CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

THE EARL OF OXFORD must have written a number of sonnets which have not survived, certainly many more to the Queen than are included in the collection first published in 1609. For those which we can with fair assurance recognize as addressed to her, though few in totality, cover an extensive time-span. Then, too, there must have been at least a score celebrating the early boyhood of the Fair Youth, if only because No. 126 reads like an *envoi* to a series, with the boy still young. But these are the very ones we should expect would be eliminated—intimate sonnets to the Queen as mistress and as mother of the engaging youth (who, like Mamilius, was really a "hopeful prince," son of the sovereign *Leo*ntes). To judge by his own testimony, the father was enchanted by the child and longed to have him for his own. And it is a logical assumption that he would have said so in much poignant and beautiful verse, particularly since this was a medium through which he could effectively appeal to the Queen.

Southampton seems to have been very much like the young Edward de Vere, delicately built and featured, with a high color and intelligent expressive eyes, though with his mother's bright blonde hair and prominent nose. The air of pride, if not haughtiness, in Oxford's early portraits was softened in the later ones; and there is a striking resemblance between his eyes in the Ashbourne portrait and those of Southampton in all of his, gentle, intent, profoundly intelligent, although in Oxford's case tragic, while in the son's remaining benign.[1] Southampton evidently had his father's enthusiasm and flavor of eccentricity—"so young, fantasticall, and easily carried away," as Lady Bridget Manners said of him [2]—and also a certain effeminacy in his make-up, while he inherited from both parents a love of the arts, especially literary

[1] "For there can live no hatred in thine eye." (No. 93.)

[2] It will be recalled that "fantastical" was a word applied to the young Oxford. And the dramatist himself was "the old fantastical duke of dark corners." (*M. for M.*: IV.3.161.)

and dramatic, as well as a taste for fine raiment and an innate personal distinction and authority.

We have been reminded before this that, in Sonnet 91, which enumerates the appurtenances of a nobleman, said by the poet to be in his own case secondary in delight to the love of the Fair Youth, there is mention of this predilection for fantastic dress:

> Some glory in their birth. some in their skill,
> Some in their wealth, some in their body's force;
> Some in their *garments, though new-fangl'd ill;*
> Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse.

Partly from an access of discretion and partly from the modesty of the truly great, Lord Oxford must have destroyed many sonnets and kept only those he was willing to perpetuate, "bound richly up and strung with crimson strings." As for the order in which they were printed, it is, as a whole, anything but chronological, although now and then, within a small group, they seem to have been kept in proper sequence. Of course, whoever edited the Sonnets may have discarded some which were too candidly revealing, while indubitably shuffling those preserved, to produce as much confusion as possible, as the chronological order of the plays was carefully upset in the Folio. Indeed, when studying them closely, one seems to detect fleeting evidences of method in the way they were rearranged.

Nos. 153 and 154 would appear to have been among the earliest. So does No. 122 which, although patently revised, was addressed to the Queen in apology for having given away the tablet encrusted with diamonds that she had presented to him after his victory in his first tournament, in 1571. "Thy gift, thy tables. . . ." It is the practiced courtier who protests,

> To keep an adjunct to remember thee
> Were to import forgetfulness in me.

No. 128 is also a courtier's poem, written to the Queen, who was a skilled performer on the virginals. The young Earl had been accustomed to stand beside her as she played; and songs from two of his dramas are to be found in her Virginal Book. (In quoting this sonnet, we italicize certain phrases for the point we are about to make.)

> How oft when thou, my music, music play'st
> Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
> With thy *sweet fingers,* when thou gently sway'st
> The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
> Do I *envy those jacks* that nimble leap
> To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
> Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
> At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!
> To be *so tickl'd,* they would *change their state*
> *And situation with those dancing chips. . . .*

Jonson made this sonnet the subject of one of his innumerable parodies (*E.M.O.:* III.3), when he had Fastidious Brisk (Southampton) say of Saviolina (Elizabeth) playing on the *viol da gamba:*

> You see the subject of her *sweet fingers* there. Oh, she *tickles* it so that . . . *I have wished myself to be that instrument,* I think, a thousand times.

The intimacy existing between Oxford and Elizabeth is apparent in the concluding lines of No. 128:

> Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
> Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

No. 123 is also definitely addressed to the Queen, the final couplet repeating Sebastian's pledge to Olivia (*T.N.:* IV.3.33),

> And having sworn truth, *ever* will be *true,*

as well as the concluding statement of the Earl of Oxford's first signed sonnet, written to Elizabeth,

> As nought but death shall *ever* change thy mind.

Sonnet 123 has it thus:

> No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change;
> . . . . . .
> This I do vow, and this *shall* ever be:
> I *will* be *true,* despite thy scythe and thee.

(That he means "E.Ver" here is attested by his use of "shall" for force, as in the next line he uses "will" with "I": E.Ver shall; I will.)

Nos. 124 and 125 are also addressed to the Queen. It is difficult to understand how certain commentators could have taken "my dear love," in 124, to mean the Fair Youth: it is so obviously the poet's love for Elizabeth:

> If my dear love were but the child of state,
> *It* might for Fortune's bastard be unfather'd.

He means, of course, that if his love for the Queen were but a politic product of environment—"the child of state," because he had lived near her at court, among the "weeds" and "flowers"—it would be less sincere and dependable. But—

> It was builded far from accident
> It suffers not in smiling pomp nor falls
> Under the blow of thralled discontent;
> . . . . . .
> It fears not policy, that heretic;

therefore, being true love, it is unimpeachable and will endure.[3]

[3] The final couplet may refer to the repentant Essex, one of those

> . . . *fools of time,*
> Which die for goodness, who have liv'd for crime.

He is making the same protestation in No. 125, which seems to belong to 1588–89 and also to 1601; for on February 7 of the latter year a representative of Essex and Southampton arranged by bribery to have *King Richard II* presented at the Globe Theatre; the following day the Essex Rebellion took place, and there was hell to pay. Since the story of Richard was the story of a monarch's deposition, suspicion fell upon everyone connected with the performance at the Globe, and Oxford's enemies would have seized the chance to accuse —or *inform* against—him. The manager and some of the actors were arrested, though later released, and it goes without saying that if the playwright had been a man of the people, he would have been condignly punished.

Of course, *Richard II* was an old play, written twenty years before for court and private performances. Subsequently, however, it had not only been revised, with Richard standing symbolically for Southampton, it had been produced in public theatres; and the Queen, angry and bitter against both Southampton and his father—all the more so because of her own guilt towards them—expressed her resentment to William Lambard six months after the uprising in a conversation which the antiquary himself recorded. His account, necessarily abridged, follows:

> That which passed from the Excellent Majestie of Queen Elizabeth, in her Privie Chamber at East Greenwich, 4° Augusti 1601, 43° reg. sui, towards William Lambarde.
>
> He presented her Majestie with his Pandecta of all her rolls, bundells, mambranes, and parcels, that be reposed in her Majestie's Tower at London; whereof she had given him the charge 21st Jan. last past.
>
> *Her Majestie* cheerfully received the same into her hands, saying, "You intended to present this book unto me by the Countess of Warwicke; but I will none of that; for if any subject of mine do me a service, I will thankfully accept it from his own hands:" then opening the book, said, "You shall see that I can read:" . . . Then she descended from the beginning of King John, till the end of Richard III . . . in the first page she demanded the meaning of *"oblata" cartae, litterae clausae, et litterae patentes.*
>
> W.L.—He severally expounded the right meaning. . . . Then she proceedeth to further pages. . . .
>
> W.L.—He likewise expounded all these . . . which she took in gracious and full satisfaction; so her Majestie fell upon the reign of King Richard II., saying "I am Richard II. know ye not that?"
>
> W.L.—"Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind gent. the most adorned creature that ever your Majestie made."
>
> *Her Majestie.*—"He that will forget God will also forget his benefactors; this tragedie was played 40^{tie} times in open streets and houses. . . ." [4]

[4] F. Chamberlin: *The Sayings of Q. Eliz.;* p. 52 ff. Original ital.

"The most adorned creature that ever your Majestie made" could have been either Essex or the Earl of Oxford, who, with the help of his "imagination," had originally written *Richard II* during the banishment which had followed his efforts to save the Queen from deposition and death at the hands of the conspirators of 1580. The implication is that its frequent public performances were his fault.

Elizabeth's remark, "He that will forget God will also forget his benefactors," is characteristic. She made a show of being profoundly religious; but her behavior was considerably less Christian than that of Lord Oxford, who, in times of intense pessimism, arising for the most part from her outrageous treatment of him and their son, had been sporadically skeptical and fatalistic. However, as regards the final revision of *Richard II,* with its overtones about the Fair Youth as the sun (son), the deposed *roi soleil,* she had grounds for resentment—especially in view of its forty performances in public—although Lord Oxford had never, of course, expected the play to be used to bolster a conspiracy, had never dreamed that Southampton would revolt against his sovereign. What his heart was set upon was Elizabeth's recognition of her rightful heir, what his mind demanded was justice and truth.

Because the Earl of Southampton had joined Essex, the Queen, well aware of Lord Oxford's passionate devotion to the impetuous young man, may have suspected him of too much sympathy for their project. She had certainly treated him badly enough even in material ways to have a guilty conscience, even ignoring his pleas for the restoration of the Forest of Essex, which rightfully belonged to him. But throughout his life Lord Oxford never faltered in allegiance to his sovereign, and, despite his sufferings at her hands, despite his bitterness that his titanic efforts in the field of the drama had apparently gone for nothing, with himself anonymous and neglected, yet he could still find it in his heart to protest his love for her.

> Were 't aught to me *I bore the canopy,*
> With my extern the outward honouring,
> *Or laid great bases for eternity,*
> *Which proves more short than waste or ruining?*
> 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?
> No; let *me* be obsequious in *thy heart,*
> And take thou mine oblation *poor* but *free,*
> Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art
> But *mutual render,* only *me for thee.*
> Hence, thou *suborn'd informer!* a *true* soul,
> When most impeach'd, stands least in thy control. (125.)

Of what avail to him that, as Lord Great Chamberlain, he "bore the canopy" over the Queen in the thanksgiving celebration for England's great victory over Spain, taking his part in pomp and circumtance, or that he had written deathless poetry and drama for the glory of England, which was being allowed to go nameless and for nothing? He had seen the Queen's sycophants and favorites come and go, sacrificing everything for temporary or uncertain benefits. Essex, for instance, had been granted the monopoly of the compounding of sweet wines, but to attain this "compound sweet" he had foregone the "simple savour" of more genuine satisfactions.[5] Others had been Ralegh, Drake, Brooke, Lord Grey: she had dealt harshly with them all. No; he himself offered her the disinterested homage of a "poor" but "free" man, from his heart, which was based upon "mutual surrender," such as they two had known, "In days long since, before these last so bad." His enemies, men who were jealous of the Queen's love for him, had been at work trying to poison her mind against him once more, telling her that he had abetted the conspiracy. But as a "true soul," he spurns these "suborn'd informers," and so, he knows, will she.

We have already shown that No. 34 is addressed to the Queen (Chap. Twenty-nine), and No. 33—where their son is again the sun, "my sun,"—is aimed at her, although these are placed in the midst of a group written to the Fair Youth.

It seems clear that No. 120, belonging to the same period as No. 125, is a companion-piece, or a sequel, to No. 34. It was a younger man who spoke to Elizabeth in 34, an older and far wiser one who weighs their common guilt in the later sonnet, evidently written as a result of the terrible shock of the conspiracy, which could not have appalled Elizabeth more than it did Lord Oxford. There was obviously a long nocturnal session at that crucial time, during which caustic recriminations passed between these two violent creatures, with the Queen accusing the Earl of fomenting the trouble: a veritable "night of woe." Now he reminds her that, however much he may have been at fault in what he has written in *Richard II,* she had once egregiously failed him too.

> That *you* were once unkind befriends *me* now,
> And for that sorrow which I then did feel
> Needs must I under *my transgression* bow,
> Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel.
> For if *you* were by *my* unkindness shaken,
> As *I* by *yours,* you've pass'd a hell of time;

[5] Elizabeth remarked to Bacon: "Essex has written me some dutiful letters, which moved me; but after taking them to flow from the abundance of his heart, I find them but a preparative to a suit for renewing his farm of sweet wines."—*Bacon's Letters.*

And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
To weigh how once *I* suffer'd in *your* crime.
O! that our *night of woe* might have remember'd
My deepest sense, how hard *true sorrow* hits,
And soon to *you*, as *you to me then tender'd*
The *humble salve* which wounded bosoms fits!
But that *your trespass* now becomes a fee:
Mine ransoms yours, and *yours must ransom me.* (120.)

The "humble salve" she had tendered him had been that of which he had formerly said (in No. 34):

For no man well of *such a salve* can speak
That heals the wound and cures not the disgrace.

In the earlier sonnet he asks in hurt resentment why she had led him on, if she were going to allow him to suffer pain and disgrace as a result of his acquiescence and his trust, letting "base clouds o'ertake" him which had darkened his life—as had been the case in 1581. Now he says that if she has been by his recent "unkindness" or "transgression" shaken as he was by hers long ago, she's "passed a hell of time," as he did then. So it is that her former "trespass" has become "a fee," and it must ransom his, as his ransoms hers.

No. 109 is also very early, belonging, as we have suggested, to the year 1574, when the young Earl had run away, soon after the birth of his son to the Queen.

In No. 67 the proud but frustrate father is chiding the boy's mother for her irresponsible behavior towards their son, whose Tudor "rose is true." She was probably keeping him too much at court, and this may have been the very period at which Oberon was pleading with Titania for her changeling boy. It is very appealing.

Ah! wherefore with infection should he live,
And with his presence grace impiety,
That sin by him advantage should achieve,
And lace itself with his society?
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?*
Why should he live, now Nature bankrupt is,
Beggar'd of blood to blush through lively veins?
For she hath no exchequer now but his,
And proud of many, lives upon his gains.
O! him she stores, to show what wealth she had
In days long since, before these last so bad.

No. 68 continues in the same vein, bringing in "beauty" and "truth," and adding a stinging reproach for a woman who artificially prolongs the appearance of youth, while reminding her that she has

a normal and valid claim to it in her son, in whom her own youth is renewed. (Compare No. 3, *lines* 9-10.)

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
When beauty liv'd 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;
In him *those holy antique hours* are seen,
Without all ornament, itself and true,
Making no summer of another's green,
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;
And him as for a map doth Nature store,
To show false Art what beauty was of yore.

This is characteristically plain-spoken. He disliked painting, and wigs.

In "golden tresses" and "beauty's dead fleece" we find a direct connection with Portia-Elizabeth, whose

. . . *sunny locks*
Hang on her temples like a *golden fleece.* (I.1.169-70.)

And Bassanio uses almost the exact language of this sonnet when he says that "crisped snaky golden locks" are

. . . often known
To be the dowry of a *second head.* (III.2.94-5.)

All this is unmistakably and significantly satirized in *Cynthia's Revels* (V.2):

Crites. . . . You that tell your mistress her *beauty* is all composed of theft; her hair stole from *Apollo's goldy-locks;* her *white and red, lilies and roses* . . . her eyes two *stars* [Son. 14.]

No. 127 plays upon the same idea and, superficially, it would seem to be addressed to the Dark Lady, but repetition of the point made in the one above, shows it to be aimed at Elizabeth:

In the old age *black* was not counted *fair,*
Or if it were, it bore not *beauty's* name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And *beauty slander'd with a bastard's shame:*
For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
Fairing the foul with Art's false borrow'd face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.

But in the remainder, we see that this "beauty" was "born fair"; and so we find that "black" is used here again in the sense of "stain," as Aaron was black, and Othello, *line* 4 being a pun on an idea.

No. 101, while apostrophizing his Muse, is aimed at Elizabeth, referring to her as "beauty" once more, and to himself as "truth," the parents of the Fair Youth, in praising whom his Muse has lately been dilatory.

> O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
> For thy neglect of *truth in beauty dy'd?*
> Both *truth and beauty* on *my love* depends:
> *So dost thou too,* and therein dignified.
> Make answer, Muse; wilt thou not haply say,
> "Truth needs no colour, with his *colour*[6] *fix'd;*
> *Beauty* no pencil, *beauty's truth* to lay;
> But best is best, if never intermix'd?"
> . . . . . .
> Then do thy office, Muse; I teach thee how
> To make him seem long hence as he shows now.

This is one of the many Immortality or Eternizing Sonnets.

No. 25, whether or not directly addressed to the Queen, is written in bitterness for her treatment of him, her premier Earl, erstwhile favorite, and lover. Like 66, it voices the disillusionment of the courtier, as he gives vent to it elsewhere in letters and and plays, notably in *Hamlet* (III.2.60-2.) Although his deserts have been great, "fortune" has barred him from triumphs.

> 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.

The symbolism here is obvious. Lyly wrote of Queen Elizabeth: "She useth the marigold for her flower." As for the "sun," which is identified with the Queen in No. 34, we cannot do better than to quote Tillyard:

> And in *A Christian Familiar Comfort* [John Norden] compares the state of the heavens and Queen Elizabeth and her Council to the *primum mobile,* or controlling sphere, within whose compass any other motion must be contained. But much more frequent . . . is the special [comparison] between the *sun,* the ruler of the heavens, and the king, ruler of the state. The *roi soleil* is indeed one of the most persistent of all Elizabethan commonplaces.[7]

No. 25 continues:

> The painful warrior famoused for fight,
> After a thousand victories once foil'd,
> Is from the *book of honour* razed quite,
> And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd.

[6] I.e., hue; and also his royal colors.
[7] *The Elizabethan World Picture;* p. 82.

In William Segar's *Of Honour Militarie and Civil,* published in 1602, Lord Oxford's triumphs in the tournaments were recorded, but not his literary accomplishments. Very little is said about his part in the second, though, as we have noted (Chap. Twenty-four) a contemporary document shows that he was a resplendent figure in the 1581 triumph. In a book called *"Axiochus,* a Dialogue by Plato, *Translated out of the Greek by Edw.* [*sic*] *Spenser,"* is inserted a full description of the Earl of Oxford as the magnificent Knight of the Sun in the 1581 tournament. Without further introduction appears the following:

> Hereto is annexed the sweet speech or Oration spoken at the Tryumphe at White-hall before her Maiestie, by the Page of the right noble Earle of Oxenforde.[8]

The speech is highly allegorical and has been suspiciously mutilated here and there. It seems likely that, when some powerful hand weeded everything out of the record which reflected credit upon Oxford, this was covertly slipped in—it may have been by Spenser himself, who was on to Burghley's tricks.

The publication of the *Book of Honour* in 1590 (which we have not seen) coincided with the nadir of Oxford's fortunes. Thus Sonnet 25, and probably also 29, are intrinsically dated, if he were left out of that. He takes comfort for the pain and discredit he has suffered in the love of the Fair Youth,

> Where I may not remove nor be remov'd.

No. 29, addressed to the Fair Youth, is adorned and brightened by the lovely lark-at-heaven's-gate image which, beginning with his early signed poems, became as distinct an Edward de Vere *cachet* as Echo.

In the first seventeen sonnets, which are clearly dynastic in tone, the poet urges the Fair Youth to marry and assure the continuance of his line. Surely only a father would exhort a young Earl to

> Make thee another self, *for love of me,*
> That beauty still may live in thine or thee. (10.)

This was Elizabeth's sole hope now of carrying on the Tudor dynasty. But strange creature that she was—egoistic, vain beyond normal conception—she seemed indifferent to an extension of herself, clinging only to that which was centered in her own person, while also, however, preserving the legend of virginity seemingly so dear to her people's hearts.[9]

[8] Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, Eng. Lit., 1475–1700. N. Y. Pub. Lib. A facsimile.
[9] A suggestive passage occurs in one of the poems of *Love's Martyr: or Rosalins Complaint,* "In Sorrow's Ioy," referring to her death:

> That Pellican who for her people's good
> Shirkt not to spill (alas) her owne deare blood:
> That maid, that Pellican.

There is abundant allusion to Elizabeth as the mother:

> From fairest creatures we desire increase,
> That thereby *beauty's rose* might never die. (1.)

This means the beautiful Queen's Tudor rose. In the quarto "Rose" is capitalized.

> Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
> Calls back the lovely April of her prime. (3.)

Not of her youth, for she had not been young to this lover, but of her "prime." In No. 70 he reminds his son that having "pass'd by the ambush of young days," he now presents "a pure unstained prime."

> . . . "*Truth* and *beauty* shall *together thrive,*
> If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert;"
> Or else of thee this I prognosticate:
> *"Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date."* (14.)

This is patently symbolical. He cannot mean that truth and beauty will forever perish if Southampton leaves no heirs; that would be fatuous, and Shakespeare is never fatuous. The only possible persons —or personages—to whom he *can* refer are de Vere, scion of England's most illustrious family, and the Queen. He always refers to these two as "truth" and "beauty." The disguise is thin enough, in all conscience. Compare the penultimate stanza of the *Threnos* of *The Phoenix and the Turtle:*

> *Truth* may seem, but cannot be,
> *Beauty* brag, but 'tis not she;
> *Truth and beauty buried be.*

In the first of the Sonnets he says:

> *Pity the world,* or else this glutton be,
> To eat *the world's due,* by the grave and thee;

and he adds, in No. 9:

> *The world* will be thy widow. . . .

Rather extravagant for a private person, even a handsome young Earl, who is "the world's fresh ornament."

> Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place
> With *beauty's* treasure, ere it be self-kill'd. (6.)

It has been generally supposed that the poet indited these first seventeen sonnets to the Fair Youth at the time Burghley was promoting a marriage between him and the Lady Elizabeth Vere, in 1590. If he were being literal in No. 2—"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow"—and was himself precisely forty years old, then their date would have been 1590. In that year the Earl of Southampton was officially seventeen years old—by our calculations, sixteen—and the little Lady Vere fourteen. But even a prince of sixteen or seventeen could scarcely be warned that he was risking extinction of his line by not marrying; and so the "forty winters" must be taken as figurative rather than literal. Elizabethans used round numbers with notably wide latitude.

It is high time this question of the assumed coincidence of Burghley's negotiations for the match with the earnest plea of the poet that the Fair Youth should marry, was examined in the light of common sense. If Burghley knew Southampton was Lord Oxford's and Queen Elizabeth's son, he surely could not have pressed the matter—unless he were doing so *for public effect:* a characteristically Cecilian motive; that is, to suppress rumors of the Fair Youth's parentage. Although it is unsafe to build upon Burghley's ignorance, we may be sure this secret would have been stringently guarded; and it is not impossible, albeit most unlikely, that both he and the Countess of Southampton, for a while at least, inferred Leicester's paternity. Oxford was skilled in dissimulation—"I am not as I seem to be"—and one can with considerable glee imagine him deliberately obfuscating Burghley as Hamlet did Polonius. But not to be overlooked is Helen-Elizabeth's remark to Pandarus-Burghley in *Troilus and Cressida* (III.1.143-8) in connection with a hair-heir pun. Speaking of Troilus, she says:

> He hangs the lip at something: *you know all,* Lord Pandarus.
> *Pandarus.* Not I, honey-sweet queen. . . . [To Paris] You'll remember your brother's excuse?
> *Paris.* To a *hair.*

Of course, if the Earl believed Elizabeth de Vere was his own daughter, he would never have countenanced such a match. And he had outwardly accepted her as his daughter. Perhaps he, too, was acting for public effect, but considering the melancholy into which his calamitous misfortunes had plunged him in 1590, it is unlikely that he would have had the spontaneity or enthusiasm for pressing any enterprise at that time, or indeed during the following year either. In any case, throughout his eloquent plea he was thinking *only of the youth,* who in his person symbolized a union of "truth" and "beauty." From everything he says it appears that he had *no specific girl in mind.*

Naturally, the Earl of Southampton never agreed to the match: after a protracted period of apparent inertia, he refused it point blank. The report which said he had been compelled to pay Burghley five thousand pounds for what we should now call "breach of promise" stemmed from a gossipy letter written by the Jesuit priest Garnet —the "great equivocator"—and was, therefore, thoroughly unreliable.

That is the only source of the statement. No record exists of any payment ever demanded or discharged.[10]

There is a conspicuous parallel to this situation in the marriage of Florizel to Perdita in the part of *The Winter's Tale* belonging to the late revision. If Perdita had been the daughter of Polixines, as her father had suspected her of being, Florizel would have been her half-brother.

The first seventeen sonnets could have been written at almost any time between 1590 and, say, 1596–97, the "forty winters" meaning forty-odd. The youth could hardly have been said to have attained his "prime" before he had reached his majority.

Commentators have remarked that, after writing this first group, the poet never again mentioned marriage in the Sonnets. But how do we know that these were composed consecutively? They may have been spread over a span of ten years and simply placed together by the editor of the 1609 publication. In fact, they must have been, for the intrinsic order of the Sonnets was unquestionably upset.

Some of these first seventeen might even have been written during the long period of Southampton's dalliance with Elizabeth Vernon, in the latter 1590's, when he procrastinated for all the world as his mother had been constitutionally prone to do. Oxford may have had so much more than enough of this kind of thing that he wished to bring the young man to a definite decision, to make him realize his responsibility, not only from the standpoint of high birth and rich endowment, but also as potential King of England. There is circumstantial evidence that, almost to the last, he entertained a hope of eventual recognition for "truth's and beauty's" heir.

The most lordly and forceful of this whole group of sonnets is, in our opinion, No. 7. Here the youth's life is openly compared with that of the "sun" of heaven:

> Lo! in the Orient when the gracious light
> Lifts up his burning head, each under eye
> Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,
> Serving with looks his *sacred majesty;*
> And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,
> Resembling strong youth in his middle age,
> Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,
> Attending on his golden pilgrimage;
> But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,
> Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day,
> The eyes, *'fore duteous,* now converted are
> From his low tract, and look another way:
> So thou, thyself outgoing in thy noon,
> Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son.

[10] Ward gives no credence to the report.

This, we submit, was not written to a seventeen-year-old boy but to a young man with whom the poet had for years been pleading to be mindful of his posterity. Curiously enough, the youth seems to have been like his mother in this regard too. It is striking that the play on "sun" (son) is accompanied by "sacred majesty" and "duteous."

Lord Oxford was in an intolerable position. For one of his open, truthful, ardent, and articulate nature, his situation was a source of constant torment. Here he was, the father of the rightful heir to the throne of England—and this meant more to a feudal lord of ancient lineage than we of today can appreciate—dishonored for having begotten him, unable to acknowledge him or even to enjoy the easy affectionate rapport other men had with their sons. His devotion was deepened by his sense of guilt and exalted by the boy's distinguished personal attributes and honorable estate, while his sense of duty was increased by his powerlessness to obtain for the young prince his true heritage. All he could do was to give vent to his love, his bitterness, his humility and remorse, his dynastic fervor, as well as to his feeling of responsibility for his son's character and welfare, through the medium which was most natural to him, poetic and dramatic expression.

> But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
> . . . . . .
> Thou, best of dearest and mine only care. (48.)

The Earl had need of all his powers of dissimulation and must have exercised them well, especially in his association with the Fair Youth himself, in order that he might not guess why this older man loved him so tenderly. He could not allow their true relationship to be suspected; and so he told young Wriothesley, who had begun taking the role of the heroine in his plays, that if he had actually been a girl, his poet would have fallen in love with him, but since Nature had defeated him in this, he would give him the love of a true friend.

> A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
> Hast thou, the *master-mistress of my passion;*
> A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
> With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
> An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
> Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
> *A man in hue all hues in his controlling,*
> Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
> And for a woman wert thou first created;
> Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
> And by addition me of thee defeated,
> By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
> But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure. (20.)

This sonnet is no longer baffling when the peculiar situation in which the poet found himself is understood. The "master-mistress" characterization recognizes the young boy's effeminacy—he wore his hair very long, curled "like buds of marjoram" (No. 99)—and his taking girls' parts in the plays, perhaps sometimes Rosalind or Juliet opposite Oxford as Orlando or Romeo, Viola to Oxford's Duke Orsino, "your master's mistress." Since "passions" were love-poems,[11] the Fair Youth was the master-mistress of the poet's verse as well as of his love—though not of his carnal love; Nature had taken care of that.

In *The Tempest,* Ferdinand (the Fair Youth) tells Alonso, regarding Miranda (the plays):

> I chose her when I could not ask *my father*
> For his advice, *nor thought I had one.* (V.1.190-1.)

And he says of Prospero-Oxford that he was one of whom he had often heard but never seen before:

> . . . of whom I have
> Receiv'd *a second life;* and *second father*
> This lady makes him to me. (194-5.)

Nature, like Venus, "fell a-doting" on the young Adonis.

> Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
> Is poorly imitated after you;
> On *Helen's* cheek all art of beauty set,
> And you *in Grecian tires* are *painted new.* (53.)

Elizabeth was Helen in *Troilus and Cressida;* and Southampton certainly played first Viola, and probably later Sebastian, "in Grecian tires" and "painted new," in *Twelfth Night.*

Regarding the word "hue," which is used so often in connection with the Fair Youth, it may have had something to do with the "stain," with the "purple flower," and also with Southampton's initials, H.W. The letters V and U were interchangeable—as were I and J—in that day. W was always written VV. So Henry Wriothesley's initials were H.VV., or H.UU., and pronounced "aitch double-u"; which would be "hue" or "hew." In the First Folio it was written "hew." [12] But that it had largely to do with his "color" or "colors" is

[11] Lyly wrote Watson, apropos of his sonnets: "My good friend, I have read your new *passions,* and they have renewed my old pleasure."

[12] Hence the "Mr. W.H." of the dedication of the Sonnets could be merely a reversal of the letters from "Mr. H.W.," since he is actually the H.UU. whose "colour" is so frequently mentioned in the sonnets addressed to him. Nicholas Lind is generally supposed to have signed his transposed initials, "L.N.," to the Preface of *England's Helicon:* "To the reader, if indifferent." Again, in some copies of Anthony Munday's *Fidele and Fortunio,* 1584, the initials "M.A." are signed, in others, "A.M."

evident from many allusions in contemporary plays and poems. Of course, all noblemen had their colors—Oxford's were blue and tawny, or Reading tawny—and so did royalty: Elizabeth's were green and white. Thus we speak of appearing under true or false colors.

In *As You Like It,* Celia says to Rosalind, who is not only called "fair youth," but who, in the 1590's, was undoubtedly portrayed in private theatres by the Fair Youth:

> Change you colour? (III.2.183.)

This might be nothing in itself, but when it occurs repeatedly, with variations, it becomes significant.

There is another passage (I.2.100-7) weighted with suggestion:

> *Celia.* Sport! Of what *colour?*
> *Le Beau.* What *colour,* madam! How shall I answer you?
> *Rosalind.* As *wit* and *fortune* will. [I.e., as Oxford and the Queen will.]
> *Touchstone.* Or as the Destinies decree.
> *Celia.* Well said: that was laid on with a trowel.
> *Touchstone.* Nay, if I keep not my rank—
> *Rosalind.* Thou losest thy old smell. [Of a courtier.]

In *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV.2.149-52), the following dialogue occurs:

> *Nathaniel.* Sir, you have done this in the fear of God, very religiously; and as a certain *Father* saith—
> *Holofernes.* Sir, tell me not of the *Father;* I do fear *colourable colours.*

In Sonnet 101 we find the poet very explicit. Amid a wealth of "truth and beauty" symbolism, he declares:

> *Truth* needs no *colour,* with his *colour fix'd.*

In other words, the "colour" of the son of "truth"—Vere—is self-evident. unimpeachable.

It will be recalled that the passage in *Cynthia's Revels* about the exchange of beavers (Chap. Sixty-one) has Amorphus saying:

> . . . it will preserve your *complexion* to *eternity.*

That is, it will give you immortality in your true colors.

For another example: Amorphus-Oxford protests (*Cyn. Rev.:* I.1):

> If my behaviours had been of a cheap or customary garb, my accent or phrase vulgar, my garments trite, my countenance illiterate . . . then I might, with some *change of colour,* have suspected my faculties.

And again, in the same play, when Amorphus is instructing Asotus, he says (III.1):

> Rather seem not to know them [i.e., the writers who are courting his favor], it is your best . . . but if they be offered to you in discourse, shake your light head, make between a sad and a smiling face, pity some, rail at all, and commend yourself. . . . Come, you shall *look back upon the court* again today, and *be restored to your colours.*

We may, therefore, take it that the constant repetition of "hue" in reference to the Fair Youth implies that he goes under a certain color, by the initials, H.W. or H.UU., but that he is "a man in hue, *all hues* in his controlling." Jonson says bluntly enough that at "the court" he can be "restored" to his "colours."

By 1599, the other writers had begun to realize what the relationship was between Oxford and Southampton. Nashe knew it earlier. Jonson had not known it when *Every Man Out* appeared in 1598, but he showed in *Cynthia's Revels* that he did. And Chapman showed, in *A Humourous Day's Mirth* (1599), not only that he had guessed the secret but also that he saw through Oxford's tactics.

In this play, Lemot stands for Oxford; and one of the characters speaks of Lucilla's house as "the *muster-mistress* of all the *smock-tearers* in London." The allusion is exceedingly rash. "Muster-mistress" would, of course, immediately have been understood to point to the "master-mistress" of Sonnet 20—by now familiar to the coterie of writers who had seen it in manuscript—and to Viola-Sebastian, the "master's mistress" of *Twelfth Night.* The "smock" referred to Elizabeth, from Bertram-Oxford's refusal, in *All's Well,* to remain "a forehorse to a smock," when he wished to go to the wars. A "smock-tearer" is one who uses a smock roughly and thus suggests *The Rape of Lucrece.* The affair had become a *cause célèbre* in the court and literary-circles of London; strong measures were taken to suppress comment.

Mr. Percy Allen, referring to what must be another version of *A Humourous Day's Mirth,* in which Verone (one Ver) is Oxford, quotes the following passage:

> *King* [apropos of Verone's son.] What can he do?
> *Cat.* Speak some speech his father hath made for him.
> *Queen.* Why? Is he good at speeches?
> *Cat.* O, he is rare at speeches.[13]

Characteristically, Oxford brings the "master-mistress' implication out into the open in the late version of *Troilus and Cressida,* which is an effective counterblast to all this innuendo, when he has Thersites, who is at least partially Chapman, call Patroclus Achilles's "male varlet," Achilles being partly Oxford himself and Patroclus, Southampton. The original Patroclus *was* Achilles's "male varlet"; and this indicates Oxford's scorn for the officious playwrights, the cynics, or "dogs." The manuscripts of his Sonnets may have reached some of these indirectly, through other writers for whom he had more respect. However, the Sonnets, as Canon Rendall wisely observed, "never contain a trace of erotic implication."

[13] *Who Were the Dark Lady and Fair Youth?*

Nos. 98 and 99 would seem to belong to the period of the boy's yet sexless youth, the former touching upon "hue" again, and the "lilies" and the "rose," showing delight in all the manifestations of springtime. Since it closes with,

> Yet seem'd it winter still, and you away,
> As with your shadow I with these did play,

it would seem to belong to the late summer of 1585, when Oxford himself was away, as No. 97 obviously does. The inference is that it is "winter" because the "sun" (son) was absent.

The other, No. 99—a fifteen-line poem, by the way, not a sonnet—speaks of "The purple pride . . . In my love's veins," the whiteness of his hands, the "buds of marjoram" for his hair, and then brings in the symbolism of the "rose's thorn" (Elizabeth's *Rosa sine spina*) and the canker of bastardy:

> The *roses* fearfully *on thorns* did stand,
> *One blushing shame, another white despair;*
> A third, nor red nor white, *had stol'n of both,*
> And to his robbery had annex'd *thy breath;*
> But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth,
> A vengeful *canker* eat him up to death.

The Queen's red rose blushed for "shame," while Oxford's was white with "despair." As for their son, mingled red and white, with the Fair Youth's "breath," the "vengeful canker" had done its work.

We may be sure that when he was old enough Southampton would have played Ferdinand in *The Tempest;* and it is evident that Oxford was writing of him—who was now as fascinated with the plays (Miranda) as the original, Ferdinando Stanley, could have been—in the following passage, added for the purpose:

> *Prospero.* . . . this gallant which thou see'st
> Was in *the wrack;* and, but he's something *stain'd*
> With grief,—that *beauty's canker,*—thou might'st call him
> A goodly person. . . .
> *Miranda.* I might call him
> A thing divine; for *nothing natural*
> I ever saw *so noble.*
> *Prospero.* It goes on, I see,
> As my soul prompts it. (I.2.410-17.)

Miranda's words mean no "natural" son was ever of so "noble" birth. Ferdinand presently requests Prospero

> . . . that you will *some good instruction* give
> How I may bear me here. . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . My language, heavens!
> I am the best of them that speak this speech,
> Were I but where 'tis spoken. (421-7.)

As, indeed, Southampton was. He had received his M.A. at Cambridge in 1589 and had then proceeded to Gray's Inn. All this time he was spending whatever hours he could spare at the theatre. Even so late as 1599 Rowland White wrote Sir Robert Sydney:

> My Lord Southampton and Lord Rutland come not to the court. . . . They pass away the time in London merely in going to plays every day.[14]

No. 37 would seem to have been written in 1590 or '91, while the poet was feeling broken and desolate, before he married again. When he says,

> So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,

he speaks both literally and figuratively, and perhaps indirectly refers to the "separable spite" of the preceding sonnet, which keeps him apart from his son. In No. 89 he again mentions his lameness, a result of his duel with Knyvet. This one and No. 88 are an expression of devotion which, from an older to a younger man, could only be paternal. Incidentally, the word "attainted," in 88, would be applicable solely to a person of high position.

No. 22 is one of the most tenderly paternal of them all:

> 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:
> How can I then be elder than thou art?

No. 23 speaks of love which can hardly contain itself; the exuberance of the youthful Oxford has found a new channel. No. 24 stresses the beauty which so delights him, enriching his love with an aesthetic satisfaction profoundly important to a man of his nature. It begins:

> Mine eye hath *play'd the painter* and hath *stell'd*
> Thy beauty's form in table of my heart.

In Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (V), Mercury says to Amorphus:

> Sir, you have *plaid the painter* yourself, and *limn'd* them to the life.

No. 62, which has, strangely enough, been interpreted by certain modern critics as a confession of egotism, is another expression of deep paternal love:

> Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
> And all my soul and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account;

[14] Enc. Brit.; quot. *Sydney Papers*, ed. Collins, ii, 132.

> And for myself mine own worth to define,
> As I all others in all worths surmount.
> But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
> Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
> 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.

Not to be minimized, as we have already noted, are the implications in both No. 62 and No. 42:

> *'Tis thee, myself*, that for myself I praise,

and,

> But here's the joy: *my friend and I are one.*

It will be recalled that the Queen in *Hamlet* is, like Elizabeth, the hereditary monarch, "the imperial jointress"; so that the elder Hamlet has been her consort, as Oxford considered that he had been Elizabeth's consort (whom Leicester and Hatton, as Claudius, had symbolically poisoned, removing him from his intimate relation with the Queen and filling his place.) Thus the young Hamlet, though he is first of all the young Oxford, becomes later his other self too, and is, therefore, the son of the Queen and her former consort. It is all very complex, but it is valid, and it adds poignant significance to the lines spoken at the close of the play by Fortinbras:

> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have prov'd most royally.

In 1598 Mere's *Palladis Tamia* spoke of "Shakespeare's sugred sonnets among his friends." It is very telling, therefore, that in *Cynthia's Revels* (II) Asotus-Southampton is said by Mercury to be "the heir of Philargyrus." Now, *Phil-argyrus* is an anagram for *Phil-sugarry*, or *sugary love*. The Sonnets were "sugred," or sugared, because they expressed an overweening love—or what the mean-spirited Jonson called "sugary love"—for Southampton.

As we have said, No. 126 is patently a *finis* to a special group pertaining to the boy's early youth. It is not a sonnet but a twelve-line canzonet written in rhyming couplets. The poet seems to be saying that the youth's childhood is waning as he grows older:

> O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
> Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle hour;
> Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
> Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st. . . .

Evidently his youthful freshness was prolonged, as had been the case with his father, who had remained beardless beyond the usual date.

But like all of Nature's minions, he would have sooner or later to yield to her "audit":

> If Nature, *sovereign mistress* over *wrack*,
> As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,
> She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
> May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.
> Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
> She may detain, but still not keep, her treasure:
> Her *audit*, though delay'd, answer'd must be,
> *And her quietus is to render thee.*

There is of course a double-meaning here, for the "sovereign mistress," Elizabeth, was Nature and she was responsible for the "wrack." So the poet is repeating the suggestion made in No. 67 that "Nature bankrupt is," since she "hath no exchequer now but his"; and he adds that she may dally and procrastinate, but sooner or later she must make her final settlement, acquitting the account, and to surrender ("render") the Fair Youth, as heir, will be "her quietus," the wiping-out of her and her line. (This is in fact a pun; for the phrase, *Quietus est,* was employed to certify accounts which had been examined and proved correct.)

Perhaps the reason Oxford used so many legal terms in certain of the Sonnets was partly because the Fair Youth had gone to Gray's Inn at the turn of the decade, and partly because, his property being in litigation just then, he was thinking in legal terms. Another example occurs in No. 46. And we find, to mention a few more:

> "Shall *sum my count,* and make my old excuse,"
> Proving his beauty *by succession thine!* (2.)

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

> Which happies those that *pay the willing loan.* (6.)

> So should that beauty which you *hold in lease.* (13.)

Jonson refers to all this in *The Poetaster* (I.1) when Tibullus exclaims: "How now, Ovid! *Law cases in verse?*" And later:

> *Ovid.* I'll prove the unfashion'd body of the law
> Pure elegance, and make her rugged'st strains
> Run smoothly as Propertius' elegies.

Sonnets 30 and 31 must have been written when Lord Oxford was sunk in retrospective melancholy and may belong to 1589-91, before he remarried. He calls the youth "dear friend" in the former, while in the latter his expression of devotion is similar to that in the dedication of *Lucrece:* "And thou . . . hast all the all of me." He has been

brooding over his mistakes and disappointments, and seldom did he reach lovelier flights of poetry than when he wrote:

> When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
> I summon up remembrance of things past,
> I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
> And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
> Then can I drown an eye unus'd to flow,
> For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
> And weep afresh love's long-since-cancell'd woe,
> And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight. . . .

While this may be said to be the common fate of sentient man, it applies with particular force to the Earl of Oxford, who, being markedly sanguine, had been doomed to frustration and defeat in his worldly aims. The "eye unus'd to flow" recalls Othello's, "albeit unused to the melting mood" and other similar statements, and makes us smile, because the truth is that the emotional Oxford was somewhat given to tears.

It is interesting to speculate upon whether "love's long-since-cancell'd woe" applies to his misplaced love for Elizabeth and the sorrow that had come of it or to his baffled love for Anne Cecil, or to both. Perhaps Anne was one of the "precious friends hid in death's dateless night": Sussex would have been another, of course. However, we somehow never feel Anne's presence in Oxford's most intimate expresssions of grief, least of all in the Sonnets; and she figures only as *a part* of certain sympathetic characters in the dramas: Desdemona who, unlike Anne, did leave her father for her husband, being an idealization born of remorse.

> Thou art the grave where buried love doth lie. (31.)

This develops the thought voiced in No. 30.

The majestic No. 64, which has been called "a melody in words," ends upon a poignant expression of paternal love. In fact, no one who has loved deeply could fail to respond with anguish to the last lines:

> Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate—
> That Time will come and take my love away.
> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

The proud young Earl of Oxford with his "hawking eye" had come a long way. He had known humiliation and defeat, bereavement and remorse, frustration, disgrace, torture of heart and mind; but he had grown through suffering and had become a supremely great poet.