tell what we should tearme our labours, iron or bullion.' †

* The debt of *Mids. Night's Dream* to *Endimion* is unmistakable.

† Epilogue to *Campaspe*.

As the result, through his plays there runs a law of 'diminishing returns.' *Campaspe*, probably the earliest of the eight plays (performed in January 1582, and first published in 1585), comes nearest to true drama, *Endimion* to comic underplot; but neither germinates or fruits. Bond does not hesitate to ascribe the initial impulse and direction to the Earl of Oxford; and visibly, as their relations grew more distant, the impulse waned and evaporated. Lyly was one of those pert and shallow wits who confuse independence with impertinence; he could not resist 'glancing at abuses,' and making himself facetious at the expense of those whom he had most occasion to respect; Edward de Vere and Gabriel Harvey were probably the friends on whom he depended most for literary success; yet in trying to make mischief between them he gave himself away as one whom kindness or intimacy encouraged to forget his proper place.

In this connection one novel feature in the plays assumes special significance, the introduction of songs and musical interludes to lighten and brighten the action, most often (as in Shakespeare's Plays) of minor parts. In *Campaspe*, the slaves' Tavern-song

O for a bowle of fatt Canary

the dainty Apelles ditty

Cupid and my Campaspe played

and Trico's bird-song *

What bird so sings, yet so does wayle ?

are a breath of fresh air in a stove-heated chamber. Something of a cloud hangs over their origin; words of the songs are not found in any of the versions of the plays published by Lyly in his lifetime. Not till 1632 (twenty-six years after his death) do they appear in print, and then in a folio issued in the same year, and

* With this compare the Nightingale Song in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, 'As it fell upon a day.'

by the same printers, as the Second Folio of Shakespeare. Even then, a number of the *lacunæ* (9 out of 30) are left blank. All this cannot be mere accident; it looks as though, in part at least, the songs were borrowed goods, over which Lyly could claim no copyright. Nowhere does he show a trace of the capabilities revealed in the *Campaspe* series, and it is hardly credible that the tuneless doggerel on which he fell back in later plays (in *Midas*, for instance, or *Mother Bombie*), could have emanated from the same hand as penned 'Cupid and my Campaspe.' Even in these, gleanings from the master hand are intermittently interspersed. The legitimate—may it not be said the irresistible?—inference is, that Lyly was indebted for them to his patron-director Edward de Vere; and they are brought into close and formal contact with Shakespeare, when we find a variant of the pixies' song in *Endimion*,

Pinch him, pinch him, black and blue,

actually utilised in the *Merry Wives*, and printed in the imperfect draft of 1602.

In 1583-4 Lord Oxford transferred to him the lease of the rehearsal theatre at Blackfriars, and also made him a grant of land * valued at £30 13s. 4d. yearly, a larger income than Lyly could command from any other source. In 1587 he is still described in a legal document as 'servant to the Earl of Oxford,' but there is nothing to determine the precise nature or duration of the engagement. In 1590 the inhibition of the Paules Boys deprived him of that source of occupation and emolument, and drove him to public drama and entertainments organised by noble lords. But further discussion of the literary relation between Lyly and the early plays of Shakespeare lies beyond our scope.

* The Manor House, Bentfeylde, Bury Lodge, near Bury. Gerrard, *Elizabethan Drama*, p. 122.

*Section vi: OUTLINE OF PUBLIC LIFE, 1576-1588;
YEARS OF SECLUSION, 1588-1604*

Before entering further upon literary affiliations it will be well to survey in rapid outline the years that intervened between Lord Oxford's return from travel and the virtual close of his public activities. In the close circle of privileged and competing courtiers, whose ambitions waited upon the favour of the Queen, he was a leading, and in some respects the foremost, figure. In 1577 he received from her Majesty a grant of the Manor of Rysing. In 1578, on the occasion of her Cambridge visit, when, not to mention lesser lights, Lord Burleigh and the Earl of Leicester, Sir Christopher Hatton and Philip Sidney all lent lustre to the Royal train, the Earl of Oxford takes a place second to none in Gabriel Harvey's verses of congratulation.* At Shrovetide in 1579, in conjunction with his cousins, the Earl of Surrey, Lords Thomas Howard and Windsor, he 'presented a device' for the entertainment of the Court, and its success was sealed by the jewels which at the end of the masque the two Earls presented to her Majesty. A little later there occurred the famous Tennis Court quarrel with P. Sidney, which as a Society scandal attained so disproportionate a place in the pages of later annalists, and at the time resulted in Philip Sidney's rustication from Court to the Arcadian shades of Wilton. At the Court tournament of 1581, the Earl of Oxford stood first upon the list of Defenders, and it is noticeable that Philip Sidney and Sir Thomas Knyvet (as well as Lord Windsor and others) were among his supporters. The prize of valour was awarded to the

* *Gratulationes Valdinenses*; see Nichols, *Progresses*, III., and Ward, *17th Earl*, pp. 156-8.

Earl of Oxford ; it is the last function of the kind in which he bore a part. Expenditure so lavish necessitated continuous sale of his estates ; between 1580 and 1585 he parted with no less than thirty-two, and the mercantile ‘ adventures,’ by which he sought to retrieve his fortunes, only landed him ever deeper in the mire. Towards the end of 1580 a change comes over the scene. In his fickle and impulsive way he entangled himself with the faction of Roman Catholic peers, Lord Henry Howard and Charles Arundel, whose religious sympathies led them into treasonable collusion with Spain ; and he is even said to have made profession of the Catholic faith.* Whether that be true or not, he passionately disavowed and indeed helped to expose their disloyal intrigues, but failed to regain the personal trust and good graces of the Queen till the summer of 1583.

In March 1582 he was seriously hurt, perhaps permanently injured, in an affray with Sir Thomas Knyvet,† and subsequently to this date we hear of no personal feats of arms. From 1584, which saw the assassination of William Prince of Orange, and the death of Alençon Duc d’Anjou in France, the horizon grew dark with gathering war-clouds. In the relief expedition despatched to Flushing in 1585, Oxford received high command, but was almost immediately superseded in favour of Leicester and Sir Philip Sidney, and brought back as commander of the Horse at home. He could not brook a second place. In 1586 his position in the peerage, his relations with Lord Burleigh, and also with the Crown, designated him for a place on the tribunal which heard the charges of high treason against Mary Queen of Scots, and his voice was with those who awarded the sentence of death. Her execution in February 1587 threw down the glove to Spain, and in the busy months that followed Lord Oxford played his part ; at his own charge he hired ships and fitted out the *Edward Bonaventure* to meet the Great Armada ; and

* See, further, on § 116.

† See on § 74.

a contemporary ballad * pictures him thus on his own forecastle.

De Vere, whose fame and loyalty hath pearst
The Tuscan clime, and through the Belgike lands
By wingèd Fame for valour is rehearst.
Like warlike Mars upon the hatches stands.
His tuskèd Boar 'gan foam for inward ire
While Pallas filled his breast with warlike fire.

It appears that he was not present at the decisive engagement off Gravelines, but at the triumphal service of Thanksgiving held at St. Paul's on Sunday, November 24, in company with the Earl Marshal, he carried the golden Canopy, beneath which the Queen advanced up the cathedral nave. It was the last public pageant in which we hear of his taking part. Thenceforth, a cloud of mystery—almost a conspiracy of silence—envelopes his public and his private life.

At the moment when the English fleet lay concentrated at Plymouth, in waiting for the advent of the Great Armada (May 1588), Lady Oxford gave birth to her fifth child, and ten days later, on June 5, breathed her last at Greenwich. Next year the Earl parted with Vere House to Sir John Hart, and dropped into a homeless, unsettled life in London apartments—his ambitions shattered and his resources finally exhausted. Such correspondence as survives deals almost entirely with financial matters, and hopes of lucrative preferment. But before the end of 1591 a second marriage came to his relief, and he gave his hand to Elizabeth Trentham, one of the Queen's Maids of Honour, and daughter of Sir Thomas Trentham of Staffordshire; in February 1593 she presented him with a son and heir, named Henry, to carry on the ancient title. The name Henry was unknown in the De Vere family, and some have felt tempted to associate it with Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, with whom at this time he entered into

* The initials I. L. suggest John Lyly as the author, but the style hardly favours the conjecture.

intimate relations. In this same year he finally alienated Castle Hedingham to the three surviving daughters of his first marriage, and to Lord Burleigh, acting as their guardian. Many of the mortgages had been redeemed by the help of liberal advances from the Trentham family. He himself, possibly under his wife's influence, withdrew into studied seclusion. Their residence was first at Stoke Newington, 'a very proper house,' and later (from 1596) at 'King's Hold' Manor House, a dignified residence in the adjoining parish of Hackney,* both of which were then garden suburbs within easy reach of London, less than three miles from the *Theater*, or the *Curtain*, or the later *Globe*.

The daughters remained in the guardianship of their grandfather, Lord Burleigh, and on his death in 1598 passed to that of his second son, Sir Robert, who served as Chief Secretary both to Elizabeth and James I. In 1590 onwards, and intermittently till 1594, there were protracted negotiations for a marriage between the eldest daughter Elizabeth and the young Earl of Southampton, but the Earl was reluctant to enter the married bond, and finally a still more advantageous match was found in the person of Lord William Stanley who became heir to the title in 1594, and on January 26, 1595, was espoused to Elizabeth as 6th Earl of Derby. In this connection a strange entry occurs in a long letter addressed by Father Garnett, Director of the English Jesuits, to Father Robt. Parsons, on November 19, 1594. 'The marriage of the Lady Vere to the new Earl of Derby is deferred by reason that he standeth in hazard to be uncarled again, his brother's wife being with child, until it is seen whether it be a boy or no. The young Earl of Southampton, refusing the Lady Vere, payeth £5000 present payment.'† The amount and the reason assigned seem incredible, but point to some

* Robinson, *Hist. of Stoke Newington and Hackney*, pp. 109-14, gives full particulars, with inventory.

† Foley, *English Jesuits*, IV. 49.

actual transaction. In 1597 there was talk of marriage between the second daughter, Lady Bridget (aged thirteen) and William Herbert, prospective Earl of Pembroke, but it came to nothing, and in 1599 she was espoused to Francis Norris, who became Lord Norris in the following year. The third daughter, Lady Susan, was married to Sir Philip Herbert on December 27, 1604.

For personal maintenance from June 26, 1586, Earl Edward received from the Crown a yearly grant of £1000 (in modern values not less than £10,000) paid quarterly under the Privy Seal, and renewed in the same form by King James I.* So large a pension (or salary) from the Privy Purse has no parallel under the economic regimen of Queen Elizabeth, and no hint remains of duties or obligations imposed. The Earl was not engaged in any secret service or diplomatic employment, and his applications for military or administrative posts never met with success. A letter to Lord Burleigh (1594) refers to abuses and hindrances inglorious to her Majesty and himself in the discharge of 'his office,' but that might quite naturally refer to his stewardship of the Forest of Essex, to which he made good his claim in 1593. In default of other evidence, Ward suggests some connection with the office of the Revels and Court entertainments, which fell under the Queen's personal administration.† As some corroboration of this it has been urged that during the interval between the death of Lord Cobham on March 5, 1597, and the appointment of the younger Lord Hunsdon, on May 18, 1599, the Earl of Oxford undertook the duties of Lord Chamberlain and the direction of 'the Lord Chamberlain's men.' But that inference seems to hang upon a confusion between the office of Lord Chamberlain and the hereditary title of Lord Great Chamberlain appendant to the De Vere succession.‡

* Ward, 355-6.

† The conjecture may claim some support from Sonnets §§ 110-111.

‡ Gerrard, *Elizabethan Drama and Dramatists*, pp. 8, 19, 23.

There is no ground for ascribing his seclusion to collapse of physical or mental powers. In September 1597 he pleads ill-health as an excuse for abstention from Court festivities at Theobalds, and in 1601 he formally withdrew from attendance in the House of Lords. But in February of that year he sat as Senior Peer on the panel of twenty-five noblemen, before whom Essex and Southampton were charged and found guilty of high treason. And up till then we find him applying for various positions and offices of state. The notable point is that during his latter years his leading interests, and the notices regarding him, centre more and more round literature and the stage. His repatriation in 1576 synchronises with the earliest recognition of the Theatre in London, and also with the issue of the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, which included seven of his early poems; and no less markedly do the years of retirement correspond with the outburst of Sonneteering and Minor Verse which revealed England as 'a nest of singing birds,' and with the typical and unique developments of the Elizabethan drama. A few dates will drive the point home. Among Sonneteers the *Delia* series by Daniel and Constable's *Diana* appeared in 1592; *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* by Barn. Barnes and *Phillis* by Lodge in 1593; Drayton's *Idea* in 1594. Among the pioneers of drama Greene died in 1592, Marlowe in 1593, Kydd in 1594; the Lyly Masques begin in 1588, the first published Shakespearean Play in 1591. With these data in mind we may resume the thread of his literary contacts and activities from 1576 onwards.

*Section vii. DRAMA : CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONIA ;
ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE STAGE*

1576 A.D. is a memorable date ; almost it might be called the birth-year of Elizabethan drama. It saw the nativity of the first two London Playhouses, the *Theater* (built by Jas. Burbage, the actor) near the site of the suppressed Priory at Holywell, and the *Curtain*. They opened up new possibilities ; they gave form and setting, and some degree of permanence, to entertainments which had hitherto been mere interludes or rude improvisations dependent on the hospitality of the tavern-yard, the beer-garden, or the village green.

The streams from which Elizabethan Drama drew its supplies were manifold : some from the home-soil of Mystery Plays and Moralities, of burlesque and farce ; some from exotic sources of Academic and Renaissance drama, fed on the conventions of the Greek, the Roman, or the Italian stage ; some from the allegorical pageants and masques favoured in circles of the Court. At the visit of Elizabeth to Cambridge in 1564, ' the nights were passed in Comedies and 'Tragedies,' and at Oxford two years later the same form of entertainment was repeated ; while in London the Inns of Court granted the use of their Halls for similar programmes. Thus for a time the scholars and the pedants, the courtiers and the beaux, had it their own way ; and indeed monopolised the position of advantage. An artificial and spectacular drama of this kind tended to become (like sonneteering) an elegant and fashionable craze ; its main appeal lay in pageantry, designed to gratify the performers even more than the spectators ; and its poetry fell away into cultured wit, entertaining to the sophisticated, but without meaning or message for the

multitude. But the opening of public theatres gave to the younger and more Bohemian University wits—to Marlowe, Green, Peele and their associates—a door and a platform, of which they were not slow to take advantage, where the Comic and the Tragic Muse tuned their instruments to the ear of the populace, experimenting freely in the vagaries and the licences, the poetry and the prose, the heights and the depths of the Elizabethan drama. As a by-issue in the fray, a new departure in English literature, there came into existence a tribe of literary and linguistic critics, who under the new lights subjected the traditions of the elders—say of Roger Ascham, of Philip Sidney, of Gabriel Harvey—to new and searching analysis, and sought often by the comparative method to reach the first principles of rhyme, rhythm, metre, prosody, accent, alliteration, etc., and so to determine the true laws which regulate the just structure and handling of English verse and prose in their various forms and applications.* From these writers we learn something of the position held by the Earl of Oxford amid the new developments.

For Philip Sidney our subject requires personal and special treatment ; and our first witness may be William Webbe. A Cambridge graduate, attached as tutor to a country house in Essex, he does not indeed give much evidence of first-hand learning, and his judgments are for the most part traditional and pedagogic. But more or less he was an industrious reader of current verse, on which he pours no little scorn, and following the lead of Ascham he became an ardent advocate for the reform of English versification upon prosodial lines. Though Spenser is his foremost admiration, he showers unstinted praise on Dr. Phaer and Gabriel Harvey, and tried his own hand at English Hexameter, Elegiac and Sapphic. This makes the testimony of his *Discourse of English Poetrie*, published in 1586, the year of Sir Philip Sidney's

* For ready reference, and scholarly annotations, Greg. Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vols. I. II., is invaluable.

death at Zutphen, the more remarkable. 'I may not omitte the deserved commendations of many honourable and noble Lordes and Gentlemen in her Majesties Courte, which in the rare devises of Poetry have been and yet are most excellent skylfull, among whom the right honourable Earle of Oxford may challenge to himself the tytle of the most excellent among the rest.'* Here is categorical proof of conspicuous literary activities during the decade preceding 1586.

Our next witness is *The Arte of English Poesie*, published in 1589.† This treatise is of a very different order of merit; it is replete with learning well and cunningly applied, and shows first-hand appreciation of English literature from Chaucer, Langland, and Lydgate to the time of writing: often indeed it follows misleading trails and will-of-the-wisps in the analysis of poetic and prosodial technique, but throughout it builds on solid bases of learning and study, on the strength of which the author appraises the work and methods of contemporaries. It was ascribed insecurely to George Puttenham, or alternatively to his brother Richard ‡; but more recent investigation refers it to Lord Lumley, § one of the most learned noblemen of the day, connected both by blood and marriage with the Earl of Oxford. The writer, whoever he was, was in touch with the highest circles of literary society, and this adds weight to the passages in which he deals with the anonymous activities of authors of distinction. 'Now also-of such among the Nobilitie or gentrie as be very well seene in many laudable sciences, and especially in making of Poesie, it is so come to passe that they have no courage to write, and, if they have, yet are they loath to be a knowen of their skill—So as I know very many notable Gentlemen in the Court that have written commendably,

* Greg. Smith, I. 243.

† An earlier licence shows that it was ready for printing in November 1588.

‡ Greg. Smith, II. 407.

§ Ward, *17th Earl*, p. 246.

and suppressed it againe, or else suffered it to be publisht without their owne names to it : as if it were a discredit for a gentleman to seeme learned and to show himself amorous of any good Art.* Later on he goes on to specify. After summarising the contributions made by Skelton, Sir Thos. Wyatt, the Earl of Surrey, and Lord Vaux under Henry VIII, by Sternhold, John Heywood and E. Ferrys under Edward VI, and by Dr. Phaer (followed by A. Golding) under Mary, he continues † : ‘ In her Majesties time that now is are sprung up another crew of Courtly makers, Noble men and Gentlemen of her Majesties owne servantes, who have written excellently well, as it would appeare if their doings could be found out and made publicke with the rest, of which number is first that noble Gentleman Edward Earle of Oxford . . . ’ and further defines their merits in these terms, ‘ For Tragedie, the Lord of Buckhurst and Maister Edward Ferrys, for such doings as I have seen of theirs, do deserve the hiest price ; Th’ Earle of Oxford and Maister Edwardes of her Majesties Chappell for Comedy and Enterlude. For Eglogue and pastoral Poesie, Sir Philip Sidney and Maister Challenner, and that other gentleman who wrote the late shepheards Callender. . . . ’ ‡ One could not ask for evidence more specific or precise. The writer speaks from personal knowledge of courtiers, noblemen, and gentry attached to the Royal household, whose literary output was of the highest quality, but who carefully refrained from avowed authorship, and circulated their works either privately, or under cover of some assumed name. First among these he places Edward, Earl of Oxford, but is careful not to divulge secrets of authorship. His lists of enumeration include Lord Buckhurst (joint author of *Gorboduc*), Philip Sidney, Walter Raleigh, Edward Dyer, Fulke Greville,

* Greg. Smith, II. 22.

† Greg. Smith, II. 63.

‡ Greg. Smith, II. 63, 65. *Arcadia*, it may be noted, did not appear till 1590, *Astrophel and Stella* not till 1591, both as posthumous productions. The *Shepherd's Calendar* was issued in April 1579, but the authorship long remained secret.

Gascoigne, Breton and Turberville, and may fairly be said to cover the courtly writers of distinction whose names and works are familiar to students of Elizabethan literature. Chapman's star had not yet risen above the horizon, and perhaps Lord Lumley himself is the most conspicuous omission. The writer's own works seem to have observed the rule of anonymity to which he refers. None of the above-named could claim distinction in *Comedy*; that was the province in which the Earl of Oxford attained to eminence. Mr. R. Edwards, with whom he is coupled, died in 1566, and the two plays associated with his name, the *Palamon and Arcite* composed for the Royal reception at Oxford, and the *Damon and Pithias*, are justly included under the term 'Interlude.'* The mention accorded to him is perhaps chiefly due to his share in editing the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*. Nowhere does the treatise refer, by name or otherwise, to Shakespeare; and in conjunction with the importance given to the Earl of Oxford, the omission is noteworthy.

A few years later Fr. Meres, in his *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598, endorses and emphasises the same verdict—'the best for Comedy amongst us bee Edward, Earle of Oxford,' followed by a long list of names (including 'Shakespeare').† Notwithstanding the parade of erudition, Meres' lists of authors seem not much more than a scissors-and-paste inventory, combining notices and intimations derived from other hands.‡ But by this time 'Shakespeare' is included on the Elegiac and Tragic as well as the Comic roll, and under Comedy is credited with *Gentlemen of Verona*, *Errors*, *Love Labors Lost*, *Love Labours Wonne*, *Midsummer's Night Dreame*, and *Merchant of Venice*—all of which appeared in early Quarto form; but it is obvious that in Meres'

* Greg. Smith, I. 410; II. 65.

† Greg. Smith, II. 320.

‡ His panegyric of Elizabeth (Greg. Smith, II. 321) is copied word for word from the *Arte of Poesie*, and he extracts at still greater length from Sidney (II, 322), and from Webbe (I, 313).

catalogue 'Shakespeare' takes his place as an author only, not as an individual; and this is, I think, confirmed, not contradicted, by his reference to 'the sweete wittie soul of Ovid in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred *Sonnets* among his private friends, etc.' In connection with 'the sugred sonnets to private friends' it has not, I think, been noticed that F. Meres was brother-in-law to John Florio. For years, probably from 1588 onwards, Florio 'lived in the pay and patronage' of the Earl of Southampton*; in 1594 he was an inmate of the Earl's Titchfield household†; and there was no 'private friend' more likely to enjoy the privilege of confidential perusal of the *Sonnets*. Baynes, in his *Shakespeare Studies*, finds clear traces of Shakespeare's acquaintance with Florio's earlier work in *First Fruits* (1587); and prefixed to the *Second Fruits* (1591) is an anonymous Sonnet, which Florio describes as the work of a friend 'who loved better to be a poet than to be called one,' and in which Minto solely on the evidence of style, discerned the hand of 'Shakespeare.' It runs thus

Phaeton to his Friend Florio.

Sweet friend, whose name agrees with thy increase,
 How fit a rival art thou of the Spring!
 For when each branch hath left his flourishing,
 And green-locked Summer's shady pleasures cease,
 She makes the Winter's storms repose in peace,
 And spends her franchise on each living thing;
 The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing;
 Herbs, gums and plants do vaunt of their release.
 So when that all our English wits lay dead
 (Except the laurel that is ever green)
 Thou with thy fruits our barrenness o'erspread
 And set thy flowery pleasance to be seen.
 Such fruits, such flow'rets of morality,
 Were ne'er before brought out of Italy.

* Introductory Letter Dedication to the *World of Wordes*.

† Stopes, *3rd Earl of Southampton*, pp. 69-83.

The Shakespeare attribution seems to me a happy stroke of divination, and it may be worth while to point out some of the typically Shakespearean touches. The term of address, 'Sweet friend,' compared with §§ 56, 76, 108, the play upon the name Florio, 'whose name agrees with thy increase,' the alliterative cadences of ll. 3-5, the procession of the seasons compared with §§ 5, 10, 97, 98, the use of 'increase' (cf. § 97.6), of 'shady' (§ 77), of 'set' compared with 'maiden gardens yet unset' (§ 16.6), of 'our barrenness o'er-spread' compared with 'beauty o'ersnowed and bareness everywhere' (§§ 5, 97.4), a line like

The daisies sprout, the little birds do sing

compared with §§ 97, 98, and the song, 'When daisies pied,' in *Love's Labour's Lost*, V. ii, the Spring Song in *A.Y.L.I.*, v. iii, and the Pedlar's Song in *Winter's Tale*, all bear their testimony. The 'She' in l. 5 refers of course to the *Primavera* 'Spring' personified in Flora, echoing the author's name. On the whole there is good reason to number this among the 'sugred sonnets to private friends' recorded by Meres, though he drops no direct hint of connection between the Earl of Oxford and the 'Shakespeare' literature.

It is now time to trace Lord Oxford's personal associations with the stage. As was usual in great households, a troop of players had formed part of the establishment of the De Veres, and notices of their activities extend back into the reign of Henry VII. They were maintained by Lord John, the 16th Earl, and doubtless took part in the entertainments provided for Queen Elizabeth during her five-days' residence at Castle Hedingham in August 1561.* Other notices record performances given by them at Ipswich, Maldon, and elsewhere,† so that from boyhood Lord Edward must have been familiar with stage plays. After the death of Lord John in 1562

* See p. 10.

† Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II. 99.

the troupe was broken up, and the dismantling of the Castle must have dealt a fatal blow to further hopes. But subsequent to his return from Italy, 'the Earl of Oxford's men' revived in a new form. Early in the following year the Earl of Warwick's men, among whom the Duttons were leading figures, went over in a body to the Earl of Oxford's service. Under the terms of the 1571 Act of Parliament players were compelled to apply for licence under a peer of the realm or personage of higher degree; and without this were liable to arrest as 'rogues and vagabonds.' The relation of the patron to the players varied much; sometimes the company were a part of his household; sometimes his contribution to the ceremonial revels, which sustained the lustre of the Court; sometimes he was little more than a screen, or figure-head, satisfying the legal requirement; while at others the tie meant active interest or even participation in their engagements. And this certainly seems to have been the case with the Earl of Oxford. Apart from the Shrove-tide masque of 1579,* there is little or no evidence of his company performing before the Court. The accounts of the Master of the Revels show that the acting fell chiefly to the Queen's own company,† to the Lord Chamberlain's servants, to the Earl of Leicester's troupe, or to the Children of the Chapel Royal. The records are copious, but almost the only notice of any appearance of the Earl of Oxford's servants was on New Year's Day, 1584.‡ They seem rather to have catered for the demands of the London 'Theatre,' and the provincial stage. In April 1580 they were in trouble before the Lord Mayor, for misconduct at 'the Theatre,' which the Civic authorities viewed with censorious eyes, and two of the leading actors, R. Leveson and L. Dutton,

* See p. 40.

† First instituted by the Master of the Revels in 1583.

‡ For two of these years (1581-3), it must be remembered, he lay under Royal displeasure, and the official establishment of Queen's Players in 1583 went far to do away with the employment of private companies for Court occasions.

were committed to the Marshalsea. A little later they went on tour, and at the time of the Midsummer Fair Lord Burleigh (father-in-law to the Earl), as Chancellor, commended them to the good offices of the Vice-Chancellor, John Hatcher; but he, pleading fear of the pestilence, risks of interference with University Examinations, and previous precedent, sent them on their way with twenty shillings for travelling expenses. Later in the year they were acting at Norwich, in 1581 at Bristol, and chance notices of a similar kind occur throughout the eighties. During the earlier part of this period John Lyly was in close collaboration with the Earl of Oxford, as secretarial assistant and manager in his dramatic enterprises.* The company is commonly described as 'the players' or 'the men' or 'the servants' of the Earl of Oxford; and they must not be hastily confused with the Company of Choir Boys, which he supported in co-operation with the Children of Windsor, and of the Chapel Royal, and of St. Paul's, who in 1584 gave a performance of *Agamemnon and Ulysses* before the Court. His experiments were multifarious; for in the same year we hear of a company of acrobats and tumblers performing under his patronage. That their energies were mainly directed to Comedy and Melodrama seems clear; it is shown by the character of the theatres and stages which they frequented; by the direct participation of Lyly, whose dramatic efforts were limited to light Comedy, and of Anthony Munday, in the conduct of their programmes; and by the pre-eminence in Comedy accorded by consentient testimonies to the Earl of Oxford himself, who doubtless gave first preference to his own companies. And in the Puritan protest against plays, addressed to the Chief Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, in 1587, the Earl of Oxford is coupled with Lord Leicester and the Lord Admiral as a chief offender.

His versatility is further shown in his ardent love of music; and in the lighter forms of composition, glee and

* See p. 86.

madrigal, he himself attained considerable skill. In dedicating to him his *First* (1591) and his *Second* (1599) *Song-Book*, John Farmer credits him with expert proficiency; and among his musical settings to *A Banquet of Dainty Conceits*, Anthony Munday includes the *Earl of Oxford's March*, and the *Earl of Oxford's Galliard*.

For the conduct of these various enterprises, which must have made heavy demands on purse and on initiative, he employed John Lyly as secretary manager, and there can be little doubt that he utilised his services as well as those of Anth. Munday, in the production of plays. The exact terms or duration of service are not known; they were no doubt matter of personal arrangement; but they were permanent and substantial, as shown by the transfer of lease and the grant of land already referred to.* Till 1589 at least he continues in his service; all the notable Lyly plays or interludes belong to this decade, and so too, it may be added, most, if not all, of the ten Shakespearean plays enumerated by Fr. Meres, in which the marks of Euphuist and Lyly influence are most conspicuous.†

From 1589 the fortunes of the Company can only be vaguely outlined; we know their existence, and catch here and there a glimpse of their movements; but they are wrapped in the obscurity which envelopes their patron, and the letters that fall within this period are concerned only with family or public affairs. Among rival companies the position of favour and distinction was held by Lord Leicester's men. On his death in 1588, they became Lord Strange's men, taking their title from Ferdinando Stanley, prospective heir to the Earldom of Derby. And on his sudden death in 1594 they passed into the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, under whom they continued to serve, until the accession of James I promoted them to royal livery. During these

* P. 39.

† Gerrard, *Elizabethan Drama and Dramatists*, goes so far as to attribute them (revision apart) to Lyly, with the support of Greene or Nash.



last, dramatically speaking these 'Shakespearean' years of the reign, the London stage was held by 'The Admiral's' and the 'Chamberlain's' men, serving under the colours of Lord Howard and Lord Hunsdon respectively.* From 1594 the Chamberlain's company (with which the Burbages, Shakspeare, and others were connected) acted at the *Theatre*, and in variety of repertory and financial strength gained rapidly upon their rivals. In 1597, owing to disagreements with their landlord, they forsook the *Theatre* for the *Curtain* close at hand. At the expiration of their lease in 1598, by a bold stroke they secured a new site on Bankside in Southwark, erected the famous *Globe* theatre, and transferred thither their effects and plays. Their success and enterprise drove their rivals at the *Rose* to build the new *Fortune* theatre, on the north side of the river. In 1600 for a time the *Globe* and the *Fortune* became the only two Play-houses licensed for the performance of plays in London; and this privileged position they owed to the direct countenance and intervention of Queen Elizabeth herself. All Shakespearean plays so far as known were 'put on' at the *Globe*, and this it can hardly be doubted was the stage for which the Earl of Oxford exercised his dramatic activities. Throughout he was in close and intimate relations with the titled patrons. In 1594 his eldest daughter Elizabeth was affianced to Lord Strange's younger brother William Stanley, and as soon as the succession proved secure, became (in January 1595) Countess of Derby. Intimate domestic intercourse followed between the two Earls, and continued during the time when Lord Derby was chiefly occupied in 'penning comedies for the common players' (1599).

* In *Elizabethan Drama and Dramatists* Mr. Gerrard supplies a full and succinct digest of the kaleidoscopic changes and activities of the various companies, their patrons, their composition and their programmes, so far as they have yet been pieced together from the fragmentary materials available. The first Lord Hunsdon was Lord Chamberlain from 1594 to 1596; his son's warrant of succession is dated May 18, 1599; but an interim tenure of the office by the Earl of Oxford does not as yet seem to me established.

During these latter years the Earl of Oxford seems to have given his name to some private and perhaps provincial troupe, who, when the licence privilege was restricted to the *Globe* and the *Fortune*, received special permission to act at the *Boar's Head*. But in 1603 they, together with the Earl of Worcester's men, amalgamated under the patronage of Queen Anne, and as the 'Queen's Players' were taken under the royal ægis of King James I.

Section viii: LINKS WITH E. SPENSER; GABRIEL HARVEY; PHILIP SIDNEY

It must not be imagined that these active and generous sympathies with innovation and experiment—with Euphuism and with the new ventures, constructive, metrical and histrionic, of Elizabethan drama—meant alienation from the more classical and ordered developments of the national poetry. In 1579 Edmund Spenser, befriended by Gabr. Harvey, and under the patronage of Philip Sidney, produced *The Shepheardes Calender* under the modest *nom de plume* *Immerito*. There, in accordance with his allegorising genius, contemporaries are all attired in pastoral costume, and identification is not always certain. But verbal echoes hardly leave room for doubt that the Willye and Perigot shepherds, who in the August canto contend in Amœbean rhymes, stand for the Earl of Oxford and Philip Sidney.* Acting as judge, Cuddie (sc. Spenser) is unable to decide between their rival merits—no slight tribute to Oxford, when we remember that *The Shepheardes Calender* was

* Discussed in Looney, *Shakespeare Identified*, pp. 342–6. The following parodies seem unmistakable :

Compare Spenser :

Per. I saw the bouncing Bellibone

Wil. Hey ho, Bonibell

with Sidney's

You scarce can tell

Which is the dainter bonny belle.

And, again, Spenser's

Per. Dame Cynthia's silver ray

and

Wil. Heyho, pinching payne

with De Vere's

This Cynthia's silver light

and

Patience perforce is such a pinching pain.

dedicated to Sidney and brought out under his auspices. The identification is of primary importance for determining the personality of 'Willie' in the *Tears of the Muses* section of the *Complaints*.^{*} There Thalia, the Dramatic Muse, deploras the low estate to which Comedy has now fallen, dispossessed by 'Barbarism and brutish Ignorance' of

all that goodly glee
Which wont to be the glory of gay wits.

All places they with follie have possest
And with vaine toyes the vulgare entertaينه
But me have banishèd, with all the rest
That whilome wont to wait upon my traine,
Fine Countefesaunce and unhurtfull Sport
Delight and laughter deckt in seemly sort.

The poet bemoans the coarseness and vulgarities which in 1579 provoked Stephen Gosson's 'pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters and suchlike caterpillars of a commonwealth,'[†] and to which Philip Sidney was composing a corrective in his *Apologie for Poetrie*. A little later the Muse goes on to deplore the withdrawal from the active stage of the one choice spirit, skilled to combine 'wit and merriment' with the culture and refinement of the past—

And he the man whom Nature self had made
To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate,
With kindly counter under Mimick shade,
Our pleasant Willy, ah is dead of late

* * * * * *

But that same gentle spirit, from whose pen
Large streames of honie and sweete Nectar flowe,
Scorning the boldnes of such base-borne men,
Which dare their follies forth so rashlie throwe ;
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell, ‡
Than so himselfe to mockerie to sell.

^{*} The *Complaints* contain pieces of very various date. The year of publication (1591) marks only the final terminus.

[†] *School of Abuse*.

[‡] Cf. § 29. 2, 'I all alone beweepe my outcast state.'

'Gentle' in Elizabethan parlance, and habitually in Spenser, implies high birth and degree, and apart from this date and description exclude reference to William Shakspeare, to whom some have desired to refer the tribute. He was at this time twenty-six at most, and just embarking upon the full flow of professional activities. Among the aristocracy there is not one whom the words fit so well as the Earl of Oxford, and the phrase

Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell

agrees exactly with the situation. The 'Willie' appellation is repeated and confirmed.

That the expression of admiring reverence is not overcharged is shown by the tributary Sonnet *To the right Honourable the Earl of Oxenford*, appended to Books I-III of *The Færie Queene*, first issued in this year (1590):

Reccive most Noble Lord in gentle gree,
The unripe fruit of an unready wit.

* * * * *

Sith th'antique glory of thine ancestry
Under a shady vale is therein writ,*
And eke thine owne long living memory,
Succeeding them in true nobility :
And also for the love, which thou dost beare
To th'Heliconian ymps, and they to thee,
They unto thee, and thou to them most deare.

Among the seventeen dedicatory Sonnets not one approaches in warmth of literary appreciation that with which the master-poet of the day thus sets his seal to the verdict of less inspired contemporaries.†

This leads us back to Gabriel Harvey, the Hobbinol

* The reference may be to *F.Q.* III. ix, in which Paridell and Britomart descant on the grace of noble ancestry.

† The text has dealt only with passages connecting Spenser with the Earl of Oxford. Should he prove to be the author of the Sonnets, the riddle of the Will Sonnets—'My name is Will'—receives direct and satisfying solution. Cf. Looney, *Shakespeare Identified*, pp. 338-340.

of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, the most vocal member of that select '*Areopagus*' circle, which moved in the Sidney orbit at Leicester House. They were Romantics of an orthodox and purist school, which clung to Academic rule and precedent. For a moment Gabriel Harvey induced Spenser himself to subject English verse to metrical and prosodial schemes derived from Latin. Gabriel Harvey was himself a bookish pedant, whose mind ran in grooves of narrow gauge. For him 'sweet Roger Ascham' and Sir Philip Sidney in prose, Mr. Spenser in verse, had uttered the last word. Euphuism he distrusted; Comedy he abhorred; Lyly and Nash fell equally under his lash. We have touched already on the encomium which he lavished on the earlier products of the Earl of Oxford in English and in Latin Verse. In his 1578 summons 'to drop the useless pen and take in hand the sword'* we may perhaps read latent disapproval of his excursions into Euphuism and Comedy. In his 1592 diatribe against T. Greene he hotly disavowed any disrespectful intention in the satirical verses, with which he had amused his friends. And he is a writer whom one must not take too seriously; so much is mere professional pugilism, often pounding a dummy. But we come to closer touch with his real thoughts in the annotations with which he sprinkled the margins of his favourite authors, and their irresponsible informality makes them the more interesting, as a mine of curious information.† In them a curious problem is raised by references to a certain *Axiophilus*, who in learning, promise and poetic genius excelled all others. After an enumeration of noble authors he is mentioned in these terms:

No marvell, though Axiophilus be so slow in publishing his exercises, that is so hasty in dispatching them: being one, that vigorously censures himself; impartially examines other; and deemes nothing honourable, or commendable in a poet, that is not divine, or illuminate; singular, or rare; excellent, or some

* See p. 31.

† See *Marginalia*, edited by G. C. Moore Smith.

way notable. I doubt not, but it is the case of manie other, that have drunk the pure water of the virgin fountain.

Again, after dealing with the best poets of the day, including 'Shakespeare and the rest of our flourishing metricians,' he writes :

And amongst so many gentle, noble and royall spirits meethinks I see sum heroical thing in the clowdes : mie souveraine hope. Axiophilus shall forgett himself, or will remember to leave sum memorials behind him : and to make an use of so manie rhapsodies, cantos, hymnes, odes, epigrams, sonets and discourses as idle howers, or at flowing fitts he hath compiled.

Who was this Axiophilus ? Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Essex, King James, or on the other hand, Spenser and Chapman, seem excluded by the contexts, in which they are individually recognised, and it is hard to fit the cap to any other. But in his résumé of noble authors * one name is conspicuously absent—that of the Earl of Oxford, for whom in 1592 he entertained affectionate respect, and who is pretty certainly indicated in the still more glowing terms of Letter III : 'I dare not name the Honorabler Sonnes and Nobler Daughters of the sweetest and divinest Muses, that ever sang in English or other language : and their own most delectable, and delicious exercises (the fine handyworke of excellent Nature and excellenter Arte combined) speake incomparably more, than I am briefly to insinuate.'

Such praises befit the unnamed Axiophilus of the *Marginalia*, and the only tolerable alternative is to interpret Axiophilus as Gabriel Harvey,† idealised in his own conceits ! In the context such an explanation seems preposterous, even if we can bring our minds to credit such a travesty of self-deception ! For Axiophilus is consistently associated with high birth and station, consorting with his peers ; he is depicted as experimenting in many kinds of literature, prose and verse,

* Cf. Letter II. of September 8/9, 1592.

† Moore Smith leans to this conclusion, *Marginalia*, p. 306.

solemn and slight ; as prolific and versatile, but at the same time fastidious in self-criticism ; copious in production, but persistently withholding his products from premature publicity ; a sensitive self-conscious artist and anchorite of literature, in strict seclusion trimming and polishing his fine-filed phrase, until it satisfies his own exacting standards of finish and perfection. All this is the antipodes of Gabriel Harvey's own principles and practice of procedure. He retired to Saffron Walden, and there lingered on for thirty years (till 1630) ; but his pursuits lay in the direction of medicine, science and astrology ; and show no trace of any addiction to hymns, odes, epigrams or sonnets, or the least disposition to hide his lights under a bushel.

NOTE

With no little hesitation I have decided to include the following note. It does not impair the main argument, and it illustrates the temper and practice in literary circles of the time. It offers a reasonable guess at Gabriel Harvey's choice of a pseudonym, and as a flying buttress adds a feature of some little value to the structure.

If identification with the Earl of Oxford be allowed, ingenious surmise has discovered in Axiophilus an interpretative anagram. Anagrams are always tricky ground, but were a favourite diversion among the courtiers, wits and scholars of the day. *The Arte of Poesie* deals with them at length, and the author quotes with glee his triumph over the gentlemen of the Court in transposing *Elisabet Anglorum Regina* into the anagram *Multa regnabis ense gloria* ; a yet more elaborate combination constructed out of *Henry Writhesley, Earle of Southampton*, the English anagram '*Vertue is thy Honour ; O the praise of all men*,' and on the engraved 'Henry James Wriothesley' tomb, '*Here I see many worthies lye*' ; and for the Latin *Henricus Wriothesleius Heroicus, lætus, vi virens*. And, by a curious chance, Axiophilus does yield the anagram I. O. Shax. Pilū, a cryptic indication that the Earl of Oxford lay behind the *nom de plume* Shakespeare (with its current variants Shaxper, etc.). The pilū for 'spear' is quite in the Harvey vein of verbal wit, as, for instance, his John *Securis* for Lyly's Pap *Hatchet*. Is this to be set aside as mere accident ? The question is discussed at length in the *Axiophilus* monograph by Eva T. Clark, published by the Knickerbocker Press.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

The relations between Philip Sidney and the Earl of

Oxford were so personal and specific in kind that it seemed well to reserve them till our brief survey, literary and biographical, was otherwise complete. Among the gallants who ruffled it in the Court of Elizabeth, they were the two most taking and gifted personalities. In culture and in ideals they had much in common, but certain factors of station, character and qualities of the mind predestined them to rivalry often of a hostile kind. Sir Henry Sidney, of Penshurst, among his manifold activities was an eager aspirant to social distinction, and his marriage with Lady Mary, daughter of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, connected him with the high aristocracy. For their son, born November 30, 1554, he secured no less illustrious a sponsor than King Philip of Spain, who had recently been married to Queen Mary. The boy's literary gifts were trained and developed first at Shrewsbury, and then, 1568-71, at Christ Church, Oxford. In 1568, when he was rising fourteen, his father arranged for him a match, with Anne Cecil, daughter of Sir William Cecil, Secretary of State. But two years later he found himself discarded in favour of a more illustrious suitor, in the person of the young Earl of Oxford. In the following years, at tilt and tourney and in feats of arms, they were in constant competition, but the highest honours fell to the Earl of Oxford. In 1572 he was given a place in the suite of the Earl of Leicester, on his Paris mission charged with negotiating a matrimonial alliance between Queen Elizabeth and Duc d'Alençon; and in the years that followed (1572-5) he was employed on a variety of missions, such as fall to the lot of a young and brilliant attaché, in many of the leading Courts and cities of France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Poland. Brilliant, accomplished and debonair, he knew how to accept instructions, and to commend them by personal address and charm to those with whom he had to deal. Again and again the Earl of Oxford was subjected to the chagrin of being passed over in favour of his young and

gifted rival, about whom there gathered a halo of personal attractiveness which captured the imagination of contemporaries to an extent almost unequalled in English history. In literary as in diplomatic or military prowess, appreciation seems always in advance of actual achievement: and it is not altogether easy to diagnose its source; in part the secret lay in personality.

The Courtly circle of the 'Areopagus' acclaimed him as their fugleman; Sir John Harington in his *Briefe Apologie of Poetry*, and in more tempered tones the *Arte of Poesie*, turn to him as an arbiter of taste. It is hard to say on what materials his early compeers based their estimate; the *Astrophel and Stella* Sonnets first made their posthumous appearance in 1591, and then in an unauthorised edition. *The Defense of Poesie*, written about 1583, though not published till 1595, gives the best help towards explanation. The style is limpid, clear and engaging. There is considerable show of learning and culture, though the plumes are mostly borrowed from Scaliger, Minturno and scholars of the Continent; the illustrations and the anecdotes are aptly introduced. While the critical thought is mostly second-hand, and by no means firm in outline, he avoids pedantry or shallowness, and with an easy grace free from mannerisms—no essay of the time is more modern in its touch or manner of approach—he formulates and adorns the best-accepted canons of the society in which he moved. In original criticism he lacks the independence and the nerve to recognise the value of new departures, and in his appreciations of Lyrical, and still more Tragic and Comic inventions, he is enmeshed in the toils of traditional and outworn conventions. He clings to the supposed unities of structure and the didactic aims which were attributed to the Classical drama, and sees in the tedious and anæmic harangues of *Gorboduc* the path of promise for the Elizabethan stage, without regard to truth of characterisation or dramatic realism. Here it is that he comes into open

collision with the Earl of Oxford. Spenser, indeed, with admirable tact adjusts the balance between Sidney the patron, and Oxford 'the imp of Helicon.'* But to the Academic Romantics the Earl of Oxford and his players were the promoters of Bohemian innovations and literary anarchy. Sidney's censures upon 'Playes that be neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies, mingling Kings and Clownes, with neither decencie nor discretion' are a direct assault upon Shakespearean drama and 'that mungrell Tragy-Comedie' which was to prove the crown and glory of Elizabethan drama, but were no doubt carried by acclamation among the academic dilettanti, who formed his mutual admiration society. Sidney possessed real gifts of perception, and perhaps his greatest service to English literature was his recognition and patronage of Edmund Spenser—even if in some directions he cramped his poetic output. But for himself, Poetry was a pardonable weakness which in a gentleman and soldier needed something of apology; he is one 'who (I knowe not by what mischance) in these my not old yeres and idelest times, having slipt into the title of a Poet, am provoked to say something unto you in the defence of that my unelected vocation.'* And again, later, 'I, as I never desired the title, so have I neglected the means to come by it. Onely overmastred by some thoughts, I yeelded an inckie tribute unto them.'* This is not the temper to kindle or sustain poetic afflatus. The 'inckie tribute' was probably for the most part paid in Sonnets, for which there was some fashionable vogue in Court circles, provided they were not exposed to the public gaze. They passed from hand to hand among the privileged, just as we find a detached lyric,† and two six-line stanzas by the Earl of Oxford, astray among the *Astrophel and*

* See Greg. Smith, I. 150–1, and 195.

† These were reclaimed, and initialled E. O. in *England's Parnassus*, 1600. The stanzas are in fanciful poetic form: in one the closing phrase of each line forms the opening of the next, a trick-pattern employed for comic effect in *Comedy of Errors*, I. ii.

Stella Sonnets. Around these a somewhat doubtful romance has been woven. In 1576 Sidney met and admired Penelope, daughter of Sir Walter Devereux, but does not seem to have pressed his suit with much ardour, and in 1581 he once again had the mortification of being superseded in favour of a wealthier rival. And most, if not all, of the Sonnets belong to the period when Stella had become Lady Rich, and

Rich in the riches of a loyal hart,
Hath no misfortune, but that Rich she is.

How much the episode provided and inspired a theme for literary exercises in the Petrarchan manner, and how far the artificial hue and texture adopted mask the 'white heat' of deep and genuine emotions, remain still in debate among good critics. But all are agreed as to the high level of technical accomplishment attained, in marked advance upon anything found in *Arcadia*. With minor variations and freedoms he definitely closes with the quatorzain as his medium: this adaptation of the Petrarchan model, first adopted in France, was naturalised in England by Sir Thos. Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey, and as shown in the Anthologies became the favourite form with Elizabethan sonneteers. It was employed by the Earl of Oxford in the single sonnet included in his early Poems,* and was finally canonised by the practice of Sidney and Shakespeare. Except upon the stage, direct conflicts between poets were necessarily rare, though literary partisanship was keen and voluble. But—Spenser apart—one contest of poetic wit was recorded between Lord Oxford and Sidney. The glove was thrown in a characteristic six-line stanza †:

* De Vere, *Poems*, p. 4. 'Who taught thee first to sigh?' from Rawlinson MS. It was printed at the end of T. Watson's *Tears of Fancy*, published posthumously in 1593.

† The metre is that used in *Venus and Adonis*. The opening, 'Were I a king,' shows that the date of composition is subsequent to the issue of *The Shepherdes Calender* in 1579.

Were I a king I might commend content,
Were I obscure unknown would be my cares,
And were I dead no thoughts should me torment,
Nor words, nor wrongs, nor love, nor hate, nor fears,
A doubtful choice of these things which to crave,
A kingdom or a cottage or a grave.

It may be dated about the same time as the Tennis Court quarrel, and Sidney's *Tu Quoque* parody is almost as tame as his rejoinder on that occasion. His literary activities belong chiefly to the years of retirement (1579-81), which resulted from that episode. In January 1583 he received a complimentary knighthood, and in March he married Frances, daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham; the brief years that intervened before his death at Zutphen, in 1586, were too fully engaged with parliamentary duties, 'employments' and expeditions, to permit of literary composition on any considerable scale. For these the claims of the Earl of Oxford came into inevitable conflict with his own, so that in the administrative as well as literary sphere there was continuous, and galling, rivalry. In August of 1585, as we have seen, Oxford was entrusted with command in the Flushing expedition; but his speedy recall and supersession in favour of Leicester and Sir Philip Sidney proved the final blow to his political career; and thenceforward literary pursuits seem to have been his main preoccupation. Sir Philip Sidney's death at Zutphen deprived the Classical school of Romantics of their Choragus; and the double event played its part in determining the currents of English Literature. In Prose the Classical tradition pruned the conceits and excrescences of Euphuism, and prevailed in the ordered periods and cadences of Jewel, Hooker, Whitgift, and the general company of Elizabethan divines: while Poetry, on the other hand, finally discarded modes and formulas that were inapplicable, and claiming its own franchises Elizabethan Drama entered upon the heritage prepared for the English tongue and genius.

Even if here and there our *interpretations* may be questioned, our survey has sufficed to show how central, and how catholic, a place the Earl of Oxford holds among the literary circles and activities of the Elizabethan age. A Philip Sidney or a Francis Bacon may have stepped more prominently into the limelight, but no figure gathered to itself the like variety and range of skilled appreciation; and, evidentially, more striking still are the testimonies which, after his decease, Anth. Munday and, above all, Geo. Chapman, accorded to his memory. Where can the like be found? During the latter years of creative output, like Moses on the Mount, he 'entered into the midst of the cloud,' and resolutely wrapped its folds about him. Contemporaries bear witness that he jealously screened the secret of authorship, and posterity was content to believe that all his handiwork passed with him to a nameless grave. Another alternative is open; that the cloak used to mask his identity in life has also availed to baffle the eyes of posterity. And our study of the Sonnets will show how many lines of evidence converge upon the personality of the 17th Earl of Oxford.

NOTE

This is not the place to discuss Greene's petulant outburst against 'the upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers,' which may seem foreign to the context. But identification of the personal reference is far from certain, and it is pertinent to remark that the terms used are more appropriate to an aristocratic high-brow presuming to tamper with the librettos of Greene and his colleagues, than to a rising professional playwright, retouching dialogues or situations committed to his charge. And a 'Tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hide' is a curiously inapt parody for belittling a young and unfledged actor aspiring to ventures in composition. We shall have occasion to refer to the passage in commenting on Sonnets § 21 and §§ 78-80 (p. 257).

THE DE VERE FAMILY IN 16TH CENTURY

Sir Edwd. Trussell

JOHN DE VERE, 15th Earl = Elizabeth Trussell
1490-1540

Thomas Howard

JOHN DE V. 16th Earl 1512-62 = (1) Dorothy Neville
(2) = Margt. Golding

Elizabeth = Thomas Lord d'Arcy = Lord Sheffield = Hen. Howard 1517-47 [Earl of Surrey *Poet*]

Thomas Lord d'Arcy John 2nd Lord d'Arcy

Aubrey† Robert Geoffrey† Ursula

Thomas 4th Duke of Norfolk 1536-72

Henry Howard Earl of Northampton

EDWARD D. V. 17th Earl = (1) Anne Cecil 1550-1604

Katharine = Edwd. Lord Windsor

Elisabeth [Son] Bridget = Lord Fr. Norris Frances Susan, b. 1587 HENRY, 18th Earl 1593-1625

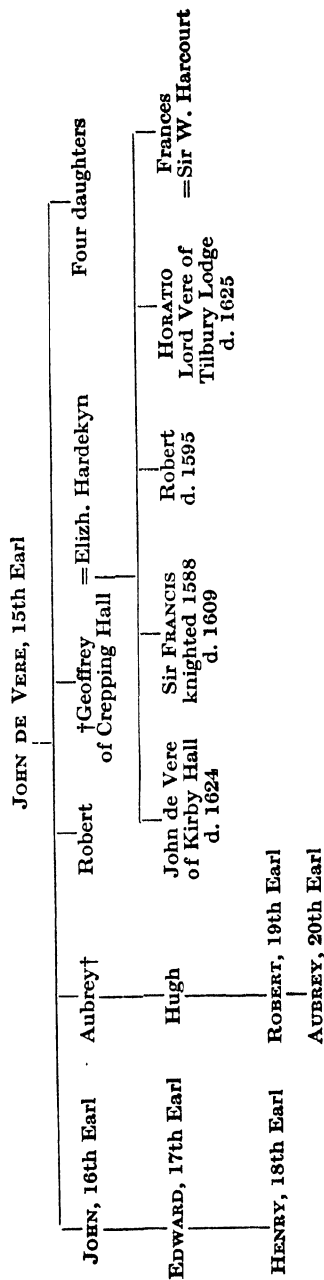
b. 1575 b. 1583 b. 1584 Earl of Berks. 1587-7 = Sir Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke

Robert B., Ld. Wil. d'Eresby, 1st Earl of Lindsey, 1582-1642

Mary = Peregrine Bertie 1555-1601 Lord Willoughby d'Eresby

6th Earl of Derby = Wm. Stanley

Supplementary Table showing Relationship with the Fighting Veres.



CHAPTER III

UNITY OF THE SONNETS

FORM: STYLE AND MANNER: CONCEITS: EUPHUISM: WORD-PLAY: ASSONANCE AND ALLITERATION: CONTENT: THEORIES OF AUTHORSHIP: A MEDLEY: CONVENTIONAL, POETIC EXERCISES: DRAMATIC UNITY, PERSONAL AND AUTO-BIOGRAPHICAL: ORDER CHRONOLOGICAL: QUATORZAIN: FORM: DICTION

FOR actual study of the Sonnets it is well to draw a broad distinction between the main series §§ 1-126, and the second comprising §§ 127-154. Throughout the following sections, I have only Series I in mind, except when I refer explicitly to sonnets of the later group. Series II will ask for later and supplementary treatment.

‘It has never been seriously questioned,’ writes Prof. Raleigh in 1907 (and later), ‘that all the Sonnets are by Shakespeare.’ It was somewhat of a rhetorical flourish then, and has passed out of date. Yet broadly it was true of all the responsible editors and critics, whom Raleigh had in mind, who made their approach from the side of literary appreciation, and who possessed the requisite gifts of perception and the courage of their intuitions. Palgrave (1865), Dowden (1881), Tyler (1890), Wyndham (1898), Saintsbury (1898), Garnett and Gosse (1903), Seccombe and Allen (1903), Beeching (1904), Bradley (1909), Mackail (1911), one after another found in the Sonnets a satisfaction of their poetic instincts which bore the hall-mark of one master-mind and lay beyond the reach or imitation of rivals. For them the argument for unity reposed on self-evidencing utterance; the personal difficulties which it involved, if any, were brushed aside or circumvented. Since

then Baconian sectaries, Stratford fundamentalists, Searchers of archives, have unearthed new tests, and applied touchstones which pay little or no respect to literary quality. Almost at random Sonnets are assigned piecemeal to different authors, different recipients, different occasions, at the bidding of capricious *motifs*, or of some Freudian complex, or some fantastic scheme of rhyme-patterns, which play fast and loose with poetic quality and interior content. With these aids the latest editor upholds Shakespearean authorship on pleas which reject a third of the whole number as unauthentic.* His literary critique, such as it is, seems to rest on some unformulated Shakespearean canon of perfection, to which the rejected sonnets fail to conform. The answer is obvious. Few forms of poetic composition are more unequal than the Sonnet. 'These are our failures,' said Beau Brummel's valet with his tray of crumpled cravats. Here and there, among the misses, even a Barnabe Barnes achieves a hit; while even the most gifted marksmen—Milton, Keats, Wordsworth—too often misaim or miscarry. In the Shakespeare Sonnets the astonishing thing is how few fall short! It is hardly an exaggeration to say that at his worst he compares favourably with contemporaries at their best.

Moreover, in the line of great English poets, is any less exempt from flaws than Shakespeare? they are inseparable from his greatness. Most certainly there is no touch of the 'faultily faultless' about his methods, his ventures, or his execution. It is because he took all risks, and often lost the hazard, that he scaled the unascended heights, and stands supreme. Best and worst, the Sonnets represent a more sustained and even level of accomplishment than the plays. And not unnaturally: for the stage he often worked in haste, he was hampered by conditions, he made concessions

* But no critic has more trenchantly exposed the shallowness of Sir Denys Bray's proposed readjustments than J. M. Robertson.

to his audience and to the personnel of individual players, he adapted or incorporated the work of other pens. While the Sonnets are of his own invention, units of feeling or of fancy, devised and wrought on the small scale, as the spirit moved him. Further, the so-called flaws are often marks of authenticity. Conceits—of phrase, of fancy, of analogy and metaphor—were characteristic of the age, and are a part of Shakespeare's mental habit. At times they are exasperating, but the worst excesses belong to the Euphuistic interchanges of the earlier plays. In the Sonnets they are comparatively restrained, and subdued to the demands of the artistic sense. But the tendency remains inveterate—at once a weakness and a strength—and who can presume to draw the dividing line? If sometimes, as in the plays, it drops to the level of the sickly or the tasteless pun, at others the allusive play in the sound or double sense of words adds a finishing touch of rich suggestiveness to the chosen term. In the Sonnets Shakespeare can hardly use the word '*lines*' without some conscious glance at its companion meanings—lines of the poet, lines of the painter or the graver, lines of the plough-land, the entrenchment or the battle array, lines of the figure or the '*lineaments*' which yield the contours of beauty or the furrows of care or age; and the reader misses much who fails to catch the variant suggestions.* Similarly in the neighbourhood of words like '*gentle*,' '*shadow*,' '*will*,' shot with cross-threads and hues of meaning, which contrast and blend and subtly intertwine, he must keep alertly on the watch.† But to argue that

* §§ 16, 18, 19, 32, 63, 74, 86, 103, 115. In the last even the jingle '*lines*' and '*lie*' is deliberate.

† For allusive plays on double meaning of words, note among others: *breed*, §§ 6, 12; *burthens*, § 102; *case*, § 108; *conquest*, § 6; *content*, § 1; *contracted*, § 1; *husbandry*, §§ 3, 13; *numbers*, § 17; *office*, § 101; *prick'd*, § 20; *shadow*, §§ 7, 37, 43, 53, 61, 98; *soil*, § 69; *spring*, § 102; *sweet-season'd*, § 75; *state*, § 64.9–10; *touch*, § 17; *use and usurer*, §§ 4, 6, 9.

‡ For puns: *Ay—eye—I*, §§ 104, 148; *Morning—mourn—mourning*, § 132; *or—o'er*, § 12.

this habit of mind implies lack of sincerity, spontaneity, or play of emotion in the writer, is to misread his genius and his modes of expression.

A similar caution may be applied to the poet's love of assonance. He is saturated with the alliterative instinct, which from its first origins became congenital in English poetry. He purges its excesses, and chastens its childish crudities with an ear so sensitive to vowel as well as consonantal accords, that he produces without effort combinations whose perfections have never been surpassed, and whose delicacy mocks analysis: hardly a quatrain is free from their conscious or unconscious influence.* But it is none the less true that at times, or in particulars, he yields to temptations which jar upon our more sensitised or sophisticated ears. To Shakespeare sibilation was almost as dear as it was repugnant to Tennyson. In § 27—a sonnet of great power—Robertson stigmatises 'body's works expired' as a cacophony of which Shakespeare was incapable. 'Love's Labour's Lost' might stand for a warning, or even ll. 9-10 of this same sonnet, or 'grief's strength seem stronger' of the next; but, as *Lucrece* is his own selected standard for comparison, I turn to it and find † 'night's scapes,' 'descants't,' 'grief best is pleased with grief's society,' 'with thought's feathers flies,' with other 'portents' of the same kind, just as in the Sonnets I read:

So thou prevent'st his seythe. (§ 100.14.)

I am neither defending nor assailing these combinations, but only demurring to criticism which adduces them as disproof rather than evidences of Shakespearean authorship. They are even not without value as an indication

For phonetic jingles: *lie—lines*, § 115; *pen—pencil*, § 16; *pen—penury*, § 84; *ruin—ruminate*, § 64; *wit—witness*, § 26.

This *penchant* must be remembered in considering the name-plays in §§ 76 and 82.

* For typical instances, take §§ 2.1-4, 5.9-10, 12.7-8, 19.5-7, 66.9-12, 73.3-4.

† *Lucretius*. 747, 1111, 1184, 1216.

of date; and my impression is that in this particular Shakespeare's own ear grew more sensitive, reducing excess of sibilation, or tempering it with vowel modulations, as in

When to the session of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past. (§ 30.1-2.)

Another line of attack comes from the side of personality, from those who find it impossible to reconcile the inner content of the Sonnets with that which is known of the life and doings of William Shakspeare the man. To these misgivings there is no direct rebuttal: each new disclosure, up to its trivial worth, makes it more difficult to associate the man with the output. Some, perhaps the wisest—with Palgrave, Saintsbury, or from a more shaky standpoint, Greenwood—adopt a resolute agnosticism. Knowing so little, is their verdict, we are at liberty to imagine all. And often, like Masefield, they even argue themselves into a belief that knowledge of personality would be loss, not gain. That refuge of scepticism I distrust profoundly. There are lives, not a few, for which oblivion or obscurity may be the friendliest shelter. But among great poets is there one whose message does not gain in power and in appeal by association with personality and with the experience which gave it birth? Literary and spiritual valuations of course take the foremost place; but 'Higher Criticism' is their handmaid, and often lights the way to choice and unsuspected finds. On the track of William Shakspeare research enthusiastic and indefatigable has drawn a blank: it has not shed a ray of light on any single line or reference in the Sonnets; it has only deepened obscurity. But should the quest be thus diverted to some other personality, able to satisfy the contents and implications of the Sonnets, the labour expended will not have been in vain—and such an one has, I believe, been discovered in Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford. Read in this guiding light, the Sonnets from

end to end become coherent, and psychologically luminous: for myself it has not merely made dark places plain, but enriched them a hundredfold.

Another course has been to build fairy fabrics on things that 'may have been,' on Shakspeare's schooling at Stratford, on his training as a page, on his residence in London—or even at Oxford or on the Continent—on his intimacy with the great, or on the miraculous gifts of 'genius.' 'These are such stuff as dreams are made on.' They throw interesting sidelights on the conditions of the time, but have no links with facts, except that they must be presupposed in order to account for 'Shakespeare.' The poor scraps of authentic record are enough to discredit the imaginary. Miracles do not happen: *Venus and Adonis* in 1593, *Lucrece* in 1594, have to be accounted for. No miracle of genius can make the *Metamorphoses* familiar, or reincarnate 'the sweet wittie soul of Ovid'; none can instil familiarity with French and Italian speech or literature; none can inoculate with the birthright and accent of nobility. And these are inherent not only in the Plays and Sonnets, but from the outset in 'the first heir of his invention.'*

Others, in whole or part, fall back upon the contention that the Sonnets can be explained, or explained away, as poetic exercises,† practices of the conventional or dramatic type, which found play in inventing and depicting fictitious situations, that lent themselves to verse. Of all heresies this is the deadliest. It is true that sonneteering at this period suffered from this epidemic, and Mr. Lee's immersion in that atmosphere seems to have dulled his faculties of appreciation. To his editorial industry most of us owe the knowledge that Watson in his *Hecatompithia* (1582) prefixed to

* In his delightful little volume upon *Shakespeare*, Mr. J. Bailey notes among 'the Shakespeare miracles,' that 'Shakespeare, who knew all about the law without ever having been a lawyer, and all about the sea without ever having set foot on a ship, can give us a great lady's chaff to perfection without, one may be sure, having had more than the rarest and hastiest chances of studying it.'

† See Beeching, xxi-xxii.

each canzonet a note defining the source from which it emanated ; that Barnes' *Parthenophil and Parthenope* (1593) is but an echo from Petrarch and his school ; that Lodge's *Phyllis* (1593) and Daniel's *Delia* (1594) are but shadow-nymphs, who sing the songs of Ronsard and Desportes ; that on the title-page of *Licia*, Giles Fletcher ascribed his fifty-two Poems of Love ' To the Imitation of the best Latin Poets and others.' These are the flower of the flock, and it is needless to pass to the decadents, whose steady trend is towards conceits of studied artifice ; throughout, their springs of inspiration are *literary* ; their poems are translations, paraphrases, imitations, or descants on themes (French or Italian) whose well-head was in Petrarch. For this reason the stock theme—often the sole obsession—of the Sonneteers was Love—Love personal, Love ideal, Love intellectual, or Love Platonic, alike the Uranian and the Pandemic Aphrodite. Much knowledge is a dangerous thing, and Mr. Lee is tempted to compress Shakespeare into the same category. While acknowledging pre-eminence in craftsmanship, he fails to recognise that, apart from poetic skill, the vital difference lies in directness and sincerity of feeling and expression. Compared with other sequences, the *distinguishing* feature of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* is that they are personal, an outcome of current and of moving intercourse. Poetic quality visibly quickens or flags with the tension of emotional and personal rapports. It is true that in adopting the Sonnet as his vehicle the author, rightly and artistically, submits himself to some extent to its established conventions ; and true also that, just as in epistolary intercourse, the theme is often generalised, and dealt with on the abstract rather than the individual basis. Of every extended Sonnet sequence, ancient or modern, that is true. Sonnets of this impersonal complexion can be singled out ; but they are the exception, not the rule. They represent some passing play of sentiment, or wit, or reflection, communicated to a friend. But it is hardly too much

to say that every sonnet of the series rests on a personal background, and was the product of an actual situation—though naturally it is not always possible to recapture the right clue. Shakespeare was no more ‘drawn into the current’ of the Sonneteers than into that of Marlowe or of Lyly. He utilised their forces for the expression of his proper self. To attentive and sympathetic reading the tokens are plain; and it will be well to summarise results before establishing and verifying the details.

The final proof of inspiration, as of unity, lies in that pervading note and temper, that accent and idiom of the affections, that sincerity and poignancy of expression, which interpenetrates the whole with an atmosphere that is unique. ‘No poetry of this kind approaches Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in apparent vehemence and intensity of feeling’ is the considered and final judgment of Prof. Saintsbury,* based on a range of reading and a breadth of sympathies unequalled among contemporaries. But this rests on so subjective and incommunicable an appeal that it will be well to give their due to rival theories of composition.

First, then, the Sonnets are no mere rehandling of Petrarchan or post-Petrarchan themes. Of Sonnets §§ 1–126 hardly one deals with Love in the abstract, unless we extend that term to sublimated friendship. The form and substance are directly personal. Among commentators who dispute or qualify this, J. M. Robertson is the latest and most drastic. In his view some of the Sonnets are from a man to a woman; others (directly, or on commission) are by, or from, a woman to a man; forty or fifty are not by Shakespeare at all. In cases, where it seems worth while, discussion may be reserved for individual Sonnets. On grounds of purely verbal exegesis, of which he is a master, Tucker finds that of Sonnets §§ 1–126, thirty-nine are explicitly and nineteen are presumably addressed to a man, while sixty-nine

* In *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V. p. 172, and compare pp. 234–5.

leave the question of sex open; not one is clearly addressed to a woman. Reserving the second Series, Sonnets 127-154, for separate treatment, none in my judgment are addressed to a mistress, feigned or real. In the few which touch on sexual passion, the note is dourly realist. At times, under stress of absence or partial estrangement (*e.g.* in §§ 97-99), the writer falls back on 'common-places' of the craft, but with the aim of keeping friendship in repair. And the 'conceited' sonnets, such as there are, descant on themes dealing with common thoughts and interests—such as Art (§§ 24, 52, 83), Law (§§ 35, 87, 134), Astrology (§§ 14, 15), the Elements (§§ 44, 45), Dreams (§§ 27, 28, 43, 61), Death (§ 74), and the solaces of posthumous survival held out by eternising verse. These, and not a few telling references which they contain, are the offspring of personal interchanges, not of mere disconnected flights of fancy.

Still less possible is it to account for the Sonnets as an exercise, or exercises, of dramatic invention. One of their most noticeable features is the absence of dramatic outline or fitness. There is no dramatic plot, no dramatic delineation of characters, no dramatic progress or unity, no dramatic *dénouement*. The one connecting unity is the impact of events upon the personality of the writer himself. The presentation of events or persons is so allusive and obscure that it has proved an insoluble riddle to commentators.* The incidents themselves show no trace of artistic selection, ordering or manipulation. They are detached, unrelated, and as inconsequent as the vicissitudes of actual life. Nay more, they are as ill adapted to dramatic combination and effect as they are to conventional sonneteering. Surely these are the last faults that can be reasonably charged upon Shakespeare, of all persons in the world. Consider the raw materials so far as they transpire, out of which the Sonnets are composed—the reluctance of

* Tucker, xxxiv.

a young man of birth, beauty and accomplishment, to enter upon the bond of matrimony; the duty urged upon him of continuing the line; the breach of trust and honour, in the liaison with his friend's mistress; misunderstandings, estrangements, and neglects; favours and preferences extended to a rival poet or poets; disappointments and frustrations of Court life; disablement, illness, and premonitions of death. Could a more intractable or uninviting series of topics be presented to sonneteer or dramatist? The Sonnets are fabricated, not of fancy, but of life—fragments of autobiography, self-revelations of hopes, admirations, affections, misgivings, fears, remonstrances, resolutions and irresolutions, called out by circumstance.

There is no good reason to distrust the order in which they have been handed down. Attempts have been made to improve upon the traditional sequence, but no reshuffling of the pieces has yielded a more harmonious whole. Connected sonnets—groups, doublets or triplets*—seem always rightly placed. Casual and unsystematic though they be, the chronological indications,† noticeably those dealing with age of writer and recipient, are consistent, and fall in with changes of mood and tenor answering to the time-succession; and careful study will disclose corroborative clues.

The form and methods adopted are well suited to the work in hand. There is no defining Shakespeare's style: it is too universal to be particularised; it refuses to be docketed or labelled. He has no one accent or manner peculiar to himself: there are few in which he does not experiment. He plays, with almost every degree of finish, on all the stops—tragic or comic, bombastic or colloquial,

* It is surprising how large a part of the field this covers, but I forbear to load the page with details. Sonnets §§ 1-16 and 33-42 form groups, containing several pairs. Other doublets are §§ 20-21, 27-28, 30-31, 44-45, 46-47, 50-51, 67-68, 69-70, 91-92-3; trios occur in §§ 82-84, 88-91, 94-96, 97-99, 117-119, 123-5; while §§ 33-36, 63-66, 71-74, and 88-91 fall into natural quartets.

† The most explicit—those in §§ 104, 107, 125—will be discussed in their place.

emotional or ironic, lyrical or didactic. His peculiar gift lies in intuitive perception of the possible values of words, and in the satisfying perfection with which he adjusts them to the occasion and the need. Often from jarring discords he will extract a haunting harmony. The Sonnet in his hands has limits of its own ; his use of it may almost be called original. It is no longer the vehicle for poetic conceits, for highly charged emotion, for imaginative flights, but becomes the medium of intimate and personal approach congenial to a nature reserved and sensitive. In expression of the feelings the Sonnets abstain intuitively from the heightened emphasis demanded by the stage ; they observe the restraint, the courtesy of address, dictated by ' manners ' and gentle breeding ; however poignant the emotion, it never loses self-command. Descriptive passages, used sparingly, either reflect actual environment—the scene of writing, or the time of year—or are the fittest metaphorical expression of the moods and desires which they depict. The similitudes are free from strained or far-fetched ingenuity, drawn almost always from the obvious and the familiar, from rain and sunshine, cloud and calm, from the dawning and declining day, from the procession of the seasons and the vicissitudes of birth and ripening and decay and death, which have their natural counterparts in the soul-life. No predecessor had realised so directly and habitually the emotional possibilities implicit in this romantic note. It is useless, and even suicidal, to index phrases which detached from their context lose half their charm ; in detailed study we may underline here and there effects which easily escape the unobservant.

The Sonnet form adopted is in keeping with the use to which they are applied. In the hands of Petrarch the Sonnet reached classical perfection of form as a unit of literary architecture : for lofty themes, for ceremonial approach, for occasions of pomp and splendour, the octet and sestet form exhibits unsurpassed magnifi-

cence ; but, like a temple portico and pediment, it was too dignified for domestic use, particularly in English, where rhyming lacks the facilities of the inflexional apparatus of Italian. For the epistolary and colloquial sonnet it is too stately and formal. And guided by a true instinct for the purposes to which he applied it, Shakespeare preferred the triple quatrain, with concluding distich, to the more elaborate and rigid structure of the octave balanced by the sestet. There are gains and losses ; the unity ceases to be monumental, but it becomes vertebrate and supple, the appropriate vehicle for the sonnet of personal reflection and address.* The quatorzain handling was not his own invention. The French had freely experimented in it, and metrically it was the form to which the Earl of Surrey inclined, adopting it in more than half the Sonnets to which his name is attached in Tottel's Miscellany. Other poets—among them Edward de Vere—with minor variations followed in his wake. Its danger lies in tedium and prolixity, in lack of effect ; few can sustain a dominant idea at a high grade of poetic tension and expression through fourteen continuous lines. Sonneteering was a favourite game of skill with Elizabethan wits and poets ; but a perusal of the output even of the best exponents is the true index of the unrivalled excellence of Shakespeare in this field of craftsmanship. This is due not only to grace of imagination, to the music of sound, and the magic of phrase, but above all to sincerity of appeal and manipulative skill in the use of his material. The systematic isolation of the closing couplet makes it the fitting vehicle for an epigrammatic moral, or conclusion from the main contents ; there is indeed a risk of making it too emphatic and magistral, and to avoid this Shakespeare, while hardly ever tolerating a 'run over' of the last line of the quatrain,† does frequently use the distich as a support or completion of the closing

* On this see Beeching's edition, *Introd.* xlviii-1.

† § 35 is perhaps the sole exception.

stave, so that together they form a balancing sestet. Again, the twelve lines are habitually treated as three separate stanzas, or quatrains, and such grouping gives great enrichment and variety of pattern and effect. Now and then a single thread of structure informs the whole (§ 66); more often, while the main unity is preserved, the theme receives twofold or threefold illustration, each crystallised in a self-sufficing whole. To illustrate from those that come first in the series. In § 3 the call to reproduce the type is mirrored in the pattern of the lover, the beloved, and the mother. In § 5 the jocund hours of bud and bloom, the procession of the seasons, the distilled resultant of their handiwork, are gathered into a final promise of survival. In § 7 the rising, the midday, and the setting sun each utter their challenge of appeal, and with this we may compare the variation of treatment in § 33, where the first two stanzas contrast the clouded and unclouded sun, the third applies the contrast, and the final distich closes with the assurance that notwithstanding mist or cloud or storm the sun itself is dowered with inviolable radiance

Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

Artistically, the very finest Sonnets—such as §§ 7, 18, 60, 64, 73—owe much to the cumulative value of successive quatrains, but rhetorical effect is always subdued to the note of personal address, and no concession is made to the recitative or bombast which befits the stage. Throughout they are personal, not epideictic.

In mere technique the quatorzain has other advantages. In rhyming power Shakespeare cannot compare with Spenser in variety or ease, and this form of sonnet never demands more than single rhymes; those employed are somewhat restricted and conventional, and laxities such as 'loan' rhyming with 'one' (§ 6), 'gone—moan,' 'unset—counterfeit' (§ 16), 'love thee—prove me' (§ 26), 'assure ye—cure me' (§ 111), 'better—greater,' § 119, 'remembered—tendered' (§ 123), are tolerated without compunction.

In diction we have touched already on certain tricks or habits of mind, characteristic of the writer and the period * ; and here and there, especially in the conceited sonnets, Euphuistic touches like 'verdure' or 'perspective' intrude—with good effect. But, apart from these, as befits the situation, vocabulary is kept simple ; new-fangled words are rare. 'Eisel' or 'marjoram' are passing accidents : others, like 'pebbled,' 'resty,' 'twire' are from the vernacular ; and the compounded or hyphenated words are built of simple, or even of colloquial elements, such as 'the *steep-up* heavenly hill,' 'the *world-without-end* hour,' or 'you are my *all-the-world*' ; while the happiest strokes of all

Now stand you on the top of happy hours
And many maiden gardens yet unset (§ 16)

Give not a windy night a rainy morrow (§ 90)

The proud full sail of his great verse (§ 96)

But that wild music burthens every bough (§ 102)

exemplify the perfect mastery of the very simplest expedients.

* P. 94.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL TRAITS

ARISTOCRATIC—Domestic—*Rooms and Furniture : Music and Painting : Dress : Jewels : Heraldry.*
External—*Gardens and Grounds : Flowers : Sports and Recreations.*

TERMS OF ADDRESS : SIMILES AND DESCRIPTIONS : MORALS :
LAW.

THERE are certain general and distinctive traits which characterise the Sonnets as a whole. The first and perhaps most palpable is the *aristocratic* cast and complexion which everywhere prevails. To a large extent that is true also of the Plays ; though there it may be partly discounted by the conventions and exigencies of the stage. But in the Sonnets, where no such plea avails, it is all-pervading, an atmosphere—domestic, social, moral and personal—in which the writer and recipient move and breathe, and have touch with one another.* It is voiced by the writer, but it is equally assumed of and in the recipient, as the natural idiom which he will understand and reciprocate.

To begin with externals. The setting of life is that enjoyed only by the privileged few, those of noble birth and estate. The scenery is that of the Elizabethan mansion, as revealed to us in the royal progresses of the Virgin Queen, and reflected still in mellowed survivals from the past. Surrounded by its pleasure-grounds and parks, the ancestral Hall is replete with the appurtenances of elegance and state. The sun-dial is on the terrace, mirrors adorn the walls or dressing-table.

* See § 87–91 ; and cf. p. 80.

92 S E T T I N G O F T H E S O N N E T S

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste. (§ 77)

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest. (§ 3)

My glass shall not persuade me I am old. (§ 22, cf. § 62.9)

Your own glass shows you when you look in it. (§§ 103. 6, 14)

The library is furnished with books, and on the table lies the album (§ 77) for choice extracts, or dedicatory verses ; the virginal has its place in the boudoir (§ 128), and music and madrigal add charm and refinement to family life (§ 8). Portraits and pictures had perhaps less hold upon the writer's fancy, but here, too, one of the least intelligible sonnets (§ 24) is a literary *jeu d'esprit*, which puns and funs upon the methods and devices of the painter, and perhaps owed its inspiration to some specimen or present of the kind. Two sonnets (§§ 46, 47, and compare §§ 16, 101) are a descant upon the portrait presented to him by his friend, and there could hardly be a surer mark of wealth on either side. To these we may add the repeated references to artificial painting and cosmetics, as well as to false hair, which are characteristically Shakespearean. Express allusions of the kind will be found in §§ 20, 21, 82, 83, as well as in § 127 and the Plays, while two sonnets (§§ 67, 68) take their chief cue from current fashions of the kind.

Why should false painting imitate his cheek,
And steal dead seeing of his living hue ?
Why should poor beauty indirectly seek
Roses of shadow, since his rose is true ? (§ 67)

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,
Before these bastard signs of fair were born,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow ;
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
To live a second life on second head ;
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay. (§ 68)

To which *M.V.* III. ii, 92-6 offers a close verbal parallel.

The more private chambers house the wardrobe for the robes of state, the jewel-case (§§ 48, 52, 65, a figure familiar in the Plays), the cabinet or safe (§ 48) kept under lock and key, which reveal the surroundings of the writer. In § 2 :

Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now
is doubtless a personal touch, and finds its counter-
part in

Puts apparel on my tattered loving. (§ 26)

The full-length illustration in Sonnet § 52 admirably depicts the passion for gorgeous dress and pageantry, which was so marked a feature of the age

Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.
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.

Gems in their casket are part of his personal belongings (§ 48), and the jewelled carcanet, say of the S.S. Collar, even more than the robe of state, was the mark of the highest nobility. And for other insignia of rank, we may refer to

the blazon of sweet beauty's best (§ 106)

and the heraldic touch introduced into § 12.4, where

Sable curls, Or silver'd o'er with white

is a passing reminder of the conceits which adorn or disfigure the stanzas of *Lucrece* (§§ 8-10, 29-30), and the references to heraldry, coats of arms and mottoes, which are scattered about the Plays.*

These traits and touches, be it observed, are no mere

* Cf. § 12 Comment. In § 85.3 I suggest the possible restoration of a heraldic term.

decorative appendages, but belong to the warp and woof of the tapestry which they adorn.

To turn to outdoor surroundings and interests is to find the same impression confirmed, and indeed accentuated. At these outgoings of the feudal life, the cleavage between social grades—the territorial magnate, the peasantry, and the rising bourgeois of the towns—was marked and unmistakable, above all in the administrative functions, the pastimes and pursuits, which absorbed the energies and fortunes of the hereditary lord. And here there is no mistaking the milieu in which the Sonnets move. The scenery belongs not to the town, or even to the countryside, but to the domain, the garden and the park (§§ 54, 70, 73).

Roses and lilies, it may be said, are but the stock-in-trade of the practising sonneteer, and beside them the marigold and violet, as in the Constable Sonnet :

My Lady's presence makes the Roses red,
Because to see her lips they blush for shame.
The Lily's leaves, for envy, pale became ;
And her white hands in them this envy bred.
The Marigold the leaves abroad doth spread ;
Because the sun's and her power is the same.
The Violet of purple colour came,
Dyed in the blood she made my heart to shed.

Diana, Dec. I, ix.

Lancastrian and Yorkist feuds gave to the rose vogue and values peculiar to English verse : but beside the poetic convention, there are tell-tale passages in which the rose is no mere literary pattern or device, but takes a living place in symbolism (cf. §§ 1, 35, 54, 67, 95, 98, 99, 109, 130).

The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their masked buds discloses.

* * * * *

Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made :
And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth. (§ 54)

The reference to the distillation of the petals for the attar of roses which preserves their perfume does not stand alone. It has already been anticipated in the exquisite close of § 5 :

Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was :
But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show ; their substance still lives sweet.

It falls into striking accord with the taste for perfumes, their invention and manufacture, for which the Earl of Oxford was celebrated.* 'Three April perfumes' (§ 104) is the dainty description of three following springs ; and so too the scented violet (§ 99), the 'buds of marjoram,' the sun-awakened marigold (§ 25) are denizens not of the hedgerows, but of the beds 'of different flowers in odour and in hue' (§ 98), or of the 'maiden gardens, yet unset,' of which we read in § 16. Rightly understood, the scenery of § 12 depicts the clock, the barns, the garnered sheaves, which were so essential and prominent a feature of every noble house or grange.

The procession of the seasons (§ 104) is instinctively depicted in terms of the garden-close, the avenue and the woodland, rather than those of tilled lands or the countryside.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
(§ 78, cf. § 104)

Sports and recreation are a still clearer index of the social circles and pursuits native to the author ; and on these the Sonnets give no uncertain sound. The palmary passage is in § 91 :

* P. 30 and § 5.

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
 Some in their wealth, some in their bodies' force ;
 Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill ;
 Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse ;

* * * * * *

Thy love is better than high birth to me,
 Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
 Of more delight than hawks or horses be.

The goals and prizes of ambition here enumerated are precisely those on which Lord Oxford's youthful aspiration had centred ; no biographer could sum them up more perfectly.* Birth, wealth, brave apparel, bodily prowess, skill in the joust and tourney and courtly accomplishments, hawking, hunting and horsemanship, these were the fields in which he had outshone all rivals. They are the comparisons which would naturally occur to his mind in any attempt to express the value and attraction of some prize more enviable still. Still more is this the case with the ' vantage ' and ' double-vantage ' of § 88, drawn from the tennis court, in which de Vere was an adept.† To him they are as natural and appropriate as they are incongruous with everything we know, or can reasonably connect with, the Stratford actor. And how could he, forsooth, affect to regard the smile of princes, and the distinctions of Court life, as objects of inferior worth and moment, compared with the rewards his friend's affections could bestow ? So far as it possesses sincerity or actuality, Sonnet § 25 could only proceed from one who had known the vicissitudes of reputation in the fickleness of Court smiles and frowns.

Let those who are in favour with their stars
 Of public honour and proud titles boast,
 Whilst I, whom Fortune of such triumph bars,
 Unlook'd-for joy in that I honour most.

* * * * * *

Then happy I, that love and am beloved
 Where I may not remove nor be removed.

In the hold of the affections, his tenure is permanent.

* Pp. 18, 16, 40.

† P. 40.

For menage and relish of horsemanship, we must have recourse to the *Venus and Adonis* or the Plays, but paler reflections meet us here in the Sonnets §§ 50–51, whose parable is drawn from the experiences and the fatigues of the interminable posting journeys, which laid so heavy a tax upon Elizabethan high life and fashion (cf. §§ 27, 28, 48).

Once more, the aristocratic note runs through the terms of affection and regard. They are not those of patron and client, but drawn from the manners and address of feudal courtesy.*

Lord of my love, to whom in vasalage,
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit (§ 26)

supplies the most direct illustration, and may be compared with ‘vassal’ of § 58. Duty, or *devoir*, repeated in ll. 2 and 5, bears its sense of feudal allegiance and obligation, as more than once in the Plays, just as ‘attaint’ (§ 82) and ‘attainted’ (§ 88)† are only properly predicable of those who hold high place, subject to dishonour, and are therefore liable to degradation and ‘disgrace.’ And ‘gentle thief’ (§ 40, cf. §§ 41 and 48) is a misfit, apart from the birth and breeding which it implies.

Upon the ceremonial and ‘obsequious’ style of feudalism he grafts the richer and romantic note, in which the Courtly circles of the Elizabethan renaissance expressed affection and regard, employing ‘lover’ (§§ 31, 32) and ‘love’ as courtesy equivalents for friendship and friend, and using such adjectives as ‘sweet’ to express personal attractiveness and charm. In all the Plays where the Italian atmosphere is introduced, and with less freedom in the historical Dramas, such terms are common form between people of birth and breeding ‡; similarly in these ‘sugred Sonnets,’ which

* See Beeching, xx–xxi; and notes on § 26, 58, 108.

† Attainder, from Old French *ataindre*, means extinction, forfeiture of civil rights.

‡ Cf. Dowden, on Sonnet § 32.

won the admiration of contemporaries, they take their natural place, and from end to end express the glow of affection which the author felt for his recipient. 'Love' or 'My Love' (§§ 13, 40, 56), 'Dear My Love' (§§ 13, 72), 'Sweet Love' (§ 76), 'Sweet boy' (§ 108)—the very term of accost used by Greene in his death-bed charge to Thomas Nash—'My lovely boy' (§§ 54, 126), and kindred turns of speech (§§ 8, 40, 47, 48, 54, 105, 110) * are the habitual terms of address, but never convey a trace of erotic implication. In the later sonnets (§§ 108–109), and not least in those engaged with the thought of oblivion and death, they are as frequent and as ardent as in the earlier. Coarser suggestions are due to want of moral, or more often of literary sense, or to misinterpretations derived in part from mistaken views of authorship. Those who suppose that the Sonnets are addressed some by a man to a man, others by a man to a woman, others by a woman to a man, others again written to order to fit dramatic situations, become the fools of their own commitments, and lose all sense of values. The true value of the phrases is in part to show the mood in which the given sonnet is composed, and in part to serve as index to the sensibility of the writer.

Another criterion of authorship may be found in the similes and reminiscences applied to the writer himself. They assume instinctively the tokens of nobility, and help to create an ensemble and atmosphere as unmistakable as that which connects Wordsworth with Lakeland, or Burns with Ayrshire peasantry, or Shelley with Italy, or Tennyson with Victorian lawns and Freshwater. What poet, not of noble station, would 'march in ranks of better equipage' (§ 32), or picture the heart of his beloved as

the grave where buried love doth live
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone (§ 31)

* S. Lee, *Life of W. S.*, p. 127, refers to specific uses of the term 'lover' in dedicatory approaches of client and patron; but these do not give the key to the use in the Sonnets, and 'lovers of poets' stands

as in the mortuary cloister of the De Veres of Hedingham? So likewise with the reminiscences of the past, most fully summarised in § 66. Nowhere is failure ascribed to lack of means or position or natural advantages, but to the self-seeking, chicane and greed of false unscrupulous and pushing rivals. It is only too faithful a picture of Court life under Elizabeth. It would be easy to fit names to each category.

The same is true of moral standards and practice in the more restricted sense. They are those of 'high life' and the Court, not of the common folk. But this topic may be reserved for treatment in its proper place (§§ 32-35).

One special department of vocabulary and idea has special prominence in Shakespearean verse, and not least in the Sonnets. Individual experiments and eccentricities can be quoted, but nowhere, in the main line of English poetry, is there such extensive and expert use of the terminology of Law. It strikes even a casual reader, but the upholders of Baconian authorship have invested it with disproportionate attention. Professional pride and skill were enlisted in championing the cause, and an imposing array of learned witnesses from Lord Campbell and Senator Davis downwards—many of them, it may be noted, Americans—are cited by Grant White, Lord Penzance and Durning Lawrence, to prove the trained and consummate familiarity with law displayed by the writer; of a kind, it is declared, which could only be required by systematic professional training and practice. Modern criticism takes a more sober estimate of his proficiency, and points out that he shows little or no trace of acquaintance with the superior Courts of Common Law—with the High Court of Chancery, the King's Bench, the Court of Exchequer, or of Common Pleas—and that even in the use of legal phraseology he

at a far remove from 'Sweet love' in apostrophe. In §§ 29 and 56 the address is not personal, but used of affection made more dear in retrospect.

drops into minor pitfalls, which a brother of the craft would instinctively avoid.* When doctors disagree, who may presume to diagnose? Yet the true explanation seems to me written plain across the face of the Sonnets. What kind and province of law is it with which the writer shows himself familiar? Just those which were the daily meat of the Elizabethan nobleman. Under Tudor rule the extinction of Baronial power, and the suppression of Clerical privilege, followed by the dissolution of the Monasteries and religious corporations, created a void in the social order which it was the task of Elizabethan statesmen to fill in. The constitutional system was reorganised. The powers and disciplines hitherto vested in lords of the Manor, great and small, ecclesiastical and lay, were transferred to new organs of local government, represented at the upper end by Lords Lieutenant and High Sheriffs, by Magistrates and Justices of the Peace, and at the lower by Overseers, Surveyors, Constables and minor Parish officials, who supply the comic factors for so many farcical scenes and humours of the Shakespearean plays. For a time the processes of local law passed into the hands of the resident landholders and gentry; they became their most serious interest and occupation, the mark of status and the road to distinction. Appropriate training, and a term of study at one of the Inns of Court, became a requisite of gentility. In his curriculum of education Cecil accords to Law a place second only in time to Latin and to French. As Royal ward, in training for his high estate, Edward de Vere was placed under a tutor trained in law, and proceeded (like the Earl of Southampton later) to a course at Gray's Inn.† Administrative law became a normal field of intellectual activities, the one in which peers of the realm would have most common ground, and in which allusive similes would be most

* For fuller discussion of the subject see G. Greenwood, *Is there a Shakespearean Problem?* pp. 4-6, 38-110; but his lengthy discussions lead to no constructive conclusions.

† P. 14-15.

pointed and intelligible. Such are the technicalities, which have unduly impressed the imagination of some legal critics. Even to-day, when the history and archæology of law have become an open book, great pleaders or ornaments of the judicial bench * may have but nodding acquaintance with the provisions of Manorial Custom, and the formularies of Court Baron or Frank Pledge. But in actual procedure many of the time-honoured and picturesque forms of inheritance tenure and transfer were faithfully retained, treasured and preserved as heirlooms from the past. And with his selective alchemy of speech Shakespeare converts the high-class 'shop' of noble lords into poetry of enduring charm.

Terms connected with land-holding and real estate—tenure by lease or copyhold, title and conveyance, mortgage and release (§§ 87, 92, 94, 134, 142) are the most frequent. Lines like

Summer's lease hath all too short a date (§ 18.4)

or

So should that beauty which you hold in lease
Find no determination (§ 13.5-6)

have given such terms poetic currency; and they are used to express that transitoriness of things, precious and rare, which is part of the atmosphere of the Sonnets. A more solemn note of accountability and finality attaches to that annual 'audit,' upon which the Lord of the Manor based all dealing with the tenantry. In § 2.10 it is but a passing word

This fair child of mine Shall sum my count.

In § 49.3-4 the figure is more developed

When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum
Called to that audit by advised respects;

and the approving show of hands is introduced with

* True of English, and still more of American tribunals.

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good effect (l. 11). But deeper suggestions are stirred in passages where all the good things of life are regarded as 'trusts' bequeathed by 'lease of nature' * or of time, on terms for which they will exact full interest and reckoning.

Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,
And being frank she lends to those are free. (§ 4 3-4)

What acceptable audit canst thou leave ?
Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
Which, usèd, lives th'executor to be. (§ 4.12-14)

This is the final note on which the series ends :

Her audit, though delay'd, answered must be
And her quietus is to render thee (§ 126.11-12)

where *quietus* has the technical sense (preserved in quit-claim) of the final settlement and surrender which acquitted the account, and gave the discharge.

Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place ?
(§ 137.9-10)

is a kindred instance of the way in which technical words easily lose their value. The parallel in *Love's Labour's Lost*, II, i, 233, shows how once they were available for popular pleasantry and punning. The gallant Boyet asks for '*Grant of pasture*' on sweet Maria's lips ; to which she wittily replies :

Not so, gentle beast,
My lips are no common, though several they be.

Similarly, in § 46.7-11, the sophisticated use of terms, with which 'conquest,' 'freedom of that right' and 'moiety' are also combined, repels the modern reader :

But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.

* *Macbeth* IV, i.

To side * this title is impannellèd
 A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart ;
 And by their verdict is determinèd
 The clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part.

But all will admit that such a sonnet is only likely to emanate from one familiar with these tenants' Courts, and to be addressed to one who shares the same experience. If here the handling is too Euphuist, a stately use of Court procedure is achieved in the opening of § 74 :

But be contented : when that fell arrest
 Without all bail shall carry me away,

which in imaginative transmutation of the commonplace reaches the same level of dignity as in *Hamlet*, V, ii, 347 :

As this fell sergeant, Death,
 Is strict in his arrest.

Less obvious examples, in the use of individual words, abound ; for instance, in § 57 the ' hours,' ' time,' and ' services ' claimed from the serf, and in § 58 the ' liberty,' ' charter,' ' privilege,' ' injury,' ' pardon,' that fall within the lord's prerogative ; they will not fail to catch the attention of the observant, but need not here be catalogued. So, too, the references to ' usury ' in §§ 4, 6, 134, and other Sonnets—with the recurrent word-play on ' use '—may be left unindexed. In them (as in the Plays) the writer shows his familiarity with the law of creditor and debtor, more particularly in the raising of money by aid of mortgages and usury. But nowhere is there a hint of proceedings for recovery of petty debts, such as occupied the Stratford Court of Record, before which John Shakspeare more than once appeared, and (as some hold) gave his son William opportunities of ' picking up ' law.†

* ' Side ' is Old English for ' settle,' and the ' 'cide ' of commentators a needless correction.

† Greenwood, *Is there a Shakespearean Problem ?* pp. 75, 103-5.

On the side of authorship, the evidence furnished by the Sonnets under this head seems clear, consistent and decisive. The point of view is unmistakable, an added trait of the aristocratic complex which invests the Sonnets with an atmosphere and colouring, in which there are no discordant notes.

CHAPTER V

AUTHOR AND RECIPIENT

THE AUTHOR—*Traits and Personality : Age : Health, Insomnia : Past Failure : Idealisation of Friend.*

THE RECIPIENT—*Aristocrat : Personal Beauty, Charm, Gifts : Characteristics and Shortcomings.*

THE personality of the writer demands a treatise to itself; for the evidence of the Poems and the Plays cannot be divorced from that of the Sonnets, in which he ‘unlocked,’* or, as some will have it, disguised, his heart. Under the flickering beams of these sidelights, the subject has been handled or mishandled in volumes, essays, and articles, which exhibit every degree of insight, obtuseness, or perversity. Here we will draw only on the Sonnets themselves, which afford the one sure ground-plan for supplementary and inferential restoration.

To begin with the more external traits and characteristics, the author, addressing himself to one who is in the springtide of youth (§§ 1, 22, 37), has himself at the outset of the Sonnets reached life’s meridian. The contrast is precisely drawn in § 2. (See p. 144.)

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty’s field,
Thy youth’s proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tattered weed, of small worth held—

where the contrasted ‘*thy*’ must receive the emphasis which its sevenfold iteration implies. ‘Forty’ may not be arithmetically exact, but poetically represents the round truth. The use of ‘forty’ as ‘merely typical’ is not borne out by the parallel adduced from *Henry VI*,

* ‘With this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart.’—*Wordsworth*.

I, iii, 91 (apart from doubts of authenticity): and the reckoning is confirmed and guaranteed by § 37 ;

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.

The language may be somewhat overcharged by sentiment, but in a personal sonnet the simile would be absurd if it outraged approximate possibilities. It would come within the range of a man of forty or thereabouts, addressing a youth, not yet of age, but could not drop below those limits.

And the same inference follows from the words of § 3 :

Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime.

The appeal rests on personal reminiscences. Writing to a young man of marriageable age, the writer recalls the beauty of his mother in *her* prime. Again, in round figures—a son nearing twenty, a mother approaching forty or thereabouts, is needed to meet the case, and the writer recalls her girlish beauty, as it was at the outgoings of maidenhood. Thus the indications all agree, and confirm each other.

With something more than his usual perversity, S. Butler holds that none but a young man recently out of his teens could have used language like that of § 2 regarding the age of forty ; yet not only M. Drayton at thirty-six writes (Sonnet xlv)

Age rules my lines with wrinkles in my face,

and Byron on his thirty-sixth birthday

My days are in the yellow leaf,

but in contemporary prose, from lawyer to lawyer, Francis Bacon to Lord Burleigh, we may read : ' I wax now somewhat ancient ; one and thirty years is a great deal of sand in the hour-glass,' and may reflect how much

the intervening centuries have done to conserve and lengthen youthful vigour and bloom. As an incidental confirmation it may be added that the retrospective summaries of losses, bereavements and discomfitures, of grievances long unatoned, of dead friends and buried friendships (in §§ 30, 31), necessitate a long and chequered experience of life.

The notes on personal appearance, though tinged with self-consciousness, bear out the same picture. The 'deep-sunken eyes' and lined and hollowed cheeks of § 2 (cf. § 60.10), the silvering locks of § 12, show deeper traces of age, as the series proceeds, till in § 62 we reach the rather morbid

Bated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity

and in § 63

Age's cruel knife.

Later, in § 100.9-10, like inroads of mortality begin to affect his friend; while in § 108 youth and bloom have yielded to 'the dust and injury of age,' and the 'necessary (inevitable) wrinkles' that mark the full-grown man. The contrast with §§ 19 and 22 makes them the more suggestive.

A further note on relative age occurs in the § 126 *Envoi*:

Thou hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st.

This is less explicit in terms, and the distinctive twelve-line form casts something of doubt on its proper place in the Sonnet series; but it pictures the recipient as having outgrown the bloom of youth and passed into riper manhood, while 'his lovers' are withering towards that 'sickle-hour' which waits for all. Thus the lines seem to occupy their proper place, as though the writer recognised that his *Explicit* was reached.

Surmises are precarious, but I suspect that the illness which underlies §§ 27-32 left lasting traces, marking the end of youth and the recrudescence of hurts and

disablements (§§ 73, 74.11, 89), which at the time it had defied. The exquisite cadences of § 73 reflect the sense of premature old age; autumn is shedding its last golden leaves, and twilight hours foretell the approach of night. He is haunted already by that pre-occupation with death (§§ 71, 73, 74, 77, 81, and cf. §§ 31, 32) which is characteristic of the age, and which found such varied notes of utterance in Sidney, Raleigh and above all Donne. Of all maladies few are more aging, externally or psychically, than insomnia; and where are its haggard horrors more vividly depicted than in the companion Sonnets §§ 27, 28?

I keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see :
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.

Similar references will be found in § 43 which repeats the 'sightless' eyes, and in § 61.1-4 :

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 ?

The trouble was evidently chronic and recurrent, and it helps to account for that note of melancholy which runs with a crescendo movement through the course of the Sonnets * as part of their abiding charm.

The stamp of frustrated prospects and forfeited ambitions is everywhere impressed. About this there can be no mistake--the writer's own career had been a failure, high hopes and expectations clouded with disaster and disgrace : †

In disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone bewep my outcast state. (§ 29.1-2)

* See comment on §§ 66, 71-4.

† Sonnets §§ 25, 29, 30, 31, 37, 63-6, 71-4, 81, 89, 90, 110-112. Particulars may be reserved for discussion as they arise.

And whatever the unkindness of fortune or the world's despite it is hardly denied that the fault lay in no small measure with himself. Few of the Sonnets are more deeply felt than those which picture his life's story under the familiar imagery of the overclouded day (§§ 12, 34, 63.4-5) or the declining year (§ 73).

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.
 (§ 33.1-12)

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away,
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest. (§ 73.1-8)

And as the Sonnets proceed, waning physical powers are accompanied with a growing sense of declining poetic zest and inspiration (§§ 76, 77, 86, 100, 101, 103, 105).

Thus then the attitude and accent of maturer age run consistently throughout. Circumstances affect the tones of utterance, but all through it is the key to right understanding. For the ardours and imprudences of youth, nay for defaults and blemishes, the elder man makes more than generous allowance (§§ 35, 41, 57) ; accepts and pardons them as promises of better things

to come. Where remonstrances or cautions cannot be withheld, they are offered as tributes of affectionate regard, and never take the guise of patronage or condescension. From a chastened and more disciplined experience he writes as one whose own hopes and aspirations have undergone shocks and reverses that are irretrievable; past all illusions for himself, his one desire and longing is to preserve from like disaster gifts nurtured under some happier star; and to promote and watch with pride their realisation in a younger and a happier career.

Thus I in thy abundance am sufficed
 And by a part of all thy glory live.
 Look, what is best, that best I wish in thee :
 This wish I have ; then ten times happy me !
 (§ 37.11-14.) Compare § 30.31.

Ambitions once cherished for himself are transferred, with heightened desire, to another. His own name might be 'writ in water,' provided only that 'all he had willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good' should flower and fruit and win praise in one more worthy than himself.

Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
 Though I, once gone, to all the world must die :
 The earth can yield me but a common grave ;
 When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie,
 Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
 Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read ;
 And tongues-to-be your being shall rehearse,
 When all the breathers of this world are dead.
 (§ 81.5-12)

Such idealisation of the affections in the person of some younger man is more rare in literature than * in life. In the constitution of the Sacred Band of Thebes it held a binding place. In the devotion of teachers to

* Bradley, in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 334, compares the devotion of Antonio to Bassanio.

their pupils, or to some 'beloved disciple,' it is far from uncommon. Sir T. Browne in *Religio Medici* writes : 'I never yet cast a true affection on a woman ; but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God. . . . I love my friend before myself, and yet methinks do not love him enough. . . . When I am from him, I am dead till I be with him.' It is a prose paraphrase of the Sonnets in their most effusive mood. To natures of poetic temperament, that feel the need of affection, it is instinctive. Beeching * quotes a particular instance from the letters of the poet Gray ; but nowhere in literature does it find expression so rich as that of the Sonnets. They are in truth the Classic treatment, in terms of the English Renaissance, of a theme which finds numerous anticipations in the annals of monasticism, and must have had analogies in the mediæval relations of Squire and page. It is superfluous to enlarge upon the warmth and delicacy of the sensibilities which they reveal. The terms of admiration are to our taste luscious ; but are in fact restrained compared with those habitual in dedicatory poems, sonnets and epistles, or even in the formal correspondence of dignitaries and officials. At the initial stage the devotion is romantic ; the romance was destined to shattering disillusion ; but none the less there remained to memory a fragrance that was inextinguishable ; and in the quality of the affection displayed nothing is more remarkable than the generosity and the constancy (especially §§ 57-58, 105, 108-9) which in the face of slights, neglects and irresponsiveness, held fast to plighted troth, and the delicacy and consideration, which even in remonstrance or rebuke, ripened experience extended to the exuberance of youth. From the first declaration of homage to the final Envoi,

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass his sickle-hour ;

* Sonnets, pp. xv-xvi.

with which he, so to say, signed, sealed and delivered the parcel of the Sonnets as a discretionary trust, he never wavered in the fealty of his poetic devoir—‘What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours.’ ‘The marriage of true minds’ (§ 116) consecrates an irrevocable tie, and is the possession which outweighs all others

The mutual render, only me for thee. (§ 125)

As a minor point we observe that he disclaims for himself ‘learning’ of the technical or academic kind, such as Ben Jonson or Chapman were able to boast.

In § 78.5–8 :

Thine eyes that taught the dumb on high to sing
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have added feathers to the learnèd’s wing
And given grace a double majesty,

the poet numbers himself with the erstwhile ‘dumb’ and ‘ignorant,’ as compared with the trained learning of his compeers :

But thou art all my art and dost advance
As high as learning my rude ignorance. (§ 78.13–14)

But we must not at this point be tempted to pass from exterior and general traits to the more delicate play of words and motive, to the lights and shadows of underlying sensibilities, and the reactions of shifting circumstance, which only closer study of individual sonnets can reveal.

The recipient we approach with more reserve. Our knowledge is far less direct : he is not described, but only addressed, and we behold him as reflected in the affections of a friend. Some would refuse to invest him with individuality at all, and rend him into fragments, or creative fancies. But certain features are clear and indubitable, and studied with perspective and discrimination combine naturally and convincingly into an organic whole.

To begin with, the implications of aristocratic outlook and demeanour apply to the recipient even more directly and forcibly than to the writer. They are part of the whole texture of the Sonnets, and are in perfect accord with all that we learn of his personality. He was of high rank (§§ 2, 37, 69, 79, 81, 96), born of a mother distinguished for her beauty (§§ 3, 10), and on him it had devolved to perpetuate the heritage and gifts of his noble line, son, it seems clear, of a father now deceased (§§ 1-6, 9-13).

At the opening of the Sonnets he had reached the flower of puberty, but was unwilling to contract marriage with the lady whose betrothal apparently found favour with the author. All prospect of the desired match disappears at an early stage (from § 14 or § 16 onwards) from the scheme of the Sonnets. Praises are lavished on his youthful beauty and good looks

the world's fresh ornament

And only herald to the gaudy spring.

(§ 1.9-10 ; cf. §§ 3, 18, 16, 62, 65, 67, 68, 70)

His flowing locks—golden or gold-brown—are compared to buds of marjoram (§ 99). If his type of beauty was somewhat feminine (§§ 20, 99), he was yet an Adonis among women (§ 53), to whom the hearts of maidens turned with fond desire (§ 3.5-6), and later this was to betray him into amorous and wanton ways (§§ 40, 41, 69, 95-6). There are no clear tributes to physical prowess, and in society he shone rather by accomplishments than deeds of note or daring :

Beauty, birth, wealth, wit

Entitled in thy parts do crownèd sit, (§ 37)

where the references to rank and title are explicit. For music he had no liking (§ 8), but was perhaps a connoisseur of the painter's and engraver's art (§§ 24, 47), and in literature became the patron of poets, who competed for the favours of his countenance (§§ 78-86 ; cf. 21, 32).

As the Sonnets progress, there is the same gradual advance in age as we have already noted in the writer. Successive stages are apparent in §§ 1 *sqq.*, 53–4, 70, 96, 100, 104, and more markedly in § 108, where youthful bloom can no longer deny ‘the dust and injury of age.’ That, in youth at any rate, he possessed charm and unusual gifts of fascination goes without saying—it lies at the very core of the Sonnets. But his qualities seem to have been of the showy and æsthetic order, not based on strength of will or fixed aims and purposes, so much as upon foibles and impulse. The impression we receive is that of a nature touchy and wayward (§ 70), given to display, fond of flattery * (§§ 21–23, 69, 83, 84, 99), impatient of rebuke (§§ 57, 58). Under the brave exterior lay the canker of ‘self-love,’ making him vain and fickle (§§ 87, 90, 92) in the affections, and quick to take offence.

* In flattery, it is hard to discriminate between giver and receiver. But the Sonnets continuously produce the impression that the writer at any rate felt that he was addressing one whom it was necessary to humour and to flatter, and that no pill of warning or criticism could be administered except in jam (§§ 62, 67–70). In § 84.14 the ‘fond on praise’ is quite explicit. It must be remembered also that the idioms of flattery are governed by the conventions of the time. And, alike in Court and literary circles they were never more highly spiced and seasoned than under Gloriana; the royal palate and literary manners (as shown in dedications) demanded it. By way of modern comparison, how far can we judge the susceptibilities of Queen Victoria by the letters of the Earl of Beaconsfield?

CHAPTER VI

THE SONNETS AND THE POEMS

VENUS AND ADONIS, and THE RAPE OF LUCRECE.

EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON—*Boyhood, Youth and Training : Court Life : Portraits : Marriage Proposals : Career.*

THE POEMS—*Moral and Intention : Dedications.*

DESTINATION OF SONNETS—*Addressed to Earl of Southampton : not to a Woman : not to Earl of Pembroke : Irreconcilable with Wm. Shakspeare : Authorship.*

THE true starting-point for the interior criticism of the Sonnets is their close connection with the Poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, though commentators to their cost have taken little or no account of it. To the earliest appreciators of Shakespeare it was an assumption. In the first (1598) mention of the (as yet unpublished) sonnets, Meres brackets them together, and probably the same association underlies the contemporary tributes paid by R. Barnefield (1598) and J. Weever (1599) to the 'honie-tong'd' poet of love. Whether that is so or not, disjunction has wrought endless mischief, and the two are inseparable. *Venus and Adonis* does not merely abound with verbal echoes of a tell-tale kind, but contains currents of thought which clearly belong to the same period and phase of feeling. Sonnet § 3 is the best instance. The 'unear'd womb' (l. 5) echoes the '*never eare* so barren a land' of the *V.A.* dedication, and the word does not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare. The inapposite

What is thy body but a swallowing grave
Seeming to bury that posterity,
Which by the rights of time thou needst must have,
(*V.A.* 757-9)

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is the antecedent of the more refined,

Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
Of his self-love, to stop posterity ? (§ 3.7-8)

and the same motif,

Die single, and thine image dies with thee,
so incongruously introduced into *V.A.* 171-4,

By law of nature thou art bound to breed
That thine may live, when thou thyself art dead,
And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive
In that thy likeness still is left alive

becomes the burden of the opening group of sonnets.*

Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,
And, being frank, she lends to those are free. (§4.3-4)

That's for thyself to breed another thee

* * * * *
Leaving thee living in posterity. (§ 6.7-12)

Make thee another self, for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee.
(§ 10.13-14)

And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.
(§ 12.13-14)

Similarly, the kindred theme,

Make use of time, let not advantage slip ;
Beauty within itself should not be wasted,
(*V.A.* 129-130)

develops into

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy ? (§ 4.1-2)

and

Beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And, kept unused, the user so destroys it. (§ 9.11-12)

* See on § 1, Comment, pp. 139 and 143.

These parallels, it will be observed, are all derived from the opening group of Sonnets.* That is not due to any wilful *ex parte* selection, but in reading the *V.A.*—while there are repetitions of unusual epithets, and even reminiscences like

Within the gentle closure of my breast † (§ 48.11)

I have noted no correspondences of the same order in later sonnets, and they point to the *V.A.* having been composed shortly prior to the opening of the Sonnet series. The importance of this for determination of date is obvious: and receives confirmation from parallels adduced from the early Plays, especially *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*.†

In discussion of the Shakespearean Canon, one point is beyond dispute, that *Venus and Adonis* published in 1593, and *Lucrece* in 1594, were dedicated by 'William Shakespeare' to the young Earl of Southampton. And it will be convenient at this point to assemble the relevant dates and incidents in his career for comparison with the Poems and Sonnets.§

As a result of the treasonable designs and plots, which brought Howard, Duke of Norfolk, to the block in June 1572, and of the stricter enforcement of the Act of Uniformity, Henry Wriothesley, the second Earl of Southampton, was committed to the Tower as a Popish recusant. The protests and entreaties of his young Countess secured at length some relaxation in the rigours of confinement, and in the autumn of 1573 he was permitted, under surveillance of Lord Montague, to join her at Cowdray House, Midhurst, where she had sought the shelter of her paternal home. There, on

* Herford, in the Eversley edition of the Sonnets, corroborates this.

† It is important to note that in *V.A.* 782 'The quiet closure of my breast' is in the mouth of Adonis (not Venus), and also that 'gentle' in the Sonnets refers to gentle birth and breeding—not to feminine tenderness (so in §§ 5, 40, 41, 79, 81, 96, 100, 113). ‡ See pp. 136-7.

§ Mrs. C. C. Stopes, *Third Earl of Southampton*, is a mine of detailed information.

October 6, to the great joy of his parents, was born at last a son and heir, destined to succeed to the title and estate as Henry, 3rd Earl of Southampton. He was brought up, under Catholic disciplines, in the Titchfield mansion, where his father maintained an establishment of unsurpassed magnificence.* At four years old an unhappy and irreconcilable estrangement deprived him of his mother's care, and consigned him to the keeping of servants and retainers ; and this continued till his father's death on October 4, 1581, when he succeeded to the Earldom, within two days of completing his eighth year. Under the will, lavish provision was made for the funeral, for monuments, and for personal legacies ; charge of the boy's person and estates was entrusted to the Executors, the most active of whom was the deceased Earl's favourite steward, named Thomas Dymock ; while the Countess was left with a penurious jointure of the yearly value of £362 19s. 0½d., quite unbecoming to her rank and station. An instant appeal to the Earl of Leicester, her cousin, was so far successful that custody of the boy and his fortunes was shortly transferred to Lord Burleigh, as Master of the Queen's Wards, and in his household he must have mixed often with the young children of the Earl and Countess of Oxford. At twelve years old, in the Michaelmas term of 1585, he was matriculated as a Fellow Commoner at St. John's College ; and two Latin themes, together with a Latin letter (1587), preserved at Hatfield, show what rapid progress he made with his studies. By June 6, 1589, he was entitled to his M.A. Degree, and prior to that had already, in February 1588, been admitted as student at Gray's Inn. There, to his lasting credit, he took under his wing John Florio, who eventually dedicated to him his great Italian Dictionary, *The Worlde of Wordes*, when it was brought to com-

* Both Cowdray and Titchfield are figured in *Old Homes of Britain*. Cowdray House and its fortunes are fully described in W. H. St. John Hope's sumptuous volume on *Cowdray and Easebourne Priory*. The great hall was decorated with *large-scale* paintings of historic occasions.

pletion in 1598. Young and Bohemian poets and pamphleteers—Barnabe Barnes in 1593, and Thomas Nash in 1594—turned to him as the rising Mæcenas of his day, and the selfsame years produced the far more notable dedications of *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece*. To these may be added the tributary Sonnet by Gervase Markham in his poem on *The Revenge*; but the list of clients is not very impressive, and to judge by the collection of illuminated manuscripts, missals, hour-books, etc., which shortly before his death he presented to St. John's College Library, he was perhaps chiefly drawn to literature on the artistic side. He had not the bent or concentration of the student, and as soon as he was released from academic surroundings, rank, wealth, good looks, and temperament all beckoned him to the dance of fashion and pleasure which circled round the Queen. In accomplishment and means he stood second to none of the young nobility. His entrance on the stage coincides very closely with the exit of the Earl of Oxford, who in 1591 espoused Elizabeth Trentham and finally retired from Court. In 1592 he rode in the Queen's train on her visit to Oxford;

quo non formosior alter

Affuit, aut docta iuvenis præstantior arte

writes the official eulogist. In 1593, not yet of age, he was nominated, and all but admitted, to the crowning honour of a vacant Garter; in 1594 he figured with distinction in the lists of tournament and Tennis Court competitions. For the charm and brilliance of his prime we depend not only on the Sonnets (§§ 1-18, 20, 22, 47, 53, 54, 67-9, 83, etc.), whose evidence might plausibly be discounted, but on contemporary portraits* which depict him at every stage of development. At twenty-

* More numerous, it appears, than those of any contemporary. S. Lee, *Shakespeare*, pp. 144-6, enumerates fourteen, and a special study of the Wriothesley portraits will be found in the Walpole Soc. Transactions VIII. The Welbeck Abbey portrait referred to in the text is reproduced by S. Lee and minutely described, and so also (with others) in Stopes, *Third Earl of Southampton*, pp. 94, 253.

one he stands before us arrayed in sumptuous and elaborate attire, with delicate and clear-cut features, lithe, well-proportioned limbs, and the flowing love-locks, which were his special pride.* It is a telling portrait, but behind the brilliance lay defects which time was to reveal. There was want of balance, self-control, reserve, and weight. The ground fault lay in personal vanity, which there was so much to stimulate. With men, pique and petulance landed him in undignified encounters; with women, he was disposed to vaunt, rather than to control, conquests and amours, which finally culminated in hasty wedlock (1595) with Elizabeth Vernon, one of the beauties of the Court. Already in 1594, Lady Bridget Manners, sister of his friend the Earl of Rutland, had put aside suggestions of marriage with one 'so young, fantastical and volatile.' Realising and foreseeing these traits, it was no wonder that his legal guardians, the Dowager Countess and Lord Burleigh, while he was still within their control, had endeavoured to provide some steadying antidote: together they schemed for him marriage with Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the Earl of Oxford.† By birth and connections no lady in the realm was more eligible. She was of suitable age, less than two years his junior, and since her mother's death in 1588 had been domiciled with her grandfather and guardian, Lord Burleigh. As early as 1590, when he was not yet seventeen, the project was matured; but neither the wishes of his mother nor the prudence of his guardian induced him to abridge his liberties, and as soon as he was his own master (if not earlier) any lingering hopes of the match were abandoned. In public affairs, weakness of will, ambition, and passion for display led him to pursue 'wandering fires,' to

* The type is in complete accord with the implications of the Sonnets. See p. 115. The golden locks find specific recognition in the motto prefixed to the *Venus and Adonis*:

mihi *flavus* Apollo
Pocula Castalia plena ministrat aqua.

† See p. 43 and on Sonnet § 1.

embark on unsound ventures, and to follow the star of Essex,* even on his last fatal escapade. But we will not here forestall the exact part which he played in these enterprises.

Of the true inwardness of the Poems, I entertain no doubt. Regarding them as addressed by the Earl of Oxford to the Earl of Southampton, interpretation becomes transparently plain. Mythological poems of this period—apart from translations—were recognised and habitual vehicles of allegorical suggestion. In *Venus and Adonis*, the young Earl—who in Sonnet § 53 is actually called Adonis—

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you—

the exemplar of youthful beauty, is urged to hold aloof no longer from the nuptial tie, but to exercise his virility for the transmission of his own gifts and graces to a progeny of whom the world had need. He must not, for pleasures of the chase and physical delights,

Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn (*V.A.* 4)

forego his duties to the race, or spurn the instincts of sex. The intention is not incitement to lust, but a call to the effective use of nuptial joys.

Make use of time, let not advantage slip ;
Beauty within itself should not be wasted.

(*V.A.* 129-130)

Read by this light, touches or pleas that seem sophisticated or banal, find their natural justification, as closer study of the earlier Sonnets will help to show. When Hazlitt dubs the two poems 'a couple of ice-houses,' he wilfully overshoots the mark ; but they do not voice the passion of youth,† and the attribution of

* As a boy of sixteen he impetuously crossed the Channel to Dieppe to place his services at Essex' disposal.

† Similarly of the Sonnets G. Bernard Shaw justly writes, ' Nothing could be more unnatural as from one young man to another.'

authorship to a youth of about twenty-six* imposes a strain on critical credulity. Apart from literary brilliance, unequal but astonishing, Venus drops to the level of an insatiate courtesan; the psychological interest, such as there is, centres in Adonis, but mere disinclination, and that compliant and ineffectual, is not a fruitful or inspiring theme. The poem stands or falls as a poetic exercise, on which in composition and adornment the author lavished the finest skill of a not unpractised pen. It was far in advance of any like tribute addressed to the young Earl, a recognition of his literary and æsthetic gifts, by which he would set no little store; and the picture of Adonis, in the pride of his unfettered youth, is an allegoric eulogy of his manly modesty, his irresistible charm, and the careless courage of his bearing, which the recipient would appreciate at its full value.

A year later, *The Rape of Lucrece* tells another tale, in which the allegory is very thinly veiled. It is the poet's warning to the youthful aristocrat against the perilous course on which he is embarking. Let him not repeat the tragedy, which brought the noble house of Tarquin to the ground—the fatal indulgence of lust within the confines which courtesy and social honour proclaimed inviolate. The portions of the poem most deeply felt are those (Stanzas §§ 27, 31, 40, 44–56, 101–2) which depict the struggle between Conscience and Desire in Tarquin's wrestle with temptation.

The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace (l. 712)

I know repentant tears ensue the deed,

Reproach, disdain and deadly enmity ;

Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy. (ll. 502–4)

Once, at least,

But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,

The shame and fault finds no excuse or end (ll. 237–8)

* The composition of *Venus and Adonis* is commonly assigned to a period preceding all dramatic production, which began by 1590 at latest; but 'first heir of my invention' must not be unduly pressed. April 26, 1564, is the date of William Shakspeare's baptism.

the situation in the Sonnets seems directly touched. More searching correspondences underlie the apostrophes to Time * and Night, and the graver aphorisms such as

'Tis but a part of sorrow that we hear ;
 Deep sounds make lesser noise than shallow fords,
 And sorrow ebbs, being blown with wind of words.
 (ll. 1328-30)

For Sorrow like a heavy hanging bell †
 Once set on ringing with his own weight goes. (ll. 1493-4)

Unruly blasts wait on the tender spring ;
 Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers ;
 (§ 69.94)

The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing ; (cf. § 73)

What virtue breeds, iniquity devours. (ll. 869-872)

The spectral sounds and shadows of the night, so freely exploited in *Lucrece*, 302 v., 449 v., 764 v., 1570 v., are close akin to the waking visions which haunt the sleeper in Sonnets §§ 27, 43, 61. Verbal recurrences are numerous, and so too the Euphuistic partiality for oxymorons and hyphenated words which characterise this period of writing. The links of *verbal* connection begin early, perhaps with 'user' in § 9, and 'ruinate' in § 10, but the true parallels belong to the second and later stages of the Sonnets.† Sonnet § 26

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage,
 Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,

* The challenge to time in *Lucrece*, 925 vv., echoes again and again through the earlier Sonnets (§§ 12, 15, 16, 19, 60, 64).

† Sonnet § 71 :

Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell,
 is a perfect replica.

† Instances of unusual words or usages common to *Lucrece* and the Sonnets are : *accessary*, *arrest*, *aspects*, *brag*, *chops* and *wrinkles*, *the crow*, *esconce*, *interest*, *hearsed*, *loathsome*, *map*, *niggard*, *ruinate*, *wink*, etc. The association of *Philomel* with *burthen*, of *Narcissus* with *self-love*, and in many cases the metrical ictus and position is as telling as the actual word employed. For oxymorons *poor-rich*, *cursed-blessed*, *niggard-prodigal*, *O modest wantons ! wanton modesty !* in *Lucrece* may be compared with *blessed-fair* (§ 92), *profitless usurer* (§ 4), while hyphenated combinations are so numerous that they become a feature of style.

has been described as a poetic expansion of the *Lucrece* dedication.*

Passages, and even sections, of the poem seem forced, as though the writer were making play with words, and straying from his main subject ; but it is reasonable to surmise that the more artificial insets, such as the elaborate conceits on Heraldry (ll. 55-68, 197-209, 828-831, 1053) and the detailed study of tapestry or fresco (ll. 1366-1491) had esoteric interest for the reader to whom it was dedicated. They were departments in which the Earl of Southampton showed special taste and liking. So interpreted, the choice of theme is vindicated, the issue frankly faced, and in design and execution the moral is conveyed with tact and courage. In more than one Sonnet, in § 19.14, in § 38, in § 78, and § 100, I find direct reference to *Venus and Adonis* and the *Lucrece*, where in retrospect he regards them as 'lays' pervaded by the true lyrical impulse, as drawing their *imprimatur* from dedication to the Earl, and deriving from him 'both skill and argument.' Once again it is noticeable how the dramatic and personal interest (such as there is) centres in Tarquin, not in the heroine Lucretia, who is left a mere type not individualised.

And how convincingly the dedications of the poems conform to the setting proposed ! They present a striking contrast. That to *Venus and Adonis* addressed to 'Right Honourable' by 'Your Honor's in all dutie' is courteous, respectful and self-respecting, but contains no suggestion of personal intimacy ; the writer desires to express and to receive appreciation, in submitting for acceptance the best and most finished piece of work he has as yet been able to achieve. A year later, the *Lucrece* Dedication strikes a wholly different note. The expressions used cannot be thinned down to dedicatory formulas. More fulsome and more laboured addresses it would be easy to quote ; but one might hunt in vain for any equally sincere and confident in its warmth of personal

* S. Lee, p. 127. See on § 26.

intimacy and of prospective devotion. 'The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end,' in its simplicity and directness, is no commonplace of conventional approach; still less is the pledge of life-long devotion. 'What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have, devoted yours.' For equal and life-long devotion, he plights his troth; and the Sonnets, from start to finish, redeem the pledge.

This I do vow, and this shall ever be;

I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee. (§ 123.13-14)

From the *Venus and Adonis* dedication a case might be made for Shakspearean authorship; there, the difficulty lies in the handling and the literary workmanship of the poem itself. With the *Lucrece* it is otherwise; the poem might be attenuated into a mythological exercise in style; but the dedication, addressed by a prentice player to the Earl of Southampton, without even a word of respect, becomes a rank impertinence which would have stopped all chance of further intercourse.

We have dwelt upon the decisive notes of contact which connect the Poems and Sonnets, and identify them as work of the same hand. They do not by themselves prove unitary authorship of the whole series, though to that they make their contribution: that must be argued from a wider range of data, applied to the Sonnets individually. But they are ample to show that the main stream of the Sonnets proceeds from the same source as the *Venus* and the *Lucrece*. And this carries with it the corollary that the Sonnets, like the Poems, were in their main content addressed to the Earl of Southampton. About the Poems there is no dispute; and when once unity of authorship is admitted, the inference must be extended to the Sonnets. From beginning to end they know but a single patron,* the

* Compare Sonnets §§ 23, 26, 32, 37, 38, 69, 76-86, 100-106, and indeed, *passim*.

one ideal loyalty and inspiration 'that taught the dumb
 bn high to sing.'

Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
 Whose influence is thine and born of thee :
 In others' works thou dost but mend the style,
 And arts with thy sweet graces gracèd be ;
 But thou art all my art and dost advance
 As high as learning my rude ignorance. (§ 78.9-14)

Since all my songs and praises be
 To one, of one, still such and ever so. (§ 105.3-4)

From 1593 and 1594 the *Venus* and the *Lucrece* were public property ; and however private or personal the sonnets may have been, it would have been absurd for the writer to have gone on professing allegiance to his first and only love, except to him to whom the *Lucrece* dedication was addressed. This is the interior proof of destination, resting on unity of authorship ; and except to those who regard the Sonnets as a medley of various hands or as fictitious exercises, it should carry full conviction. External evidence is almost a blank : after the first unauthorised publication in 1609, they disappear from notice, as though somehow suppressed or blanketed. They found no place in the Folio edition of the Plays, or in any edition of the Poems : till in 1640, J. Benson's adapted version—with its interpolated titles, changes of pronouns and of terms of address—presented them as a Sonnet sequence to a woman, and diverted criticism to a false track. Nor was the misapprehension corrected, until Malone's edition of the complete works in 1778. Naturally (and rightly) it was assumed—as by N. Drake in 1817—that the friend to whom the Sonnets were directed was the Earl of Southampton, until Thorpe's camouflaged dedication of the Sonnets 'To Mr. W. H.' led to a hasty and ill-advised conjecture, that 'Mr. W. H.' signified William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and thence to a fabric of guess-work, involving Mary Fitton and others. It is strange indeed that this broken reed should

have pierced the hand of so many editors, for never was there a more unwarranted literary canard.

(1) Never in all his life was Lord Pembroke designated 'Mr. W. H.' Still less could he have been so termed by a favour-seeking editor in 1609, and perhaps least of all by T. Thorpe, when we compare his elaborated dedications to the 'humbly thrice-kissed hands' of the same 'Lord William, Earle of Pembroke . . .', followed by a resounding list of his distinctions, in 1609, and again in 1616.

(2) The initials thus attached would have disclosed the very secret which the editor-printer was at pains to conceal.

(3) Lord Pembroke's age alone is prohibitive. When first he came to London late in 1597, or early 1598, he had not yet turned eighteen. His father was then still alive; so was a brother; his hair was black; and in other particulars it is impossible to fit him into the framework of the Sonnets.*

(4) With William Shakspeare in particular he had no known personal relations.

(5) If Pembroke was the recipient, the Sonnets must be referred to 1598 and later—an inadmissible corollary.

With the Earl of Pembroke ruled out, there remains no serious competitor.† Our study of the surroundings and setting of the Sonnets yielded an ensemble entirely congruous with that in which the Earl of Southampton moved. And closer study of particulars will reveal minor traits and tastes and pursuits, accordant with what we learn from elsewhere of his personality. Further still, the scheme and progress of the Sonnets will be found to adjust itself without strain to the incidents of his private and public life. The reconciliation depends upon a changed angle of approach and view. That again and again the Sonnets, in their presuppositions and in their

* See Mrs. Stopes, *Sonnets*, pp. xviii-xx.

† I am of course aware of vagaries, most of which are (for those interested) summarised in J. M. Robertson's *Problems of the Shakespeare Sonnets*.

tone, conflict with anything that we know, or can even reasonably imagine, of William Shakspeare of Stratford, any reader of intelligence and candour must,* I should have thought, admit. There lies the rock of offence—the ἀμύχανον κακόν—which has driven expositors to treat the author as a commissioned mouthpiece for patrons male and female, or as a practitioner of poetic conceits, ‘effusions of fancy’ or allegorical flights, or else to regard the Sonnets as a medley of experiences and experiments, in which it is hopeless to recover a unity or to unravel the enigmas of authorship.

* This is not meant as a reflection upon predecessors. In criticism, as in science, history or philosophy, one has to put up with facts; and *so long as no alternative seems open*, one must either shut one’s eyes, or (till new light dawns) accept seeming impossibilities.

CHAPTER VII

THE SONNETS—STUDY AND COMMENT

IN continuous commentary on the Sonnets, formal division into sections or groups, such as those proposed by Wyndham, could not fail to be misleading. It would suggest conscious structural plan, as of cantos in a poem or scenes in a play, instead of natural succession in experience. At the same time, where incidents of relationship, or lapse of time, or change of topic produce a natural break, I have introduced a space, to call attention to the change, in the same way as paragraphs in a continuous text. Precision is of course impossible, but such indications may serve a useful purpose as direction-posts, and the title-headings prefixed may, I hope, assist towards right interpretation. On the other hand, I have not hesitated to dissociate Series I from Series II ; in destination, in manner, and in grouping the differences are marked, and even the original imprint suggests a dividing line.

Throughout, my guiding aim has been to explore and to interpret the circumstances, aims, emotions and relationships which brought them into being, and to get at the heart of their meaning, their poetry, and their implications. Technical, literary or verbal exegesis (so admirably and fully handled by Prof. Tucker) I have subordinated to this end, and in quotation have felt at liberty to choose, without more ado, between readings approved by the best editors (Beeching, Tucker, Knox Pooler and others). My leaning has been conservative, but the original imprint is so full of obvious errors of reading and of punctuation,* due to the editor or printer,

* For proofs, see Beeching, p. lix.

that apart from critical guidance no one can uphold strict adherence to the Quarto text.* Elucidation of personal questions and allusions I have carried as far as my command of materials allows, but have deliberately abstained from following out clues attaching to parallels in the Shakespearean Plays. The Note appended tabulates the primary data. It yields convincing proof of unity of authorship, and weighty evidence that the composition of the main body of the Sonnets must be referred to the period between 1591 and 1598, within which the plays concerned took shape.

The whole has proved a fascinating quest: throughout I find a unity of note and a coherent sequence, which enhance at every turn their personal significance and their poetic charm, rooted in the personalities of Lord Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and the Earl of Southampton. Their cumulative effect is ample to compel conviction and to heighten appreciation.

NOTE ON LEADING PARALLELS FOUND IN THE PLAYS

Apart from mere vocabulary, close links of thought and phrasing occur in the following plays. All, it will be noticed, belong to the Meres 1598 list, and I arrange them in the more or less generally accepted order of composition:

	<i>Two Gent. Verona.</i>	<i>Sonnet References.</i>
I, i, 21 } III, i, 19 }	Hero and Leander reference	§ 56.10-12.
I, i, 30.	"watchful, weary, tedious nights"	§§ 27, 43, 61, etc.
I, i, 42-4.	"As in the sweetest bud The eating canker dwells, so eating love Inhabits in the finest wits of all."	§§ 35, 54, 70, 99.13. cf. § 1.2.
I, ii, 1	I see things too, although you judge I wink.	§ 43.
I, iii, 8.	Missions oversea	§ 55—Comment.
I, iii, 30.	Tilts and tournaments	§ 91.
I, iii, 84.	April sun clouded	§ 33, etc.
III, i, 140-8.	Messenger thoughts	§§ 44, 45.
	Proteus and Valentine types	§§ 33, 55—Comment.

* A delightful facsimile is available in the Noel Douglas Replica Edition.

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Love's Labour's Lost.

Sonnet

- I, i. The opening lines teem with Sonnet phrases and echoes : *References.*
- King.* Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives, §§ 64, 65,
Live register'd upon our brazen tombs, 107, 128.
- And then grace us in the disgrace of death ; §§ 29, 108.
- When, spite of cormorant devouring Time, § 19, etc.
- Th' endeavour of this present breath may buy § 81.
- That honour, which shall bate his scythe's keen §§ 12, 60,
edge, 100, 123.
- And makes us heirs of all eternity.

And so, too, do the Biron fancies and pleasantries in IV, iii, 255, 299, 328, 350, which so curiously anticipate or reproduce the Sonnet references to bright eyes (§§ 1.14, 17, 20), to black hair (§ 127), and to the office of the elements (§ 44) ; while II, i, 13-15,

My beauty
Needs not the painted flourish of your praise ;
Beauty is bought by judgment of the eye,
Not uttered by base sale of chapmen's tongues,

read in connection with § 21 and § 33, almost irresistibly suggest a covert allusion to the Chapman name.

V, ii, 799 shares " world-without-end " with § 57.5.

Romeo and Juliet.

Sonnet

- I, i, 220. *R.* Oh, she is rich in beauty ; only poor *References.*
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store. §§ 11.9-10,
14.11-12.
- B.* Then she hath sworn, that she will still live chaste ? §§ 1.12,
R. She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste. 4.5-7.
- I, ii, 33. Mine being one
May stand in number, though in reckoning none. § 136.8.
- I, v, 47. Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear. § 27.11-12.
- II, iii, 3. Like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path. § 7.10.
- II, v, 9. Now is the sun upon the highmost hill § 7.5,9.
Of this day's journey.

The parallels all belong to the earlier sonnets ; and the same is mainly true of those drawn from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

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Less numerous and convincing parallels occur in—

Richard II.

Sonnet References.

I, iii, 268. Every tedious stride I make

Will but remember me what a deal of
world

§§ 28, 50.

I wander from the jewels that I love.

§§ 48, 52.

III, iii, 65. Compared with §§ 7 and 33, and other verbal similarities
(Tucker xxii-xxiii.)

King John.

II, ii, 498.

The glorious sun

Stays in his course and plays the alchemist

Turning with splendour of his precious eye

The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold,

seems closely reminiscent of § 33.

But the "tasting-cup" simile of § 114, reminding us of *King John*, V. vi, belongs to a later stratum of sonnets.

1, 2 *Henry IV*, parallels are carefully studied in Beeching, *Introd.* xxv-xxvi.

The only other play that shows more than verbal resemblances is *Hamlet*; and there the parallels, drawn from the later Sonnets, are more temperamental than literary. See § 71, *Comment*.

SECTION I: FIRST SERIES, §§ 1-126

Sonnets §§ 1-8. Marriage in Prospect

The opening group of sonnets is the most compact and homogeneous in the whole series. They are addressed to a high-born gifted youth, son of a mother distinguished for her beauty, whose charms and promise had captured the imagination of an older man, so that his own hopes and aspirations seemed to live again in the prospects and future of his *protégé*. He has now reached marriageable age, and with almost importunate eagerness the writer urges him to enter upon the marriage state, to perpetuate in offspring the line of his nobility, and reproduce the gifts without which the world would be defrauded of its due. The situation is obviously personal; no sonneteer would have invented the theme or the treatment. There is no mention of Love, the central theme of all conventional sonneteering; and the position is obscured by the absence of any reference to the lady—her position, her virtues or her charms. For any scheme of fiction the omission is surely intolerable. Marriage is not treated as a union of hearts, or a satisfaction of desire, or a mingling of souls; but solely as an honourable call and obligation on the heir of noble lineage, his debt to nature and mankind. In such a scheme the dramatic opportunities are reduced to a minimum; but even those that remain are not utilised or developed into any kind of plot. After the first few sonnets all vestiges of romantic appeal drop out, and from § 14 onwards the marriage motive is abandoned for alien themes of personal admiration and solicitude. It has been suggested that Shakspeare was commissioned by the Countess of Southampton to bring poetic influences to bear upon

her reluctant son. Is it not the height of absurdity to suppose that the great romanticist and dramatist executed his commission in such a fashion as this, and then embarked upon his own account on disconnected fancies and inventions, by way of private and poetic exercise ?

Thus at the outset the Sonnets, as addressed by Wm. Shakspeare to Southampton, are beset with impenetrable difficulties. Prior to his intrigues with Elizabeth Vernon, the one alliance proposed and entertained for the young Earl was that with Lady Elizabeth de Vere. *Commissioned* to plead claims of marriage, even a *mariage de convenance*, upon the scion of a noble house, a poet sonneteer could not fail to pay some tribute to the conventions, to concede some feigned homage, if no more, to the romantic and idealising regards of love. But in the Sonnets neither the romantic nor the sexual *rapproches* receive one syllable of notice : no word of praise commends the beauty or accomplishments or virtues of the lady in question. The silence seems inexplicable. But granting that (for reasons inscrutable) the writer refrained from singing the praises of the lady herself, is it conceivable that he should have dropped no word or hint of her illustrious lineage ? and this, when his own professional career had brought him into direct and intimate connection with her noble sire ? The riddle seems insoluble : when suddenly, like a flash-light in the dark, the ascription of authorship to Edward de Vere himself illumines a dead wall of obscurities, and reveals approaches that, offered as conjectures, would have been dismissed as wild improbabilities. Addressed to a prospective, but reluctant, son-in-law, the handling of the theme loses its incongruity : and it answers in detail to the relations which actually existed.

From 1591 onwards, until the young Earl of Southampton came of age, his mother and his official guardian, the Lord High Treasurer, combined to press upon him the desirability of union with Lady Elizabeth, daughter

of the Earl of Oxford, his junior by two years. It was never, so far as we hear, in any sense a love-match, but one of those *mariages de convenance* which custom approved for the scions of royal and titled houses. The project had the cordial support of the young lady's father. Owing to prolonged estrangement from his wife, or for other reasons, his relation to his daughters was one of complete detachment. On their mother's death he had left them to the keeping and the legal guardianship of their grandfather, Lord Burleigh, and his interest hardly went beyond the endorsement of suitable marriages, as opportunities occurred. There was everything to attract him in the betrothal of his eldest child to the most brilliant and distinguished of the rising young gallants. If the Sonnets open at a late stage in the negotiations, succeeding, as the literary indications suggest, the publication of the *Venus and Adonis*, all fits like a glove into its place. Pretences of romance, descriptions or praises of the bride, would have been mere affectation, encomiums on her family offensive; the one effective appeal is exploited with consummate grace, and backed by flattering assurances of personal appreciation. One after another the minor references and implications will be found to suit the persons concerned.

Sonnet § 1: Beauty—the Gift and the Giver

Sonnet § 1 strikes the full note of admiration which rings through these opening sonnets:

Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring.

The allusions are specific. By the spring of 1594 the young Earl was in the forefront of Court favourites, 'the world's fresh ornament' already nominated for the riband of the Garter, and a leading figure in the tournaments at which the herald played so picturesque a part.

'Gaudy,' be it remembered, takes its derivation from the decorative 'gauds' of jewels, gold and silver, which are nowhere more richly illustrated than in the Welbeck portrait of the Earl just come of age. The poet has already full command of his instrument, and nowhere is the workmanship more finished than in these earliest specimens. The allusive subtlety of

Contracted to thine own bright eyes

is drawn firstly from the self-centred gaze of Narcissus absorbed in his own perfection,* but glances likewise at the secondary sense attached to 'two *contracted* new' of affianced lovers in § 56.† The word-play is characteristic, and employed again in 'buriest thy *content*' of l. 11. So, too, 'thine own bright eyes' conveys a pregnant compliment; they were the feature that gave special attraction to Southampton's good looks; they are made the central motive of Sonnet § 14, and the same reference is emphasised in

If I could write the beauty of your eyes (§ 17.5)

and

There lives more life in one of your fair eyes (§ 83.13)

of later Sonnets (cf. § 24.8-14). The Sonnets are intimately personal; and this order of poetry admits compliments, quips, ironies, and niceties of allusion that are foreign or uncongenial to the abstract Muse. The demands they make are more exacting, but until the ear can catch the overtones of personal allusion, the more delicate and secret harmonies of the Sonnets are inevitably missed.

The *Venus and Adonis*

Beauty within itself should not be wasted (l. 130)

* Compare

Had Narcissus seen her as she stood,
Self-love had never drowned him in the flood. *Lucr.* 265.

† Wyndham quotes parallels from *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, and 1 *Henry IV*, and 'contract' is habitually used in this connection.

gives the keynote to this and the next sonnet ; and the phrasing—‘ increase,’ ‘ beauty’s rose,’ ‘ waste in niggarding ’—teems with echoes from the Poems.

Thou, tender churl, mak’st waste in niggarding *

is the obvious precursor of ‘ *beauteous niggard* ’ in § 4.5, and

The niggard prodigal, that praised her so (*Lucr.* 79)

and Sonnets §§ 1–4, 9–10 ring successive changes on Stanzas xxvii–xxix of *Venus and Adonis*, as shown in words underlined :

Then woo thyself, be of thyself rejected :
Steal thine own freedom, and complain on theft.
Narcissus so himself himself forsook
And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.

Torches are made to light, jewels to wear,
Dainties to taste, fresh beauty for the use,
Herbs for their smell, and sappy plants to bear ;
Things growing to themselves are growth’s abuse :
Seeds spring from seeds, and beauty breedeth beauty ;
Thou wast begot, to get it is thy duty.

Upon the earth’s increase why shouldst thou feed,
Unless the earth with thy increase be fed ?
By law of nature thou art bound to breed
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead ;
And so in spite of death, thou dost survive
In that thy likeness still is left alive. (See pp. 119–20.)

Apart from the Sonnets and the allegorical intention of the poem, the whole passage is glaringly inapposite.

* *Romeo and Juliet*, I, i, 223, is closely parallel in sense and wording :

Ben. Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste.
Rom. She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste.

Sonnet § 2 : The Dower of Youth

The terms and references, closely allied to § 1, yield striking confirmation of the setting for which we plead.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held.

There is no case for regarding ' forty ' as ' merely typical number ' (p. 107) except that no alternative seemed open. But, if Edward de Vere was the author, it assumes at once its natural place; he turned forty in the year 1590, and draws the contrast between himself and ' thy youth's proud livery.' Here, too, the term bears its rightful and only natural sense, denoting the distinctive appanage of royal or noble estate, paraded with more than usual splendour in the Southampton household (p. 122). And we catch, too, the undertone of personal reminiscence recalling the day when in the pride of youth the young Earl of Oxford rode at the head of his eighty retainers in Reading tawny,* with the blue boar badge, all which had long since passed into the ' tattered weeds ' of discarded finery. In l. 2, notwithstanding the alliterative ' besiege thy brow ' in l. 1, ' thy beauty's field ' makes it clear that the ' deep dug trenches ' refer to the furrows traced by age.† But fondness for the double meaning of words is something like a passion with the writer, and here perhaps helped to dictate the choice of phrase. Time ' the besieger ' is a familiar figure, as in § 65

* See p. 15.

† Cf. ' time's furrows ' in § 22.3, closely parallel in context, and

Thou canst help time to furrow me with age

in *Rich. II*, I. iii, and

Witness these trenches made by grief and care

in *Tit. Andr.* V. ii, 28. See Comment on § 60.

Against the wrackful siege of battering days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
 Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays.

In ll. 1 and 2 (just as with 'thou' in ll. 13 and 14) 'thy' needs to be stressed to give the required contrast. Any trained ear will at once realise the rhythmical gain; and find the clue to right interpretation. '*You, your, yourself,*' in § 16 and throughout § 120, are good instances of the need for correct stressing of the personal and possessive pronouns, which is again and again of vital importance. Gödeke, with unfortunate results, sought to make the 'thou' and 'you' variations a test of destination, and other commentators have laboured the theme. Dowden, in his edition of the Sonnets,* tabulated the statistics, but without throwing light upon the reason. It is a matter in which Elizabethan usage enjoyed much latitude. The most one can say is that 'thou' and 'thy' tend to be more individual and personal in their appeal. Hence naturally they predominate in the first fifty Sonnets, but insensibly drop into 'you' and 'your,' and later appear only in Sonnets touched with the accent of emotion, such as §§ 107-110, 122 and 125.

In l. 7, 'thine own deep-sunken eyes' answer to 'thine own bright eyes' (§ 1.5) and carry on the contrast between youth and decline, which is even more harshly drawn in later sonnets, especially §§ 62, 63. Similarly, the figure of the 'glutton, eating the world's due' on which § 1 ends, is resumed in the 'all-eating shame' of l. 8. The figure, however true, is not easy to handle gracefully or without offence, which accounts for the studied language in which it is expressed. In feasting on your own delights you starve the world, consuming and at the same time withholding and wasting the good things which were given to you for distribution: the 'thrifless praise,' which plumes itself on what is in truth a spendthrift economy, is developed at more

* Introd. pp. 24-26; cf. Tucker, lxii.

length in the 'unthrifty loveliness' of § 4, which is a helpful commentary on 'use' and 'sum my count' of ll. 9 and 11. The thought of beauty wasted, by not bearing fruit, is drawn from *Venus and Adonis*, l. 180 :

Beauty within itself should not be wasted,

and repeated in § 9 :

Beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And, kept unused, the user so destroys it.

Sonnet § 3 : The Legacy of Beauty

Sonnet § 3, full of beauties with a rather lame close, introduces a new appeal. Mary Browne, daughter of the first Lord Montague, married the 2nd Earl of Southampton in 1566.* { The beauty and distinction with which she presided at Cowdray were matter of common fame, but the lines bear the mark of one who had personally known and admired her in that 'golden time,' upon which her son and the inheritor of her good looks was now entering. In date they nearly coincide with her second marriage (on May 2, 1594) to Mr. Thos. Heneage, Vice-Chamberlain of the Queen's household. For ten years, from 1584 to 1594, she had remained unmarried, directing the upbringing of her son. } She had favoured and tried to bring about the proposed match, but the Earl had never yielded to her wishes : hence the tactful reserve with which the topic is introduced. We have referred already to 'the glass' † (ll. 1 and 9, recurring §§ 22, 62, 77, 103) as a note of social surroundings, and the 'windows of thine age' (l. 11) as in other places (§ 24, *All's Well* II, iii, *Richard III* V, iii, *Romeo and Juliet* I, iv, IV, i, *Venus and Adonis* 482, etc.) recall the lattice windows of the period. The singular felicity ‡ of ll. 4-6, only equalled by § 16.5-7,

* She was not yet thirteen, and only twenty at the birth of her son, the 3rd Earl, in October 1573. See pp. 121-2.

† P. 92.

‡ The play on 'husbandry' is again indulged in § 13.10.

recalls in 'unear'd' the dedication to *V.A.*, and ll. 7-8 and 14 are built upon *V.A.* 757 and 174. 'Self-love' is brought into precisely the same connection by Parolles in *A.W.E.W.*, I, i, where 'virginity' is said to be 'made of self-love . . . the most inhibited sin in the Canon.' And the play shows other close resemblances to the earlier sonnets. § 68, 13.14.

Sonnet § 4 : Held in Trust

Sonnet § 4 is a variation played upon the proverbial line

Vitaque mancipio nulli datur, omnibus usu (*Lucr.* III, 371)

where *mancipium* connotes absolute ownership, contrasted with tenure with usufruct. Knowledge of an adage so familiar to jurists and moralists does not prove first-hand acquaintance with the poet. 'Bequest' (l. 3), though used at times of a trust, and 'largess' (l. 6), are hardly appropriate to Nature, the great capitalist, and suggest poetic renderings of some legal equivalent. And here lies the weakness of the sonnet: '*Use, unused, usurer, abuse, sums, audit, executor* are technical terms drawn from legal forms of account. They are dexterously handled, but poetry rebels against legal technicalities. And this sonnet takes its place among the 'conceited sonnets' composed for the delectation of one who shares the same interests or hobbies. Among the Sonnets these turn chiefly upon Art (§§ 24, 53), Costume (§§ 48, 52), or Property Law (§§ 58, 87, 134), and we need not here linger over the verbal elucidations.

Sonnet § 5 : Horæ Fugaces

Sonnet § 5 brings us back to pure poetry, as dainty as any in the Sonnets. Each quatrain has beauties of its own. The hours (as in §§ 16.5, 19) are the instruments or agents of Time. The use of capitals in the original text is very capricious; here they are personified as the

ministering *Horæ*, who ply their 'gentle work' in the production of beauty; 'gentle,' as throughout the Sonnets, is associated with high-born refinement. The dissyllabic value allowed to 'howers,' as it is written here in the original, and probably should be also in § 16.5, where it rhymes with 'flowers,' is possibly associated with its use for the personified *Horæ*.

In the second quatrain the movement of the verse, leading on with gradual retardations to

Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness everywhere,

the winter of bleak and blanched old age, is masterly. And the third quatrain gives a perfect instance of alliterative handling of a figure or process which had a special fascination for the writer's sensibilities, and is harped upon in § 6 and again in § 54

Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made.

It is found in *Euphues*, but here

Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was

seems borrowed from Sidney's *Arcadia*, the first edition of which appeared in 1590, supplemented by Books III, IV and V in 1593. Book III 5, runs: 'Have you ever seen a pure rose-water kept in a crystal glass? . . . How sweet it smells while the beautiful glass imprisons it!' But it gains personal significance from the Earl of Oxford's known predilection for distilled perfumes and attar of roses (pp. 30, 95). The sensitiveness to smells, offensive as well as agreeable, is a feature of the Plays.* 'Leese' for lose in the last line is probably harmonised into accord with 'meet' and 'sweet': common enough in Chaucer, it is not used by Shakespeare, unless it is to be restored for 'leave' in § 78.14.

* J. Bailey, *Shakespeare*, pp. 29-30.

Sonnet § 6 : Bear Fruit and Multiply

Sonnet § 6, a continuation of § 5, begins beautifully, but 'use,' 'usury' and 'breed' (with secondary sense of interest) are rather empty echoes of preceding sonnets; and the tenfold multiplication of the original is dangerously near to bathos. A curiously close parallel occurs in *All's Well*, I, i. 'Virginity by being once lost may be *ten times* found,' by the mother blessed with ten maiden daughters.

Sonnet § 7 : Courses of the Sun

Sonnet § 7 is a courtly rendering of the favourite image drawn from the diurnal courses of the sun, here introduced in terms of feudal respect. The application, as indeed the closing couplet declares, is directly personal; the recipient is the newly mounting sun ascending to his meridian height, while the contrasted afternoon decline is described with the conscious melancholy which tinges so many of the Sonnets. 'Reeleth' (l. 10) in assonance with 'feeble' is similarly used in *Rom. and Jul.* II, iii, 3 of darkness dispersing before the dawn, and 'under eye' and 'steep-up' are characteristic turns, like the 'steep-down' in *Othello*. The seeming weakness of the close—not an uncommon phenomenon (*e.g.* in §§ 8 and 13) is in part redeemed by realising that 'get' means 'beget,' just as in *V.A.* 168 :

Thou wast begot, to get it is thy duty.

Sonnet § 8 : The Music of Life

Sonnet § 8 we may attribute to some personal occasion, on which the friend had shown distaste, or at any rate indifference, to music and part-singing. It may well have been the writer's first intimation of this want of response, and musical references are consistently absent from the rest of Sonnets §§ 1–126. The writer's own love of music, especially of part songs, appears in

§ 128, and is elaborated in *Lucrece* § clxi-clxii, and in passages of the plays too numerous to quote. It agrees with what we know of Lord Edward de Vere, as not only patron of musicians but himself composer and performer of madrigals and songs.* It will be noticed how ingeniously he 'conceits' the idea, in 'concord' (l. 5), 'married' (l. 6), 'singleness' (l. 8), 'husband' (l. 9), and 'single' (l. 14).

Sonnets §§ 9-11 : Live on in Offspring

Sonnets §§ 9-13 continue to urge the obligation of marriage, with Prayer-Book insistence upon its procreative end, but without much of conviction or inspiration; there is less and less likelihood of his pleas meeting with effective response. When reluctance to marry is ascribed to the fear of some day leaving a widow disconsolate, and is countered by the argument that celibacy on the other hand will reduce the world to the position of a childless widow (§ 9.2-8), and that unpropagated offspring is a murderous assault against the world at large, we are moving in the realm not of poetry, but sophistry. The expansion of the latter thought in § 10 leaves us no less cold, but the closing 'for love of me' is the first open expression of that drawing of personal affection which soon becomes the dominant note. The couplet itself is virtually an epitome of *V.A.* 171-4:

Thou art bound to breed,
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead.

We need not linger over verbal difficulties in § 11, but it is worth noting that the last couplet is addressed to a lover of choice books or illustrations. 'Made for store' (l. 9) carries us back to the mediæval conditions of choice cattle kept for stock, when the common herds were slaughtered. It implies treasured selection and breed (cf. §§ 14, 37, 64, 67).

* See p. 55, and compare Southern's dedication, quoted on § 14.

Sonnet § 12 : Time the Reaper

Sonnet § 12 is a descant on the text

Sunt lacrimæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.

In simple images, line upon line depicts the pensive beauty of decay, fields whitening to the harvest, the stately tree-tops dismantled of their leafage—in language exquisitely choice and tranquil.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night ;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls, Or silvered o'er with white ;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green, all girded up in sheaves,
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard.

In l. 1 the clock might denote the dial-hand, used for the same symbolism in §§ 77, 104, but 'count' is decisive in favour of the clock chiming the hours, so often associated with outdoor scenery in Shakespeare (p. 91). In § 84 'bravery' is used of the radiance of day, while 'hideous' (derived from *hispidus*) is specially attached to night, as in 'making night hideous' (*Hamlet* I, iv), probably from a vague association with 'hide.' In l. 4 I do not hesitate to retain the original 'or' in preference to the tamer 'all'; 'sable' is a recognised term of heraldry, and so used in *Hamlet* I, iii of the ghost's beard 'a *sable silvered*.' The same contrast here cannot be accidental, and *Or* is the proper counterpart to *Argent* in metals; the same contrast is used with freer latitude in *Macbeth* II, iii of Duncan's 'silver skin, laced with his golden blood'; *Lucr.* 56 has the still closer parallel:

Virtue would stain that or with silver white.

The word-play *or* and *o'er* would be an additional attraction to the poet, just as with 'bier' and 'beard'

in l. 8. These two lines, 7-8, are an instance of his magic intuition in choice and placing of words. 'Bier' elsewhere is used only of carrying out to burial; and in the same way the 'white bristly beard' of the bearded wheat or barley pictures old age in contrast with the 'sable curls,' the lovelocks, or 'down' upon the lips of youth:

The tender spring upon thy tempting lip (of *V.A.* 127).

How far there is conscious reminiscence of Ps. 126.7, 'bringing *his sheaves* with him,' it is hard to say; but words can go no further in richness of alliterative assonance and suggestion. It will be noticed, too, how skilfully they prepare the way for 'Time's scythe' in l. 11. It is not a mere emblem (as in §§ 60, 100, and perhaps 126), but part of the picture of the reaping. 'Breed' once again plays upon its twofold sense of progeny, and high breeding, just as in § 6 upon 'offspring' and 'interest.'

Sonnet § 13 : Survival

Here, for the first time, 'Love' appears as a term of address (ll. 1-13), and personal attachment begins to supersede the hope of alliance through marriage. It is almost the last sonnet in which the progenitive plea is urged; the theme has grown threadbare, and legal terms (ll. 5-6) tend to detract from the poetry. In the last line commentators on 'You had a father' have urged, in the interests of the Pembroke hypothesis, that the words do not necessarily imply the father's death. This may be admitted, but the phrase is certainly more natural and telling, if the recipient's father was numbered with the dead, and he alone left to carry on the line. Perhaps the most pertinent parallel is that in *All's Well*, I, i, 'This young gentleman had a father—oh, that "had"! How sad a passage 'tis!' At this date (according to S. Lee) Southampton was the one leading peer to whom the words were applicable in this direct sense.

Sonnet § 14 : Love's Astrology

The comparison of the eyes to stars, and divination by their aid, is among the commonplaces of sonnets and anthologies. Shakespeare may well be directly indebted here to Sidney's 'Astrology' sonnet in praise of 'those two starres in Stella's face,' but it supplies no decisive verbal precedents. 'Pointing' (cf. § 26.10), 'predict,' 'constant stars,' and 'prognosticate' contribute happily to the astrological colouring. Other astrological references occur, as in the next sonnet :

Whereon the stars in secret influence comment,

and §§ 25.1, 26.9 may be compared. They show belief in the 'influence' of heavenly bodies, and are characteristic of the period. De Vere's own interest in this department is certified by John Southern's dedication of *Pandora* :

For who marketh better than he
The seven turning flames of the sky ? [the Pleiades]
Or hath read more of the antique ;
Hath greater knowledge of the tongues ?
Or understandeth sooner the sounds
Of the learner to love music ?

For correspondence with Dr. Dee, the astrologer, see Ward, *17th Earl*, p. 50.

Sonnet § 15 : The Cycle of Growth and Decay

Sonnet § 15 is finely conceived and framed, the two earlier quatrains mounting up to their apodosis in the third. The world stages upon which the powers of nature and the generations of created things play out their part, rehearse the destiny that awaits each individual—birth, growth, prime, decay :

Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay,
To change your day of youth to sullied * night.

* 'Sullied night,' contrasted with youth's day, might be cited in favour of substituting 'sullied' for Hamlet's 'too too *solid* flesh.'

'Debateth' for 'contends' is a common Elizabethan use, and recurs in § 89, 'I'll vow debate'; here the meaning is that Time *vies with* decay in the process of decomposition. Against these assaults there is but one remedial counterstroke, here introduced for the first time. The poet alone can extract victory from defeat, and as it were graft shoots from the perishing plant upon the stock of Time. 'I engraft you new'—the conceit is perhaps too subtle, and too closely packed for the uninitiated, but § 37.8 helps to make the intention of the word clearer. Though it appears here only in a preliminary form, it may be well at this point to discuss the 'eternising' motive, which plays so large a part in such the sonnets—in §§ 17, 18, 19 to begin with. Horace, Ovid, ~~ace~~ it follows precedents set by Pindar, sonneteer, Italian and reproduced by many an imitative that Sonnet § 55, French or English.* Who can doubt

Not marble,

nor the gilded monuments,
confirmed by the 'bra
upon the *Exegi monumentum* eternal' of §§ 64 and 65, drew and the close of Ovid's *Métamorphose perennius* of Horace, small part of the truth, the mere *choses*? But this is a topic was not new, but in the Sonnet outward shell. The with a depth and a sincerity that goes to its invested predecessors. (To suppose that he is far beyond all accommodating himself to prevailing taste was 'merely diversions and improvisations, is to miss the' in poetic of the Sonnets.) Walters comes nearer to the truth in treating these utterances as a central key to the whole; but he goes astray in attributing them to allegorical intention; whereas they are fitful disclosures and confessions of personality. At times the form disguises, perhaps even from himself, the inwardness of motive. It is rooted in the access of a new-found affection, which

* For adaptations by Ronsard and Desportes, Drayton and Daniel, see S. Lee, *Shakespeare*, p. 114.

supersedes the hope or expectation of a more formal tie. Where the marriage sonnets end, the eternising sonnets begin. His first ambition is, sincerely, to reveal, extol, and if so be immortalise, the excellences of his friend, as in the words of Spenser, *Amoretti* lxxv,

My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,
And in the heavens write your glorious name.

To him he represented an ideal of beauty and perennial youth

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st ;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st :
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (§ 18)

But forthwith, increasingly, a deeper inspiration supervened. If the friend was (as he deserves) to be immortalised, *his own* lines were to be the means and pledge of that survival.

My love shall in my verse ever live young (§ 19.14),
and this faith prevails, against all shocks, a lasting inspiration—*e.g.*

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth despite time's cruel hand. (§ 60.13-14)

and

Your monument shall be my gentle verse

* * * * *

You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—

Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

(§ 81.13-14)

Devotion to another thus passes into personal assurance of immortality, and gives new purpose and meaning to endeavour. Of the Christian hope of immortality there is no clear trace.* Life, it would seem,† had denied

* See on § 71. I refer only to the Sonnets. In the plays, perhaps, *Hamlet*, III, i, 'To be or not to be . . .' comes as near as any passage to expressing the attitude of the author.

† Cf. Sonnets, §§ 55, 63-65.

to him all promise of posthumous fame, of place in history, of a monument in the mausoleum of his sires, of any lasting foothold in family affections ; but unexpectedly, in the person of a youthful friend, there had come into his life a new source of inspiration and of hope, blossoming in an ideal affection, and awakening the sense of permanent survival values to be realised in the poetic presentation of beauty, goodness, and fellowship. His inward craving for immortality finds vent in idealised communion with his friend, the earnest of victory over Death and Time.* To that he clung with passionate constancy ; it accounts for the composition, the perfections and the preservation of the Sonnets, and without it they would never have been penned ; it became his secret of productive and persistent power (§ 115.4).

One may, perhaps, with apology for such surmises, even venture to go further. If on the personal side he came to realise that ' A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,' exempt from the lot of perishable things, and the ' million'd accidents of reckoning Time ' (§ 115), and so in the Sonnets sealed the artist's hope of immortality, may it not be that in the larger field the same impulse was the beacon star (§ 116) which led him on from the lighter adventures in Euphuist Comedy, through shifting scenes of Historic Drama, to the supreme efforts of unimpeded Tragedy in *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Lear* ?

Sonnet § 16 : Defeat Time's spite by progeny

The war upon this bloody tyrant, Time

is the verbal link connecting § 16 with § 15, and shows that ' you ' in l. 1 must be stressed in answer to the closing couplet. ' Bloody ' is curiously frequent in Shakespeare, and is here equivalent to the ' murderous '

* For references consult §§ 17-19, 38, 54-56, 60, 64-65, 74, 81, 100, 101, 107, 115.

of §§ 9 and 10. Lines 3 and 4 have considerable literary interest: in 'And *fortify* yourself' the word,* the position in the line, the context and identity of theme, all go to establish direct borrowing from Daniel's *Delia*, Sonnet 50; and numerous correspondences put it fairly beyond doubt. It is worth quoting the whole Sonnet—

Let others sing of Knights and Palladins,
 In agèd accents, and untimely words !
 Paint shadows, in imaginary lines !
 Which well to reach of their high wits records :
 But I must sing of thee ! and those fair eyes
 Authentic shall my verse, in time to come,
 When yet the unborn shall say ' Lo, where she lies,
 Whose beauty made him speak, that else was dumb ! '
 These [*sc.* the Sonnets] are the arks, the trophies I create,
 That fortify thy name against old age ;
 And these thy sacred virtues must protect
 Against the dark, and Time's consuming rage.

Here lines 1–2 supply the cue for § 106, though with what difference of poetic skill !

Line 3 re-echoes in § 27.9–10

Save that my soul's imaginary sight
 Presents thy shadow.

' Those fair eyes ' (l. 5) recur in §§ 1, 17, 83 ; and ' Whose beauty made him speak that else was dumb ' appears in the form

For who's so dumb, that cannot write to thee (§ 38.7)

Thine eyes that taught the dumb on high to sing (§ 78.5)

and might stand for the motto of such sonnets as §§ 76, 78, 79, 84, 105. Finally, ' Time's consuming rage,' rhyming with ' age,' finds close counterparts in §§ 63, 64, 65. *Delia* in its earlier form was issued in 1592, and this tallies well with the date assigned for composition of the Sonnets.

* The word is used again, but absolutely, in § 68.

In l. 4, 'blessed' in part means 'blissful,' and in part 'blessed with success,' that is 'fruitful,' opposed to my 'barren rime.' * Lines 5-7 are full of idyllic freshness

Now stand you on the top of happy hours,

the 'happy hours'—probably to be written and scanned dissyllabically (as in § 5), rhyming with 'flowers'—are the *Horæ felices*, which, as in the Guido fresco, lead on the nuptial train and dance of Spring (Ovid, *Met.* II, 25-6). Too close analysis of so delicious a touch of the vernacular as 'on the top' is barbarous, but it pictures them as passing to the zenith of delight.

And many maiden gardens, yet unset,

With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers

voice the renunciation of the personal hope which he had cherished, and this sonnet is the final parting of the ways between the pleas for prospective marriage, and those of personal devotion. At the same time one may catch already the word of warning against intrigues with Elizabeth Vernon and other ladies, with whom Court scandal was already associating the Earl of Southampton. Never assuredly was such a hint conveyed with more exquisite grace.

'Your painted counterfeit' (l. 6) is the earliest of the various references to portraits and portraiture, to the significance of which we have already called attention (p. 92). The language is carefully 'conceited'—'The lines of life' are the living lineaments, which will reproduce ('repair') the likeness of their sire, but play also on the *lines* of the poet, and the two are coupled with punning assonance in

this time's pencil, or my pupil pen.

For the use of 'pencil,' as in § 101.7, for the fine brush †

* 'Blessed' or 'Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them,' is very likely in the background of his mind.

† So also in Daniel, *Delia*, § 37, and *Romeo and Juliet*, I, ii, supplies the playful

The fisher with his pencil, and the painter with his nets.

with which colour is 'laid' on, as in 'pencilled eyebrows,' there is a good illustration in *Lucrece* 1497.

So Lucrece . . . sad tales doth tell
To pencill'd pensiveness and colour'd sorrow,

where again the alliterative *penc- pens-* is introduced. 'My pupil pen' is a graceful compliment to the master, from whom it learned its skill; it has been misinterpreted to mean 'novice' or prentice.

Sonnets §§ 17–32 : Friendship Plighted—as Lasting Love

After § 16 there is no further reference to marriage : it drops without note or comment, and clearly formed no part of a dramatic plot. The interest is transferred to the personal relations that resulted between the writer and receiver. It is natural to suppose that the final repudiation of marriage proposals would involve elements of unpleasantness, and coolness in the relations that had sprung up between them. The writer was determined that this should not be so, so far as it lay with him to prevent it. Sonnets §§ 17 and 18 open with profuse, even excessive, avowals of esteem and admiration; if §§ 19–24 betray something of anxiety to please, by § 25 all doubts are at an end, and for a brief honeymoon of trust §§ 25–32 are suffused with the assurance of secure and requited affections.

Sonnet § 17 : Who hath believed our Report ?

Sonnet § 17 gains something in dignity by adopting Tucker's suggestion, placing the note of interrogation at the end of l. 1, and treating l. 2 'If it were filled . . .,' and l. 5, 'If I could write . . .' as a double protasis. The movement is unusual, but both §§ 8 and 18 open with a single line of interrogation. The sonnet illustrates the writer's *penchant* for playing on the double sense of

words. The poet's 'numbers' are used for 'numbering all your graces,' and I incline to think that 'heavenly touches' glance at the 'touches of sweet harmony,' of which we read in the *Merchant of Venice*, though it may refer only to the heaven-born artist, by whom the antithetical 'earthly faces' are 'touch'd' with hues of beauty. In l. 12 'stretchèd metre of an antique song' has fascinating charm, but 'stretched' in the sense of strained depends for its justification on metre used of measurement rather than of poetic composition.

Sonnet § 18 : Beauty imperishable

The comparison to a 'summer's day,' compared with the 'gaudy spring' of § 1, and perhaps too the 'April' of § 3, suggests the progress of the seasons, and June (or July) which is implied in 'the darling buds of May' (l. 3) will be found to fit in with the time-scheme of the Sonnets.* In l. 6 'his gold complexion' † is brought into tacit comparison with the 'flavus Apollo,' who served the Castalian cups of the *Venus and Adonis*. In l. 8

Proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim (§ 98.2)

is perhaps the best comment on 'untrimm'd,' meaning disordered or disfigured. Shakespeare often uses 'trimmed' of costume, and writes 'new untrimmed bride' in *King John* III, i.

Sonnet § 19 : Defiance of Time

'Devouring Time' is probably from the *Tempus edax rerum tuque invidiosa vetustas* of Ovid, *Metam.* XV, 234, and this defiance of Time ‡ is in the same vein as the elaborate apostrophe to 'Mis-shapen, injurious,

* See on § 104, Comment.

† It is strange that in spite of this, and of the references confined to men in the last lines, J. M. Robertson suspects the Sonnet of being addressed to a woman. And this, though §§ 19 and 20, more amorous in diction, are demonstrably to a man.

‡ The same topic is treated in §§ 63-65, 123-4, 126.

shifting Time' in *Lucrece*, 925 vv, which abound in verbal resemblances to the Sonnets, such as

To ruinate proud buildings with thy hours (cf. §§ 10, 19)

And smear with dust their glittering golden towers (cf. § 55)

'Injurious Time' is repeated in § 63, while our own sonnet is another version of

To slay the tiger that doth live by slaughter,

To tame the unicorn and lion wild. (*Lucr.* 955-6)

The treatment throughout is too rhetorical for sonnet charm, which depends on more personal rapports. 'Devouring Time' suggests the typical 'lion's devouring paws' of 3 *Henry VI*, I, iii, and passes on to the tiger, but becomes mere bombast in

Burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood,

where 'in her blood' appears to be taken from the vocabulary of sport, and to mean in full vigour.

About ll. 9-10,

O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,

Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen,

it is difficult to feel sure, but both I think refer to the art of wood-cut and engraving, and may be classed with similar references in §§ 16, 60. The closing defiance to Time

Yet do thy worst, old Time : despite thy wrong,

My love shall in my verse ever live young

may be far more effectively referred to the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, than to this or earlier Sonnets, and finds its proper parallel in 'thy lays' of § 100 (see Comment, p. 238).

Sonnet § 20 : The Charmer

There is no need to waste trouble upon details * in a Sonnet so unpleasing to our taste. It is enough to

* That this Sonnet (alone with § 87) employs double rhymes throughout, and that Barnes also favours 'amaze' in this sense, is weak ground for attributing authorship to him.

notice the emphasis laid upon the brightness of the eyes, as already in §§ 1, 14, 17, and the feminine type of beauty, which characterised Southampton in his youth. Beeching rightly urges this in his clever conjecture 'A maiden hue . . .' for 'A man in hue . . .' (l. 7), but emendation is needless and indeed weakens the point. 'Hue,' as Wyndham and Tucker show, covers a wide range of usage, and

A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth

means simply, that under a manly guise he combines all masculine and feminine charms, which appeal irresistibly to either sex. The fantastic inventions of a Wm. Hughes, or of an anagram,* or of Ewe for Essex, are literary freaks—or worse. On the question of taste, it is essential to bear in mind not only relative standards of propriety, but also that among Sonnets written for personal intercourse, we may look for many neither intended, nor approved, for publication. And smoke-room pleasantries are not answerable to the rules of the public censor. That any one can seriously suppose that William Shakspeare, Actor, could address the Earl of Southampton in this strain, seems almost a record in literary credulity !

Sonnet § 21 : Poetasters

The new topic of a rival poetaster is introduced abruptly ; in a Sonnet-scheme, that would be unnatural and inartistic ; in life it is what one would expect.

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—

The ' painted beauty ' does not denote an individual,

* HEWS for Henry Wriothesley Earl of Southampton—or HERbert = Wm. Shakspeare.

but the ideal mistress of some poem or Sonnet sequence ; on the other hand, ' that muse ' and ' his verse ' point clearly to some particular poet, whom the recipient would, of course, at once recognise. Exaggerated and precious images were a vice common to most contemporary sonneteering ; but here a special type is in question ; the whole emphasis is on *celestial* imagery, which uses heaven itself for ornament, and compares each ornament of heaven in succession with the beauty of his lady-love : then passing through sun and moon, extends the comparison to

all things rare

That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems,

a mocking description of the heavenly orbs and signs of the Zodiac. The one poem that really answers to this is Chapman's astounding production, *The Amorous Zodiac*, contained in his *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, where not only is the mistress of his Muse ' coupled with sun and moon,' but every feature and part of her person, from her ' golden curls ' down to her calves and her feet, are successively paralleled with the signs of the Zodiac.

Those gold candles fixed in heaven's air

I take to be the constellations which furnish the similitudes, and the line, as Acheson observes, is a mocking parody of *The Amorous Zodiac*.

If not in heaven, amongst those braving fires,
Yet here thy beauties which the world admires,
Bright as those flames shall glisten in my verse.

In the same volume Chapman, in *A Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy*, introduced a slighting reference * to Shakespeare's contributions to the stage, and this sonnet is the private retort. These allusions give full

* In the lines

Muses that Fame's loose feathers beautify,
And such as scorn to tread the theatre
As ignorant. (Stanzas ix, x)

point to the sonnet,* and prepare the way for identification of the rival poet in §§ 76–86. As it stands, the sonnet is detached, and some would therefore transpose it into connection with that group; and on his fanciful scheme of rhyme-links Denys Bray brackets it with §§ 78 and 82, because they have the *Muse-use* rhyme in common. Such capricious transpositions are fraught with danger, and may displace valuable landmarks. This Sonnet, § 21, represents Chapman in his *Amorous Zodiac* phase (1595); before the later group he has essayed much happier flights. There is not at present direct evidence associating Chapman with Southampton at this stage,† but should it come to light that he was in 1594 soliciting the Earl of Southampton's patronage for his poem, that would clinch the conclusion, and clear up the rather oracular last line

I will not praise, that purpose not to sell ‡

the meaning of which is: You must not expect mercenary compliments from *me*—in which the passing disclaimer of anything like the relation of patron and client has its value.

Sonnet § 22 : In thy Youth my Age keeps young

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date. §

Without mention of figures, the lines corroborate Sonnet § 2.1–2 in the difference of age between the writer and his correspondent. The latter has not yet

* This meets the doubts which Tucker (with his usual clear and penetrative insight) expresses as to the composition of this Sonnet.

† Almost nothing is known of G. Chapman's earlier life. It cannot be said that his College, or even his University, is certain. He was born in 1559. His first published work contains a *Hymn*, narrating Sir Fr. Vere's exploits in the Netherlands; thus his connection with the De Veres is intimate from first to last.

‡ Cf. 'To things of sale a seller's praise belongs,' in *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, iii, 240.

§ On the *Lucrece* parallel, see on § 26.

passed the prime of youth ; when that time comes, the writer will be of age to pay the debt of nature. The elaborated conceits of the second quatrain indicate uneasiness, and the sonnet closes with misgiving as to the full requital of affections. It is hazardous to define, where the writer himself thought better not to be explicit, but to wrap his meaning in terms of delicate suggestion. And it is not easy to paraphrase Elizabethan conceits, devised to shun self-committal. But the sonnet has been so ignored, or misinterpreted, that it may be well to put its intention into prose.

All that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine, in me

I take to mean—the fruition of my affections is bound up with your well-being : their life is vested in yours, and in your youth they remain young ; your youth, your beauty, are the living embodiment of my affections, which have their centre there. So then, beloved, treasure and guard them as carefully, as I on my side cherish and treasure yours. Protect them as scrupulously

As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.

See that they are not exposed to any hurt, or any rude touch that could soil their innocence.

Presume not on thy heart, when mine is slain.

Think not that your heart can remain intact, unsullied, whole, if my affections, which are part of its being, are brought to nought.

Taken together, Sonnets §§ 21, 22, 23 show that, with his vain and fickle temperament, Southampton had manifested coldness, if not dissatisfaction, in missing the adulation to which he was accustomed. (Cf. §§ 83–84, and pp. 116, 124.)

Sonnet § 23 : Deep waters make least din

Altissima quæque flumina minimo sono labi
[*Qu. Curtius*, vii, 4, 13].

As an imperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put beside his part . . .

This opening, like that of § 110, has been habitually associated with Shakspeare's profession as an actor; but it will be apparent, as soon as pointed out, that the lines are written from the standpoint of an observer or trainer of actors, rather than of the actor himself, and are in truth the counterpart of directions accorded to the troupe in *Midsummer Night's Dream* by Theseus, or by Hamlet in his animadversions against over-acting of the part (III, ii). Thus it is in reality far less appropriate to Wm. Shakspeare than to Lord Edward de Vere, whose dramatic activities and preoccupations we have already considered in Chapter II, Sect. vi, pp. 53-4.

So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite.

The wording (here and later) is past praise, but makes some demand. 'For fear of trust,' answering to l. 2, means 'afraid to trust myself'; while

O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might

answers to

Some fierce thing replete with too much rage
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart (ll. 3-4).

'Rage' (l. 3) has been used a little earlier (§ 17.11) of the 'fine frenzy' (*furor poeticus*) of the poet, here of the 'o'ercharged' emotion of the lover. 'Say' in l. 5 is equally proper of the actor and the officiant, and 'ceremony' belongs to the vocabulary of the Court and its Master of Ceremonies, as well as of the Church.

Sonnet § 24: The Painter's Art

No Sonnet in the collection is more elaborately conceited, and it turns, as elsewhere, upon the art of Painting. For elucidation of technicalities the reader should consult Tucker's careful commentary; here again the emphasis is laid upon the recipient's 'eyes' (ll. 8-14). Sonnets of this type are *jeux d'esprit*, exercises in ingenuity, which found favour with those who shared the interest or hobby, and enjoyed conundrums.*

Sonnet § 25: Put not thy trust in princes

Sonnet § 25 is nobly and magnanimously phrased throughout. So far from implying humble origin or station,† it clearly proceeds from one for whom office and titles had seemed in store, but whom the caprice of fortune had debarred from the recognitions he had expected. Yet public slights may yield private compensations, and his friend's affection had given him a prize precious beyond compare. Then follows a living picture of the Court of Queen Elizabeth

Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.

'She useth the marigold for her flower,' writes Lyly of the Queen, and this helps perhaps to account for its popularity in gardens and in Sonnets of the period.

The marigold the leaves abroad doth spread
Because the sun's and her power is the same.‡

* Randall Davies reads it as explaining the allegorical and personal significance of *Venus and Adonis*—*obscurum per obscurius*.

† So S. Butler, pp. 61-2, followed by J. M. Robertson. It purports to come from one of lowly state—possibly 'the young Shakespeare's address to some young woman,' pp. 143, 185, 196. J. M. Robertson similarly misreads § 26, as penned by a client 'soliciting favour from a patron.'

‡ Constable, p. 94.

And never, surely, were 'princes' favourites,' Leicester, Oxford, Sidney, Essex and the rest, more at the mercy of the orb in whose eye they basked. In the last quatrain

The painful warrior famoused for fight

may be of general, not specific, application. Among possible names (Essex is, I believe, precluded by date and by context) Hawkins, Drake and Francis de Vere are perhaps the most plausible, and the terms used are not very apt for Hawkins or Drake.

'Famoused' is not a new coinage—Marlowe used it, and Nashe in his *Pierce Pennilesse*; 'fame' is used as a verb in § 84.11. In 'may not remove or be removed' of the last couplet, the idea of legal tenure seems inapposite, and the phrase is drawn from the irremovable landmark (as in § 116.4), or from the familiar 'shall never be moved' of Ps. cxii. 6, and other passages.

The sonnet reads as though his hopes of preferment had been (finally) dashed by some recent reverse, which had, however, quickened and deepened the tie of personal affection. Nowhere does friendship seem to 'stand on the top of happy hours' (§ 16.5) more than at this stage of the Sonnets.

Sonnet § 26 : Au Revoir

On the eve of a departure brought about by some misadventure, which in his own interests and those of his friends made absence advisable, he writes this sonnet of leavetaking. Episodes of this kind occur in the records of almost every Elizabethan Court gallant of the period, but guesses are unprofitable, where there is no precise clue to time or circumstance. He looks for eventual rehabilitation, but meanwhile his one mainstay in distress is the thought of his friend's affection, and the hope that its requital will one day be worth the

having. This is expressed in terms of time-honoured feudal obligations and *devoir* *

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit.

The idiom had dropped out of ordinary parlance, but is in good keeping with Sonnet conventions, between representatives of the *ancien régime*. That gives it dignity and fitness.

The close family likeness between this Sonnet and the Dedication of *Lucrece* has been a commonplace ever since N. Drake, in 1817, first called attention to it. There is nothing else quite like it in the Sonnets; and to this it may be added that *Lucrece* parallels, partly on the large scale, the apostrophe to Time and the description of the Wall-painting, partly on the small, as in 'stell'd' (l. 1444), 'eyes like marigolds' (l. 397), 'beauty purloined his eyes' (l. 1651) are sprinkled over Sonnets §§ 17-25. Two are far reaching: the rather strained outburst of Lucretius (ll. 1758 *vv*), apostrophising his daughter,

Poor broken glass, I often did behold
In thy sweet semblance my old age new-born;
But now that fair fresh mirror, dim and old,
Shows me a bare-boned death by time outworn:
O, from thy cheeks my image thou hast torn,
And shiver'd all the beauty of my glass
That I no more can see what once I was!

is surely framed on the same model as Sonnet § 22, even the rhymes 'old,' 'behold' repeat themselves.

My glass shall not persuade me I am old
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate.
For all that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me.

* See p. 103.

And again in *Lucrece*, 1506

In him the Painter labour'd with his skill
To hide deceit, and give the harmless show
A humble gait

deals with methods of just the same kind, as the Painter
Sonnet § 24

And perspective, it is best painter's art ;
For through the painter must you see his skill.

The *Lucrece* dedication, it will be remembered, dates from
spring or early summer of 1594.

Sonnet § 27 : On Journey : Insomnia

Sonnets §§ 27–28 tell of the actual journey, accomplished no doubt on horseback (§§ 34, 50, 51), and are a vivid reminder of the discomforts entailed by travel in those days, except for those in enjoyment of robust health of body and mind. It is as fine a piece of realistic work as anything in the Sonnets, picturing the horrors of insomnia induced and attended by bodily fatigue and mental unrest. In the House of Call, the 'repose' * where he lodged for the night, his sleepless eyes, staring out upon the dark, were haunted by the presence of his friend, a guardian phantasm against the powers of darkness. The expression is finely poetic ; and one is tempted to think that remembered phrases rang or jangled in his brain, as he tossed through the night watches.

My thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see ;
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.

* The word is repeated with this connotation in § 50.3.

‘Thoughts intend* a zealous pilgrimage’ recall the refrain of Philip Sidney’s first song in *Astrophel and Stella*

Doubt you to whom my Muse these notes intendeth ?

and ‘My soul’s imaginary sight Presents thy shadow’ can hardly have come into being independently of

Paint shadows, in imaginary lines !

in the *Delia* Sonnet already quoted on § 16 ; while the imagery of the two last lines would hardly be intelligible without the help of *Romeo and Juliet*, I, v, 47

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear.

The sonnet has special value as a challenge to various schools of interpretation, and as more than partial interpreters it puts them out of court. What sixteenth-century ‘conventional Sonneteer’ ever invented hours of insomnia in a wayside hostelry,† as the door to visions of his Beatrice ? What Romantic, or what allegorist, ever chose such a setting, and without putting it to any obvious use ? Actuality is its one justification.

Note

For critics of the Robertson stamp, who find it cacophonous (pp. 94–5) and amateurish, addressed to a woman by some admirer (not Shakespeare), literary argument is vain. It may be well to set down the results reached by his methods up to this point. Sonnets §§ 1–16 are pieces commissioned, mostly by order of Lady Southampton, for despatch to her son ; §§ 17–19 are of doubtful authenticity ; § 20, with its ‘crude and fleshy diction’ and double rhymes, may be attributed to Barnes ; § 21 is as likely as not to a woman, and the same may be said of §§ 23, 24, 25, the latter perhaps written on Southampton’s behalf—for presentation to

* From Latin *intendere iter*, happily suggestive of the journey.

† P. 110.

his lady ; § 26 is ' a stray,' meant perhaps for use with *Venus and Adonis*, in the hope that ' printed and bound ' it would ' put apparel on my tattered loving ' ! For verification, see Robertson, pp. 140, 143-4, 145, 146, 260, 262. *Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis* upholders of Shakespearean authorship may well exclaim.

Sonnet § 28 : Day-long and Night-long

The companion Sonnet, § 28, shows that the journey was prolonged, and insomnia troubles obstinate. We shall find similar references in later sonnets, and they must be taken into account in connection with the fits of depression, the pervading note of melancholy that so often occurs. The opening reads as though he had received some reassuring message. About the journey itself it may seem idle to speculate, but as an aside, if Edward de Vere authorship should be established, it may help towards the determination of chronological detail. After the marriage with Elizabeth Trentham, late in 1591, he kept no separate establishment, and before 1593 they took up residence at Stoke Newington. Trentham Hall lay at the upper end of the Trent Valley, in Staffordshire ; and for a withdrawal of the kind suggested by the Sonnets, no place seems so natural as that of his wife's relations. The way thither would lie by St. Alban's, Stony Stratford, Daventry, Coventry and Tamworth, and this is the one route through the Midlands with which the Plays show evidence of personal acquaintance.* Whatever the route, the Sonnet moves like a minuet from start to finish, and however conventional in form, the compliments gain personal grace from the touches of vernacular introduced in ' shake hands to,' ' do'st him grace,' † and ' twire.'

* The argument, with other ends in view, is worked out in A. Gray's interesting *Chapter in the Early Life of Shakespeare*, pp. 71-83.

† Editors ignore the apostrophe in ' do'st,' to the injury of grammar and rhythm. ' Do him grace ' is common in the plays, and cf. ' doing me disgrace,' § 103.8, and note on p. 238.

Sonnet § 29 : ' I arise, from Dreams of Thee '

At the end of his journey, oppressed with loneliness and exile, remembrance of his friend is the sustaining spring of hope. The cumulative growth and management of the three quatrains is admirable. In the second, the 'one more rich in hope,' etc., is kept general, until it receives personal application in l. 10, but the traits are drawn from those in which his friend is most enviable—good looks and bearing, friends at Court, love of art and learning, range of interests.

But what is intended by the contrast drawn in l. 8 ?

With what I most enjoy contented least.

Commentators do not put the question. Those who refer the line to Wm. Shakspeare would presumably claim it as further evidence for the dissatisfaction betrayed in §§ 23 and 110 with his profession on the stage.* On the lips of Edward de Vere it is like in kind, but refers to the earlier essays in dramatic composition which may be ascribed to this date.† It is full of interest as epitomising the obdurate conflicts of self-criticism, self-repression and thwarted aspirations, which are part of all his dealings with the drama. It is written in the mood and temper to which Chapman bears such striking testimony (see on § 81) in his memorial vignette of the Earl of Oxford. This adds no little glow and intensity of meaning to

my state,
Like to the lark at break of day, arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate. ‡

First and last, the poet's recompense lies in the output of his creative workmanship.

* Tyler regards 'I all alone bewEEP my outcast state' as very suitable to an actor on a provincial tour !

† Among others, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*.

‡ The close parallel in the song in *Cymbeline* II, iii, suggests an early date for that play, but an inset song is very precarious evidence.

Sonnet § 30 : ' Remembering Happier Things '

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past.

The exquisite overture admits us to the background of the experiences out of which the Sonnets grew. To the plain man it supplies the key of authorship. To those who explain this and the rest of the Sonnets as dramatic fiction, invented for the exercise of creative skill, and attached by the playwright to his own person (' I summon up . . .,' ' I sigh the lack . . .,' ' I drown an eye . . .'), instinct has the right to turn an incredulous ear, but if that is not enough, it may put the plain questions: Why? to what end? for whom, or what audience, were they composed? were they first-person instalments stocked for use, and never wanted, in unwritten plays and situations? What answer can be given? * Read as a sincere and moving *cri-de-cœur*, they reveal a man past middle age, whose weather-beaten life had outlived the storms of passion, loss of friends, bereavements of his dearest, who looking back could number up wastes of expenditure, squandered resources, the loss of much that was most prized, and whose hope of relief from sad brooding upon past mistakes and grievances and woes lies in identifying himself with his whole heart in the fortunes and well-being of the friend he loved. It is a faithful transcript, not weakened by reproaches or self-pity, of the life of the Earl of Oxford, up to the time when he passed into the quiet backwaters of his sheltered period, intended to express how much this new opening in the affections meant for his own happiness in life.

If the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.

* Let any reader honestly try to fit them to Wm. Shakspeare, to Southampton, to Pembroke, to Bacon, to Wm. Hughes, or to any ' Tichborne claimant ' he prefers, and he will find the difficulties.

Sonnet § 31 : In Thee my All

Sonnet § 31 is tuned to the same strain, but centres on the loss or alienation of those who had been his friends. Without more exact knowledge it is not possible to define the personal allusions. Never were the skeins of Court intrigue more tangled than in 1594-5. The stars of Sidney and Leicester had sunk, and Essex was ascendant. At the centre of the web, the Cecils, father and son, were keeping wary watch on all intrigues and interlopers. Raleigh, still in disgrace, was planning his El Dorado quest. The Bacons were trimming their sails alternately to Cecil and to Essex breezes. Southampton was casting in his fortunes with Essex' successive bids for self-aggrandisement. In such a Court a discredited favourite could not but be 'a herd-abandoned deer.' But the writer's thoughts clearly revert to 'buried' friendships of another kind, now to be reproduced in the person of his friend. Our thoughts turn to the associates and brother-peers of youth*—Howards, Arundels, Pagets—whose Catholic loyalties led them into paths irreconcilable with ties of friendship. If this be the right clue, it accounts for the introduction of the religious note, which is so rarely heard in the Sonnets.

How many a holy and obsequious tear
 Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye,
 As interest of the dead,† which now appear
 But things removed that hidden in thee lie !
 Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
 Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone.

His associations with them were coloured with Catholic sentiment and observance, and with the hues of romance which the Cloister tombs taken from Earl's Colne Priory still perpetuate.

* See p. 41.

† Cf. 'My sorrow's interest' (*Lucr.* 1797).

Sonnet § 32 : Better Things to Come

Sonnet § 32 moves still in that atmosphere of lowered spirits, which is so apt to harbour thoughts of death, and of the slights or courtesies of remembrance, which may become our portion. His hope is that affection will deal indulgently with

These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover.

The vein of sentiment is familiar ; and more enduring interest attaches to the literary forecasts of the later lines. Contemporary poetry has but reached its budding promise ; the flowering time is yet to come. On what does he base his expectation ? In 1590 Spenser had produced *The Faerie Queene*, I-III, and the sequel was still eagerly expected ; the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamium* had perhaps appeared ; but otherwise, Marlowe in 1593 had passed to his untimely grave ; already Greene and Kyd had followed. Chapman had not yet beamed, and who was to take their vacant place ? The lines must, I think, be numbered among the premonitions of genius, conscious of the stirrings of new life, and of its destined power to produce works greater than any yet attempted or achieved. In any case they shed direct and interesting light upon the composition of the Sonnets themselves. They are evidence

(1) That they are personal, composed and communicated for a friend's eye alone.

(2) That in them he offered of his best, yet from the pens of others, if not his own, there would follow 'ranks of better equipage.'

Sonnets §§ 33-42 : Sexual Strain

At this point the course of friendship was crossed by a convulsive rift. Hallam voiced the compunctions of Victorian sentiment, when in presence of these numbers

he expressed the wish that Shakespeare had never written the Sonnets. But the days of reticence are over, and it rests with the critic to deal faithfully and fairly with the issues raised.* Canons of sexual morality, and of propriety, in practice and still more in profession, are surprisingly volatile. They fluctuate, like fashion. Each age, each society, must be judged in the light of its own standard. Imperial Rome, the Court of the Grand Monarque, the English Restoration, cannot be placed at the bar of Victorian proprieties. The glimpses here given belong to the manners of the Elizabethan Court, themselves a very imperfect index for those of contemporaneous town or country life. Of that society it is true to say that no leading representative escapes, or would even have disclaimed, charges of sexual irregularities. As an index of character, the sidelights thrown by the Sonnets of the later series, which unquestionably refer to the same episode, reveal some of the fierce conflicts of feeling and emotion through which the poet himself passed. There is no reason to think that the situation was long-protracted. After the short-lived storms of §§ 33-36 and §§ 40-42, it disappears, except in its effects, from the Sonnets, and the scars it left yielded later fruit of healing repentance.

Sonnet § 33 : Spots on the Sun

During his enforced absence, news reached the absentee that his friend had yielded to the solicitations of the Siren, whose favours he was himself permitted to enjoy. It was a grievous shock (§ 34.12).

Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud. (§ 35.3-4)

Poetically, Sonnet § 33, which first deals with the disclosure, is superb ; most of it we have quoted already †

* These can be discussed more adequately in connection with Sonnets § 129 and following.

† P. 111.

as an example of stately workmanship. It represents a conflict of emotions ; it was indeed a darkening of the sun.

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. (§ 33.9-12)

But no sense of personal indignity could prevail over the drawings of affection.

Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth ;
 Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

'Stain,' used intransitively, refers to spots on the sun, or more probably to clouds and eclipses, as in § 35.3.

Sonnet § 34 : Forgiveness

In reply, the wrongdoer frankly admitted the offence, with tears of regret that he should have yielded to the temptation, but protested that it meant no breach or diminution of personal affection : the sonnet of rejoinder (§ 34) is more outspoken than before in reproach, but goes yet further in declaring that the assurances of affection it had evoked, more than atoned for the original offence.

Ah ! but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
 And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

Sonnet § 35 : Absolution

The next Sonnet goes further still in bestowing absolution ; in condoning the offence, he begins to excuse its commission, and to make himself an actual partner and accomplice in the misdoing.

I an accessary needs must be
 To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

There is no occasion for further diagnosis of a situation so repugnant to our moral prepossessions, except so far

as is required by later sonnets. That the 'amiss' should be repeated is but natural (§ 40), and not less so that the conceits and casuistries by which it is sophisticated should become more laboured and tasteless (§§ 40-42). At the end of § 40 morality goes by the board.

Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
Kill me with spites *; yet we must not be foes.

So to Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* the loss of a friendship mattered more than the miscarriage of all his argosies.

But before we leave the subject, it is well to measure its bearing upon personality and authorship, and its reactions upon the developments that follow.

First, then, the moral standpoint is that of the time and the social milieu. Brought home in individual conduct, moral principles produce a far more effective impact on the observer's mind and feelings than when generalised by the historian or moralist. He is shocked, or he applauds, accordingly. Here action and treatment are consonant with the habits and standards of the period: they are in line with commonplaces of the Elizabethan stage, and of Shakespearean plays in particular. The parallel incident in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is introduced gratuitously, and the offer of Valentine to Proteus is a measure of the gulf which separates the expectations of the Elizabethan play-goer from those of the last, or the present, generation. And in this connection comment from a quite impartial source is worth citing.† 'Above all, one may fairly recognise in Proteus, Proteus the passionate and the perjured, not perhaps a "portrait" of the false friend and supplanting lover, whoever he may be, of the Sonnets, but at least an image which could not have been drawn, or at any rate not in such deeply bitten lines, had not the friend of the *Sonnets* given Shakespeare cause to "drink

* 'Despites'—as in § 37.3.

† Chambers, *Shakespeare Survey*, p. 56.

his potions of Siren tears " (§ 119.1).’ Proteus is the amorous, inconstant, self-seeking lover, whose passions derive zest from being indulged at the expense of another. The play, perhaps more than any, abounds in verbal echoes repeating figures and phrases from these central Sonnets, and contains the reference to

wailful sonnets, whose composed rhymes
Should be full fraught with serviceable vows.
(*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, ii, 69-70.)

Secondly, in imputing lack of moral indignation, we must not underrate the magnanimity and self-restraint that went to the making of the Sonnets. True, the writer was more moved by the disloyalty to friendship than by any reprobation of the offence—

Love knows it is a greater grief
To bear love’s wrong than hate’s known injury.
(§ 40.11-12)

But how deeply the ‘injuries’ tore his heart-strings, we learn from the companion Sonnets (§§ 133-144).

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me ! (§ 133.1-2)

Chords of affection and trust were shattered, that could never be reunited ; much survived the shock, but in the background there remained

One more devil’s triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more for man, one more insult to God !
* * * * *
Never glad confident morning again.

Thirdly, in respect of composition, the evidence of this group seems decisive. Of *dramatic* invention or handling there is no trace ; apart from the collateral sonnets, there is no hint regarding the past, present or future of the third party concerned ; she is an unknown quantity, familiar only to the correspondents. Through

and through, they are personal and intimate, with 'Private and Confidential,' as it were, inscribed on every page. In this they confirm the range of their self-evidencing witness. Single sonnets may have come under other eyes, or been submitted to a circle of privileged friends. But in the main it seems impossible to separate these from those that precede or those that follow, or to regard them as intercalated at some later stage. Psychologically, they fall into their right place : while as for express references, 'My sun . . . was but one hour mine' (§ 33) relates them rightly to §§ 18-81, and later,

That you were once unkind befriends me now (§ 120.1)

demands the suitable interval of retrospect.

Further, not only were composition and custody in the first intention private, but it is reasonable to assume that sonnets of this order were not promulgated by, or with the approval of, the author in his lifetime. Either he had passed away, or was powerless to intervene, and of William Shakspeare neither of these things is true in 1609. But on that issue, even this consideration is of subsidiary weight. That critical inquirers, fairly facing the issues and competent to judge, should believe that during his early career (or later) Wm. Shakspeare the actor stood on these terms of intimacy and partnership with an Earl of the realm, is among the inscrutables. Most, I suppose, decline to put the question to themselves, or to return an answer—the refuge and stronghold of traditionists. Others, stopping their ears to evidence that will not be denied, account for them as inventions of dramatic fancy ; but it is well for those who indulge in that narcotic to remember that it does little, if anything, to save the personal or the poetic reputation of the imputed author.

Sonnets §§ 36-42

Sonnets §§ 36-38 are parenthetical, and not of special interest except as illustrating thoughts and expressions used elsewhere. § 36 shows that he still remains under a cloud, and anxious not to compromise his friend's prospects or chances; better that for the time being they should remain apart: together §§ 36-42 must cover a considerable lapse of time.

Sonnet § 43 : Shadows and the Real

Sonnet § 43 resumes the main thread of events. The note has changed: emotional spontaneity makes way for more profuse and laboured expositions of affection and regard. The habit of intercourse is maintained, but under felt constraint—the poetry of feeling falls back upon the poetry of conceits, more or less strained and conventional. The writer's own desire had been for personal reunion, an interview that might have dispersed all mists of doubt or misunderstanding. That was evaded or denied: and in § 43 he reverts to the long night watches and the waking dreams, shadowed continually by the image of his friend whom he longed 'to look on in the living day.' The changes rung on 'shadow,' 'shadows,' 'shade,' are good instances of the writer's love of playing upon the variant meanings of a word (see § 53).

*Sonnets §§ 44-45 : The Elements : Earth and Water—
Air and Fire*

The friend's actual departure on his travels gives the cue to §§ 44-45. Through the doctrine of the elements, a not uncommon conceit in contemporary

verse and prose,* these Sonnets betray, or possibly foment, the melancholy with which he is 'oppressed' (§ 45.8).

The nimbler elements, air and fire, carry their messages of love to the far-off travelling friend; the heavier, earth and water, abide with him, made manifest in the salt and heavy tears which bewEEP his loneliness. The component elements 'earth and water' are no doubt deliberately paired with the 'sea and land' (l. 7); but the conceit is too forced for even the poet's wit to manipulate into accord. The 'sea and land' certainly suggest, and go far to prove, that the friend's journey had taken him oversea. In § 45 the current of feeling vibrates more strongly. Air and fire, the vehicles of thought and of pure desire, deliver and receive their messages, with answering alternations of sadness and of gladness as they come and go. The despatch of thoughts as messengers is the theme of the Sonnet in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, i.

Sonnets §§ 46-47 : Heart and Eye ; the Portrait and the Original

Sonnets §§ 46, 47 form another pair, consequent on the receipt of a portrait, which the friend no doubt had sent as a parting token. The present is suggestive, for among contemporaries none was more often pictured than the Earl of Southampton. Whether the portrait was in oils or miniature is not expressly stated, but 'the painted banquet' (§ 47.6), *i.e.* the feast of good things presented to the eye, suggests a portrait on large scale.

* Dowden, Wyndham and Beeching cite Shakespearean instances, but the rendering here seems directly drawn from Golding's Ovid, *Metam.* xv, 261-282, and has a close parallel in *Venus and Adonis*, 149. The translation runs :

The Earth and Water for their mass and weight are sunken lowe,
The other couple Aire and Fyre the purer of the twayne
 Mount up, and nought can keepe them downe.

The lines immediately follow the *Tempus edax verum* . . . triplet utilised in §§ 19, 63-65.

In the elaboration of the language in which thanks are tendered, drawn first from the procedure of manorial Courts,* then from the rival claims of eye and heart, the undertone of uneasy formality still makes itself felt. The contest between eye and heart was an accepted commonplace elaborated by Watson in *Tears of Fancie* (1593), and by Constable in his *Diana*, Dec. VI, § 7 (1584).

Sonnet § 48 : Leave-taking

Separation appears to have been prolonged and, as we have seen (§ 44.7), to have taken the friend overseas into new surroundings and spheres of interest and of acquaintance. Nor do I find any clear note of resumption of personal intercourse until § 75, though in intermediate sonnets from § 56 onwards he comes within nearer range of correspondence. The sonnets are used as the means for interchange of thoughts, and keeping friendship in repair. As a natural result, throughout this section the poetry becomes more self-conscious, the reciprocity of feeling (if I mistake not) less, and this applies even to the misgivings, which find such finished expression in § 48. In § 56 the opening apostrophe to 'sweet love'—a phrase already used in § 29—is not personal, but addressed to love as an emotion, as is clear from ll. 6 and 8. The sequence at this stage becomes impersonal in the sense that, though reflecting a definite situation, the sonnets are introspective or subjective expressions of moods and thoughts experienced by the writer and perhaps composed for his own relief, as much as for despatch to a distant or even inaccessible friend. Their elaboration makes them well adapted for circulation 'among private friends,' and the topics chosen—travel (§§ 43–45, 50–51), the mansion with its safes and cabinet and jewel-case (§§ 48, 52, 65), the garden and the park

* On the legal terminology of § 46 see p. 101. On the portrait, p. 92.

(§§ 54, 70, 73), the manorial Court (§§ 49, 58, 74), and details of fashionable life (§ 68)—are just those which would appeal to the literary sympathies of high-born connoisseurs; * they add to the Sonnets a vein of interest hardly tapped elsewhere in English poetry.

The journey theme introduced in § 48 may be merely reminiscent, but Sonnets §§ 50–51 are so detailed and realistic that they seem drawn from a renewed experience of travel fatigues and thoughts. And if so, § 48 may well represent the actual preparations for departure. The interior (with which § 52 may be compared) is that of the Tudor country-house (such as at Stoke Newington or Putney). In any case, the similitude is well able to stand on its own merits, like that of the ‘decrepit father’ in § 37, or the ‘careful housewife’ of § 143, and the poetic value of the Sonnet lies in the illustration. Jewels, treasures, when the hour of severance comes, the owner can secrete under lock and ward, but there is a treasure of more inestimable worth, ‘best of dearest, and mine only care’—the one thing, that is, which fills him with concern—the friend’s love, which no fastening lock can keep secure, for ingress and egress to the heart is free, and *that* not only the rogue and the pickpocket, but also good men and true, will strive to filch from his possession,

For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

The line recalls

Rich preys make true men thieves

of *Venus and Adonis*, l. 724, and this is the more noticeable from its near neighbourhood to l. 782, ‘the quiet closure of my breast,’ borrowed for use in l. 11. Two intermediate lines in *Venus and Adonis*, ll. 757–8 reappeared in § 3, and combine to show how freshly these cantos remained in memory, when the Sonnets were in course of composition.

* See pp. 92–3.

Sonnet § 49 : Love's Balance

In the next Sonnet misgivings deepen, and he forecasts the time when his friend, casting up the sum total of gains and losses accruing from their friendship, will in that auditing of the accounts conclude that the losses shown outbalance the gains ; and when that judgment is submitted for the show of hands, his own hand must be raised in confirmation of the verdict. The technical terms of audit are used with singular dexterity (see pp. 101-2).

Sonnets §§ 50-51 : The Journey and the Return

Sonnets §§ 50, 51 are a couple. Nowhere in the Sonnets is descriptive realism more complete than in § 50. Once again it recalls the fatigues of travel on the ill-kept Elizabethan roads, and adds its quota to the symptoms of physical decay, which turn what once were pleasures into taxing and distressing hardships. It is a far cry from any true picture of the caravan life of actors on the march. § 51 is a characteristic descant on the concrete parable of § 50, in which for the return the poor unwilling jade is metamorphosed by fancy into the fiery courser of desire, panting for reunion.*

Sonnet § 52 : The Treasure of Price

Sonnet § 52 may be regarded as a counterpart of § 48, depicting the satisfaction that attends on home-return. Among all the Sonnets there is none more opulent in tone and movement, nor any that more confidently assumes equality of state on either side. Peer speaks to peer.†

Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.
So is the time that keeps you as my chest,
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide.

* Difficulties of exegesis are dealt with by Beeching and Tucker.

† Cf. p. 115.

Apart from appropriateness, it is hard to believe that lines like these—with their passing touch ‘*my chest*’—proceeded from anything short of actual experience. ‘The time that keeps you’ clearly refers to some kind of mission that involved prolonged absence. The Sonnets that follow, though rich and elaborate, show little or no trace of personal contacts. Their charm lies in the play of poetic diction round themes already broached (§§ 52, 54), but incidental touches here and there throw light on questions of authorship or date.

Sonnet § 53 : The Ideal of Beauty

In § 53 the couplet

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you

can hardly be divorced from the *Venus and Adonis* poems, and affords proof that allegorically the Adonis of the poem was intended to adumbrate the Earl of Southampton, along the lines already indicated in Chapter VI.* Further, apart from typological allusions to secondary senses of ‘shadow’ †—shadow as opposed to substance, shadow as type or counterpart of the idea, and shadow in its sense of picture—it is of literary interest to notice that a parallel play upon the various meanings is put into the mouth of Proteus addressing Silvia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, IV, ii :

Prot. : The picture that is hanging in your chamber—
To that I’ll speak, to that I’ll sigh and weep ;
For since the substance of your perfect self
Is else devoted, I am but a shadow ;
And to your shadow will I make true love.

Julia (aside) : It twere a substance, you would sure deceive it,
And make it but a shadow, as I am.

* Pp. 125–6.

† Shadow has already been played on in §§ 87.10 and 48.5, and recurs in § 98.14. In his note on the first, Wyndham collects useful Shakespearean illustrations, and in his Introduction, p. cxxii, refers to the use of *Umbrae* in Metaphysics and in Art.

The closing sestet, with its alliterative 'beauty' and 'bounty' answering to 'the spring and foison of the year,' has the Shakespearean magic, almost rivalling that of the next Sonnet, § 54, but concludes on compliments which are excessive, and express at best a hankering hope. The friendship that falls back on flattery is in unstable equilibrium.

Sonnet § 55 : Exegi Monumentum

Sonnet § 55 * opens new lines of interest in the close parallel between the Sonnet and F. Meres' notice of Shakespeare in the *Palladis Tamia*,† which runs—

'As Ovid saith of his work

Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira, nec ignis,
Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas ;

and as Horace saith of his

Exegi monumentum aere perennius
Regalique situ pyramidum altius
Quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens
Possit diruere, aut innumerabilis
Annorum series, et fuga temporum :

so I say severally of Sir Philip Sidney's, Spenser's, Daniel's, Drayton's, Shakespeare's, and Warner's works :

Non Iovis ira, imbres, Mars, ferrum, flamma, senectus
Hoc opus unda, lues, turbo, venena ruent,

and

Non tamen annorum series, non flamma, nec ensis
Æternum potuit hoc abolere decus.'

In the face of the explicit reference to Shakespeare associated with the quotations, I cannot understand why Tucker inclines to regard the Sonnet as an acknowledgment of the compliments paid by Meres, and there-

* It is dismissed by Robertson as 'the second if not the third-rate' production of some rather stilted rhymers, who composed it as dedicatory prefix to some unidentified poem here designated as 'this powerful rime.'

† Greg. Smith, II, 318.

fore written subsequently to 1598 (when *Palladis Tamia* appeared). The opposite inference seems to me inevitable—that this sonnet was one among the ‘sugred Sonnets to private friends,’ which, together with the twelve plays enumerated, supplied the data for Meres’ eulogy. The Sonnets in their existing form were not issued till 1609, but Meres himself testifies to private (and partial) circulation, and this is just one of the richly decorative and impersonal type suitable for such treatment. The debt to Horace and Ovid is of the most stock order, and not glossed with anything like the precision displayed by Meres. A date *prior to 1598* suggests an altogether different setting. In the sonnet the emphasis on *War*, which is not even hinted either in Ovid or Horace, becomes the leading motive of the second quatrain. Now, on June 1, 1596, Southampton cast in his lot with those who set sail with Essex in his expedition against Cadiz, and in the following year upon the *Island Voyage* to the Azores. If at the time of writing the issues of the earlier venture were in doubt—and to judge by both sonnets §§ 57 and 58 the poet eyed them with distrust, if not declared disapprobation—the sonnet seems to supply the closest indication of date yet found. The Essex expedition sailed from Plymouth on June 1, 1596, and returned August 10, 1596. The second expedition made its false start on July 10, 1597, and after putting back to refit, set sail on August 17. A further surmise—a peradventure only, that may be mere coincidence—seems admissible. We have already noticed literary links that connect this group of the Sonnets with *The Two Gent. Verona* * ; at I, iii, 8, of missions suitable for the young Proteus, we read

Some to the wars, to try their fortune there,
Some to discover islands far away.

The words are at least a striking coincidence, and would

* Of this play Masfield writes : ‘ It comes from the mood in which the Sonnets were written.’ Close verbal parallels occur in §§ 33, 35, 43, 44, 45, 51, 53, 56.

imply for the play, or for these lines of the play, a date early in 1597.

Whatever the exact background of events, the sonnet more clearly than any before betrays the writer's determination to stake all upon poetic achievement. In outward form the resolve affects his friend; the voice of poetry—such is the meaning of 'this powerful rime' (l. 2)—has a potency more capable of conferring lasting remembrance, than the quick exploits and hazards of 'wasteful war'

'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth :

The theme of immortality, gained and conferred by the poet's art, finds place in §§ 54–56, 59–61, and is still more deeply and personally felt in §§ 65, 71 ; but, in truth, the poet is more deeply concerned with his own immortality than with that of the object of his song, though the two combine and create no conflict of motive—

You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.
(§ 81.13–14)

Sonnet § 56 : Expectancy

In Sonnet § 56 absence is continued, but the opening, and still more the closing, lines convey an expectation of return—

Let this sad interim like the ocean be
Which parts the shore, where two contracted new
Come daily to the banks, that, when they see
Return of love, more blest may be the view ;
Or call it winter, which being full of care
Makes summer's welcome thrice more wish'd, more rare.

The lines gain much if they may be connected with the Essex expedition. The actual return took place at the end of August, 1596, and summer's welcome would concur with the return. Also in the preceding similitude

'the ocean,' which has caused some trouble to observant commentators, receives an unexpected justification. That the figure is a reminiscence of the familiar Hero and Leander story seems to me beyond question; and the same allusion twice finds a place in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, I, i, 21; III, i, 119. The coincidences are remarkable, if not conclusive.

Sonnets §§ 57-70 : Friendship clouded ; Separation

In § 57 the 'sad interim' is over, and the expectation of return has been realised. But it brought with it disappointment in place of the fulfilment of hopes. Overtures for reunion, and the resumption of personal intercourse, had been shelved and evaded. The question, Where, when could they meet, and what services could be best rendered? had met with cold response. His reply is couched in terms of feudal obligation, based on the personal tie of lord and servant—not those of patron and client. He was bondman of the affections.

Sonnet § 58 : Lord and Vassal

In § 57 the 'services,' the boon 'hours and times' due to his suzerain lord, in § 58 the still more technical 'vassal,' 'liberty,' 'charter,' and 'privilege' are carefully cast in this vocabulary. 'Being your vassal,' as in duty 'bound,' 'like a sad slave,' he accepts the ruling of his lord. But the very declaration of acceptance implies an unuttered reproach. *Where* his friend is, *what* rival calls or affections enjoy the preference, he will not further inquire—

So true a fool is love, that in your will
Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill—

where 'true' stands for loyal, faithful, and 'any' must receive full emphasis. The appeal met with no response,

and in § 58 chagrin cuts deeper ; there is no concealment that the rival calls came from the side of pleasure (ll. 2 and 14) or ambition, not of more serious obligations—

I am to wait, though waiting so be hell ;
Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well.

The middle quatrain is constrained and difficult—

O, let me suffer, being at your beck,
The imprison'd absence of your liberty ;
And patience, tame to sufferance, bide each check
Without accusing you of injury.

I understand it to mean—You claim and enjoy full liberty of action and movement, without reference to my wishes or concern for your welfare. I place myself at your disposal, your beck and call, but that leaves me tied, imprisoned within the restraints of loyalty and affection. I have neither part nor voice in matters which concern not you only, but me too as your second self (l. 12) ; I am left out in the cold, suffering—but even so will not recriminate. The lines are important for understanding the psychology of the writer here, as at other points, acutely sensitive, but too constant and too scrupulous to make an open breach. The resultant frame of mind, resentment mingling with unalterable devotion to the ideal, gives its touch of pathos to § 59, in which we see the writer still ‘labouring for invention’ at the time when life is denuded of its kindling inspiration. A passing point can easily escape attention, in its bearing upon authorship. The ‘*five hundred courses of the sun*’ carry the glance backward over sixteen generations, through which the De Vere family could trace their lineage to ancestors inscribed upon the title-roll of fame. The first De Vere received his Essex estates from the Conqueror, and the cycle chosen may fairly be regarded as allusive rather than accidental. But the poetic elasticity, though driven inwards, was still there.

Sonnet § 60 : Futility of Life

In build, in texture, and in colouring the next sonnet, § 60, is one of the most perfect of the introspective kind, well worth analysis. Each quatrain (as also in § 73) makes its individual contribution to the cumulative whole, portraying the obliterating tramp of Time.

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end ;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

The figures used are characteristically large, obvious and imaginative. In the first quatrain the heartless futility of life is figured in the ceaseless beat of waves monotonously breaking on a shingled shore. The epithets 'sequent,' 'pebbled,' have the Shakespearean magic ; in the latter once in a lifetime, the needed adjective drops into its predestined place. For its intention, the parallel in *King Lear*, IV, vi, 21, is the perfect commentary

the murmurous surge
That on the unnumbered idle pebbles chafes.

The main thought repeats itself with growing frequency in later sonnets (§§ 63-66, 71-74, 80, 81, 87, 90, etc.), and is part of the deep and settled melancholy which reverberates in *Macbeth*.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty race from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time ;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle !
Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. (*Macb.*, V, v)

The second quatrain, on the pattern of § 33, derives its parable from the diurnal courses of the sun. Dawn,

with its radiant flush, floods all the welkin with its light, climbs to the zenith with more gradual step, then from its height, through thwarting and malignant clouds, droops to an ignominious close. Such too is life, passing from birth to glorious prime, and thence through shadowing clouds to inglorious impotence. In the third quatrain the applications become personal, the figures change from line to line, but the distinction of phrase is admirably sustained. 'Flourish,' which originally denotes flowering vigour and beauty, is used specifically of painting—the painted flourish of your praise' (*Rich. III.* I, iii, 241)—as well as line-drawing, and so combines with felicity the attributes which belong to the bloom and the contours of youth. The instinct for alliteration perhaps gave 'transfix' its place between 'Time' and 'flourish,' but it skilfully combines suggestions (1) of time with his darts marking down his victim for destruction, and (2) of deliberate puncturing and erosion of the beauties of surface and complexion. In the next line the injury goes deeper. Time, maybe with his symbolic spade, 'delves the parallels,' the lines and furrows which it imprints indelibly 'in beauty's brow.' Then, like some evil parasite, eats its way into the vital parts, and is ready with relentless scythe to lay low the victim in the dust.

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
 And delves the parallels * in beauty's brow,
 Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
 And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.

* To refer 'the flourish' and 'the parallels' to technicalities of the printer's trade is a poetic monstrosity. The military use of 'parallel' for siege approach is vouched as early as 1591 by Garrard's *Art of War* 'They serve for parallel' to cover the soldiers; but the § 2.2 passage

Dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field

makes, as I have noted, against, not for, a military derivation. Tucker takes 'parallels' as lines of beauty, but § 19.9-10 is strongly adverse to this, and his interpretation seems to me very forced.

Sonnet § 61 : The Watchman waketh but in vain

To whom are these reflections intended to apply ? Primarily, no doubt, to the writer himself, in keeping with that accent of stoic self-depreciation which becomes temperamental ; and hence their haunting sense of pathos. But also, in the portrayal of his own shattered hopes and disenchanted illusions, he holds up the glass of warning to vainglorious and buoyant youth. The warnings could not be withheld, but are conveyed with studious delicacy of approach. *Love* is 'the watchman' (§ 61.12) who disturbs his sleepless hours with visions of the indiscretions to which it was impossible to shut his eyes. They are not named, but the 'times of pleasure' (§ 58.2), and 'shames and idle hours' (§ 61.7), denote their general drift. They coincide with the time when Southampton was more and more giving way to libertine propensities, and involving himself in crude schemes of the irresponsible adventurer Essex.

The sonnet has pathetic delicacy of appeal, and of reproach. Through the night watches he is continually haunted by the thought and presence of his friend.* Can I ascribe these visitations to *your* concern for *me* ? or have *you* occasion to be disturbed by jealous fears, and does your spirit keep nightly watch over my down-sitting and uprising, in fear that friendship may open the door to betrayal of trust ? Nay, there are no such fears to trouble *your* affection, they are the portion of my love, and set in motion by him who is most dear. The close is quite explicit, in its suggestion of other attractions and affections.

For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near.

* See p. 110.

Sonnet § 62 : Self-Love

In § 62 he follows up his plea with closer analysis of motive. 'Sin of self-love,' he begins, repeating the word used already in § 3, and here and there in the Plays. It covers all phases of egoism, and is a gentle substitute for vanity and other forms of self-admiration. But here, in addition, he tempers criticism with the subtle conceit which he develops in the last four lines, as well as by ascribing the defect to himself.

Mine own self-love quite contrary I read ;
 Self so self-loving were iniquity,
 'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise
 Painting my age with beauty of thy days,

where the 'self-love' is interpreted as love of my 'other self,' that recognition and appreciation of another's gifts, which are his one title to credit or praise. He has already played on this conceit of self-identification with 'his other self' in § 42 ; here it is too ingenious to ring true, but here as habitually when venturing remonstrance or rebuke, he speaks with bated breath, as to one quick to take offence. After all, the true intention remains clear enough.

On

Bated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity

we have commented already.* 'Withered and lined (as the words mean) need not be taken too literally, where

no face so gracious,

No shape so true, no truth of such account,

asks for a corresponding contrast in the terms of self-depreciation.

Sonnets §§ 63-65 : Tempus edax verum—Time's Despites

There was little likelihood that remonstrance, or appeal, proffered under such circumstances, would win

response. In the following sonnets the form of personal address is dropped, and changes to reflection and soliloquy. Sonnets §§ 63–65 are variations—finely rendered—on a single theme. All things, even the strongest and most durable—brass, stone, or solid continents—succumb to decay, dissolution, death, and how much more frail products of spring or summer-tide ! Too surely, and too soon, time will ‘disgrace’ and bring to nought the dearest possession of his love ; the one consolation that remains is the hope that his lines may be the means of conferring lasting remembrance on that which had been to him the most treasured gift of life. There lies the spring and hope of immortality. Other consolation there is none—

No none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.
(§ 65.13–14)

As with Dante, as with Petrarch, as with Shelley and many another, a personal affection is passing into poetic aspiration,

The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

Apart from this, life in a world where honour, virtue and truth are for ever made the prey of scheming, lust and self-assertion, has ceased to be worth living

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.

Sonnet § 66 : Broken-hearted

In structure and rhythm § 66 is the simplest of all the Sonnets. The quatrain scheme is abandoned : in its simple enumeration of terms, it recalls the cumulative series in the Earl of Oxford’s early sonnet contributed to *Tears of Fancy* in 1593.*

Who taught thee first to sigh alas, my heart ?

* It is the only Sonnet found among his early poems, and in form adopts the Shakespearean quatorzain.

The catalogue builds up the sum of vain and frustrated strivings, which make up life's struggle. But it will be noticed that, as in *Hamlet*, III, i, the miscarriages are concerned with public life, not personal relation; that is indeed the moral accentuated in the final couplet

Tired with all these, from these I would be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

The personal tie makes life still worth living. Among the items enumerated,

Simple truth miscall'd simplicity

presents a striking, though underived, coincidence with the observation of Thucydides upon the way in which intrigue and faction debase the currency of moral terms, so that 'simple truth (or 'simplicity,' τὸ εὐθές), which is so large a factor in nobility, is laughed out of court and disappears.' In ll. 9-10 'art' and 'doctor-like' refer to Academic subservience and intolerance (cf. § 78). As often, where technique is simple, alliteration and assonance are used for decorative enrichment.

Sonnets §§ 67-68 : Beauty—True-born and Bastard

In the two next Sonnets the impersonal, or rather third-personal, touch is retained. Taints or blemishes, if such there be in his ideal, are charged against the times and fashions in which his lot is cast. He was too good, too fair to be exploited by the false and meretricious world by which he is surrounded; he puts to shame the false and painted counterfeits, who imitate his perfections. With the frequent emphasis laid on cosmetics, rouge and false plaits, we have already dealt.* It is characteristic, but it is well here to add that, as these sonnets help to show, such practices belonged to the fashions of the Elizabethan Court and high life rather than to the stage, on which artificial lighting and

* P. 92.

actresses had as yet no place. The use of 'map' in Sonnet § 68

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
and again in

him as for a map doth Nature store
To show false Art what beauty was of yore
finds close parallels in *Lucrece*, l. 402

Showing life's triumph in the map of death
and ll. 1712-18

The face, that map which deep impression bears
Of hard misfortune

in both cases used of the living face. Maps of the time were still largely pictorial.

Sonnets §§ 69-70 : Praise and Dispraise—their Values

In §§ 69 and 70 the note of warning becomes more explicit than even in §§ 61-62. Your outward charms (he writes) are upon all lips, gainsaid by none

Thy outward thus with outward praise is crown'd.

But amid the chorus of flatterers, remember also that acts and deeds are judged, and often with more grudging eyes; do nothing that can tarnish your fair fame.* Blame is indeed the tribute, which malice and slander pay to virtue and to beauty; only beware and give no handle upon which they can lay hold.

In § 70 the wording has both charm and skill, and the reference to successes in the tournament is happy, but the touch of hesitation and diplomacy in utterance weakens poetic glow. The lines are interesting as evidence that through the earlier stages of friendship he had sincerely idealised the character and virtues of his friend, and that he still clings to the old ideals. Difficulties have been felt regarding

Thou present'st a pure unstained prime,

* On the literary question raised by l. 12, see § 94.

when the Sonnets themselves reveal a prime far from pure or unstained. That is true, objectively; but Shakespeare is not composing 'a character,' nor yet writing as a moralist. The faults and frailties of the past were common ground to both writer and recipient: they are indeed implied, his young days had been both 'ambushed' and 'assailed.' But what he says is: You have come through those ordeals (this was true still of Southampton) without forfeiture, or permanent loss of reputation. But among the rivals who lie in wait to catch and to malign, remember that the tongue of envy 'goeth about like a roaring lion' (l. 12) ready to devour. Robertson considers §§ 69, 70 so full of faults of reason, diction, rhythm and style, that he imputes them (together with §§ 53, 54, 81, 83, 84, 87) to Chapman. They are not, indeed, sonnets in which Shakespeare is at his best; he is not at ease in admonition or rebuke. But the language is full of Shakespearean turns and rhymes. In § 69.12 it is hard to dissociate 'the rank smell of weeds' from the use of the same quotation in § 94.14. 'Suspect' for suspicion occurs in *V. A.* 1010, as well as in the Plays; and the carrion-feeding 'Crow' appears as the symbol of what is foul and foul-mouthed in *Lucr.* 1009, and again in § 113.

Throughout this central group of sonnets, corresponding to a period of separation and growing disquietude, the tone is that of an older man, schooled by long disciplines of experience and disappointment, addressing himself to a younger, for whom he feels intimate affection and concern: addressed by patron to client, and much more by client to patron, the Sonnets lose all reality or congruity. The writer addresses one who is his equal in gifts and promise, and who has now outstripped him in the race: the words of warning and remonstrance are conveyed with fastidious and reluctant delicacy. His own failures furnish the text of his appeal; to his own ambitions he has

bidden farewell; his own hopes and energies are frustrated. There remains the master-wish, that hopes once cherished for himself should find happier fulfilment in the future still opening before his friend—

'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

Of the section as a whole it may be said that time and distance were both at work to lessen trust and intimacy, but that the consequent phases of personal relation seem to pursue a natural and coherent course.

Sonnets §§ 71–74 : Shadows of Death

Sonnet § 71 : The Passing Bell

These sonnets, all tuned to the same mood, introduce a new *motif*, the funereal refrain which from this point onwards adds to the Sonnets a deeper note of pathos and solemnity, that seldom lies far below the surface. The writer, warned no doubt by physical symptoms, feels that his days are numbered, and there enter into his verse cadences of the passing bell, premonitions of his own decease.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell.

Lucr. l. 1493, 'Sorrow, like a heavy hanging bell,' has the same cadence, and the same theme is frequent in the Plays, but verbal parallel is closest in 2 *Henry IV.* I. i. 102.*

His tongue
Sounds ever after as a sullen bell
Remembered knelling a departed friend,

* The play was probably first staged at the *Curtain*, in or soon after 1597.

and in the same play (IV, v, 116)—

Only compound me with forgotten dust
repeats

When I perhaps compounded am with clay. (§ 71.10)

Among the scanty survivals of the romantic elements in medieval religion, this symbol deeply impressed the imagination of contemporaries, nowhere perhaps more tellingly than in the pages of Donne. 'Is there any man that in his chamber hears a bell toll for another man, and does not kneel down to pray for that dying man? and then when his charity breathes out upon another man, does he not also reflect upon himself, and dispose himself as if he were in the state of a dying man?' So in his funeral sermon on King James I the clauses are punctuated with the Dead! Dead! Dead! of our sonnet, while l. 4,

From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell,

with its macabre alliteration,* anticipates the strange brooding upon horrors of decomposition and the grave, which lends a certain sombre fascination alike to the prose and verse of J. Donne. This fitful dwelling upon death is a feature in the writer's sensibility, part of that temperamental *melancholia*, in which A. C. Bradley finds the key to the Hamlet portraiture and plot. Apart from arresting correspondences of phrase, I have abstained from pursuing parallels suggested by the Dramas; but here the idiosyncrasies of the writer agree so closely with those characterised in *Hamlet*, that I cannot express them better than in terms drawn from Bradley's close and delicate analysis of the Hamlet

* The l. v, w, d alliterations [Had not Q. good grounds for reading 'vildest' ?], and the thin vowels running in and out of ll. 3-4—however little such devices may please present taste—suggest or answer to the wriggling of worms, in which Donne is apt to revel. See Donne's *Sermons*, ed. by L. Pearsall Smith, p. xxvi, 10, 215, etc. In Shakespeare, cf. Sonnets §§ 74, 81 'rotten,' and *K. Richard II.* III. ii, 'Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,' with numerous parallels.

personality.* By *melancholia* he indicates something more than mere depression of spirits, something less than disorder of mind. It is a pathological condition, which may easily pass into either of these, a temperamental instability which tends to place a man at the mercy of moods which his saner reason would reject or overrule. The commas of quotation will show how exactly the Hamlet temper agrees with the psychology revealed in the sonnets. 'This melancholy accounts for Hamlet's inaction. For the *immediate* cause of that is simply that his habitual feeling is one of disgust at life and everything in it, himself included—a disgust which varies in intensity, rising at times into a longing for death, sinking often into weary apathy, but never dispelled for more than brief intervals.' With this for their ally 'retarding motives acquire an unnatural strength, while the healthy motives sink back and "lose the name of action."' The disgust with life, as a reaction to the corrupt and sophisticated society in which his lot is cast, becomes most vocal in § 66, in temper and language so close akin to the Hamlet soliloquy in III, i.

There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life ;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd love,† the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin ?

This disgust at men and things, from which he cannot disengage himself, yet is powerless to amend, produces a rankling and heart-breaking sense of futility

The time is out of joint—O cursèd spite
That ever I was born to set it right !

* Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 120–127.

† For this particular insertion (which Bradley dubiously refers to love for Ophelia), and again for the phrase 'quietus make,' the Sonnets supply the key (§ 126).

and in Hamlet produces 'an unconscious weaving of pretexts for inaction, aimless tossings on a sick-bed, symptoms of melancholy, which only increase it by deepening self-contempt.' All these have found a place in the conduct of the Sonnets, and finally culminate in the hankering pre-occupation with death, which here becomes a feature in the series.

In an opposite direction the same unbalanced want of equilibrium accounts for impulsive fits of action, 'for the lively interest with which he concerts the play-scene and exults in its success, for the pleasure with which he welcomes old acquaintances, his school-fellows or the actors, for the forcing of his disposition in the attempt to keep this joy and courtesy alive in spite of the misery which so soon returns upon him and the suspicion he is forced to feel.' I have deliberately employed quotations, drawn solely and directly from independent analysis of *Hamlet*, in order to avoid personal bias in the choice of terms, or any suspicion that the Hamlet diagnosis was consciously or unconsciously coloured by desire to harmonise the dramatic presentment with personal experiences of the author. The result is a telling confirmation of the views of those who (by no means always from the same point of view) have instinctively felt that *Hamlet* more intimately than any other of his creations reveals the author's own personality. It goes hand-in-hand with that revealed in the Sonnets. Here the contemplated approach of death introduces 'retarding and conflicting motives,' which subtly intertwine. There is on the one hand Stoic acceptance of the inevitable, death regarded as the end of unrest, vain striving, and disappointment, and at times defied with a gruesome *Apathy*, that finds satisfaction in dwelling on the concomitants of physical corruption and decay. On the other hand, death utters its reminder to duty and affection, to pay their lasting tribute to the excellence and loveliness which it has been their privilege to behold and share. They must not pass insolvent to the dust.

The end of life is the satisfaction and commemoration of his love. There lies the call and consecration of his poetic gift

When thou re-viewest this, thou dost re-view
 The very part was consecrate to thee :
 The earth can have but earth, which is his due ;
 My spirit is thine, the better part of me.* (§ 74.5-8.)

In such lines the note of self-pity mingles with that of self-disdain—in part sincere, in part accepted under protest—which bows to the verdict passed by time and tide upon individual endeavour. Under varying phases and reactions—as exhibited in Chatterton, Keats, Shelley, Chr. Rossetti, and many more—English poetry is replete with illustrations : how reserved and sensitive spirits, conscious of the world's rejection or dispraise, have sought to withdraw or cloak their secrets from the eyes of men, asking only to be forgotten. Sometimes they have fallen back on religious compensations, in the hope or full assurance of immortality. But for Shakespeare no such resource was available.† There is no whisper of it in the Sonnets, and the witness of the Plays is decisive. Not even for conventional or dramatic purposes, is it admitted. It cannot be claimed even for the commendatory prayer, itself exceptional, accorded to Hamlet's departing spirit

And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. (*Ham.* V. ii.)

But none the less the craving for immortality, or at least for escape from annihilation, finds insistent expression, in wistful desire or conviction that his poetry shall survive : the 'eternising' of the man he loves is the reflex of personal cravings that will not be denied. Such conflict and suppression of the emotions is apt to assume the mask of the recluse, the eccentric, or the sphinx. It accords with what is known of Edward de Vere in later life : with the jottings that survive of William

* *Pars melior mei.*

† Cf. § 15, Comment.

Shakspeare's doings, or with the prosaic sanity imputed to him, it has nothing in common. It clothes itself in that longing for anonymous survival, which constitutes the riddle of Shakespearean authorship, and which finds utterance in § 72, and again in § 81. That his *verses* should survive is, as it were, a dying charge

My life hath in this line [these verses] some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay. (§ 74.3-4)

But yet

My name be buried where my body is (§ 72.11)

is the injunction that he lays upon him, and this thought of anonymous or pseudonymous publication adds a touch of singular interest to a sonnet, otherwise the tamest of the quartet. The printed production of William Shakespeare plays begins with 1598, and in § 72.13

✓ For I am shamed by that which I bring forth

it is legitimate to read a *double entendre* referring to the printing of Plays, which could bring on him nothing but discredit, if once the secret of authorship were known. Pathos, poetic and self-conscious, with dignified self-pity conveyed in the triple '*In me,*' reaches its height in § 73, a fitting prelude to the solemn finale of § 74.

Sonnet § 73-74 : Oncoming Death

As in others of the most perfect and satisfying Sonnets (§§ 7, 33, 60), the same thought under kindred figures—the dying year, the twilight darkening to its close, the flickering and expiring ash—is presented in the three successive quatrains. The first, perfect in melody and rhythm of monosyllabic beat, is from the scenery of park and woodland avenues, evidently a personal impression of forlorn autumnal days, tinged with the romance of ruined shrines ; the twofold sense of '*choirs,*' architectural and musical, is transferred with

magic charm to the stark and shivering boughs, now stripped of their spring leafage and desolate of song. Contingent points arise, which are indeed conjectural, but yet deserve attention. In § 73 the autumnal scene suggests an October setting, and this accords with the chronological scheme proposed for this section of the Sonnets. In § 74

The prey of worms, my body, being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife

cries out for some personal and specific reference. 'The prey of worms' is a familiar convention, and keeps company with § 71.4, but does not combine spontaneously with 'coward conquest of a wretch's knife.' 'Knife' is indeed used of Time in § 100.14, but there 'crooked knife' designates the emblematic sickle ('His bending sickle,' § 116.10, cf. § 126.2), and the context

So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife

confers on it poetic values altogether foreign to 'a wretch's knife.' 'Wretch,' usually coupled with some contumelious epithet, is almost invariably a term of belittling contempt, and I find it hard to believe that 'Time' or 'Death' whose

fell arrest

Without all bail shall carry me away

is anon degraded to the role of 'a wretch's knife.' Acceptance of de Vere authorship would heal these jarring discords, and the phrase becomes a bitter remembrance of the wound received in the duel with Sir Thomas Knyvet (1583), and the lasting disablements which it seems to have inflicted.* In so doing it throws welcome light upon the expression

So I made lame by fortune's dearest spite (§ 37.3)

reiterated in l. 9

So then I am not lame,

* See p. 41.

and

Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt. (§ 89.8)

That the terms may be merely general and metaphorical I do not deny, though there is not much in Shakespeare to support such use, nor need they necessarily imply the 'permanent limp' over which commentators * make merry, but I believe most readers of taste will feel that the passages gain, not lose, poetic propriety, referred to specific disablement.

An interesting verbal resemblance occurs in the epitaph which adorns the marble tomb of Sir Francis Vere, first cousin to Lord Edward, erected in Westminster Abbey by his wife in 1608.

When Vere sought death, armed with his sword and shield,
Death was afraid to meet him in the field.
But when his weapons he had laid aside,
Death like a coward struck him, and he died.

But the coincidence can hardly be more than accidental.

Sonnets §§ 75-77 : Redintegratio Amoris

Sonnet § 75 introduces, or prefaces, a new chapter, which turns upon the poetic relations between the author and his friend. Once more they are in personal touch, renewing the thrills and joys of first affections, and the writer is tempted to look askance at like favours accorded to other intimates and admirers. The 'miser' similitude conveys in itself something of confession and apology. There is no type of character which Shakespeare in the Plays visits with harsher chastisement, and none more alien to the disposition and career of Edward de Vere.† Here the poet pleads guilty to being a miser in the affections, and to hoarding with a miser's

* Swinburne, S. Butler, and others.

† Cf. Chapman's 'liberal as the sun,' pp. 24 and 220.

joy privileges which were his own unshared possession. This leads on naturally to § 76 and following sonnets, which show clearly where the trouble lay. Openly or covertly, his friend had implied, or his own conscience whispered, that in poetic output and invention he was not keeping abreast of 'the time,' that his Sonnets, 'keeping invention in a noted weed,' adhering, that is, to the stock form and conventions, began to lack the interest and freshness—that 'new pride' (as of spring flowers and foliage) and 'quick change' (the living receptiveness), which distinguished the later years of the Elizabethan Renaissance. Above all others it was a time of new departures and experiments in all forms of poetic craftsmanship. Prior to 1580, outside of the Sonnet, and the 5- or 6-foot Iambic, rhymed or unrhymed, English poetry showed little elasticity in form or metre. Now, under the impetus of Spenser* and lesser contemporaries, not only in Drama, Masque and Classical adaptation, but over the whole field of poetry, pastoral, lyrical and narrative, of ballad, madrigal and ceremonial ode, the whole face of English poetry was changed by

Those melodious bursts that fill
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still.†

Classical reactionaries on the one hand, critical Essayists (Webbe, Puttenham, Meres) and Reformers on the other, busy themselves with every device and analysis of form and scansion. Few possibilities remained untried

By new-found methods and by compounds strange

of these adventurous years. The 'compounds strange' are primarily, as in § 125.7, the spiced and sugared

* Signal dates are the *Shepherd's Calendar* issued under the anonym *Immerito* in December 1579. The next years were devoted to the *Faerie Queene*, of which Books I-III were completed by 1589, and published in 1590; followed in 1595 by the *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, and in 1596 by the *Four Hymns on Love and Beauty*, and *Prothalamion*.

† Tennyson on Spenser.

confections of the younger Muse, but no doubt glance also at the newly-coined combinations of hyphenated words, with which Spenser, and still more Chapman, were embellishing poetic diction. In our sonnet the ostensible answer to the charge of old-fashioned monotony is the insufficient plea that theme and inspiration—and therefore execution—remained the same,

That you and love are still my arguments.

But this is mere framework ; the heart of the sonnet, for the reader and for writer, is in the pleasantry or word-play contained—and now at last revealed—in the middle quatrain :

Why write I still all one, E.VER the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That E.VERY word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed ?

At first blush this may—and no doubt will—be called silly and trivial, after the fashion of Ignatius Donnelly cryptograms. But (1) this reading redeems from inanity lines whose challenge to authorship is more direct than any other in the series, yet without this rendering remains entirely empty and void. (2) The point turns upon a pun ; but it is precisely the kind of verbal and phonetic pun which had a fascination for Shakespeare.* Any one familiar with the early Comedies, say with the ‘ ship-sheep,’ ‘ form—manner—manor,’ and companion repartees of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* ascribed to this period, will own that this word-play, in handling and propriety, stands well above the average of witticisms of this kind. Each generation has its own tastes and canons in jesting. That Lyly and his Euphues had much to answer for in this matter, Shakespeare is our evidence in chief. And in the next generation, Donne does not think the word-play on his name unbefitting

* For instances in the Sonnets, see pp. 77–78, *n*.

the sacred context of his liturgical hymn to the atoning Christ

And having done that, thou hast done,
I have no more.

It is a matter in which extenuating circumstances are often disallowed or overlooked. From the literary point of view, the fault of the pun is that it turns threadbare as soon as made. Its merit lies in invention, not in repetition; it seldom bears the ordeal of print.* In the armoury of wit, it is the weapon of the improviser, the Tarleton or Kempe of his day, or of the Clown, who has every night a new audience to amuse. This is its justification in the text of plays, composed not for the study but the stage. And the same excuse holds good for colloquial repartee, for personal correspondence, or for 'verses of occasion,' even though stereotyped in print,

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds. (§ 94.14)

(3) Though the setting is new and apposite, the word-play would at once be caught by the recipient; it had already been used and elaborated by the 'Earle of Oxforde.' Echo songs of various type were among the literary pastimes of the day (see Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetry*, and compare *Venus and Adonis*, §§ 139 and 142). 'Ever' was itself among the tried and approved Echoes, as in Sestine 4 of Barnabe Barnes' *Parthenophil*.† But Edward de Vere improved upon it, as an 'Echo' to his own name, lineally drawn from the village of *Ver* near to Bayeux in Normandy, retaining still the memory of origin in its pronunciation, and the old orthography in family documents. In his early *Echo Verses*,‡ which have unmistakeable correspondences with the *Venus and Adonis* stanzas, we read—

* Yet it has its champions in Byron, Hood, and master-artists in light verse, like Calverley, Stephens, etc.

† There it recurs seven times. See Arber, *Elizabethan Sonnets*, I, p. 301. For another example of Echo Sonnets, see Wm. Percy's *Celia*.

‡ *Poems of E. de Vere*, lxxiii, and pp. 2-3.

Oh heavens ! who was the first that bred in me this fever ? Vere
Who was the first that gave the wound whose fear I wear for
ever ? Vere

What tyrant, Cupid, to my harm usurps thy golden quiver ? Vere
What wight first caught this heart and can from bondage it
deliver ? Vere.*

The most cautious critic will, I think, find it hard to resist the conjunction. The same cryptic quip has been suspected in other contexts, for instance, in the '*Ver begin*,' which introduces the finale song of the seasons in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but it is dangerous to strain a good case by hazardous guesses.† The word-play on the name became almost an accepted device. Thus in 1622 Chapman, urging his appeal for the relief of Sir Horatio Vere, besieged at Mannheim, entitles his poem—

Pro Vere Autumni Lachrymæ

and calls for the rescue

Of this full Spring of Man, this Vere of Veres

While *Vere* in its sense of 'truly' is openly played on
in § 82

Thou truly fair wert truly sympathized
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend.

And the reiterated emphasis on True and Truth, as
in § 63

Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account

seems to glance at the proud *Vero Nil Verius* motto.

A propos of what has been written above, in this instance, the pun is the making, not the marring, of the sonnet ; I have read it scores of times, and find in it not loss but gain. In an occasional sonnet, playful and apologetic, addressed to a friend and not composed for

* In the Rawlinson MS. the spelling runs 'feavere,' 'everre,' 'quivere,' and 'delivere.'

† There are *possible* cases in §§ 19.14, 61.12, 108.6. In the former Keats wished to transpose the words to 'live ever young.' If any play was intended, it would account for the less rhythmical order.

the public, it is entirely in place. Once again, he is light-hearted, as in §§ 128, 130, and the earlier Sonnets.

Sonnet § 77 : With an Album

Sonnet § 77 is incidental and parenthetic, evoked by the present of a Manuscript or Extract-Book. In those days of sonneteering exchange, Albums of the kind were common. Sonnet § 122 refers to some such gift, and Beeching instances the birthday present of Lord Orrery to Swift. Its position in the series may be due to some such anniversary; the tone and allusions harmonise with this phase, and displacement is gratuitous. For once I cannot agree with Tucker's exegesis, in quadrupling the present into a fourfold gift, including a Mirror, a Watch, and a Book of religious Offices (l. 13)—a most unlikely present from this sonnetist—as well as the Album for extracts. Birthday gifts, often on a lavish scale,* were in fashion in Court circles, but the sonnet itself hints at no such festa,† and a Mirror that could be trusted accurately to reflect the deepening wrinkles, the 'mouthèd graves' which successive anniversaries would delve, would be a curious irony for conveying 'happy returns'; and assuredly 'the dial's *shady* stealth' illustrated by the 'dial-hand' of § 104.9, which 'Steals from his figure and no pace perceived,' denotes a stationary sun-dial, not a watch or 'the clock that tells the time' of § 12.1. Either symbolism is drawn from the writer's own experience. Interpretation is dubious; the doubt arises whether the album was a present from the author to his friend, or whether the sonnet was composed for the title-page of an album presented to himself, and intended for the reception of new sonnets as occasion arose. In this case the references to deepening wrinkles, and to weakening memory, become far more appropriate. And it may be that

* See pp. 15, 30.

† Southampton's birthday fell on October 6th, which might fit the chronological scheme: Edward de Vere's on April 2nd.

Sonnet § 122, which records a similar gift, refers to this very volume, passed on to other hands.

Sonnet § 78 : A Rival Bard

Sonnet § 78 must be quoted in full for its contents more than execution. They repay minute attention :

So oft have I invoked 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.
 Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
 Whose influence is thine and born of thee :
 In others' works thou dost but mend the style,
 And arts with thy sweet graces graced be ;
 But thou art all my art, and dost advance
 As high as learning my rude ignorance.

Here he returns with direct and generous candour to the theme, which occupies or underlies so many following Sonnets, that of rivals in his chosen field, whose productions threaten to displace him from the coign of vantage and appreciation, which was his by right.

So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse

may, and indeed necessarily does, include sonnets, such as §§ 14, 17, 18, 26, 38, and others ; but the primary and explicit reference is to the *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Lucrece* dedications. *Venus and Adonis*, issued in 1593, laid instant hold upon the public ear, and passed into new editions in 1594 and 1596, as well as later in 1599, 1600 and 1602. And 1598 called for a second edition of the *Rape of Lucrece*, published in 1594. They were a revelation and a revolution—true landmarks of poetic advance. The claim put forward in

Every alien pen hath got my use
And under thee their poesy disperse,

is like Tennyson's

Most can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed.

It may refer in some degree to style or inspiration, but primarily to the patronage by the Earl of Southampton, which aspiring poets like Barnes, and Nash, and Markham, prized as a valuable asset for the 'dispersion' of their poetry. His own embryo efforts had been but stammering of 'the dumb,' and 'heavy ignorance,' until 'thine eyes' raised them to new heights of vision, utterance and inspiration.

On untrained and undeveloped powers, one and one alone had rained 'influence' *—that secret and vivifying power, associated mystically with the stars of heaven, which controls the temperaments, the crises, and the destinies of men—and by some spell of personality had set in motion impulses, which imparted a new gift of tongues, and lifted ignorance to higher planes of poetic insight and imaginative thought. In that 'first heir of my invention,' the *Venus and Adonis*, and in *Lucrece*

Thine eyes taught the dumb on high to sing
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly. (Cf. parallel § 38. 7-8)

It is literally true that not for himself only but for his generation those poems created new modes and standards of poetic diction, flight and finish; on a smaller and more personal scale they were the life-breath of the Sonnets, in which

Thou art all my art.

From first to last, Shakespeare (whoever he was) had but one patron—patron not in the beneficiary sense,

* This use, habitual in Shakespeare, appears in § 15.4:

Whereon the stars in secret influence comment. (Cf. § 14)

but in the sense that to his personality and gifts he owed (or ascribed) his poetic aspirations and afflatus.

Others followed in his wake. In 1593 Barnabe Barnes in his *Parthenophil and Parthenope*, in 1594 Thomas Nash in his *Life of Jack Wilton*, as well as his lubricious *Choosing of Valentines*, in 1594 Gervase Markham * in his patriotic poem on Sir Richard Grenville, had all bid with dedicatory sonnets for the countenance of the young Earl, and do not stand alone among the 'alien pens' who sought his approbation. All these, in contrast with the writer, could claim academic training as graduates in the 'Arts' (l. 12).

But among them one in particular, introduced as 'the learned' (§ 78.7), had now stepped into prominence, and raised disquieting susceptibilities. That the rival is to be identified with Chapman hardly admits of doubt. Christopher Marlowe had passed away in 1593; the terms of admiration used have nothing in keeping with the pastoral and romantic genius of Spenser; neither do the dates agree. Descriptions such as

He of tall building and of goodly pride (§ 80.12)

or

the proud full sail of his great verse (§ 86.1)

are ludicrously inapplicable to Barnabe Barnes and his congeners. The figures used imply scale, volume and stateliness of carriage, with which the lighter build and finish of the Sonnet cannot compete (§ 80.6-12). Nor do they fit the broken lengths and periods of blank verse, appropriate to dramatic dialogue. M. Drayton wrote on a large scale, but his *Polyolbion* was not yet begun; and neither the treatment nor the metre of the 8-line stanzas of the *Baron's Wars*, or the couplets of the *Heroic Epistles*, justify the metaphors employed, in anything like the same degree, as the roll and sweep of the rhyming fourteeners used by Chapman in his poetic

* So shall my tragick layes be blest by thee,
And from thy lips suck their eternitie. (Cf. Sonnet § 82.4)

masterpiece, *The Iliads of Homer*. Nor was Drayton in the literary camp of Essex and Southampton. The 'learned' and 'learning' * of § 78.7.14, and also the 'better spirit' of § 80.2, eminently befit the man who in 1595 wrote, 'I consecrate my strange poems to those *searching spirits*, whom *learning* hath made noble and nobility sacred'; and who much later chose *Learning* as the object of his sustained apostrophe in the *Tears of Peace*. The words are from the Preface to *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, which contained among other pieces *A Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy* and *The Amorous Zodiac*, instigated possibly by the *Venus and Adonis*, but relying for its inspiration on metaphysic rather than emotion. And a verbal touch in l. 7

Have added feathers to the learned's wing

confirms the reference. In *The Coronet* Chapman, appropriating Greene's taunt, had directly assailed Shakespeare and his patron:

Never shall my friendless verse envy
Muses that Fame's loose feathers beautify.

Thus the retort 'have added feathers to the learned's wing' gains apt and special point. Sonnets §§ 14 and 21 had already glanced at the poet's eccentricities, and the caustic personal touches about nocturnal visitants and

that affable familiar ghost
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence (§ 86.9-10)

find their best solution in Chapman's earlier *Shadow of Night* (1594). *Versus mei habebunt aliquantum noctis* is the strange motto chosen for the title-page, and in the poem we read

No pen can anything eternal write
That is not steeped in humour of the Night.

* 'Arts,' in l. 12 (as also in § 29, 66) has much of the technical meaning preserved in Bachelor or Master of Arts. In *Tears of the Muses* Spenser had already used 'the learned's task' in the stanzas devoted to 'our pleasant Willy,' or 'the gentle spirit,' whom (pp. 59-60) we have seen ground to identify with 'Shakespeare.'

Taken in conjunction with §§ 14, 21, 85, 86, the clue leaves little room for doubt,* and kindred references to familiar spirits prompting his verse can be multiplied.† Up to this date and even to the end, our knowledge of Chapman's life and personality is all but a blank; and corroboration of references so personal as those in § 86 is not to be expected, but ll. 5-11 must mean something more than boon companions and hob-nobbings at the Mermaid or elsewhere.

Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
 Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
 No, neither he nor his compeers by might
 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.

In the preceding sonnet, the unusual word 'hymn'

Every hymn that able spirit affords
 In polish'd form of well-refinèd pen

contains an allusion to Chapman's earliest work, the *Σκία νυκτός* *Shadow of Night*, published in 1594, and consisting of the two *Hymns*, *In Noctem* and *In Cynthia*; and in the second it is of special interest to notice how already he sings the praises of the military exploits of Sir Francis Vere in the Netherlands.

His *annus mirabilis* (1598), which saw his completion of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, and the issue of his first instalment of Homer, *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades*,‡ had not yet dawned, but in spite of faults glaring and

* For the identification see Acheson, *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet*. It is accepted by P. Allen, *Shakespeare and Chapman*, as practically certain.

† See Robertson, *Sonnets*, pp. 232-3.

‡ The *Iliads* were dedicated to the Earl of Essex, now patron, leader and chief to the Earl of Southampton. The Preface to this and the *Achilles Shield* are included in Gregory Smith, *Crit. Essays*, II. 295-307, and the most important sections of F. Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, follow immediately, pp. 308-324. Among the later Dedicatory Sonnets to the *Tears of Peace*, one is addressed to the Earl of Southampton.

repellent, 'watchers of the skies' could not but discern 'a new planet' about to 'swim into their ken,' and in this year Meres ranks him side by side with Shakespeare in Comedy and Tragedy, and other branches of poetry. Portions at any rate of the Homer were in private circulation at an earlier date, and to the promised eminence Sonnet § 80 pays a generous tribute, in which nobility of style is on a par with that of temper. The language, shot perhaps with memories of the Armada, is apposite to Southampton: 'saucy' is a favourite word with Shakespeare for the gay arrogance of youth, but in 'my saucy bark' he coined a phrase full of the dance and movement of the sea, and of the smartness essential to good seamanship, balanced by the rolling cadence of

Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth ride. (§ 80.10)

The 'saucy boat,' repeated in *Troilus Cres.* I. iii. 42, finds its best exposition in the more bombastic lines of I. iii. 35, where

shallow bauble boats dare sail

upon that element, on which

The strong-ribb'd bark through liquid mountains cuts.

The writer does not dispute his own inferiority, the lightness of the metal which he carries; but even so, the frailer vessel is in livelier and more intimate rapport with 'the embraces of the sea.' In studying the Sonnets it is wonderful with what instinct the writer divines the verdicts of posterity, and reads the hearts of men. What juster terms could modern criticism devise for equating the merits of Chapman's Homer with the Shakespeare Sonnets? If the earlier poems were something like a nightmare of pedantry and metaphysic, here ample justice is done to the sympathetic movement and grandeur of his Epic renderings. And this attitude of Shakespeare to Chapman finds an interesting counterpart in the later attitude of Chapman to Shakespeare.

In poetic and dramatic practice they belonged to rival camps, which were apt, as in the famous *Poetomachia* of 1598–1600, to engage in acrimonious strife. Chapman was on the extreme right of the Ben Jonson school, which took its stand on learning and tradition. To ‘the tribe of Ben’ the broad realism and humanism of the Elizabethan stage, the leavening of tragedy with comedy and farce, were a betrayal of the mission, the function and the self-respect of legitimate drama, and Shakespeare was of the company of those who were ready to ‘lose their soul for a jest, and to profane even the most holy.’* To Chapman, the stage was the handmaid of metaphysic and moral philosophy. In his *Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois* apologues are drawn from Sophocles and Epictetus, precedents from Locrian Princes, Demetrius Phalerius and Demades, morals from Troy and Rome. Close analysis† of the text shows how word and thought continuously take their cues from *Hamlet*, while handling of plot and of moral motives is a counterblast of protest against this very play. Hence the curious blend of envious admiration with censorious disapproval. Each poet could recognise his rival’s gifts, but their minds were tuned to different and often discordant keys, as far estranged as *Sordello* from the *Idylls of the King*. And here we are brought face to face with a problem of startling personal interest. In the passage quoted at p. 24, we have seen how in Act III Chapman suddenly introduces ‘the Earl of Oxford’ in his youthful prime as

the most goodly fashion’d man
I ever saw ; from head to foot in form
Rare and most absolute . . . of spirit passing great
Valiant, and learn’d, and liberal as the sun ;

and looking back upon that radiant promise, he deplores the defiant wilfulness of strain, which impelled him,

* Prologue to *Every Man out of his Humour*.

† P. Allen, *Shakespeare and Chapman as Topical Dramatists*, studies the contrast in great detail.

after the bent of his own genius, 'to hold on his own free and proper way,' to dash his gifts against the walls of propriety, to sacrifice ambitions, prospects, wealth, influence, everything, rather than yield a jot to demands and conventions which he disdained. It is the mood depicted in § 29. Proffered 'honours he despised,'

and esteem'd it freer

To keep his own way straight ; and swore that he
Had rather make away his whole estate
In things that cross'd the vulgar, than he would
Be frozen up, stiff, like a Sir John Smith *
His countryman, in common nobles' fashions ;
Affecting, as the end of noblesse were
Those servile observations.

Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois III.

From one who had known, and been, it may be said, in literary competition with the Earl throughout the last ten years of his life, the passage is of extraordinary interest. On the personal side it would be hard to find a parallel : and it should be read in its whole setting, which discourses on the dues and limits of self-determination, and the calls which it imposes. Chapman is seldom so clear and explicit, and I do not know what meaning can be affixed to the passage, except that (as a unique example) the Earl of Oxford had staked reputation and resources upon promoting and popularising romantic drama in forms, which enforced Chapman's poetic admiration, but none the less contravened and violated his binding canons of æsthetic and philosophical propriety.

Oh 'tis a vexing sight to see a man
Out of his way, stalk proud as he were in.

Revenge, Act III.

* In 'Sir John Smith' I suspect a direct reference to the '*Johannes factotum*' of Green's denunciation (see p. 69). Chapman's familiarity with this is shown in the 'thrash down feathers' a few lines later in his *Coronet for his Mistress Philosophy*, Stanza 10 :

Muses that Fame's loose feathers beautify
And such as scorn to tread the theatre
As ignorant. (p. 217)

In his full-length study of *The Revenge*, Allen dissects in detail the twofold strain, 'sincerest flattery' evinced in plagiarism, together with reprehension of methods employed. The study of Hamlet himself he is convinced is drawn primarily from the career and personality of the Earl of Oxford, and it is hard to resist the implication.* From an entirely different line of approach Bradley † and others hold that Hamlet, more intimately than any other character in the Plays, reflects the author's personality. For associating Wm. Shakspeare, except as a 'great unknown,' with either, there is no morsel of justification; if, on the other hand, the Hamlet conception and portrayal comes from the Earl of Oxford's pen, the problem solves itself. ✓

Sonnet § 81 : Vero Nil Verius

§ 81 is a graceful and dignified sonnet on the conventional theme of eternising, has no special pertinence in this context; but the opening lines, anticipative of death, associate it with this portion of the series, and it is not ill-placed as a reminder that the poet's debt will not go undischarged if it is the means of conferring immortality upon the donor.

Sonnets §§ 82-90 : Freedom in the affections

At this stage interest and inspiration begin to flag. The temperamental weakness, that disposition to acquiesce, to palliate and even to excuse affront, which we have already met in other relations in §§ 35 and 49, and shall find resumed in § 88, begins to prevail, and the poetry of self-disparagement, even more than that of self-effacement, forbids poetic fire or glow. 'Tonguetied' is the epithet, which he applies twice over to his

* This is far too large and intricate a subject for further digression; Mr. Allen's discussions open new avenues of exploration.

† *Shakespeare the Man* in Oxford Lectures on Poetry. See § 17, Comment.

Muse (§§ 80, 85). It is not for him to cry or strive ; if too confidingly he had embarked upon deep water, then

being wrecked, I am a worthless boat. (§ 80.11)

The sincerity and depth of his own affections had imposed no pledge, no ' marriage contract ' (§ 82.1) on the other side. If he had failed to satisfy, to retain his hold upon the heart and soul of his beloved, he had no title to complain, but only to accept ' the finding ' (§ 82.6) from him who was best qualified to judge. It was not for him to avert it by flattery or false pretence ; *truth* had been his one and only skill.

Thou truly fair wert truly sympathised
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend.

This counter-signature inevitably calls to mind the *Vero nil verius* motto of the Veres, which is utilised in ' Truer than truth itself ' of Armado's letter in *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, i. The reiteration of ' true ' in §§ 57, 62, 125 (as well as other passages) suggests a special significance, and helps to confirm the play on ' E.VERY word ' in § 76. He could not hope, or try, to compete in precious phrase or painted rhetoric ; flattering addresses and dedications were for other pens ; for him ' manners ' forbid. And he adds a warning against over-valuing such praises (§ 84.14).

Sonnets §§ 83-84 : Compliments are barren tender

The same note of disaffection runs through §§ 83, 84, that sense of nothing-to-say which overtakes correspondence when affection runs cold. They throw light on the disposition of the friend—his desire for notice and for compliments. Evidently he had written complaining of silence, and that he had not been favoured with Sonnets as in days past. The answer shows touchiness on two accounts : first, he did not profess to be a match for *somebody else*, in devising compliments/ which fell very far short of the original ; secondly, his

own skill did not lie in the direction of flattery, but of simplicity and truth. The last couplet of § 84 is among things that might have been otherwise expressed. How can the praiser fitly praise a beauty that is beyond all praise?—admits more gracious expression than

You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
Being fond of praise, which makes your praises worse,

but the sonnet is written in an irritable mood.

Sonnet § 85 : Silent Eloquence

In § 85 he has recovered from his ill humour, and plays upon his theme with fascinating skill; but, at least for the untrained reader, some explanation will be helpful. With artistic instinct the phrasing of ll. 1-4 is purposely made 'precious' * in contrast with the homely wording of ll. 5-6, perhaps the most direct and rustic couplet in the Sonnets. 'In manners' means in obedience to modesty, and 'holds her still' is a poetic variant on holds her peace or holds her tongue. The next three lines are more difficult. For

comments of your praise, richly compiled

prose would run elaborations of compliment, ornately composed. The next line has been a crux of commentators. 'Character' is at once the script of the designer, and the stamp or lineaments of the design, engrossed with the 'golden quill' of the illuminator, gilding the letters of his manuscript. It is used in this technical sense in § 122—thy tables

Full-charactered with lasting memory,

and §§ 59.8, 108.1 furnish good illustrations. 'Reserve' should be some term applicable to the calligraphist; *rehearse, preserve, deserve, treasure, rescribe* have all been suggested, but do not hit the mark. May I, greatly

* The literary use finds a starting-point in Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, l. 148.

daring, propose '*Tressure*,' used of the ornamental trimming of the head-dress, and thence of the decorative lining or tracery imposed upon the shield, as in the Royal Arms of Scotland? 'A tressured coat' is quite good idiom in heraldic speech, and the word if admissible is singularly apt and expressive. Shakespeare's acquaintance with heraldry, its 'achievements,' 'differences,' and 'abatements,' and technical terms such as 'imprese,' and his knowledge of particular coats of arms, are established by *Lucrece*, 197-210 (on which see Wyndham), and many passages in the Plays (2 *Henry VI*, V. i. 204; *Rich. II*, III. i. 25). 'Filed,' the euphuistic equivalent for the *limatus* of Latin writers on rhetoric, is perhaps most familiar through the Meres *dictum* 'The Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if they would speak English'—which reads like a reminiscence of this sonnet—and Ben Jonson's derivative 'well-turned and true-filed lines' in his sonnet prefixed to the First Folio Shakespeare. Finally, albeit with hesitation, I incline to place a colon at the end of the first line (as in §§ 14, 18, 40, 151 and other sonnets) and to take lines 2-4 as protasis to the following quatrain. This resultant whole will, I believe, grow upon the reader, with familiarity

My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still :
 While comments of your praise, richly compiled,
Tressure their character with golden quill
And precious phrase by all the Muses filed,
 I think good thoughts, whilst other write good words,
 And like unletter'd clerk still cry Amen
 To every hymn that able spirit * affords
 In polish'd form of well-refinèd pen.

The 'unlettered clerk' is, of course, in contrast with the ordained Cleric possessed of academic qualifications,

* The 'able spirit,' repeated in 'his spirit,' § 86, means 'accomplished genius.' The 'cry Amen' is illustrated by *Macbeth*, II, ii; *Merchant of Venice*, III, i; *Richard II*, IV, i, and other passages in the plays. On § 116 I note its implications.

such as belonged to his rival in verse. But however faltering and faulty my professions may be, be sure that every thought and act hold true to their first love, and are outdone by none.

Sonnet § 86

The personal references, pointing decisively to Chapman, have been already dealt with: no express act of patronage to Chapman seems forthcoming, to justify

When your countenance fill'd up his line.

It may well be that the Sonnets helped to disappoint this hope.

Sonnet § 87 : Terms of Tenure in the Affections

By this time the widening rift had passed beyond mere literary predilections or susceptibilities. Their lives had fallen apart, in aims, in choice of associates, and in sympathetic rapport.

When thou shalt be disposed to set me light
And place my merit in the eye of scorn (§ 88.1-2)

can only mean that the friends and allies of the recipient viewed with disapproval, not unmixed with disdain, the doings and pretensions of the writer.

Farewell ! thou are too dear (too valuable) for my possessing accepts the position of estrangement. With Shakespearean felicity it is couched in legal terms drawn from tenure by terminable lease or grant. He abjures all claim to freehold or inalienable rights of tenure—

My bonds in thee are all determinate. (§ 87.4)

The return of gratitude had been made, as lawyers say, for 'valuable consideration'

For how do I hold thee but by thy granting ?

That having failed, the grant itself with its 'patent of privilege' reverts to him who made it. It had been based upon misunderstanding, and was liable to revocation

So thy great gift upon misprision growing
Comes home again on better judgement making.

The form chosen, and possibly the dissyllabic rhyming, is no mere toying with verbal conceits : it is well adapted to the occasion ; the legal formulas mask emotion, and give dignified restraint to acceptance of a wound deeply felt. Affections offered and avowed without reserve had met with unconcerned rejection. It was a mortifying defeat of hope. But he will not sue for damages, or lodge complaints, or take proceedings (as it were) for breach of promise. Rather he prefers to accept the repulse, and set it down to his own shortcomings. For himself, bygones shall be bygones, and all bad debts written off : he will dismiss the flattering dream, which had enchanted life, and wake to sober fact

Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter. (§ 87.13-14)

Sonnets §§ 88-91 : Rejected Addresses

The Sonnets that follow show how acutely, beneath a calm exterior, the sense of hurt struck home, a last drop in the cup of disappointment and chagrin. Against the world's despites he will clench his teeth, but this demands a deeper and more desperate defiance. Of this cross of crosses it can at best be said that it draws the sting from others and makes them negligible by comparison (§ 90.13-14).

Sonnets §§ 88-89 : His own Shortcomings blamed

Sonnets §§ 88-89, a companion pair, are full of psychological interest. Hauteur and sensitiveness, so often near allied, take refuge behind the mask of self-

disparagement, the Hamlet mood, that so subtly blends self-love with self-depreciation. Under changed conditions they reproduce the temper of §§ 35 and 49. Here once again the capacity for just resentment yields to the desire for coveted regard, the thirst for sympathetic understanding and response. Rather than forfeit these satisfactions and returns, he will once more take sides against himself, admit and magnify his own shortcomings, and find in them justification for the season of estrangement, and a tribute to his friend's superiority.

Throughout this group the aristocratic colouring is very marked—in the legal similes employed, in the punctilios of courtesy, reprise, and sport; and in this connection an incidental touch in § 88 deserves attention:

The injuries that to myself I do,
Doing thee vantage, double-vantage me.

The terminology of the tennis-court is introduced with the easy familiarity with which intimates interchange some colloquialism of the hunting-field, the cricket or the polo ground. From the conditions of the court, Tennis—‘the royal game’—was not a popular sport, but the most exclusive and aristocratic of diversions. Shakespeare's familiarity with the game is shown in his use of Chase, Court, Hazard, and in the mocking gift of tennis balls sent by the Dauphin to King Henry V (Act I, ii). Lord Oxford was a proficient at the game, and the tennis-court scene with Philip Sidney—plainly glanced at in *Hamlet*, II, i, ‘There falling out at tennis’—caused more talk than any incident in his career. Here, the general meaning is quite plain. Do not scruple to join in imputing the blame to me: disclaimer of an intimacy, which can only prejudice you in the public eye, will bring you to ‘vantage.’ But nevertheless the stroke means ‘double-vantage’ to me; the extra discredit falling on my shoulders I will cheerfully bear, and count it all gain, in so far as it furthers your success.

Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
That for thy right, myself will bear all wrong.

Sonnet § 90 : Come, let us kiss and part

It is not easy to commend a public 'cut' as the desirable expedient for conserving ties of affection and respect, but § 90 follows up §§ 88 and 89 in urging that it is, for the time being at any rate, better to drop all outward professions or signs of friendship, rather than risk some later breach or disavowal, which continued intimacy would only too probably involve. That would inflict a far deeper and more galling wound, than mere absence of protest in my defence at the present juncture. These dictates of a proud and sensitive temper, at this *Et tu, Brute* crisis, are expressed with admirable feeling and delicacy

Ah, do not, when my heart hath 'scaped this sorrow,
 Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe ;
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
 To linger out * a purpos'd overthrow.
 It thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
 When other petty griefs have done their spite,
 But in the onset come : so shall I taste
 At first the very worst of fortune's might,
 And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
 Compar'd with loss of thee will not seem so.

The same thought, that renunciation is better than betrayal of friendship, inspires Drayton's fine sonnet in *Idea* (first printed in 1619) :

Since there's no help, Come, let us kiss and part !

* * * * *

And when we meet at any time again,
 Be it not seen in either of our brows,
 That we one jot of former love retain !

but there is no obvious trace of verbal imitation. As between the Earl of Southampton and William Shakspeare of Stratford, the situation and social relations implied defy any attempt at solution.

The problem at this section of the series is to divine the offence, which brought about this breach of outward relations. Apart from clash of temperaments or interest, there was clearly some overt cause or pretext, which made friendship compromising. The language used does not imply a moral lapse or lapses, and the evidence of the Sonnets themselves goes far to preclude that alternative. Sonnets §§ 88 and 90 suggest rather some course of conduct persistently pursued, which risked exposure and disgrace, and was likely to compromise his *social* status, and his friends. In a courtly society hedged round with assumptions and traditions—political, social, and religious—it would be easy to multiply actions and courses of behaviour, that would excite prejudice and animosities, such as were rampant during the last twenty years of Queen Elizabeth. For one such at least, of an unexpected kind, we have the express testimony of Puttenham * (or Lord Lumley, it may be) that it was so ‘discrediting for a gentleman to seem learned, and to shew him selfe amorous of any good Art,’ that ‘notable gentlemen in the Court for that reason suppressed their writings, or published them without their own names.’ And later, Selden, in his *Table Talk*, still writes, ‘’Tis ridiculous for a Lord to print verses; ’tis well enough to make them to please himself, but to make them publick is foolish.’ It is but one alternative among several that might be suggested; but few, if any, would better fit the lines

With mine own weakness being best acquainted,
Upon thy part† I can set down a story
Of faults conceal’d, wherein I am attainted. (§ 88.4–6)

From an aspiring dramatist, seeking to win publicity and reputation by his productions, these lines would be meaningless; but for a noble writer compelled to veil his staged or published compositions under cover of a

* *The Arte of English Poesie*, I. viii. See p. 48.

† *I.e.* On your side of the case.

pseudonym they nicely express the situation, and the veil of caution or ambiguity preserved befits the theme. This interpretation is confirmed by § 100.3-4, where he apologises for employment of his Muse upon 'base subjects,' that is to say, plebeian drama.

But even if this be the leading clue, the terms used suggest some particular scandal or offence, in which the Earl of Southampton could shelter his own reputation at the expense of his friend's. ✓

Sonnet § 91 : Friendship reassured

Sonnet § 91 is the most explicit of all in recalling the directions and pursuits on which the writer's heart and earlier ambitions had been most set. In that connection we have dealt with it already.* But how comes it to occupy its present position? The closing couplet, with its fear of a final breach of friendship, connects it broadly with this central group (later, that is, than § 56), but the change of tone between it and those that immediately precede it is marked. Sonnets §§ 87-90 proposed, or even urged, that all dues and outward signs of friendship should be foregone: this treats them as the dearest of all possessions. A solution is not far to seek, if we bear in mind that we have not the other side of the correspondence—the response or the disclaimer elicited. Here, for instance, in answer to the suggestion that friendship should be dropped, the recipient may have replied (in effect) (1) That all sounds fine, but it just shows how little your professions of affection really meant; by all means fall back on the things for which in reality you care much more. Or again (2) So be it, then! but do not hereafter say that the fault rested with me. If you care so little for my friendship, I will cease to inflict it on you. Or again (3) By a simple assurance of unchanging affection, unless he wished it

* P. 96.

repudiated. And one might easily devise other answers to which this sonnet would be an appropriate rejoinder—

Having thee, of all men's pride I boast ;
 Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take
 All this away and me most wretched make.

(ll. 12-14)

Thus he clings tenaciously to affections which had so often been repaid with neglects or slights.

Sonnets §§ 92-93 : Fears of Inconstancy

Sonnets §§ 92-93 continue effusive and sentimental in their tone ; and in the latter, when we read ' Like a deceived husband,' and ' like Eve's apple ' (l. 13), there is room to ask whether they are addressed to a woman. Robertson, as his way is, adopts that conclusion, while admitting that they form part of Group §§ 88-93, which make so decisively in the opposite direction. Considering the usage of the Sonnets, the phrases quoted are far from conclusive. The union of hearts is frequently thought of in terms of marriage (notably in §§ 46, 82), and the references to the ' eye ' (l. 5) and ' looks ' (ll. 4-12) of the beloved are in line with much that precedes and follows. Upon the whole, they strongly confirm unity of destination, and reveal the sentimental basis which friendship had more and more come to assume.

Sonnets §§ 94-96 : The Canker in the Rose

These are written from a distance, and belong probably to a time when Southampton's moves and absences were incessant : on the Continent, on expeditions, or on intrigues nearer home. There is plainly no close or intimate contact. Sonnets §§ 94-96 are closely con-

nected and must be read together for true interpretation. They are in praise of self-restraint, as the best preservative of beauty. While paying tribute to irresistible attractions of personal charms and graces, they grow more and more outspoken in warnings against their misuse. Reckless indulgence in their mastery, for mere love of admiration and without regard to consequences, is a fatal error. The more fragrant the blossom, the more liable it is to taint and blight, and the fairest mansion most invites defacement (§ 95.2,9). Bear in mind the proverbial

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds (§ 94.14)

a poetic rendering of the adage *corruptio optimi pessima*. The line, already utilised in § 69.12

To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds

and here used as a proverbial clinch, has given rise to interesting discussions on chronology and authorship. It is drawn from Act II. i of *Edward III*, a play first printed anonymously in 1596. But it had already been 'several times played' before that date, and if Greene (as seems probable) was in large part the author, must have been composed not later than 1592. Another adaptation from the same play is the use of 'scarlet ornaments' for lips in § 142, and this helps to confirm the priority of the Play, implied in our own passage. Thus the chronological result is to suggest 1596 (or later) for the writing of the Sonnet; but as the Play (though not yet printed) may have been within the poet's knowledge at an earlier date, even this datum cannot be regarded as binding. It is possible that the references had some specific significance for Southampton, who at this stage became much addicted to attendance at plays.

As regards authorship, the Sonnets so rarely borrow from non-Shakespearean sources that the threefold echo does much to strengthen the case of those, who

throughout this Act II of *Edward III* discern clear traces of Shakespearean workmanship.*

Sonnet § 96 : Remonstrance

In § 96 expostulation becomes still more express. His good name and his future (ll. 13-14) are in danger : large and liberal allowance—‘large privilege’ (§ 95.13)—is indeed granted to youth, to beauty and to gentle birth (§ 96.1,2), but none the less the canker chooses for harbourage the choicest rose (§ 95.2); already the tongues of gossip make free with the excesses you indulge, and your own position and prospects are imperilled by intrigues, which involve innocent victims in their indulgence (§ 96.9-14). At this time Southampton’s intrigue with Elizabeth Vernon, among others, was in all men’s mouths, and had involved his withdrawal from Court in 1596. The prosecution of the amour, and the private marriage (for which he was committed to the Fleet) belong to 1598.

Sonnets §§ 97-99 : Parted Friends

The triplet §§ 97-99, so full of dainty poetry on the lines of sonneteering convention, results from a time of severance—‘this time removed’ in § 97.5, and ‘thou away’ (l. 12)—and the references personal or topical are not particularised. They are graceful notes of reminder to his friend in absence. Robertson assumes that they were addressed to a woman, and describes § 99 as “meretricious.”† In § 98 the opening quatrain is far more appropriate to a man, while ‘*the shadow*’ of the absent friend, and the ‘*figures of delight*’ which it evokes, reproduce the wording and the thought of §§ 27 and 53

my soul’s imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view.

* *Camb. Hist. Eng. Lit.*, V, 243-6; Masefield, 240; Robertson, 157; Tucker.

† Rob. pp. 51, 206.

The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
And you in every blessed shape we know.

Sonnet § 99 in its conventions seems to draw on the 'conceitful sonnet' of Constable,* comparing the charms of his Diana with Rose, Lily, Marigold and Violet. But indications are not wanting that the same patron is addressed here as before. '*Sweet thief*'—a marked phrase—with which the sonnet opens, is drawn from § 35.14, where there is no question about the identity of the recipient. From the same sonnet 'Roses have thorns' and 'Loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud' are reproduced in

The roses fearfully on thorns did stand (l. 7)

and

A vengeful canker eat him up to death. (l.12)

and in l. 6 there is the significant introduction of 'buds of marjoram.' The exact range of the simile has been questioned, but beyond doubt it refers to the clustering golden-brown † locks which were Southampton's special pride. (See p. 124.) Sir John Suckling, the Cavalier, borrows the metaphor in his *Tragedy of Brennoralt*, IV. iv (1646), and clearly refers it to form and flow, not colour

Hair curly and cover'd, like buds of marjoram,
Part tied in negligence, part loosely flowing.

They are a prominent feature in the Welbeck Abbey portrait, and also in that of the Earl imprisoned in the Tower, reproduced in Stopes' *Third Earl of Southampton*, pp. 94 and 253.

As regards time, § 97 points unmistakably to late summer or autumn.‡

* *Diana*, Dec. I, 9. See p. 94.

† On the colour 'brown madder' see Beeching and Tucker.

‡ In 1596 the Cadiz Expedition, in which Southampton took part, covered June 1 to August 10. In 1597, the fleet made its first inauspicious start on the Island voyage on July 10, and its second departure took place on August 17; it returned at the end of October.

And yet this time remov'd * was summer's time,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase.

On the other hand it is necessary to guard against hasty inference from the opening of § 98 :

From you I have been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him

which at first reading might seem to imply composition in April or May, and a long interval between §§ 97 and 98. As Tucker rightly notes, the reference is general, and recalls other spring-times when they had parted, and passes on to summer and winter contrasts, developing the sonnet along the familiar Petrarchan lines of contrasted seasons and charms.† So, too, in the following sonnet, § 99, 'the forward violet,' 'the lily,' the 'buds of marjoram,' and 'the rose,' do not bud or blossom simultaneously, except for poetical purposes. This knocks the bottom out of an elaborate chronological scheme, built up by Wyndham on the assumption of 'April' authorship, which would defer the composition of these Sonnets to 1600 *or later*. The second limb of his argument, that the reference to Saturn is astrological, and implies a year in which the planet Saturn was in opposition during April, is still more rickety. That 'heavy' has the secondary suggestion of melancholy, Saturnine, after the allusive and elusive manner of Shakespeare, I do not doubt. But 'Saturn' here is the rustic God of sowing, the 'old Saturn' warm'd to love, of *Cymbeline*, II, v. Planets do not 'laugh and leap' with the spirit of spring, but his presence does tempt the old God of husbandry to renew his youth. The lines are evidence that the sonnet was addressed to a man.

* *Sc.* of severance.

† For Petrarch Sonnet see S. Lee, p. 111.

Sonnets §§ 100-6 : Love in Retrospect

Sonnet § 100 and its companion sonnets are separated from their precursors by an indeterminate interval designated as 'so long' (l. 1), which might cover days, weeks or months. Few passages in the Sonnets surpass the second half of § 102 in melodious and rhythmical charm

As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days :
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.

But the special interest of the group lies in the indications of time and personal relations which they supply. § 100 tells us that already the traces of time begin to leave, or at least predict, their mark upon the brow of youth.*

Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey,
If Time have any wrinkle graven there.

But even if that be so, his trust is that loss of bloom will be more than compensated by growth of renown—

Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life ;
So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife.

This shows that the Earl of Southampton had not yet fallen under a cloud, and was still looking for public advancement. The emblems used are conventional, the 'scythe' has already found place in § 60 and reappears in § 122, while the 'crooked knife' stands for the 'bending sickle' of § 116, which has its 'hour' in § 126.2.

The first half of the Sonnet has still greater interest,

* See p. 116.

marking lapse of time by the course of the writer's own poetical activities. The lines call for comment—

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
 To speak of that which gives thee all thy might ?
 Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,
 Darkening thy power, to lend base subjects light ?
 Return, forgetful Muse, and straight redeem
 In gentle numbers time so idly spent ;
 Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem
 And gives thy pen both skill and argument.

He is not referring merely to the Sonnets, but to his poetic production as a whole. The invocation of the 'Muse' is deliberate, impersonating the poetic inspiration which supplies at once the lyrical fervour, the 'fury' or *furor poeticus* previously called 'the poet's rage' (§ 17.11) and also the classic grace that breathes in 'gentle numbers' (l. 6). These had found utterance in his earlier poems, 'the lays' upon which the dedication to the Earl had brought honour,* and which owed to him their plot and their artistic merit. It is a direct reference to the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. Since then his 'resty [*sc.* sluggish] Muse' had foregone the higher regions of classic poesy and 'imaginary sight' for 'base subjects of some worthless song,' that is to say, for themes vulgar and common, if not sordid. It is his description (with the characteristic touch of self-disparagement) of the early plays (those of the Meres' Canon of 1598,† on which he had expended his gift from the Muses, between writing the *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, and the composition of this Sonnet. It is a striking confession, and has the further interest of showing the value he himself attached to the Sonnets. They were no mere by-play of leisure, but fashioned out of what was best and choicest in his poetic range, evoked

* Tucker rightly construes 'esteem' as a subst., and 'doeth esteem,' is equal to 'doeth honour.' So, too, in 'do'st him grace' § 28, 'doing me disgrace' § 103, 'do'th thee grace,' and 'do'th glory in,' § 132.

† On these see p. 50.

in some strange way by idealising admiration for his friend

Both truth and beauty on my love depends. (§ 101.8)

Truth and beauty * have been similarly conjoined in § 14.14; here once again he has recourse to painter's terms (as in § 16 and elsewhere)

Truth needs no colour, with his colour fix'd;
Beauty no pencil [sc. brush] beauty's truth to lay.

This is the source from which Keats derived his

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
(*Ode on a Grecian Urn.*)

Herein lay the promise, or the hope, of immortality for his friend and himself, and in the closing invocation 'Then do thy office, Muse,' he applies the language of religion to his poetic vocation, aptly prefaced by the 'gilded tomb,' round which perennial chants of praise will sound through 'ages yet to be.' To this probably we owe the eventual preservation of the Sonnets.

Sonnet § 102 : Undying Song

Sonnet § 102 begins with playing on the thought already embodied in § 21.14.

I will not praise that purpose not to sell.

Do not put down my silence to flagging in the affections—but think rather that my love is too precious a thing to be 'merchandised,' that is, cheapened, by reiteration and advertisement; it is like the song of Philomel, less seldom heard as spring draws on to full summer ripeness: the familiar simile is rendered with perfect music of speech and sound. In

But that wild music burthens every bough

* Wyndham, *Introd.* cxxiv., gives parallel passages; and on Truth see comment on § 76. D. 212.

the *b* and *t* alliteration combine to perfection, and the play of meanings in 'burthens' is more than usually subtle. The raptures of the earlier minstrelsy are a weight upon all later efforts, but yet 'the burden' of the song remains unchanged.

Sonnet § 104 : The Triennium

Sonnet § 104 is full of poetic charm, but for our immediate purpose interest centres in the precise numerical data which it supplies—more exact than those in any other Sonnet. And this seems the appropriate place to collect and tabulate the incidental notes of time, which have occurred, and to see how far they tally with what is known of the doings and movements of the writer and recipient.

Assuming that the existing printed order corresponds to that of actual composition,* the statement is explicit that three full years—three winters, three Aprils, three Junes—have elapsed since first the writer fell under the fascination of his friend's charm—oddly emphasised by the punning 'Your *eye I eyed*.' † The enumeration of seasons starting from the oncome of winter suggests that the sonnet itself belongs to late Midsummer and the fall of the leaf—

Three winters cold

Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

So far as the wording goes, the April springs and summer Junes might be those following the 'three winters cold.' But it is far more natural to refer them to those forming part of the same Calendar year, and if so they will belong to 1594, 1595 and 1596 respectively. This follows from the relation of the Sonnets to the Poems : *Venus*

* On this see p. 84.

and *Adonis* was published in Summer of 1593, and forestalls the position still shown in the early Sonnets, which press upon the young Earl, as single representative of a noble line, the duty of perpetuating and transmitting by marriage that heritage of ancestral gifts and graces, of which he is now the sole depositary. The proposed match with Lady Elizabeth de Vere came to an end in or about May 1594, when the dowager Countess herself accepted the hand of Mr. Thos. Heneage. And in September 1594 a marriage was arranged between Lady Elizabeth and Lord Wm. Stanley, who by the death of his brother became prospective heir to the Earldom of Derby.

The second section of the Sonnets (§§ 17-32), from which the marriage *motif* disappears, may be assigned to these summer months *; they breathe the spirit of personal and passionate devotion, which finds expression in the dedication to *Lucrece*, issued at this time, and literary echoes from the poem are characteristic of this section.† Early in October the Earl of Southampton was at Titchfield, to celebrate his coming of age, but untoward circumstances ‡ put an abrupt end to the intended festivities, and hastened his return to London.

In Sonnet § 27 (and § 48), which shows the writer setting out on a tedious journey, the setting seems autumnal (§§ 28, 29, 38, 34), and absence was certainly prolonged; it left the door open for the shameless and supplanting amour (§§ 33-42) which threatened the wreck of friendship, but ended in unconditional forgiveness. Sonnets §§ 50 and 51 mark the season of return, probably in the spring of 1595, but apparently it brought no immediate resumption of personal intercourse. The young Earl may have sought to evade it; for one thing, at this period his time was much taken up with social ambitions and intrigues, and also with excursions to the Continent,

* See notes on §§ 18, 25.

† See pp. 126-7 and comment on § 26.

‡ For details of the Danvers homicide and flight, see Stopes, *Third Earl of Southampton*, p. 69.

which account naturally for 'the ocean which parts the shore' of § 56; for another, he was anxious to extricate himself from any engagement to Lady Elizabeth, and it is stated that he actually paid down a large sum (£5000) to redeem any personal obligation.*

§§ 57-58 still find the writer awaiting as it were the signal for readmission to the presence chamber of his liege lord. The star of Essex was now in the ascendant, and § 66 is a heart-sick outcry against the degradations and corruptions of Court life. In §§ 69 and 70 the note of warning becomes direct and personal, and it was in September of this year 1595 that Southampton's 'familiarity' with Elizabeth Vernon, first cousin of the Earl of Essex, became a society scandal. In §§ 68-69 summer is lightly touched, but § 73 brings us to autumn and the fall of the year, with its suggestions of decay and death. Sonnets §§ 79-86 are mainly taken up with the appearance of a rival poet on the scene. The identification of the poet with Chapman yields interesting chronological corroborations; the bantering notices of § 21 seem based on the *Shadow of Night* and *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, which appeared in 1594 and 1595 respectively. In Sonnets §§ 80 and 86 they are tempered by notes of admiration, which can only apply to the *Seven Books of Homer*, actually issued in 1598. These were finally dedicated to the Earl of Essex, but they had been long in hand, and

Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you (§ 86.2)

points perhaps to a stage when he had hoped to secure a more literary patron in the Earl of Southampton.

No key is at present forthcoming to unlock the background of § 97 or following Sonnets. It is plain that the writer had committed some offence or indiscretion, which entailed the risk of public obloquy, and could hardly fail to reflect discredit upon personal friends. Whether the scandal was personal or social there is nothing to

* See p. 43, and Stopes, *Third Earl*, p. 86.

show ; nor are we in a position to fill in any details of the doings of either Wm. Shakspeare or Lord Oxford at this juncture, beyond the fact that it was a period of great activity in the production of Shakespearean plays.
From § 89.8-9

I will acquaintance strangle and look strange ;
Be absent from thy walks—

it appears that they were within easy touch, but for the time being it was well that all show of friendship, and all personal intercourse, should drop, §§ 87-90, 92. Incidental messages or sonnets might pass, but there are no signs of resumed companionship before the §§ 100-3 quartet. The time covered by these sonnets must have been considerable, extending apparently over the winter of 1595 and spring of 1596. The close of § 100 shows Southampton active in the pursuit of public preferment and activities, and these were realised in the despatch of the Cadiz Expedition under the Earl of Essex and Lord Admiral Howard in June of 1596. We are thus brought to the third June mentioned in § 104, and we may well associate this sonnet and § 105 with his return.

§ 106 with its tribute to Spenser belongs fitly to the year in which the completing instalment of the *Faerie Queene* was given to the world. And here the curtain drops on the triennium of chequered friendship, which gave birth to the Sonnets : those that complete the series bear evidence of later date.

The scheme as outlined makes no claim to be final or complete ; it admits of readjustments, corroborations and corrections, as dated correspondence and other sources provide fresh data. Yet a synopsis of the kind has advantages ; it traces in the Sonnets an organised sequence of personal relationships ; it is a protection against false trails, and a useful framework for the determination of literary, personal and biographical allusions.

Sonnet § 105 : A God in Love

The opening phrase of § 105

Let not my love be call'd idolatry

is interesting, as the probable original of Ben Jonson's 'I loved the man, and do honor his memory on this side idolatry as much as any.' His familiarity with the Sonnets is clear in his tributary lines prefixed to the First Folio. The sentiment is the same as in 'A god in love,' in § 110.12. There is no clue to date, but the emphasis on 'constant' and 'constancy' favours late date, and there is nothing to be gained by transposition. It seems not merely fanciful to detect a reference to the Southampton motto, *Ung par tout, tout par ung*, in ll. 3-4

Since all alike my songs and praises be
To one, of one, still such and ever so.

The insistence on 'all' and 'one' is marked, and reiterated in the closing lines

Three themes in one . . . ('Fair, kind, and true') . . .
 Which three till now never kept seat in one.

Sonnet § 106 : Spenser, The Faerie Queene

Behind the allusions of § 106 there lies more of personal interest than might be supposed. They do not merely testify to that which the Plays so often illustrate, the sense of romance inherent in that old-world chivalry—that 'wasted time'—which his own generation had finally outlived: they are more—

When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
 And Beauty making beautiful old rime
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
 Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best . . .

the sensitive reader will at once feel that Spenser—not Chaucer, or Malory, or Cervantes—is in the writer's

mind, and the reference is ear-marked by the graceful touch of parody in '*the fairest wights*,' by 'old rime,' and still more explicitly by 'the praise of ladies dead and lovely knights' adapted from 'sing of knights and ladies' gentle deeds,' followed immediately by the tell-tale 'blazon,' all from the opening stanza of the Proem to *The Faerie Queene*. That the reference is to the second 1596 edition, containing Books IV-VI is, I think, clear from the alteration to '*lovely knights*.' 'Lovely' in the Sonnets * stands for *loveable* (amabiles), at once inspiring and requiting love, and it will be remembered that the representative or Patron knights of Bks. IV, V, VI are the knights of Friendship, Justice and Courtesy. Spenser enriched his first issue with a number of Sonnets to the most illustrious patrons of literature, Lord Grey, Lord Burghley, Sir W. Raleigh and others, among whom the Earl of Essex and the Earl of Oxenforde had a prominent place. This was the Sonnet in which Spenser congratulated the Earl of Oxford on

the love which thou doest beare
To th' Heliconian ymps, and they to thee,
They unto thee, and thou to them, most deare †

and Sonnet § 106 is the requital of appreciation. Late 1596 would be most apt as a recognition of the enlarged and completed *Faerie Queene* published in that year. From the tone of the poem it is clear that it was written before the final disaster at Kilcolman in 1598, and the poet's death in January 1599, and no less certainly before Southampton's disgrace in 1598. One other point is worth notice in connection with what follows. One must not press a sonnet of personal compliment too hard, but it will be observed that all reference to Gloriana or the Fairy Queen is excluded, and that the ideal King Arthur, on whose model the poet designs 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous

* E.g. §§ 5, 18, 54, 79, 126.

† See p. 60.

and gentle discipline,' * is identified with the recipient of the Sonnet. It is an invitation to realise and rise to the possibilities that lie before him.

Sonnet § 107 : Death of Queen Elizabeth

The ensuing sonnets, to judge by the internal evidence, represent a sequel separated from the rest by a long interval, reflected in the language of §§ 108–110, 119–120, and elsewhere. Their note is often retrospective, and includes experiences not touched in previous sections. Time, Age, Decay are deepening their traces (§§ 108, 123), but affection recovers much of its first warmth, with a note of deepened and tried devotion (§§ 109, 110).

✓ For determination of date § 107 is the most crucial. If associated with the death of Queen Elizabeth, it implies an interval covering and pretty closely coinciding with the most clouded portion of Southampton's career, the withdrawal from Court, the participation in the Island expedition (1597), the mission to France, the clandestine marriage with Elizabeth Vernon (1598), followed by disgrace and imprisonment (1599), and the entanglement in the Irish schemes and adventures of Essex (1599),¹ culminating in sentence of treason and imprisonment in the Tower till the end of the Queen's life. More than any sonnet in the series, it holds out clear indications of time and occasion. Reference to current events is unmistakable, and goes far towards solving uncertainties of interpretation. Those who approach the Sonnets as detached units, not looking for coherence or order within the series, and indifferent to

* From the Expository Letter of the Author to Sir Walter Raleigh, prefixed to the poem and expounding his intention (January 23, 1589).

the question of authorship or recipient, do not hesitate to refer the sonnet to the death of Queen Elizabeth, and the accession of King James. Even those who cannot bring themselves to face a date so late as 1603, have to admit the cogency of the pleas advanced, and are at a loss to find any other conjuncture that satisfies the terms employed.

S. Butler, ever the sport of paradox, describes in the advance of the Spanish Armada 'the mortal moon's eclipse' ! Tyler argues for the rebellion of Essex, which was nipped in the bud before it began. Fleay and Gollancz upheld the Treaty of Vervins in 1598. But none of these accounts for the language of elated hope, in ll. 7-10 ; nor do they allow any reference in ll. 3-4 to the imprisonment of Southampton in the Tower, from February 1601 to March 1603—subject to strict surveillance and even to execution of the suspended sentence—till the end of Elizabeth's reign. Historically, the sonnet is left hanging in the air.

Coming to positive exegesis, 'the *mortal moon*' must mean a person, and in the poetic conventions of the time that person could hardly be other than Elizabeth herself : Cynthia, Diana and the like had become, alike in Pastoral, in Masque and Sonnet,* virtual synonyms for the Virgin Queen. Beyond that, the metaphors used—especially when we are dealing with Shakespearean quality of thought—are to some extent ambiguous ; 'her eclipse endured' *may* point to some temporary obscuration of authority or popular favour, from which she has re-emerged resplendent, but it can also, beyond all question, stand for death, as, for instance, in 1 *Henry VI*, IV. v,

Then here I take my leave of thee, fair son,
Born to eclipse thy life this afternoon.

* *Cynthia*. The lead set by Raleigh and Spenser, in *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* (1591—printed 1595), was followed by F. Davison, Ode 'Of Cynthia' in *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602) ; by B. Barnes, *Parthenophe and Parthenophil* ; by Lyly in his masques ; by Ben Jonson in *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), and many others.

That is indeed the normal and accepted use, and here it has this in its favour, that the intention of the following lines at once becomes clear and intelligible, which cannot be said of the rival hypotheses.*

And the sad augurs mock their own presage ;
 Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
 And peace proclaims olives of endless age

do not answer to the situation that followed the peace of Vervins, which was accepted rather than welcomed by Elizabeth, and which did not formally end the state of war with Spain. Of the Armada they are ludicrous. And in connection with the imbecile *émeute* of Essex, it seems impossible to extract a meaning out of 'the sad augurs mock their own presage.' To the Queen's death, on the other hand, and its immediate consequences, every word seems apposite. The political croakers and prophets of evil had been many ; in their gloomy forebodings it would be the inevitable signal for a disputed succession, for disruption of the realm, for war with France—allied, perhaps, with Spain, with Scotland, or with both. Their forecasts were prevented by the dying decision and gesture of Elizabeth, and the masterly foresight of the ministers of state ; and the 'sad augurs' were among the foremost to disclaim their vaticinations, and to join the race for royal favour and homage. The union of the two Crowns in the person of James—obliquely touched in the dexterous 'crown themselves'—seemed like the final quietus of inveterate and interminable feuds.

And peace proclaims olives of endless age

The title-role of peacemaker (*Rex Pacificus*), at home and abroad, in Church and State, was that to which James aspired above all others, and which others at the outset hoped from him. That hope was deemed worthy

* Tyler's attempt to refer them to the adherents of Essex, and to the congratulations sent to the Queen by James, is a hopeless confession of weakness.

of a place in the forefront of the authorised version of the English Bible. 'The appearance of your Majesty, as of the Sun in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists.' The phrase used has an interesting parallel in Gerv. Markham's *Honour in his Perfection*, devoted to the exploits of the illustrious Earls of Oxenford, Southampton, Essex and Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, in which he describes 'the incomparable King James' as 'entering not with an olive branch in his hand, but with a whole Forest of *Olives* round about him.'

The attitude to Elizabeth and her regime is that which the body of Shakespearean literature would lead us to expect—a loyal acceptance of the constituted order, coupled with something of ironical detachment and reserve. Too often had he seen merit ignored, services unrequited (§ 25) and gilded honour shamefully misplaced (§ 66), to put his trust in princes or to join the throng of worshippers. Even in this sonnet 'tyrants' crests' has in it a touch of disdain for the powers that be. Among the funeral wreaths that decked the queenly bier none came from the hand of Shakespeare, and the silence is significant.* There were passages and allusions in his plays which she openly resented; and the abdication scenes from *Richard II* were in February 1601 exploited as a signal for the demonstration of Essex, in which Southampton was so deeply implicated.

If addressed to Southampton, the opening lines at once assume specific and appropriate meaning. After his return from the Azores voyage, at the end of October 1597, Southampton resumed attendance at Court, and renewed intimacy with Elizabeth Vernon. January 1598 witnessed the violent and unseemly fracas between him and Ambrose Willoughby, which put him out of favour with the Queen. A little later he left for the Continent, and found a place in the suite of Sir Robt.

* If Chettle's 'Melicert' signifies Shakespeare, the abstention was deliberate.

Cecil at Paris. There he stayed on for some months, planning a more extended tour in Italy ; but in August made a flying visit to London, to regularise by private nuptials the birth of a child whom Elizabeth Vernon was now expecting. As soon as the news came to the ears of the Queen, she gave orders for instant recall ; delays and evasions only incensed her more ; and on the Earl's return, both incriminated parties were lodged in the Fleet, disgraced 'for contempt.' To repair his damaged fortunes, he sought service under Essex' command in Ireland ; there, during the autumn of 1600, he became more and more entangled in his treasonable ambitions, and none of his associates committed himself more deeply in the feather-headed *émeute* staged by Essex in February 1601. Among other things he ordered or connived at the performance of *Richard II* at the Globe on February 7th. This does not in itself imply the author's own complicity, but Shakespeare's sympathies with the fortunes of Essex had been openly proclaimed in the Chorus prologue to the last Act of *Henry V*

Were now the general of our gracious empress,
As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached upon his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him.

Among the rare allusions to contemporary politics there is none so express and personal as this tribute to the Earl of Essex. At the trial for high treason, held before the Lord High Steward's Court (February 17th-19th) in Westminster Hall, the Earl of Oxford was senior among the twenty-five judges, and Francis Bacon counsel for the prosecution. The death sentence was passed on February 19th, and carried into effect on February 25th. In the case of Southampton, the Court exercised their wide prerogative, and commuted the capital punishment to imprisonment for life. Southampton was committed to the Tower, and there remained

till, in 1603, the 'mortal moon's eclipse' effected his release: this could not be more epigrammatically expressed than as a life 'supposed as forfeit to a confin'd doom' (§ 107.4). Exact interpretation of the three preceding lines

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

is a puzzle, on which it would be folly to dogmatise. The ice is thin; but assuming that the Sonnet follows immediately upon the death of Queen Elizabeth, and that its effect on the fortunes of Southampton is still uncertain, I should paraphrase thus: 'Neither the apprehensions which I felt (consequent on your actions, trial and sentence), nor the public hopes and expectations which greet the new regime, suffice as yet to decide your destinies, and the hopes which, with true and loyal affection, I entertain for your future career.' This is at least precise and intelligible—and few commentators get so far even as that. Almost the first act of the new monarch (April 10th, 1603) was to order Southampton's release, and to restore his forfeited rank, estates, and position in affairs.

Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh—

The sonnet, on our showing, was written to the accompaniment of April sun and shower, and in the closing lines, 'Death to me subscribes . . .,' the poet sees in Southampton's release and restoration a promise that his own associated hopes of immortality will after all find fulfilment.

It has seemed right to subject these sonnets to detailed and close examination in view of the important consequences that follow. As the result—either we must accept displacement, and then vainly attempt to define its limits, or we must interpose a gap of some six years, from Autumn 1596 or early 1597 to March

1603, between Sonnets §§ 106 and 107. This interval, it will be noted, coincides with the restless, tempestuous years during which Southampton, dragged at the heels of Essex, plunged from adventure to adventure, at home and on the Continent, till he landed himself under sentence of high treason and attainder, a prisoner in the Tower for life. Further, if we accept the implication of § 125, we shall assign Sonnets §§ 108-125 to the months following the death of Elizabeth in March 1603, and place the termination of the whole series before 1604. I find no references or expressions in this group that seem impatient of this date, but a small group, particularly §§ 117-121, and § 122, are not what might be expected, and may have been inserted at a venture by the Editor. Incidentally (though it does not affect the argument) it may be noticed that the resultant gap, from the end of 1596 to the opening of 1603, corresponds with the period of highest frequency in the production of Shakespearean drama ; and we must be on the watch for references relevant to this, and also for any close parallels or reminiscences of plays belonging to this period.

The problem of interpretation has been complicated by the effort to associate authorship with William Shakspeare, the playwright. As a tribute to a literary patron, or as addressed by an actor to a leading nobleman* (Southampton, Pembroke or another), Sonnet § 107 is at every turn inexplicable : it was written by some one, and to some one, whose fortunes and relations were directly affected by changes in affairs of state : and the tone is that of privileged and intimate concern. Both writer and recipient were in touch with Court circles, and if Southampton was recipient it would be hard to suggest a writer more suited to the role than the Earl of Oxford.

* In respect of *intimacy*, the same applies to §§ 108, 109, 110, 120, and many other Sonnets.

Sonnets §§ 108-9 : ' Heard Melodies are Sweet '

Sonnets §§ 108 and 109, similar in mood though differing in subject-matter, give weighty support to the inference of a long interval between § 107 and the preceding sonnets. The changes noted in personal appearance are marked and decisive.

eternal love in love's fresh case
 Weighs not the dust and injury of age,
 Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
 But makes antiquity for aye his page.

' Love's *fresh case* ' may refer to changed conditions, but primarily, no doubt, to the exterior form and habit in which love is housed, and which now shows the wear and tear of age. An interval of years ought to separate

My love's sweet face survey,
 If Time have any wrinkle graven there (§ 100.9-10)

from ' the necessary,' that is the inevitable, ' wrinkles ' denoted in our Sonnet, and a still longer interspace ' the page ' in his first bloom from that threshold of ' antiquity ' which he has now passed. In 1603 Southampton, who had lived hard and in recent years gone through a succession of adventures, campaigns and imprisonments, completed his thirtieth year.* In passing it may be noted that the terms of courtly endearment

That may express my love or thy dear merit

to the ' sweet boy ' whom he addresses,† remain (here and in § 109) as warm as in any of the early sonnets. The comparison of their reiteration to the formulas of liturgical worship and even the words of the Lord's prayer in

I hallowed thy fair name

is interesting, and may be considered with later parallels (§ 116).

* Born October 1573.

† See p. 98.

Sonnet § 109 : A Protestation

In § 109 the years of 'absence,' of estranging severance, are regarded from another standpoint. Their routes, their interests, and the company into which they had been thrown, had indeed widely diverged : but with the result that experience had proved and established the pre-eminence of that first love, which for the writer stands alone, 'the rose'—the peerless flower of flowers—in 'this wide universe.' In the Sonnets (§§ 1, 35, 54, 67, 95, 98, 130) as in the plays, Shakespeare is never weary of the rose, and for its use as symbol of perfection we may compare *Hamlet*, III, i, 160, 'the expectancy and rose of the fair state.' The phrase 'Just [*sc.* punctual] to the time' I take to refer to Southampton's release. Prior to that, during the years of 'absence,' close intercourse would have been impossible.

The warmth of affection and devotion expressed in the closing lines

For nothing this wide universe I call
Save thou, my rose ; in it thou art my all

and reiterated in the next sonnet

A god in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast
(§ 110.12-14)

implies an equality in friendship hopelessly irreconcilable with the respective positions of William Shakspeare and the Earl of Southampton. Bradley would for this reason place these sonnets (as well as § 120) among the 'sonnets to private friends,' while Robinson numbers §§ 109-112 among those addressed to a woman. Addressed by peer to peer, the language—given the warmth of affection—takes appropriate colour, and phrases like

bring water for my stain (§ 109.8)

All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood (§ 109.10)

I made myself a motley to the view (§ 110.2)

public means which public manners breeds (§ 111.4)

are all tuned to the right note.

Sonnet § 110 : Self-Analysis

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
 And made myself a motley to the view,
Gor'd my own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
 Made old offences of affections new ;
 Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
 Askance and strangely ; but, by all above,
 These blanches gave my heart another youth,
 And worse essays prov'd thee my best of love.
 Now all is done, have what shall have no end :
 Mine appetite I never more will grind
 On newer proof, to try an older friend,
 A god in love, to whom I am confined.
 Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
 Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

This most enigmatic of Sonnets is crucial for identification of authorship. Early editors pounced eagerly on passages like this and § 23 referring to the stage, and somewhat gratuitously put a similar interpretation on § 111.4, as authentic evidences of the hand of William Shakspeare, actor and playwright. But commentators of more refined discernment find in these lines a source of very serious embarrassment. The difficulty is that the attitude taken towards the drama and the stage is precisely that which a professional actor or playwright, whose name and fortune depended on that career, would be the last to adopt or to acknowledge ; above all in addressing the patron, whose countenance had been earned and still depended upon the exercise of that vocation. How, of all people in the world, could William Shakspeare, actor and playwright, in the full tide of his career pour scorn and self-reproach upon the pursuits and pre-occupations to which he owed everything ?

In the face of this difficulty extremists cut the knot by denying Shakespearean authorship, or by imputing mere dramatic responsibility in composing a sonnet for a woman, or to a woman, or connected with some incidental liaison to which he was made privy.* More cautious critics meet the dilemma in another way. Wyndham does not face the issue: but Beeching, followed by Bradley,† denies that there is ‘any reference to the poet’s profession as player.’ It deals only with social or personal aberrations of some kind. And endorsing this view, Tucker adds that an actor does not ‘gore his own thoughts’ or ‘make old offences of affections new.’ It is a way out of the difficulty, that leaves everything in the clouds—and that may be the end. But the device is open to a more serious objection: it does not give just, or adequate, values to the terms employed, in the context in which they stand. ‘Motley’ is distinctive of the stage, and still more so ‘*motley to the view*,’ that is, to the eye of the public whom the motley entertains. Another poet might have dropped into such metaphor in a more or less casual way, and passed on to expressions, which apart from dramatic application became obscure and unintelligible; but for a poet-player, especially one so sensitive to the use and values of words, to have used these terms without reference to his own vocation, seems a literary impossibility; and it destroys all clue to phrases which point to experiences as intense and poignant as any recorded in the Sonnets. ‘The Sonnet gives the confession of a favourite of society’ (Beeching), or ‘the theme is simply that of his lapses and aberrations,’ and ‘Gored my own thought, viz. by affecting baser sentiments than I really possessed’ (Tucker), seem to me weak and unhelpful attenuations of what to the author had been a soul-

* According to Massey the sonnet was composed for presentation to Elizabeth Vernon by the Earl of Southampton, prior to their clandestine marriage. Robertson, pp. 173–181, gives a sympathetic summary of these vagaries.

† *Oxford Lectures*, p. 322.

shaking catastrophe. The exact nature of that catastrophe rests upon interpretative conjecture. Tyler, relying directly on the language of § 121, and many others in his wake, assumes some moral lapse* which had outraged public opinion and exposed the author's reputation to grave public scandal. Even if some such episode lies in the background (to which our present sonnet gives no support), it does not account for the phrases used, and was of subordinate or negligible account. To my reading the words point rather to violent reactions—mental, emotional and social—which had provoked intense inner strain, as well as outer misunderstanding and disapproval, and which through tempestuous storms at last worked out their own salvation by restoring him to that haven of calm which is ensured by tried and proved affections.

In the development of Shakespearean drama it is agreed that somewhere about 1901 a change comes over the spirit of the scene, affecting not merely literary style and habit, but the whole outlook upon life in the delineation of character, motive and consequence. Without more exact chronological determination of the composition, as well as the actual production, of plays, it is impossible to date the change precisely, and without guiding biographical data impossible to analyse the contributory causes. Whether it should be ascribed to injurious strokes of fate, or to embittering vicissitudes of personal experience, or to overwrought conditions of nerve or brain, remains an unsolved mystery. But the change declares itself in the province alike of the Comic and the Tragic Muse. In Measure for Measure, for instance, there is a new vein of corrosive doubt and disillusion, the index of a spirit vexed and disquieted, ready with almost misanthropic irony to question the existence of human goodness or the beneficence of the divine action. In Tragedy it creates the Iago type of diabolical and successful malignity, and passes on—in

* So Tucker, p. xxxv.

a Macbeth or Antony or Coriolanus—to the defeat of loyalty or valour or honour by the sinister powers of ambition or sensuality or egoistic pride. They are creations of a mind ill at ease with itself and with human kind, and the sonnet becomes intelligible as an outcome of experiences associated with this phase of dramatic activities.

Of these—whether originating with Shakspeare, or the Earl of Oxford, or another—we know practically nothing. They are shrouded in mist or irrelevances, almost as though there had been wilful camouflage. We can but say that they coincide with the period of most rapid and intense production. In 1598 the *Globe* Playhouse on the Bankside replaced the old *Theater* at Shoreditch, and became the House *par excellence* in which from that date onwards Shakespearean plays were staged. The rate and volume of production rivalled that of the Athenian stage of old, and so, too, did inequalities of execution. Our sonnet is in the nature of a personal confession, shot with self-criticism and self-reproach. The writer had resumed interests and associations, from which for a time he had held aloof. They are those of the stage and stage-players, to whom between 1580 and 1590 he had contributed not merely official patronage but also personal cooperation. } This exposed him to social tabus which he was not in a position to defy.* Such associations were regarded as derogatory to his rank and status, and gave a handle to his enemies and rivals at Court. Later, he could ignore that risk, and returned to his first love, in forms even more uncompromising than before. In 1602 a petition was preferred to Privy Council, praying that the Earl of Oxford's Players should be restricted to the Boar's Head.† Here he acknowledges the indignities and condescensions which it entailed—

'Tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view.

* §§ 110–112. See Comment on § 90 (p. 230).

† Chapman, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV. 334–5.

To paraphrase and particularise these lines is offensive, but it is necessary to make their meaning plain. Only very imperfectly can we estimate the pressure of circumstances and conditions, the current conventions of the stage, the license and degradations of the vulgar taste, the clamour of the groundlings and the pit, the Byronic itch of composition, the concessions to collaborative help, the whims and eccentricities of individual actors, the innumerable compromises—artistic, literary and ethical—which went to the making of Shakespearean drama. First and foremost in his own self-criticism comes the introduction of ‘the motley’ element, the antics of clowns and pages and farcers, the interludes of coarse or vulgar banter, of obscene and mirthless wit, which so often injure unity, plot and characterisation. Nor was the writer’s view restricted to that which survives in print: on the Elizabethan stage much was improvised and topical, but for that, too, the playwright manager was in large measure held responsible; he provided the openings, and gave his sanction. In so far as the Earl of Oxford’s Company is concerned, there was a stage (though earlier in its record) when acrobats and tumblers added variety attractions, but in this sonnet the references seem purely literary and dramatic.

Gor’d mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
a fine and pregnant paradox, is one of the most poignant epigrams in the Sonnets. *Troilus and Cressida*, assigned by the best authorities to this period of Shakespearean drama,* supplies the most telling parallels—

Tro. : Let Paris bleed ; ’tis but a scar to scorn :
Paris is gor’d with Menelaus’ horn.

and again

Achilles : I see my reputation is at stake,
My fame is shrewdly gor’d.

the figure is from the bull-ring, and pictures the nobler

* *Camb. Engl. Lit.*, V. 195-6.

creature baited into inflicting wounds upon inferior antagonists. It is Shakespeare's own pre-endorsement of Ben Jonson's 'Would he had blotted a thousand!' and betrays the sensitive compunctions which underlay the nonchalant bravado. Too often had he inflicted deadly hurts on his own thoughts, and subjected them to humiliating degradations; too often consented '*to sell cheap what was most dear.*' Beside the Falstaff of *Henry IV* there is the Falstaff of *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives*; beside Mark Antony of *Julius Cæsar*, Antony of the title-role; beside Claudio of *Much Ado*, Claudio of *Measure for Measure*; beside Beatrice Hero, and so on without end, in a theme beyond our scope.

The lines that follow are enigmatic; but the '*affections new,*' under whose influence he had 'look'd on truth askance and strangely,' may well represent that pessimistic and at times cynical vein, those '*blenches*'—aberrations and distempers of a mind diseased,' and 'written troubles of the brain'—which found vent in the later tragedies. If that be so, II. 7–12 depict the release from storm and turmoil of spirit, and that restoration to the harbourage of the first affections, which (with however unfinished a dominion) prevails in *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* and (so far as authentic) in *The Tempest*.

Sonnet § 111 : The Medicine of Pity

Sonnet § 111 continues the apologia, but pursues it along the lines of personal relationship; it preserves the contrast between these Sonnets and those which preceded the long interval of silence and practical estrangement.

The Sonnets (say from §§ 94 to 104) passed through various gradations of doubt, concern and apprehension to warning and remonstrance. Now the balance is reversed. The claim for forbearance comes from his own side, in answer to words of 'chiding' or reproof

received from his friend. He asks for understanding and sympathy in the tasks to which he has been committed. They call for pity rather than for blame: so far as there is fault, ascribe it to that evil star, which compels me to courses injurious to self-respect, and to those 'evil communications, which corrupt good manners.'

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.

The line must refer to duties rendered in return for the annual grant or salary received from the Crown. *If* those were concerned with Revels and public entertainments (see p. 65), 'public manners' will refer to the codes and standards of public taste, for which he had to cater without regard to his own position or reputation. There have been many other suggestions,* which I need not recapitulate. Incidentally, those who refer the words to William Shakspeare, ascribe to them very much the same content, though from quite a different angle. 'Thence . . . my name receives a brand' means a very different thing on the lips of Oxford. The problem posed, it will be noted, is not that of the actor for his stage-parts, but that of the dramatist for his creations. The material in which he had to work—dramatic representation of multifarious types of human temperament, passion and emotion—tends to affect his own nature

And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand (ll. 6-7).

It is an interesting fragment of self-analysis. He takes for the time the colour of that which his imagination conjures into being. He recognises his need of a counter-active, even if it be harsh to the taste—

* For example, Looney refers them to the status of 'public Ward'; Randall Davies, p. 35, to Bacon's public duties as Advocate!

Like a willing patient, I will drink
 Potions of eisel 'gainst my strong infection.*

But there is an antiseptic more potent still, in the tonic
 cordials of pity and affection.

Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye
 Even that your pity is enough to cure me.†

Sonnets §§ 112-113 : The Tonic of True Love

From the friend—now once again restored to personal intercourse (§ 113.1)—he received the assurances, 'the love and pity' which he craved. They were enough to heal his scars, the 'impression' or 'brand' (§ 111.5), the stigma which public opinion had sought to fasten on his good name; and fortified by them he could turn a deaf ear—'his adder's sense' ‡—to critic or to flatterer. In l. 4, 'o'er-green,' with which compare 'o'er-snow' (§ 5.8), means cover with fresh spring beauty; in the Sonnets 'green' habitually conveys this idea (§§ 63, 68, 104). Sonnet § 113 goes beyond § 112 in protestations that his friend's praise or blame is the one index of merit or demerit to which he attaches any weight; compared with that he could put no trust even in his own eyes. The opening, 'Since I left you,' shows that they had been enjoying personal intercourse: it does not refer to the long interval of separation. Southampton was released on April 10th; King James' state entry into London took place in May; the Coronation not till July 25th.

* In the following line Tucker's suggested emendation is most attractive

No bitter *nīs* that I will bitter think.

The gain in emphasis and rhythm is great, as well as in mere grammar. Chaucerian 'Nis' for 'is not'—on the model of 'nam,' 'nast,' 'nas' (was not), 'nath,' 'nil,' 'nolde,' and the like—is used by Spenser and by Raleigh.

† The closing rhyme 'assure ye' with 'cure me' is unusually loose, like 'love thee' with 'prove me' in § 26. Knox Pooler suggests 'assure me,' but see p. 87.

‡ Ps. 58.4—used also in *Troilus Cres.* II. ii. 171.

The renewal of rapport, to which these Sonnets (§§ 113–119) bear witness, is full of psychological interest.

Sonnet § 114 : Accession of James I—Flattery

Sonnet § 114 invites us to review the situation in the opening summer of 1603. The interval since Southampton's imprisonment in February 1601 had seen the composition and production of some of Shakespeare's greatest masterpieces. Southampton had himself become an ardent patron and connoisseur of the drama; in autumn of 1599 we read of 'his going to plays every day.'* And the accession of King James was the signal for a new outburst of theatrical activities. The premier company of actors, known successively as Lord Leicester's, Lord Strange's and the Lord Chamberlain's—the recognised exponents of Shakespearean drama—who included in their company Richard Burbage, John Hemming, Henry Condell and William Shakspeare himself, attained to the dignity of The King's Players, and had their assigned place in the Coronation ceremonies. The sonnet is the acknowledgment of tributes of appreciative praise received from his friend, the Earl of Southampton. The opening couplet is peculiarly apposite to the juncture, and adds not a little to the piquancy of the sonnet.

Or whether doth my mind, being crowned with you,
Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery ?

His fear is that praises so unstinted should falsify his true deserts, like that flattery which (as the day's experience shows) is the bane of kings. Or can it be that my source of inspiration—'your love'—transmutes to gold the base metal and the dross of unrefined humanity ?

Your love taught it this alchemy
To make of monsters and things indigest
Such cherubins as your sweet self resemble (ll. 4–6).

* Sidney Papers, ii. 182.

'Indigest,' used also in *King John*, V. vii. 26,* and in 3 *Henry VI*, V. vi. is from the Latin *rudis indigestaque moles*, and denotes the raw slag on which the alchemist operates. Cherubins become rather a favourite term in the later plays. The first alternative, he fears, is true; yet he must partake of the proffered cup, unquestioning. The metaphor of the tasting-cup (used in *King John*, V. vi. 28) is abrupt and unusual, and commentators have failed to find in it any propriety.

Mine eye well knows what with his gust is 'greeing,
And to his palate doth prepare the cup (ll. 11-12).

It was a feature in the almost forgotten ritual of Coronation, revived in the petition presented in July 1603 by Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, for the observance of his ancestral rights as Great Chamberlain, 'to serve our Lord the King with water before and after eating, the day of the Coronation, and to have as their right the basins and towels *and a tasting cup*, etc., etc.'* Thus the sonnet becomes a telling corroboration of authorship and date.

Sonnet § 115 : Love Grows with Growth

The opening phrase does not recall specific lines, but faithfully represents the general tenor of such Sonnets as §§ 17, 18, and many more. Nowhere is the sense of love's fruition more conscious and assured. The earlier love seemed in its own kind perfection, and could not picture to itself a fuller flame (cf. § 109.2). But *Love* in its nature, as well as in allegory, is a *Babe*, endowed with potentialities of expanding growth, for which Time, the transformer and so often the undoer, gives unimagined opportunities; and the thought leads on to the quatrains of the succeeding sonnet.

* Ward, p. 346.

Sonnet § 116 : Love's Beacon Star

This is another good instance of a sonnet in which successive, and to some extent contrasted, quatrains, build up a stately whole. The first (which Saintsbury singles out as 'that most magnificent quatrain of all') commends the sacredness of plighted love with almost ritual formality, for which Scriptural Latinisms are fittingly employed.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments

is a direct adaptation from the Book of Common Prayer, which is similarly drawn on at the wedding scene in *Much Ado* IV. i. 12. The following lines, too, are, I think, inspired from Scriptural sources. At any rate, 'My covenant will I not break, nor *alter* the thing that is gone out of my lips' (Ps. lxxxix. 34) is singularly apposite to the context and sense; and, again, to a modern ear

Or bends with the remover to remove

inevitably suggests 'He that removeth his neighbour's landmark' of Deut. xxvii. 17, and the Communion Service; and this is borne out by 'mark' in the next line. 'Bends' remains perplexing, but used of diverting a boundary line gives better sense than any other I have seen attributed to it. Allusions to religious formulas or observances are scanty in Shakespeare, yet enough to indicate the trend of his affinities. To one who has approached Elizabethan literature from the ecclesiastical side—through the writings, say, of Parker, Whitgift, Cartwright, Hooker, Jewel—the contrast is arresting. Treatises, pamphlets, homilies, tomes of controversy contain not a line of poetry or a reference to drama; while in the dramatists there is barely a reference to what to 'The Other Half-Rome' is the one

topic of absorbing interest. They move in different hemispheres ; and it is almost refreshing to come across Tom Nash in the thick of the Marprelate scrimmage, bespattering opponents with mud and scurrilities. Catholic uses appear to interest Shakespeare chiefly or only from the romantic side of medieval charm. What moral sympathies he has with monk or nun, turn on ascetic rather than strictly Christian values. And on the other hand, for stage purposes, impersonations of Puritan types are always derogatory or disdainful. Of the religion of experience he shows no hold ; but the similes from the ' unlettered Clerk ' intoning his ' Amen ' in § 85, and the ' adder's sense ' drawn from Ps. lviii. 4, show plainly to what forms of service he was accustomed.*

The landmark not to be removed of the first quatrain leads on to a new *motif* in the ' ever-fixed mark ' of the second, imaged as the saving beacon of the storm-tossed

* As affecting authorship, the Stratford tomb and monument are sufficient voucher for William Shakspeare ; similarly, Edward de Vere was buried and commemorated in the Chancel of St. Augustine's, Hackney, which was demolished in 1790. His father was an adherent of the Reformed faith, and his boyhood had been passed among the Protestant influences of the Cecil household, and the tutelage of Arthur Golding, where Prayers Morning and Evening were part of the prescribed regimen. In 1571 Golding dedicated to him his *John Calvin's version of the Psalms of David* (see p. 12). Incidentally, he appears to have toyed with Roman Catholicism (see p. 41), but only from the social side, and he soon found it incompatible with his patriotic loyalties. More explicit testimony will be found in *Honour and his Perfection*, or *A Treatise in Commendation of Henry, Earl of Oxenford, Henry Earl of Southampton, Robert Earle of Essex, and . . . Robert Bartue, Lord Willoughby of Eresby*. In this panegyric tribute to the De Veres, whom he derives lineally from the Roman Emperor Verus, the points which Gervase Markham singles out in praise of Edward, the 17th Earl, are unexpected and significant. He had known him personally, and the tribute is addressed to Henry the 18th Earl, the Earl of Southampton, and their colleagues in the field. *Honestus, Pietas et Magnanimus* is his summary of the 17th Earl. After dwelling on ' the unrivalled honour which he won for this Kingdom ' in travels on the Continent, and the open-handed liberality which he extended to all and sundry, he concludes with a special tribute to the abundance of his alms, to his ' support of Religion and Learning,' and to his ' holy and religious concern in the Chapels and Churches he did frequent.' This eclectic position—voiced in the world of letters by Erasmus—is the true-born child of the Renaissance, and in perfect accord with the general impression produced by the Sonnets.

mariner. 'Mark' or 'sea-mark' is used of the light-house in *Coriolanus* V. iii. 74

Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw,
And saving those that eye thee.

Love is the Pharos, whose starry ray guides 'every wandering bark' to its haven of calm. The last line of the stanza

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken

appears to play on astronomical conceits of altitude and angular value or range. But the applied meaning is tolerably clear—the higher above us the love on which our heart is set, the surer becomes its saving worth.

The third quatrain is one of the most perfect in the Sonnets. The sickle of time, keen and pitiless, reaps its short-lived victories; but '*Love's* not *Time's* fool' * (§ 124.13). Love has eternity.

In conclusion, I cannot forbear calling attention to a striking parallel in mood and actual expression, which occurs in the letter addressed by the Earl of Oxford to his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Cecil, Chief Secretary of State, a few days before King James' arrival in London on May 11th. Looking back on the Queen's death, and as yet uncertain what the future held in store, he writes, 'In this *common shipwreck* mine is above all the rest, whom she [the Queen] hath left to try my fortune *among the alterations of time and chance*, either without sail whereby to take the advantage of any prosperous gale,† or with anchor to ride till the storm be overpast' (Ps. lvii. 1).

* The phrase recurs in § 124; and is also illustrated by 'Life time's fool' in 1 *Henry IV*, V. iv. 81.

† For verbal illustration, compare

calm sea, auspicious gales (*Tempest*, V. i.),

thy prosperous helm (*All's Well*, III. iii),

a prosperous south-wind friendly (*Winter's Tale*, V. i),

and similar passages.

Sonnet § 117 : Constancy in Love

Sonnet § 116 is a declaration of unalterable constancy in love, and it is followed in § 117 by a still more vehement disclaimer of unfounded misapprehensions. The writer is on his defence against complaints and recriminations, which charged him with neglects and slights, with selfish pre-occupation in his own schemes and interests at the expense of prior claims of friendship. It is a new note, imparting to this little group of Sonnets a colour of their own.

That the charges refer to recent occurrences, and imputed breaches of honourable obligation is plain ; but beyond that the terms are inconclusive, poetry of this kind does not specify particulars. Robertson finds the language unintelligible save as addressed to a woman,* yet the terms and metaphors employed—the ‘ great deserts,’ the legal ‘ bonds,’ the ‘ booking ’ of arrears and dues, the ‘ dear-purchased right,’ the ‘ hoisted sail,’ the ‘ levelling ’ and ‘ shooting ’ (with arquebus or pistol)—are only in keeping as addressed by man to man. And if the sonnet may be referred to the weeks following the King’s accession and arrival, to May and June of 1603, an explanation is to hand. Southampton’s release, one of the King’s first acts, took place on April 10 ; and his immediate concern was with the restoration of his rights, rank and possessions, forfeited by the sentence of attainder. In that sentence Sir Robert Cecil, as Chief Secretary of State, and perhaps, too, the Earl of Oxford as premier Peer, had played a foremost part, and in the acts of high treason, next to Essex himself, Southampton was the chief delinquent. But the trial

* Robertson, *Problems of the Sonnets*, pp. 195–6. At pp. 179–80 he expounds it ‘ as a straying lover’s appeal to a woman he has slighted.’ His main objection is that language like ‘ your great deserts repay,’ and ‘ your own dear-purchased right,’ cannot be addressed by a poet to *his patron*, and with that I do not disagree. He attributes this sonnet to ‘ the author of the “ Will ” sonnets, who cannot have been Shakespeare ’ (p. 196), while §§ 109–116 are all addressed to one or more women.

was a full exposure of his shallowness, his weakness, and his amiability ; he had acted like a child playing with bombs ; not of such stuff were conspirators made. And on the score of youth and irresponsibility, the capital sentence was in his case commuted to imprisonment for life. The April 1603 release did not cancel the attainder or its consequences : for that he had to depend primarily on the influence which Sir Robert Cecil, as Secretary, and his brother-in-law, the Earl of Oxford, could set in motion. From Sir Robert not much could be expected ; political relations and temperament had combined to imbue him with profound distrust of the Earl's stability or loyalty ; the Earl of Oxford was one, if not the main, sheet-anchor of his hopes, and he had his own position and interests to secure. It is in keeping with all that we know of Southampton's petulant and aggressive egotism, that he should fling charges of lukewarmness or duplicity against any friend whose advocacy failed of immediate effect. The phrases used

That I have frequent been with unknown minds
 And given to time * your own dear-purchased right ;
 That I have hoisted sail to all the winds

are apt descriptions of the overtures and interchanges that took place between the English Councillors of State, the new King, and his Scottish followers, and which resulted in establishing both Sir Robert Cecil and the Earl of Oxford in positions of Royal trust and favour. In answer to the charges or distrusters expressed, Lord Oxford hastened to assure the Earl of his unbounded and unalterable devotion, and that no draught could be more bitter than any reflection upon

The constancy and virtue of your love (§ 117.14)

If this be the true key to interpretation, the actual course of events fully bears out his plea. On April 27 the Earl of Southampton met the king on his way to

* *I.e.* 'sacrificed to the passing need and occasion.'

London, and received distinguished marks of Royal favour; on July 7 he was made Captain of the Isle of Wight; and on July 21, in time for the Coronation (July 25), he was recreated Earl of Southampton; and in the following April he received full restitution of all rights. It was not till July 18 that the Earl of Oxford himself was reappointed Keeper of the Forest of Essex and of Havering House, and shortly after commended to a seat on the Privy Council, and a renewal of the annual salary of £1000 from the Exchequer.

Sonnet § 118 : Bitter Pills

Sonnet § 118 is enigmatic. Taken by themselves the words might refer to unrepaying associates of any kind—political, literary, or (as Robertson will have it) feminine. Of whatever kind they were, they proved nauseous and bitter to the taste; yet as an antitoxin restored his zest and appetite for the old and tried affections. The medical conceit is too much elaborated to give poetic pleasure, and among the Sonnets none seems less attractive. It may have fallen out of its true context, and doubts of the same kind attach to §§ 119–121. The language used, and the retrospective allusion in § 120 suggest the play of personal passion and jealousies in love, far more than feuds arising out of political rivalries or resentments.

Sonnets §§ 119–122

That the Sonnets—above all § 119—are Shakespearean I do not doubt; but in this place they do not fit the scheme proposed, and seem alien to what precedes and follows. They might easily belong to the gap between §§ 106 and 107. Sonnets §§ 119–120, which seem to hang together, are most naturally referred, though after an interval of time, to the §§ 33–42 episode,

while § 122 is merely occasional. Thus there is a good deal in common with the make-up of the Second series, which is not formally distinguished from the First in the 1609 volume. If this small batch found their way by some accident into the main sequence, their excision would restore a much more satisfying unity.

Sonnet § 119 : Passion Purged

Sonnet § 119 is full of power, deeply and passionately felt. The language, above all the

Siren tears

Distilled from limbecks foul as hell within,

reads like the fierce reactions of § 147, and ll. 4-5 find more epigrammatic expression in

A bliss in proof, and proved a very woe (§ 129.11)

And it is hard to force the terms into any framework but that of passionate indulgence in some illicit love ; but without any sure clue to date, destination or circumstance, surmises seem unprofitable. The main gist is clear, that the one stable and satisfying affection is love for his friend. The suggestion that the sonnet is addressed to a woman affords no relief : the final couplet

So I return, rebuked, to my content,

And gain by ills thrice more than I have spent

might in that case be addressed to a wife, but this is wholly incongruous with the tenor, the wording, and the allusions of § 120, which can hardly be dissociated from § 119. The retrospective references to §§ 33-42 imply a considerable interval in the dates of composition, as well as identity of authorship. For rhythm and for just understanding it is important to accentuate the personal pronouns throughout. Here (once more) it seems quite impossible to accommodate the tone and terms used to any conceivable relation between William Shakspeare and a noble patron.

Sonnet § 121 : Backbitings

Sonnet § 121 does not clear up the situation, but further strengthens the conviction that in subject-matter Sonnets §§ 119, 120, 121 hang together, and concern some social scandal by which his enemies sought to injure the writer in his friend's esteem. The offence somehow touched their personal relations. He does not deny misconduct on his part, but resents the meanness and the falsity of allegations based upon it. The sonnet—unusually self-centred—is a bitter protest against the calumnies and imputations of the backbiters, who spy upon his frailties, and proceed to colour them with their own 'rank' imaginations. 'Better,' he says, 'to be vile' and to commit the sins imputed, with their return of pleasure, than to be made the prey of hateful charges, which are the reflection of their own malevolence. 'Level' (l. 9), a euphuist metaphor drawn from shooting, is similarly used by Constable

Mine eye, the sight thou tak'st thy level by,

and is frequent in the Plays, in this sense of 'aim.' Here it suggested the *hapax legomenon* rhyme 'bevel,' a term used of the carpenter's or mason's gauge for measuring angles, and meaning aslant, askew, or 'out of plumb.' But I notice also that the term is used in heraldry—'He beareth party per bend *beville*,'* and the author may have become familiar with it from this connection. 'Rank thoughts' in l. 12 recall

their thoughts . . . add the rank smell of weeds. (§ 69.12)

Sonnet § 122 : A Souvenir

The sonnet is a passing trifle, which in theme recalls § 77, though there is no need to connect the two. At some time he had passed on to other hands certain writing or memoranda tablets, which had been a present

* Lodge (1562).

from his friend. The transfer seems to have been resented as a slight, and this is a graceful sonnet of apology, which might find a place anywhere. The use of such 'tables' is well illustrated by Hamlet's

My tables, my tables—meet it is I set it down (I, v, 98)

The theory of displacement receives strong support from the close relation which connects § 116 with §§ 123-4. They are closely allied not merely in the defiance addressed to Time, but in identity of phrase 'fools of time' (§ 124.13) repeated from 'Love's not Time's fool' (§ 116.9), in the recurrence of figures, 'the sickle' (§ 116) and 'the scythe' (§ 123), and most of all in the recovery of mutual trust, appropriate to the days before the Corolation, when both Southampton and Oxford were waiting upon the royal favour.

Sonnets §§ 123-5

Sonnets §§ 123-5 hang closely together in the situation which they depict; to minimise, or even deny, all reference to public events requires special pleading, and goes far to denude them of all point. In § 124 the emphasis is throughout political, and contemplates vicissitudes unfavourable to the fortunes of the writer and his friend; the language cannot be explained away as obscure generalities upon the fickleness of the affections. Again, in § 125, 'I bore the canopy' is too explicit to be lightly dismissed as 'merely figurative'; occasions or actors, to whom it could be aptly applied, are rare, and parallels are not forthcoming, either from Shakespeare or contemporaries. Nor is it in the manner of the Sonnets; the handling of words is at times 'precious' and even difficult, but he does not use obscure and far-fetched similes to convey his meaning. So, again, the second quatrain unmistakably refers to actual courtiers and time-servers, not to false or fickle wooers presented under that guise, to whom the penalties

and forfeitures entailed seem quite inapplicable. Direct application of the terms used is a gain at every turn, and to such the sonnets lend themselves with reassuring ease.

Sonnet § 123 : Defiance to Time

In § 123 the terms, addressed to Time, are general, but the main gist is clear. They depict a new regime under which new designs and influences are coming into play, threatening to supersede the old. Pretentious and imposing as they are

Pyramids built up with newer might

they do not impress the writer as contributing elements of new or lasting value :

They are but dressings of a former sight

calculated to impose on the short-lived and the inexperienced. The pretence of novelty cannot affect him, or alter the long-established relations between himself and his friend : we (he says) are not to be rushed into new affections or attachments ; come what will, I remain true to the old loyalties, faithful unto death,

despite thy scythe and thee.

How far ' the scythe ' * refers to himself, or to his friend, or both, is doubtful. But in any case the words are a presentiment that the end draws near.

All this, it will be noted, agrees perfectly with what we know or can infer of the position of the Earl of Oxford and the Earl of Southampton under the new regime. There was no abrupt break with the past ; but they became in effect ' back numbers,' and had no place in the inner circle of Court favourites and advisers.

Sonnet § 124 : Ties of Love outlast Ties of State

§ 124 is much more personal and explicit. It is idle to deprecate attempts to elucidate the personal and

* §§ 60.12, 116.10 both illustrate the figure admirably.

political allusions, they are in the texture and life-blood of the sonnet, which deserves careful paraphrase :

If my dear love were but the child of state,
It might for Fortune's bastard be unfather'd,
As subject to Time's love or Time's hate,
Weeds among weeds or flowers with flowers gather'd.

The bond of tried affection, which had so long united them, was no mere political attachment. Had it been so, the turn of Fortune's wheel, the new combinations of parties and persons would be enough to disinherit it of all rights and status, reducing it to a mere 'bastard' at the mercy of the ups and downs of circumstance, the praise and the blame, the admiration or the contempt, that shifting favours deign to bestow. Nowhere is the assumption clearer, that both writer and recipient had occupied positions of importance in public or State life; both alike had moved in the sunshine of Court favour and shadows of its frown

Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.

But their friendship was built upon a more stable and enduring base; it did not depend * upon the smiles of royal countenance in the past—when both had enjoyed the favours of the virgin Queen—nor would it succumb to their withdrawal

Under the blow of thrallèd discontent.

Some have interpreted 'thralied discontent' as a reference to Southampton's imprisonment after the fall of Essex. But for that the phrase is totally inadequate; and secondly the following line (l. 8)

Whereto the inviting time our fashion calls

shows that the condition described applies to the writer as much as (and probably more than) to the recipient. Considering the writer's idiosyncrasy,† one is tempted

* Textually 'suffer'd' would be more accurate than 'suffers,' and the error (*d* for final *s*) would be easy; but the present, answering to 'falls,' keeps the statement more general.

† P. 77.

to ask whether 'blow' is not intended to suggest 'breath' or 'blast,' as well as any particular 'stroke' or rebuff. About the main meaning there can be no doubt. 'Thrallèd discontent' expresses the dissatisfaction of those who feel their hands tied helplessly by obligations, which inwardly they resent but are powerless to resist; grudgingly they must submit to an order of things to which their position compels them to conform. The position in which Oxford and Southampton found themselves after the accession of James could not be better expressed. They became as it were old retainers placed on the pension list, but excluded from the initiative and influence which passed into other hands. The closing quatrain is difficult, and errors may have crept in. 'It fears not policy' yields tolerable sense, meaning that our mutual loyalty can afford to ignore the short-lived designs and intrigues with which the new monarch was from the moment of his accession beset. But Tucker's 'feres' * is attractive, and if admissible gives the still more apposite meaning—our fealty declines to consort or have truck with scheming intrigue, but takes its stand immovably upon that larger and loftier conception of policy which cares only for the general good, regardless of all fitful gleams or squalls of passing sentiment. 'Policy,' in the poorer and the usual Shakespearean sense of 'scheming,' is called a 'heretic,' as always broaching new-fangled doctrinaire ideas in its assaults upon established verities—and the word is prophetically consonant with the 'statecraft' of King James and his advisers. The meaning of the much-disputed closing couplet

To this I witness call the fools of time
Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime

now becomes clear. References to Essex, to Jesuit martyrs, and to Gunpowder Plot, seem chronologically,

* For Q. '*feares*'. Shakespeare used the substantive for 'companion,' 'mate,' but not the verb.

as well as exegetically, untenable. Rather he has in mind the witness of those—Raleigh, for instance—whom the course of events soon forced into the background, and displaced in favour of the Scotch lords and less worthy favourites, to whom James inclined his ear. In their day they had been time-servers, ready to compromise with principle and to use ill means * for the retention of place and power. Now in their turn they had to suffer and to die (politically) for policies to which they owed their rise. Thus Time ‘makes fools’ of all.

Sonnet § 125 : The Heart's Oblation

The language of § 125 is still more explicit in its reference to actual events. That ‘I bore the canopy’ is used in a purely figurative sense is altogether unlikely, and leads to I know not what, particularly when followed up by the line

With my extern the outward honouring.

The canopy belonged to rare occasions of royal pageantry, and was particularly associated with Coronation ceremonies ; though we find it used at the Thanksgiving Service for the Defeat of the Armada in 1588, when it was borne by the Earl Marshal, and the Earl of Oxford as Lord Great Chamberlain. And again at the Queen's funeral, the canopy over the coffin was carried by six Earls, of whom the Earl of Oxford was one.† Thus for him the phrase has very special pertinence. As hereditary Lord Great Chamberlain, it was his prerogative to carry the sword, or bear the canopy, on these great historic occasions. It was perhaps the proudest prerogative belonging to the De Veres, recognised as their

* ‘Crime’ needed for the rhyme, for which ‘rime’ and ‘prime’ are the writer's only alternatives, is often used in this lighter sense of anything that is chargeable with misdoing or misleading.

† As a later illustration, at the royal entry into Oxford in 1605 ‘the King and Queen,’ we read, ‘advanced under a fair canopy of crimson taffety, carried by six Canons of the Church.’

crown of ceremonial privilege. It is no mere figure of speech, when he declares that even that high distinction is of less account in his eyes than the place of honour and priority in the affections of his friend. The particular reference I take to be to the July 25 Coronation ceremonies which followed the accession of King James in 1603, still fresh in the writer's thoughts when the sonnet was composed.

The second quatrain is no less realistic.* Theme and treatment run parallel to § 25, but the sense of grievance and resentment has passed to the later stage of jaded disillusion 'Vanity of vanities ! all is vanity !'

Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
Lose all, and more, by paying too much rent,
For compound sweet foregoing simple savour,
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent ?

The wording is somewhat euphuistic, strained in conceits and antithesis, but the reference is to actual courtiers, the disappointed hangers-on in the world of fashion. '*Dwellers on form and favour*' plays on the double sense of 'those who make much of' and 'those who build on' as firm tenure and habitation, speculating upon the advancements, profits and promotions of which Court life disposed. The 'compound sweet' summarises the elaborate feast of good things, the dainties and the luxuries of Court life contrasted with the homelier and more simple fare of those who abstained from such costly outlays. Too often they pay dear for the venture, losing all or more than all invested. 'Pitiful thrivers' is a pregnant phrase ; thrivers, as illustrated by 'thrifless praise' in § 2.8 and 'unthrifty loveliness' in § 4.1, is used of 'investors' who secure a good turnover, and 'pitiful'—like sorry or miserable—combines the meaning of poor, despicable with that of 'to be pitied.' Their investment is poor and disappointing, and they get

* The generalised application of these lines to disappointed and unrequited lovers seems to me relatively feeble, and to sacrifice and obscure the unity of the sonnet.

nothing in return beyond the barren reward of spectators in the show. In preference to such vanities, he chooses rather to offer his homage and his gifts at the shrine of his true love.

No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art
But mutual render, only me for thee.

'Obsequious' (from association with obsequies) is used often of the mourner, but here of the worshipper approaching the object of his devotion with the 'poor but free oblation' that lies at his command, that of sincere and worshipful affection. The unexpected 'not mixed with seconds,' applied to the sacrificial cake of pure wheaten flour, suggests some literary or ritual reference more direct than commentators have yet unearthed.* But the figure and application are plain. Immune from secondary ends or rivals, and free from all alloy, he offers up the unique and unadulterated love, which unites him to his friend

In mutual render, only me for thee.

Let libellous tongues say what they will, their charges cannot touch or tarnish truth. 'True' once again, as in §§ 57, 62, 82 (with a possible side glance at the Vere name and motto), stands for faithful, loyal, constant.

One could not wish for a more satisfying or harmonious close to the drama of the Sonnets. Not by poetic design, but by the kindness of circumstance, the final notes, after sore vicissitudes, attain something of the sovereign calm which attends the exodus of Œdipus the King, or Samson Agonistes.

* For verbal illustration, though from a very different context, one may quote

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
Vainly with gifts would his favour secure,
Richer by far the heart's adoration . . .

Sonnet § 126 : Envoi

The six-couplet canzonet that follows forms a pleasing Envoi to the whole, and has literary interest and charm. ' My lovely boy ' looks back upon this closed chapter of experience as a unity of lyric love. But date and intention are uncertain ; it may well owe its place to the editor, and in a considered criticism of the Sonnets, it is better to leave it out of account.

SECTION II: SECOND SERIES

Sonnets §§ 127–154

The second series of Sonnets raises problems of its own, but psychologically as well as poetically the chief interest centres in the lights thrown upon the composition and contents of the earlier series. Apart from unity of authorship and form of publication, the series reads like a medley of disjointed sonnets, loosely tied together. Sonnets §§ 153 and 154 may be at once dismissed as mere exercises in translation, probably by some other hand; while § 145 is not even in sonnet form, and in thought and style drops to a low level of execution. § 128 on the Virginals is prettily conceited, but cannot be addressed to the 'dark lady' who (from § 141, and perhaps too, § 130) seems to have been unmusical. Sonnet § 130 itself can only be read as a pleasantry, making fun of the foibles of sonneteers; and the same may be true of the puns and prettiness of § 132. Sonnet § 139 is so slight in its gallantries that it might well be mere play of fancy, apart from its falling into natural company with § 140. Further, Sonnets §§ 129 and 146—the two most striking in the collection—may be isolated upon other grounds: they are introspective soliloquies, distilled from his heart's bitterness, certainly not addressed or submitted to the mistress, on whom the rest depend. They may be compared with the *Spiritual Sonnets* issued by Constable in 1591, or Barnes in 1595, but still more resemble utterances of Donne, in some of his self-flagellating lyrics. Here, the ideas and terms are less technically religious, but are fraught with no less moral intensity. § 146 voices the remorseful reactions which are so

frequent a sequel of passions indulged to excess ; while § 129 ranks among the most poignant expressions of the wrestle between the flesh and spirit ever penned outside of Christian experiences of contrition. In his *Belief in Christ* (pp. 265-67) Gore, building on Raleigh's *Shakespeare* (pp. 210-12), singles out this sonnet as expressing in terms of heightened individual sensibility that inner conflict of the instincts and emotions, which in a St. Paul or St. Augustine found utterance in the sense of sin. Shakespeare was a child of the generation and society in which his lot was cast,* a lens in which its rays are focussed. In the Elizabethan period the sexual urge was vehement and masterful, the counterpart of that glowing and uncontrolled virility, that intellectual *élan*, that uprush and expansion of imaginative and æsthetic energies, which alike in action and in literature lifted the age to perhaps unequalled heights of daring enterprise and vividness. The annals of the Court—of every leading favourite and gallant—and in another sphere, the lives and deaths of the makers and masters of Elizabethan drama, all tell the same tale. Released from formal and ecclesiastical restraints, it was not yet brought under the social and ethical controls which gave poise and stability under Puritan reactions. But the Sonnets themselves reveal the ferment beginning to work.

Sonnet § 129

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action ; and till action, lust
 Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust ;
 Enjoy'd, no sooner but despisèd straight ; ✓
 Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
 Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad :

* See p. 177.

Mad in pursuit, and in possession so ; ✓
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme ;
 A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe ;
 Before, a joy propos'd ; behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows ; yet none knows well |
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

The theme is a commonplace with Sonneteers ; but, as a personal experience, nowhere is the sense of satiety, of squandered energy expended in the satisfaction of lust, depicted with more unsparing realism. One cannot (with Hallam) wish such a Sonnet, or even its obverse in some that follow (§§ 141, 144), unwritten or undivulged. They underlie the poet's dominion over the hearts of men ; and that stands secure. But to my thinking they were not designed for publication ; hardly, if at all, for the eye of an understanding friend ; but rather, as has so often been the case, for relief of an intolerable strain.

Sonnet § 127

The opening of § 127, in praise of the dark type of beauty characteristic of the Mediterranean in contrast with the blond Nordic types, is here elaborated into Sonnet form ; it might serve as prologue to a series, but seems rather a variation or poetic exercise played on the general theme. The conceit of the black eyes and brows *mourning*, the discredited and often fictitious charms of the fair, is repeated in § 182, but there with yet further word-play upon '*morning*.' The same conceit is further elaborated in *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, iii. (See p. 137.)

Sonnets § 131—152

We are thus left with a compact series, §§ 131—152, all of which, with the exception of § 145 and to some extent § 146, turn upon relations between the writer and the dark lady who occupies the background. That

she was an actual person does not admit of doubt ; nowhere in the Sonnets are the traits of individuality more concrete and convincing. Happily, there are no clues for identification, and the baseless Mary Fitton slander has been long since pulverised. Outside of the principals, there are no reputations to blacken or to whitewash. From the Sonnets themselves we glean incidentally that she was married (§§ 142.7, 152.3), and, more doubtfully, that the husband's name was William (§§ 135, 136) ; that she admitted other lovers to favours bestowed, or solicited from admirers (§§ 135-137, 142) ; that apart from her eyes, on which repeated stress is laid (§§ 127, 132, 133, 139, 140, 149), she could lay little claim to graces or good looks (§§ 131, 141, 148) ; but Cleopatra-like * wielded powers of fascination capable of rousing, for a time at least, ungovernable cravings and a sexual obsession, against which reason and refinement protested in vain (§§ 141, 147). The same enticements, to which the writer had fallen a victim, were later used for the seduction of his bosom friend (§§ 133-136), and the interest such as it is centres in the light thrown upon the earlier Sonnets (especially §§ 34-42) relating to the same episode. In such a theme there is little to inspire, and poetically these sonnets do not approach the levels of the earlier series—indeed, they bring to an end the period of idyllic inspiration—and at their worst they fall into repellent strains of physical coarseness (§§ 135-8, 151).† Which, or how many, were actually sent to the object of address remains in doubt ; some at least, one is entitled to hope, never passed beyond the writer's *escritoire* ; but Elizabethan canons of correspondence, and of repartee, were far removed from those of to-day.

The published order may be accepted as chronological ; internal references, such as ' Beshrew that

* Acheson, p. 16, who also compares *Cressida* and *Rosaline*.

† Readers curious about particulars of verbal exegesis will find their needs admirably met by Prof. Tucker ; but these have no bearing on date, authorship, or destination.

heart . . .,' coupling § 133 with § 132, and § 133 in its turn with § 134, are rightly placed, and the successive phases exhibited show a not unnatural development of moods. Unlawful passion (§§ 131-132, cf. § 42) meets a check in the first shock of betrayal; accepting the indignities entailed (§§ 133-34, cf. §§ 34-36), it deprecates rejection and disdain (§§ 139-142), protests against charges of frailty which apply equally on either side (§ 142), passes to recrimination and even threats (§ 140), and ends with unconcealed disillusion, repugnance and repudiation (§§ 147-152). There is little to fix social status, or relation between the writer or the person addressed; and the contrast in this particular with the main Series suggests that there was not much in common.

Sonnets §§ 138 and 144

Two Sonnets, from a purely literary point of view two of the most finished (§§ 138 and 144), found a place in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, issued by Wm. Jaggard in 1599, and this furnishes a useful indication, or margin, of date. The former was there subjected to verbal modifications, which, though slight, help to mask the situation, and to make it applicable to any two lovers of maturing years. The 1599 version is unmistakably the later,* and may well be the effluent of a closed and buried experience. To a less extent the same holds good of § 144, and it is hard to suppose that it would have been made public until the actual episode had become a thing of the past. Even assuming wilful piracy in the publication, it must have passed through some intermediate hand or hands. Thus the date to which we have been previously led for the composition of the Sonnets §§ 34-40, late in 1594, agrees well enough with these indications. At that time the Earl of Oxford

* In the revised 1599 version the two lovers *conspire* in false pretences, and accept each other's fictions. The 'lie' *double entendre*, in ll. 13-14, is much more veiled.

was forty-four, and 'My days are past the best' of § 138.6 conform well to that period of life; they could not apply to thirty.*

The fierce and natural resentment of § 144 corresponds in mood with §§ 34 or 42

The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief

To him that bears the strong offence's cross (§ 34.11-12)

or even better with

And yet, love knows it is a greater grief

To bear love's wrongs than hate's known injury

(§ 40.11-12)

and the sensitive reader cannot fail to catch the verbal echo of 'the strong offence's cross' in

Both for my sake lay on me this cross (§ 42.12)

and

A torment thrice threefold thus to be cross'd (§ 133.8)

That 'the good' and 'the bad angel' of Series II are one with the friend and the mistress of Series I, needs no further arguing. The disclosures are in too close accord, and too peculiar in kind, to permit of repetition. Not only would one be loth to multiply such occasions; but they do not occur twice in an individual experience.

A more precarious indication of date may be found in the way in which the last quatrain of § 127

'Therefore my mistress' hairs are raven black,

Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem

At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,

Slandering creation with a false esteem.

is expanded and elaborated in *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, iii, 255 vv. The play, one of Meres' 1598 list, was published in a revised form in that year, but was certainly composed earlier. No play has closer verbal correspondences with the earlier Sonnets. Act IV, iii, in particular, has echoes in §§ 14 and 21, and in the *Biron* scenes critics like Masfield recognise repercussions derived from this special episode.

* William Shakspeare turned thirty in April 1594.

CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE—AUTHORSHIP

THE conclusions resulting from our examination of the Sonnets may be summarised in these terms. The main body of the Sonnets, comprising §§ 1–126, bear the impress of a single mind, and move throughout in an atmosphere and social milieu common to the writer and to the person to whom they are addressed: there is no good reason to assume variety of destination, seeing that a single recipient supplies a better and more satisfying key to interpretation. Not only explicit statements in the Sonnets, but also the incidents of personal intercourse, the changes of sentiment and tone, marks of the wear and tear of time affecting outward form and growth of personality, choice of *motifs* (e.g. marriage, liaisons, travel, the triumph of Time and Death), and finally the references to exterior events, all point to a considerable lapse of time, extending over years, during which the Sonnets grew towards completion. The various clues are confirmed, and may one day be more exactly determined, by literary parallelisms interspersed through the Plays, especially the earlier Plays of the Shakespearean canon.

Conspicuous among these, and of primary importance, are the literary links which identify the recipient with the patron, to whom the *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Lucrece* are addressed. Tradition, and still more explicitly the dedications and interior correspondences of the Poems, connect them with the Earl of Southampton; and with that attribution, the touches of personal description, and notes of circumstance, fall into ready and even striking accord. If the later

sonnets leave more room for conjecture, here, too, reconciliation proves easy and illuminating ; the coincidences of character, career and circumstance that emerge, are telling and consistent. Again and again the glove fits, and the finger-marks put competing suggestions out of court.

As to sequence, the signs all point to preservation of the order in which they were originally composed ; back references all fall correctly into place, and so, too, the verbal links of thought, phrase, figure or rhyme, which connect successive or companion sonnets. This line of proof admits of great elaboration ; besides the larger subject-groups (§§ 1-16, 33-42, 78-86) it is surprising how many of the Sonnets fall into pairs, or trios, or quartets ; but analysis would be tedious, and carry little conviction except to the student who will be at pains to work it out for himself.*

For critical minds of a certain type disintegration theories have special fascination : they give room for ingenious guesses, combinations and reconstruction ; for detection of resemblances and plagiarisms ; for discriminating different hands in composition ; for deciding which are authentic, which commissioned ; which impersonal, and which dramatic ; and for inventing destinations that seem appropriate to the several hypotheses. But these random shafts have done little to impair or shake the sense of inherent unity. All that have real weight turn upon the traditional assumption of authorship, and the relation of client to patron which it involves. In the Sonnets, the approach is never that of a beneficiary or dependent, of any side-glance at material rewards or official countenance ; equality of social status, parity of outlook, interests and experiences, are taken for granted ; † the writer is entitled to remonstrate and rebuke ; to deprecate the indiscretions and the ' wantonness ' of youth, to warn against excesses, self-love and presumption. His admiration and his

* See p. 84.

† §§ 52, 69-70, 109.

eulogies, however unrestrained and ardent, are from the standpoint of one who has the right to reciprocate favours, to confer as well as to receive acknowledgments. He has himself shared like privileges and aspirations.

The more closely the Sonnets are studied, the more impossible does it become to reconcile them with any conceivable relationship that can have subsisted between the Earl of Southampton and a provincial actor on the London stage.* Heroic (as well as apologetic) attempts have been made to save the situation from the literary and cultural side, and on a blank background the painter can impose what forms and colours he will; but the incidents and relations of personal familiarity disclosed in the Sonnets are fatal to the thesis upheld; they cannot be made to fit. If unity of authorship and destination is allowed, the Sonnets must be ascribed to one who moved in the same sphere as the Earl of Southampton, one (his senior in years) who was brought into close and intimate touch with him in domestic as well as public intercourse, one, too, who was himself a poet engaged in literary rivalries, and one whose own career had fallen under some cloud foreshadowing an inglorious end. The circle of Elizabethan nobility and courtiers, even including the leading gentry, is not very large, and among them there are few (if any) in whom such conditions meet.

The claims of possible and impossible candidates have been scrutinised†; but one figure has recently emerged, who in a remarkable degree satisfies the requirements. Only lately has it become plain how central a place belongs to Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, at the confluence of the various currents of literary activity—poetic, dramatic, exotic, and academic—which combine to form the product known as ‘Elizabethan.’ Student, poet, playwright, and patron of the

* For instances see pp. 200, 200a, 216–225, 231, 268, 278, 280, 281, 292.

† Georges Connes, *The Shakespeare Mystery*, states the brief vivaciously for Lord Derby and Lord Rutland, as well as Bacon.

drama, he was in touch with the most versatile spirits of the age, and in the judgment of his best-informed contemporaries his own compositions were second to none in excellence. And when we subject the Sonnets to close personal scrutiny, or in the Plays analyse the incidents and characters and motives, which seem most to reflect the author's own experience, by the light of his career and personality, we are met by coincidences so numerous, so circumstantial, so surprising and illuminating, that it becomes impossible to set them down to chance or to refuse to recognise in them the handiwork of Edward de Vere. The authors with whom in youth he was most conversant—*e.g.* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, and *Il Cortegiano*—and again those with whom later he collaborated or associated most intimately—Lyly and Munday, and from very different angles, Sidney and Chapman—are just those whose traces are clearest in Shakespearean handiwork. Just as the Plays, when scrutinised, reveal numerous and arresting coincidences with recorded incidents and traits in the career of Edward de Vere, so, too, in the Poems and Sonnets, the personal and literary relations, and the fugitive allusions to public events, find in his personality and doings a unifying centre of co-ordination ; and for those in the secret he here and there inserts his cypher of identification (pp. 210–12).

Outlying sonnets, belonging mainly to the second Series, are in somewhat different case. In point of composition they proceed from the same hand, but there the correspondence ceases ; in tone and manner they are less intimate and confidential. Some are detached and topical, addressed ostensibly to women, others mere *vers de société*, playful or complimentary in type ; others reflective or expletive soliloquies of personal emotion. Not one seems written to a male recipient. The largest group concerns a 'dark lady,' who in several sonnets is addressed in person ; but it by no means follows that these sonnets were actually despatched to

the supposed object of address ; among the hundreds or thousands of sonnets that have been composed that is the exception rather than the rule. Chronologically, these sonnets are certainly not a sequel to Series I ; for the related group is associated with sonnets that come early in that Series (§§ 33-42), and in many cases style and thought seem less mature. The general impression is that of a miscellaneous assortment, put loosely together for reference or preservation.

This brings us finally to the problem of publication, and the cryptic dedication prefixed by Wm. Thorpe ; it is needless to review the threadbare controversies respecting ' Mr. W. H. ' That it could stand either for Lord Wm. Herbert, Earl of Pembroke,* or for Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, has been sufficiently disproved † ; nor would either in 1609 have given assent to the publication of materials so compromising. Still more freakish guesses need not even be named. The most plausible and attractive conjecture, propounded by Fleay and elaborated by Mrs. Stopes, is that ' Mr. W. H. ' stands for Wm. Harvey, the old-time friend and counsellor of the Dowager Countess of Southampton, to whom, finally, three years and more after the death of Sir Thos. Heneage, she gave her hand in marriage (January 1599). At her death, in 1607, the Countess made him her sole executor and residuary legatee of all goods and chattels, except such family jewels, treasures and effects as passed by specific bequest to her son, daughter, or personal friends.‡ Thus he came into possession of all her documents and papers, and Mrs. Stopes suggests that among these was an Album or copy of the Sonnets, which, on winding up the estate in 1608, he committed to Thorpe, as publisher, to secure their preservation. And to him Thorpe makes becoming acknowledgment. The date fits neatly : and the com-

* On Earl of Pembroke destination, see Stopes, *Third Earl*, pp. 42-48.

† See pp. 180-1.

‡ Stopes, 834-5.

bination solves outstanding difficulties about piratical procurers and publishers. But, apart from minor difficulties, the objections are weighty, and I think insuperable. How could a collection of this kind come into the hands of the Dowager Countess? From 1594 (if not earlier), when she married Sir Thos. Heneage, her relations with her son had been neither intimate nor cordial. Her subsequent marriage with Mr. Harvey he openly disapproved and tried to hinder. These are not sonnets which (as a whole) either author or recipient would have committed to her eye, or her keeping. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the appended sonnets (of Series II) were ever communicated to the Earl. Further, in administering the estate, Lord Harvey would never, without leave asked or granted, have authorised the publication of sonnets, which the Earl of Southampton above all others would have been at pains to suppress. Among Nich. Rowe's early *Anecdota* on Shakespeare there is no more solid hearsay than that which, on the authority of Sir William d'Avenant, records a gift to Shakspeare of £1000 from the Earl of Southampton. Whatever the exact amount of the transaction, it may well be interpreted as a retiring *douceur*, which enabled him to rest on his laurels, to acquire a property at Stratford, and to withdraw from London, upon the sole condition—loyally and scrupulously observed—of holding his tongue. Between Wm. Shakspeare and Lord Harvey no personal connection has been traced, nor any link of authorship, copyright, avowal or disavowal, connecting either with the Sonnets. It seems little likely, then, that the 'Mr. W. H.' anonym will be deciphered, until it is known into whose hands and keeping the 'Shakespeare' literature—Poems, Sonnets and Plays—passed at the author's death. If Edward, Earl of Oxford, was the author, neither will, nor letters, nor records, have as yet come to light to dissipate the darkness which settled down upon his grave.

The initials in all probability conceal some soubriquet or anagram.

So far as the Earl of Southampton was concerned, in 1609 he was immersed in large financial ventures ; he had nothing to gain, and not a little to lose, by publication ; protest or public intervention would have been suicidal ; his wisest course was to let sleeping dogs lie, and so far as possible to secure quiet suppression.

The assumption that in his Stratford retirement Wm. Shakspeare, for sake of some small publisher's gratuity, threw them upon the world without note, comment or remark, or again that he submitted without protest to unauthorised publication, involves still more inextricable difficulties.

These apart, it is hard to understand how the *entire* collection can have been in any private hands, except those of the actual author. Censorship of the press was at this period under strict and vigilant control ; it would not have been easy to produce a pirated edition during the author's lifetime without his leave or his connivance. The natural inference is that in 1609 the author was either dead, or else unable to exercise control. Much speaks in favour of posthumous publication. In the dedication itself 'our ever-living poet' is far more appropriate to one who had passed from earthly life : press-correction is not merely careless, but unintelligent, and the proof-sheets cannot have come under the eye of the composer ; the misprints listed by Beeching are proof decisive ; not only are words misread, but meanings misunderstood, and punctuation murdered. Nor is it easy to discover, or even imagine, a motive for publication in the author's lifetime. As poetry, they were not of a kind to enhance his reputation or command a large market. There was much in them to compromise, and to give a handle to critics or to enemies.

Preservation is not attended by these difficulties ; writers of personal and reflective verse have again and again husbanded among their papers imperfect or con-

fidential productions, which as artists or as moralists they would never have exposed to the public gaze ; for themselves they possessed an interest and value quite independent of artistic or permanent merit. Later, those into whose keeping they passed, impelled by various motives, have revealed to the world what the author would never have brought himself to divulge.* Post-humous publication of this kind seems the most hopeful key to explain the production of these Sonnets, the strict veil of precautions with which it was attended, and the strange sequel of silence which followed upon publication. For these good reasons were not wanting.

* Among contemporaries Thos. Carlyle is perhaps the most notorious instance.

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