CHAPTER EIGHTY

HISTORY WAS REPEATING ITSELF in more ways than in providing Lord Oxford with another powerful Cecil to frustrate his enterprises. A more harrowing instance was that, whereas twenty years before, he himself had been imprisoned in the tomb-like Tower of London, his son, his other self, now was there: the Fair Youth, of whom he had written, "You are my all-the-world." None of his correspondence upon this subject survives, naturally; but it does not require much deduction from past events to be assured that there was no lack of eloquent pleading and that the despair caused by his failure to improve his estate was as nothing compared with the agony of mind he now endured. A man of such emotional force as that which could produce a Macbeth, a Hamlet, a Lear, would have been almost disintegrated now by grief and a feeling of baffled impotence. With his sensitiveness and power of vivid evocation, he would have suffered all that Southampton was suffering in his confinement, augmented by his own painful recollections, his suspense and loving sympathy, his anguish of spirit.

What would have been more likely than that he should turn during this latter period to his old play, *Richard III,* conceived while he

[21] Ward; p. 338; cit. Lansdowne MSS.

himself had been immured within those grim walls, and written so graphically that the atmosphere is still almost overpowering after nearly four hundred years? In that terrible drama of ruthless ambition, impotent passion, and brutal betrayal of innocence, the word "Tower" is used twenty-six times.

Richard III was an exceedingly popular play. First published anonymously in quarto in 1597, it was reissued and ascribed to "William Shake-speare"—the name hyphenated—in 1598; after this, six more editions appeared before the Folio of 1623. The third, *of 1602*, was described significantly as "newly augmented." The next came the year after Oxford's death. There is no way of knowing just which passages he wrote into it in 1602; but of one thing we may be sure: he was still obsessed with the Tower and with repulsion against hypocrisy and ambition of the Cecilian order. No man can write such speeches as some of those found in *Richard III* unless he feels his subject with gruelling intensity.

It is altogether probable that the readers who created a demand for seven editions of this play, between 1597 and 1623, took the monstrous hypocrite to be Robert Cecil. In a letter written by Francis Bacon to George Villiers, James's iniquitous favorite, sometime after the Earl of Salisbury's death in 1612, the following advice was given:

> Countenance, encourage, and advance able men in all kinds, degrees, and professions. For in the time of the Cecils, the father and the son, able men were by design and of purpose suppressed.[1]

It was not, of course, until after Oxford's death that Cecil betrayed his lifelong friend Ralegh, precisely as Richard betrays Buckingham; but Oxford knew his treachery and could foresee the event, as he says in 2 *Henry IV* that such things can be foreseen:

> *Warwick.* There is a history in all men's lives,
> Figuring the nature of the times deceas'd;
> The which observ'd, a man may prophesy,
> With a near aim, of the main chance of things
> As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
> And weak beginnings lie intreasured. (III.1.80 *et seq.*)

The public would have understood that the "Shake-speare" who wrote *Richard III* had taken an accurate measure of this faithless man who later informed James concerning his old friend Ralegh and also Cobham:

> I do profess *in the presence of Him that knoweth and searcheth all men's hearts*, that if I did not sometime cast a stone into the mouths of

[1] Macaulay: *Lord Bacon.* The author notes that Burghley had been unfriendly to Bacon, because of his great ambition for his son Robert, who "was no match for his cousin Francis."

> those gaping crabbs when they are in prodigall humour of discourses, they would not stick to confess dayly how contrary it is to their nature to be under your sovereignty.[2]

It might be old Burghley himself calling upon the Almighty to strike him dead if the lies he was affirming were not holy truth. Hume's appraisal would have applied equally well to the older man, although he never seemed to realize this: "The cool unemotional hunchback was intent upon playing a double game by which, in any case, *he* would win." [3]

Even Richard's transparent flattery of women did not exceed in guile that of Robert Cecil aimed at Queen Elizabeth—for example, in a letter to Essex in 1596:

> No prayer, [observes that profane sycophant] is so fruitful as that which proceedeth from those who, nearest in nature and power approach the Almighty. None so near approach his place and essence as a celestial mind in a princely body. Put forth, therefore, my lord, with full confidence, having your sails filled with her heavenly breath for a forewind.[4]

How much of the character, Richard of Gloucester, was Burghley and how much was his son Robert no one can say, but it matters little, for like father like son: the only difference was that the twisted body which, in Robert, was so ironic a manifestation of his twisted soul, was not a physical feature of Burghley, who was "a goodly apple rotten at the heart"; spiritually he was equally warped.

The Cecilian sanctimony is perfectly struck off in the scene Richard and Buckingham stage wherein Richard shall appear between two Bishops, making a show of having been disturbed at his devotions. Buckingham has been sent to arouse the people in favor of Richard by declaring Edward's children bastards and even Edward himself not the true son of his father. (III.7.) Buckingham, having made no impression on the crowd—who, at his "God save King Richard . . . spake not a word"—asks the Mayor to explain the situation to them. He does so perfunctorily, stipulating, "Thus saith the duke," not speaking "in warrant for himself." Whereupon "some ten voices cried, 'God save King Richard!' "—these, however, Buckingham's own followers.

With infinite guile Gloucester and Buckingham, whom the hunchback will not scruple to abandon after his usefulness is ended, arrange to create a demand for Gloucester to be King, working so subtly upon the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens that they presently wait upon him to demand his acceptance of the sovereignty. It is then that Richard comes forth upon the gallery, between the two

[2] Hume: *Sir Walter Ralegh;* p. 213.
[3] Op. cit.; p. 219.
[4] Strickland; p. 502.

Bishops, as if in extreme reluctance, replying unctuously to Buckingham's apology for disturbing him:

> My lord, there needs no such apology;
> I do beseech your Grace to pardon me,
> Who, earnest in the service of my God,
> Deferr'd the visitation of my friends.
> But leaving this, what is your Grace's pleasure? (III.7.103-7.)

Follow long speeches by Buckingham and Gloucester who hypnotize their listeners' minds into a conviction that England's need of Richard is so great that it must over-ride Richard's own modesty and preference for religious contemplation. Finally the Mayor begs him to accept the crown:

> Do, good my lord; your citizens entreat you.
> *Buckingham.* Refuse not, mighty lord, this proffer'd love.
> *Catesby.* O! make them joyful: grant their lawful suit.
> *Gloucester.* Alas! why would you heap those cares on me?
> I am unfit for state and majesty:
> I do beseech you take it not amiss,
> I cannot nor I will not yield to you. (200-6.)

After further protestations, he does of course "yield";

> Call them again; I am not made of stone. (222.)

By now the Mayor and Aldermen have been induced to believe they really want Richard for their King.

> *Buckingham.* Tomorrow may it please you to be crown'd?
> *Gloucester.* Even when you please, for you will have it so.
> . . . . . .
> *(To the Bishops.)* Come, let us to our holy work again.
> Farewell my cousin;—farewell, gentle friends. (239-45.)

This is absolute Cecil. Oxford had taken it all in through the very pores of his skin since his impressionable boyhood: he could no more help expressing it in drama than he could help breathing the English air.

He is bringing this knowledge from the deeps in Richard's soliloquy (I.3.325 *et seq.*):

> The secret mischiefs that I set abroach
> I lay unto the grievous charge of others.
> . . . . . .
> But then I sigh, and with a piece of scripture,
> Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
> And thus I clothe my naked villany
> With odds and ends stolen forth of holy writ,
> And seem a saint when most I play the devil.

There is one speech which is aimed directly at Elizabeth, though there is no saying when it was written, whether in the early days,

when the young Earl was pleading for recognition as father of his son, or whether after 1601, when Southampton was in the Tower. It is, significantly, Queen Elizabeth who speaks:

> Give me no help in lamentation;
> *I am not barren* to bring forth complaints:
> All *springs* reduce their currents to mine eyes,
> That I, being govern'd by *the watery moon,*
> May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world!
> Ah! for *my husband,* for *my dear Lord Edward!* (II.2.66-71.)

Thus Oxford's true wife, Queen Elizabeth, the "imperial votaress" of the "moon," who was "not barren" but was susceptible to tears—or to "springs," Vers—weeps for her "husband," her "dear Lord Edward." (Oxford was, of course, called "Lord Edward.") This is no casual coincidence of images. It is the father of the Fair Youth putting words into the mother's mouth.

One marks frequent analogies to the text of *Macbeth,* which was first written in 1589. Here we have "tears to drown the world." Oxford may have revised both plays within a short time of each other; in any case, both plays had ambition for their theme. There are, moreover, suggestions of *Hamlet,* which was certainly the subject of a late revision. And one speech of Gloucester's (I.3.70-3) may belong to the period of Oxford's satirical remark to the Queen upon news of Essex's execution:

> I cannot tell; the world is grown so bad
> That *wrens* make prey where *eagles* dare not perch:
> Since *every Jack became a gentleman*
> There's many a gentle person made a Jack.

Although he gave this speech to Gloucester, the inference is that a petty-minded Cecil makes prey where an eagle of the nobility is not allowed freedom. It is interesting that the Prince of Wales is named Edward. The young Edward de Vere who first wrote this play in 1580–81 stood virtually in the position of Prince of Wales; now his son did.

It is certainly the elder Oxford, the father of a dishonored son, who speaks through the mouth of Queen Margaret:

> O! that your young nobility could judge
> What 'twere to lose it, and be miserable!
> They that stand high have many blasts to shake them,
> And if they fall, they dash themselves to pieces. (I.3.257-60.) [5]

So has Oxford had blasts and storms and wracks; so will Wolsey have, and Lear. It is still he who replies to Gloucester's,

[5] *Wolsey.* And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again. *(H. VIII:* III.2.372-3.)

. . . but I was born so high,
Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,
And dallies with the wind, and *scorns the sun,*

with Queen Margaret's,

And turns *the sun* to *shade:* alas! alas!
Witness *my son* now *in the shade of death;*
Whose *bright out-shining beams* thy cloudy wrath
Hath *in eternal darkness folded up.* (I.3.263-9.)

(It is most striking to note that at this time—in 1602—Lord Oxford was writing Robert Cecil: "I hope that Her Majesty . . . will not draw in the *beams* of her *princely grace.* . . .")

Gloucester-Cecil means that he was born to power. Being his father's son, he could sometimes scorn the sun—*le roi soleil*—for even Elizabeth was often obliged to defer to the Cecils' judgment. He certainly scorned, or contemned, the sun (son). Oxford must have known that Robert Cecil was even now in secret correspondence with James about his accession. If Southampton should succeed Elizabeth, Cecil would be ruined.

Margaret's words are definite and clear: "my son, now in the shade of death"; this is the "sun" of the Sonnets, the Fair Youth, imprisoned in the Tower for life,

Whose bright out-shining beams thy cloudy wrath
Hath in eternal darkness folded up.

Oxford must have believed that Robert Cecil was responsible for keeping Southampton imprisoned. This may have been an exaggeration—though who can say?—yet Cecil would naturally have preferred to have him in the Tower: he was certainly inimical to him after his release.

The next line of Margaret's speech is significant:

Your aery buildeth in *our* aery's nest.

In other words, the Cecils had usurped the Veres' high position and brought them low. (Shylock-Burghley had been Jacob, the supplanter.)

If, when Queen Margaret describes Gloucester as

. . . that bottled spider,
Whose deadly web ensneareth thee about (I.3.242-3),

and as

. . . yonder dog:
Look, *when he fawns, he bites:* and when he bites
His venom tooth will rankle to the death (289-91),

Oxford was thought to have reference to Robert Cecil, one can imagine the effect it would have had. Since the threat in the latter passage is made to Buckingham, who seems to stand for Ralegh in the revision, it was certainly apropos, as well as prophetic. It is noteworthy that Gloucester calls Buckingham

My other self, my counsel's consistory,
My oracle, my prophet! (II.2.150-1.)

For Ralegh had been regarded at court, it will be remembered, as Elizabeth's "oracle" during the 1580's.[6]

As for the character Buckingham, it is an arresting fact that the corrupt George Villiers, who some fourteen or fifteen years later supplanted Somerset as James's favorite, actually became Duke of Buckingham. It is not unlikely that his venomous attitude towards the Eighteenth Earl of Oxford was prompted partly by spite against the Seventeenth Earl for having created this Buckingham such a scheming sycophant.[7] The shoe pinched.

There is one speech made by Queen Elizabeth in this play which Robert Cecil would never have forgiven, no matter how strongly his brother-in-law urged him against believing "fables" and "conceit" which connected him with Gloucester:

O! thou didst prophesy the time would come
That I should wish for thee to help me curse
That bottled spider, that foul hunchback'd toad. (IV.4.79-81.)

In what a frenzy of loathing Oxford must have written these lines!—and then grimly let them stand, come what come may. After they were purged out of his system, perhaps he no longer felt identified with them. One is reminded of the passage between the King and Hamlet:

King. I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet; these words are not mine.
Hamlet. No, nor mine now. (III.2.96-8.)

This is the insouciance of the poet. But his victim cannot be expected to take the indictment so airily. It is not for us to sit in judgment The politician and the poet will always be worlds apart, while the pride of the Elizabethan aristocrat has gone with the winds of change and can scarcely be even assessed in our idiom.

However, as we have said, the fact remains that Laertes killed Hamlet with poison, and Hamlet turned the poisoned sword upon him in return. Oxford allowed that to stand in the finished play; so we may be sure it was his final verdict.

Apropos of hints here and there in the plays that Lord Oxford had

[6] See *The Winter's Tale;* Chap. Fifty-six.
[7] Villiers made a great deal of trouble for the Eighteenth Earl, causing him to be imprisoned for a time in the Tower.

at one time killed a man, we have heretofore noted Gloucester's speech (III.5.71-7):

> Go after, after, cousin Buckingham.
> . . . . . .
> Infer the bastardy of Edward's children:
> Tell them *how Edward put to death a citizen,*
> *Only for saying he would make his son*
> *Heir to the crown.*

The dramatist has assured us that "the players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all." He certainly had no more reticence about portraying his own misdeeds than those of others. It is interesting that Richard of Gloucester was King Edward's brother, and Robert Cecil, Edward Oxford's brother-in-law; while King Edward had two so-called "bastard" sons, one of them the rightful King, "heir to the crown," and so had Edward de Vere.

In the matter of the two Princes who were sent by Richard to the Tower, there are marked similarities to the two young Earls who were committed to the same fortress after their conspiracy. If this is another case of history's repeating itself with variations, it is striking that the particulars coincide as they do here. Of course, the two Princes were younger, and innocent. But Essex and Southampton had both been Royal Wards, and both had hated the Cecils, with whom they had lived in their youth, as Oxford had. The two young Princes are not, to be sure, characterized as Essex and Southampton; rather they might be said to constitute a dual portrait of the latter alone. Oxford may have added some late touches to their part in the play to give it immediacy and personal poignancy. The young Duke of York (III.1), reminiscent of the charming Mamilius and the son of Macduff, is surely drawn, as they are, from the young Southampton. Undoubtedly he had been used to taunt Robert Cecil much as the young Prince taunts Gloucester here. He had been small for his age, as York is. But the Prince of Wales voices a conviction so intrinsically Oxfordian that he, too, must stand for the dramatist's son:

> *Prince.* I do not like the Tower, of any place:
> Did Julius Caesar build that place, my lord?
> *Buckingham.* He did, my gracious lord, begin that place,
> Which, since, succeeding ages have re-edified.
> *Prince.* Is it upon record, or else reported
> Successively from age to age, he built it?
> *Buckingham.* Upon record, my gracious lord.
> *Prince.* But say, my lord, it were not register'd,
> *Methinks the truth should live from age to age,*
> *As 'twere retail'd to all posterity,*
> *Even to the general all-ending day.* (III.1.68-78.)

"Methinks the truth should live." Vere: truth; Oxford's obsession.

Richard's hints to Buckingham for putting the two Princes out of the way (IV.2) recall King John's to Hubert for getting rid of Arthur. This whole drama is intensely personal to Lord Oxford; much of it belongs to his younger days. To say that Marlowe wrote it is preposterous and absurd.

We have spoken in an early chapter about the prominence here of the Earl of Oxford who had supported Richmond. It is interesting that in the final version, Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby, has—or retains—a prominent place; having gauged Richard's infamy from the first, he comes over to Richmond (Henry VII)—to the Lancastrians. This is worth marking, since William Stanley, Earl of Derby, had married Oxford's daughter Elizabeth in 1595.

There are many other points we should like to make, but we must forego all but the chief one, which, of course, concerns Robert Cecil's natural reaction to *King Richard III.* His resentment would have been all the stronger because the truth would have rankled. This fact would have caused him to feel added pleasure in Jonson's tactics of making Shakespeare seem to be Shaksper, the Poet-Ape. Oxford was actually helping to prepare the ground for his own burial; for Robert Cecil was evidently as close to Oxford's daughters as Burghley had been, his influence over them strong and constant. But there was one thing the Cecils had failed to reckon with, while Oxford himself never lost faith. That was the undying power of truth.