CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

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. . . . (Son. 30.)

In such a mood, like a clear calm after a tempest, the Earl of Oxford would have taken up *Antony and Cleopatra* for a last revision. This play, in which he was Antony—as he was Antonio in others—was intended as a symbolic though authoritative account of his relationship with the Queen. It was an idealization of "a courtezan of genius" and of himself, to whom can be applied Dowden's estimate of Shakespeare's Antony, that he never sank "into the mere voluptuary. The unalloyed pleasures of the senses are not what he seeks. His imagination plays about these and glorifies them." [1] The Antony of the drama is not the historic soldier of Plutarch's account, for he was not admirable; this one is, in the full sense of the word, a creation of the poet himself.

The Earl of Oxford here "refashioned in his imagination something more wonderful and more noble than the reality of his experience." Cleopatra was not, in the beginning, all Elizabeth: she was partly the dark wanton who fascinated him for so many years. But when he weeps "afresh love's long since cancell'd woe," these two women who caused him so much suffering merge in the poet's vision, becoming in retrospect the dominant woman of his life, his Queen. It is to Elizabeth as Cleopatra that he gives the lines,

> Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
> Bliss in our brows bent; none our parts so poor
> But was *a race of heaven.* (I.3.35-7.)

She was "a lass unparallel'd." Enobarbus says (II.2.243-5):

> . . . vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish.

Elizabeth had been quite as "riggish" as her seductive predecessor. When this play was first written, Leicester had stood for Octavius Caesar, in whom, it will be remembered, Antony-Oxford's "genius" was "rebuk'd." But now, after a lapse of more than twenty years, Leicester is thought of as the lover of the Queen's youth, and so, in the final version, can be regarded as Julius Caesar. As Cleopatra was said to have had a son by Julius Caesar, so Elizabeth had evidently had one by Leicester. Hence the young Octavius Caesar's remark (II.2.231-3):

> Royal wench!
> She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
> He plough'd her and she cropp'd.

[1] Intro. to *A. and C.;* Oxford ed.

Antony's words upon the announcement of his wife's death express in some degree Oxford's feeling about Anne Cecil's:

> There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it:
> What our contempts do often hurl from us
> We wish it ours again. . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . she's good, being gone;
> The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on. (I.2.125-30.)

This is precisely Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia. In sick mistrust, he had literally hurled her from him; but after her death he declared:

> I lov'd Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum.

Cleopatra asks:

> . . . can Fulvia die?
> *Antony.* She's dead, *my queen.* (I.3.58-9.)

When he would leave her, Cleopatra exclaims:

> O! my oblivion is a very Antony,
> And I am all forgotten. (I.3.90-1.)

He is indeed a "very Antony" when he declares (III.4.22-3):

> . . . If I lose mine honour,
> I lose myself.

In these latter years, Edward de Vere knew that he had in truth lost himself.

Antony's plea to Octavia (II.3.5),

> Read not my blemishes in the world's report,

might well have been Lord Oxford's to his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham.

The Earl of Oxford had the identical cause for self-reproach that Antony had: he had squandered his powers, even his manhood, upon a capricious Queen, lost his sense of proportion and finally his good name. This he expresses in the line of the sonnet we have quoted:

> And with *old woes* new wail *my dear time's waste.*

The demoralizing seductions of Cleopatra had habituated Antony to idleness; whereas Cupid's arrow, shot at the moon, had fallen upon "a little western flower,"

> Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
> And maidens call it *Love-in-idleness.*

Events of the late 1590's give us the clue to the identity of Enobarbus who, although most loved and trusted of all Antony's generals,

had failed him and then had died of remorse. In 1597, Thomas Nashe, who had been closest to Lord Oxford of all his literary associates, had recklessly produced *The Isle of Dogs,* causing a serious scandal. After this we never hear of him again in connection with the Earl. He died four years later, at the age of thirty-four, and soon afterwards Oxford is engaged upon his revision of *Antony and Cleopatra.*

For one version of the drama, Octavius Caesar evidently became the powerful Robert Cecil, though in what must have been a final partial adjustment to suit the time, he was made to stand for James.

> *Antony.* He makes me angry with him; for he seems
> Proud and disdainful, *harping on what I am,*
> *Not what he knew I was: he makes me angry;*
> *And at this time most easy 'tis to do 't,*
> When my good stars, that were my former guides,
> Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires
> Into the abysm of hell. . . .
> . . . . . .
> Alack! *our terrene moon*
> *Is now eclips'd; and it portends alone*
> *The fall of Antony.* (III.11.141-54.)

As Antony said this before Cleopatra's death, when she was forced to bow to Caesar, so Oxford may well have written it before Elizabeth's death—surely did so—for in her latter days, Cecil had absolute power. Occasionally she flared up at her hunchbacked Principal Secretary, if she considered him too dictatorial; as when, during her last illness, he told her that "to content the people, you must go to bed." "The word 'must,' " she said, "is not to be used to Princes. Little man, little man, if your father had lived, ye durst not have said so much; but ye know that I must die and that makes you so presumptuous." [2]

The final form of this play is closely connected with the end of the Queen's life and the poet's own. It was after she died that he wrote, in Sonnet 107, "The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd." But—as he did in the case of *Hamlet*—he obviously added touches to this play at that same time, to make Caesar stand partially for James; for the victorious Caesar is paraphrasing a portion of Sonnet 107, which actually records James's accession as Rex Pacificus, when he says (IV.6.5-7):

> The time of *universal peace* is near:
> Prove this a prosperous day, the three-nook'd world
> Shall bear *the olive* freely.[3]

[2] F. Chamberlin: *The Sayings of Q. Eliz.;* p. 311.

[3] James would, of course, have known this was an old play. It would have flattered him to have the Earl of Oxford depict him as the young Octavius Caesar. "The three-nook'd world" is England, Spain, and France.

A retrospective melancholy furnished a contrapuntal theme in this great romantic drama. Antony's speech (II.2.149-51) suggests that Oxford had been occupied with another of the late Sonnets, No. 116:

> *Antony.* May *I never*
> To this good purpose that so fairly shows,
> *Dream of impediment.*

As in the sonnet he speaks of the Vere "star," so Antony has alluded to his "stars" in the speech made in anger against Caesar (quoted above); then when he meets defeat, one of the Guards says (IV.12.106):

> The *star* is fallen.

But the mourning Cleopatra calls him "the sun" and herself the moon:

> *O sun!*
> Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in; *darkling stand*
> *The varying star of the world.* O Antony,
> Antony, Antony! (IV.13.9-12.)

She, the variable planet, is now dark, because—as Timon put it—there are "no *suns* to borrow of." [4]

Her lover's own last words are full of Lord Oxford's pervasive sense of personal tragedy:

> *Antony.* The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with *those my former fortunes*
> *Wherein I liv'd the greatest prince o' the world,*
> *The noblest;* and do now not basely die,
> *Not cowardly put off my helmet* to
> *My countryman.* . . .
> . . . Now my spirit is going:
> I can no more. (IV.13.51-9.)

"The greatest prince o' the world," for he had not only been Cleopatra-Elizabeth's lover, he had also been, under his "helmet," or mask, "Shakespeare," a noble Vere. Antony dies as Hamlet dies, and Othello, mindful of his honor.

His faults—or perhaps it is his censures—are freely admitted. Mecaenus says (V.1.30-1):

> His taints and honours
> Wag'd equal with him.

[4] Pierre Mathieu, Royal Historiographer of France, frequently shows familiarity with Lord Oxford's work in his own writing. In *The Heroyk Life and Deplorable Death of the Most Christian King, Henry the fourth,* written after 1610 and published in English translation in 1612, he speaks of "Queenes, which have no light but from the beames of Kings their orient Sunne, and [who] should therefore be crowned by Kings."

But Cleopatra, who has loved him, knows he was truly noble:

> I dream'd there was an Emperor Antony:
> . . . . . .
> His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
> *A sun and moon,* which kept their course, and lighted
> *The little O,* the earth.[5]
> His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
> Crested the world; *his voice was propertied*
> *As all the tuned spheres,* and that to friends;
> *But when he meant to quell and shake the orb,*
> *He was as rattling thunder.* For *his bounty,*
> There was no winter in 't, an autumn 'twas
> *That grew the more by reaping;* his delights
> Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back *above*
> *The element they liv'd in; in his livery*
> *Walk'd crowns and crownets, realms and islands were*
> *As plates dropp'd from his pocket.* (V.2.76-92.)

This speech not only tells of Elizabeth's love and admiration for the only man to whom she seems seriously to have plighted her troth; it pronounces her tribute to him who might have been her "Emperor," but who became a creator of royalty, of "realms and islands" in his own domain: a conjurer who could draw a world "from his pocket," a man whose gifts, or largesse, "grew the more by reaping" (this including his bounty to his literary associates). "The little O, the earth," was the world he had created, which had so delighted his Queen.

Caesar declares—and here he is James, who was an enthusiastic admirer of the plays, a microcosm in themselves—

[5] The Prologue of *King Henry V* speaks of the theatre, the world of his creation, as "this wooden O."

There is a close connection between "the star," Antony, and "this star of England," Henry V. With both characters Lord Oxford identified himself intimately. Indeed, for Henry's battle of Agincourt, the dramatist drew strongly upon Plutarch's account of Antony's campaign against the Parthians.

As Henry borrowed the cloak of Sir Thomas Erpingham, so Antony borrowed that of one of his generals when going forth to address his soldiers. As Henry went "from watch to watch, *from tent to tent,*" while "a largesse universal like the sun, His *liberal* eye doth give to every one," so, according to Plutarch, "Antony went *from tent to tent* to visit and comfort" his men, encouraging them with "his frank and open manners, his *liberal* and magnificent habits, his familiarity in talking with *everybody.*" As Henry prayed for his soldiers before the battle, so Antony "lifted up his hands to heaven, and prayed the gods [to] . . . grant his soldiers victory."

Furthermore, a striking correspondence exists between Antony and still another character with whom Oxford closely identified himself: Timon of Athens. Plutarch relates that, after losing his naval battle to Caesar, through having wantonly followed the retreating Cleopatra instead of remaining to fight, Antony became a misanthrope, and "leaving the city and the conversation of his friends, built him a dwelling-place *in the water,* near Pharos, upon a little mole which he cast up *in the sea,* and there, secluding himself from the company of mankind, said he desired nothing but to live the life of Timon; as, indeed, his case was the same."

> The death of Antony
> Is not *a single doom;* in the name lay
> *A moiety of the world.*

And to this significant statement, Dercetes adds a symbolic description of the fallen star's end:

> *. . . that self hand*
> *Which writ his honour in the acts it did,*
> Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it,
> *Splitted the heart.* This is his *sword;*
> I robb'd the wound of it; behold it *stain'd*
> *With his most noble blood.* (V.1.17-26.)

When Agrippa says (V.1.31-2),

> A rarer spirit *never*
> *Did steer humanity,*

we are reminded of Jaques-Oxford, who set himself to "cleanse the foul body of the infected world," and of other similar aspects of the playwright.

Much amazement has been expressed that Shakespeare should have paid no tribute nor written any memorial to Elizabeth at the time of her death. *Antony and Cleopatra* is his tribute, and *The Phoenix and the Turtle* his memorial. Mr. Percy Allen has observed that *Antony and Cleopatra* is a requiem, like "the defunctive music of the loveliest of all Shakespeare's poems," *The Phoenix and the Turtle*—"a final renunciation of all worldly hopes and aspirations."

Agrippa, apostrophizing the two lovers, says (III.2.12):

> O, Antony! O thou Arabian bird!

Elizabeth is spoken of innumerable times as the Phoenix, or the Arabian bird. In Anthony Munday's book, *Zelauto, or the Fountaine of Fame,* dedicated to Lord Oxford, the hero, having travelled to England and seen the Queen, exclaims: "O syr, never can my tongue give halfe a quarter of the prayse that is due that rare Arabian Phoenix." [6] And in *Cymbeline* (I.6.17), Iachimo, having proved the virtue of Imogen, who is partly a presentment of Elizabeth, asserts:

> She is alone the Arabian bird. . . .

In the closing speech of *Antony and Cleopatra,* Caesar announces with solemnity:

> She shall be buried by her Antony:
> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous. (V.2.355-7.)

It is the grave of the Phoenix and the Turtle that he means.

[6] Book I, p. 32. For classical description of the Phoenix and its relation to the sun, see *Bulfinch's Mythology.*

Although both the drama and the poem were completed before the Queen died—the few final alterations in the former having concerned only the character of Caesar—both celebrate the conclusion of her life and Lord Oxford's, and an association of profound and mystic intimacy which has been carefully hidden from the world. Elizabeth would have been familiar with the romantic drama and with the dirge as well. How deeply she was affected by them, who can say? She seems to have suffered extreme anguish of mind before her death, refusing for days and nights on end to go to bed, and protesting to Lord Admiral Howard,[7] who had been summoned to add his inducements to those of others, "If you were in the habit of seeing things in your bed as I do when in mine, you would not persuade me to go there."

Perhaps there was a touch of Elizabeth in Lady Macbeth, or vice versa; perhaps she was feeling this now, unable to refrain from identifying herself with characters who had for so long been vivid and immediate to her. As her life was interwoven with the plays, so were the plays an integral part of her life. Lord Oxford, indubitably a witness to her distress, must have returned home to take up his old manuscript and add to the Doctor's words (V.1),

. . . you have known what you should not,

the Gentlewoman's,

Heaven knows what she has known.

They had all been urging Elizabeth to go to bed, Cecil, Lord Howard, surely Lord Oxford himself, and the rest. This very phrase haunts Lady Macbeth's tortured mind; and the sleepwalking scene concludes with:

To bed, to bed. . . . What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

It is extraordinarily harrowing.

If Oxford himself, in his rich variety, is immanent in his dramas, Elizabeth is too. Not, of course, to be taken at its face-value is the scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* in which the Clown brings the Queen the asps, least of all his seemingly inane chatter concerning the "very honest woman, *but something given to lie,*" who "died of the biting of [the worm], *what pain she felt,*" especially when one remembers the role usually played by the clown and the significance of "worm." He says truly that "the worm's an odd worm" and "is not to be trusted *but in the keeping of wise people.*" This is, indeed, a lucid word to those of us who are "wise"!

[7] Lord Adm. Charles Howard of Effingham, Earl of Nottingham; not to be confused with Henry Howard, afterwards Earl of Northampton.

In *Much Ado* (V.2.82) "conscience" is called "Don Worm." The *dramatist* was impelled to record the whole truth. But the *man,* who had already sacrificed so much for his Queen's sake, made his final tragic renunciation in the majestic poem with which he wrote *finis* to their story.

* * * * * * *

In 1602 "Shake-speare" was a contributor, together with Marston, Chapman, and Jonson, as "the best and chiefest of our modern writers," to Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr: or Rosalins Complaint,* "a book," as Allen puts it, "linked by its dedication with the Oxford-Derby group of noblemen."[8] It has been widely recognized that Elizabeth is the Phoenix. Dr. Grosart, in his Introduction to a modern edition of the book makes this point in a perceptive interpretation of the cryptic poems. He understands that the Turtle is a man, but mistakenly (alas, absurdly) supposes him to be the comparatively youthful Essex. If this indefatigable student had had a little more information, he would have known that the Turtle, the *Love's Martyr* of the title, is the Queen's anonymous lover and anonymous poet, the Antony to her Cleopatra, the Truth to her Beauty, the Martyr to her Love.[9]

Even on the title-page the two are defined: not only Lord Oxford as "Love's Martyr," but Elizabeth, the Tudor Rose, as "Rosalin"; the word "Complaint" would seem to be used in the sense of "plaint." But "to make assurance double sure," an explanatory phrase is appended; so that, in large letters on the title-page we read:

LOVE'S MARTYR: OR ROSALINS COMPLAINT

Allegorically Shadowing the truth of Love
in the constant Fate of the Phoenix and Turtle.

One of the poems actually refers to the Phoenix's and the Turtle's "ring," thus testifying to the betrothal of Elizabeth and Oxford, which had been hinted at by the Earl himself in so many ways.

Allen notes that in *The Phoenix and the Turtle,* Shake-speare "treats the two birds as 'dead,' " remarking, however, that although both Oxford and Elizabeth were still alive, they were approaching their deaths. "But *dynastically,*" he says—"for these poems, like the Sonnets, are dynastic—both *were* 'dead,' while their son was, in actual

[8] *Who Were the Dark Lady and Fair Youth?*—a pamphlet in which are discussed other symbolic plays and poems belonging to the turn of the century and later, dealing with the Oxford-Elizabeth theme, including *Life and Adventures of Common Sense* (Lawrence) and *Argenis* (Barclay).

[9] Chapman's contribution, entitled, *Peristeros: or the male Turtle,* has the following couplet, with accompanying definitions in the margin:

* The Turtle. But like the consecrated Bird * of love,
* The Phoenix. Whose *whole life's hap* to his *sole-mate alluded.

fact, under sentence of death in the Tower." Certainly he was "forfeit to a confin'd doom," sentenced to the Tower for life.

Let the bird of loudest lay,
On the sole *Arabian* tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey.

But thou *shrieking harbinger,*
Foul precurrer of the fiend,
Augur of the fever's end,
To this troop come thou not near.

From this session interdict
Every fowl of tyrant wing,
Save the eagle, feather'd king:
Keep the obsequy so strict.

Let the priest in surplice white,
That defunctive music can,
Be the death-devining swan,
Lest the *Requiem* lack his *right.*

And thou treble-dated crow,
That thy sable gender mak'st
With the breath thou giv'st and tak'st,
'Mongst our mourners shalt thou go.

Here the anthem doth commence,
Love and Constancie is dead,
Phoenix and the *Turtle* fled
In *a mutuall flame* from hence.

So they lov'd as *love in twaine*
Had the essence but in one,
Two distincts, division none,
Number there in love was slaine.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder,
Distance and no space was seene,
Twixt the *Turtle* and his *Queene;*
But in them it were a wonder.

So between them Love did shine,
That the *Turtle* saw his *right*
Flaming in the *Phoenix'* sight:
Either was the other's mine.

As Mr. Allen so eloquently puts it, "The first point that strikes one, in reading this exalted dirge, is the solemn majesty of the verse, combined with the serene, sunset glory of vision discoverable in no other Shakespearean work, saving only *Antony and Cleopatra,* written [actually, as we have seen, re-written] about the same time, by the

same pen, and about the same pair." He speaks of Shake-speare's revealing statement that "the Phoenix is 'his Queen,' and that in the radiance of their mutual love he can see 'his right'—his dynastic right —flaming before the eyes of the Phoenix." At obsequies so strict and royal, moreover, the presence of only one other bird is tolerated—that "feathered King of the empyrean, the Eagle." But the sable "crow" of long lineage is allowed among the mourners to take his part.

In our opinion, the poet is saying, in the seventh stanza quoted above, that although they had loved as two persons love, they had been "in essence one: two distincts, division none"; and it is this deep, almost mystic congeniality which explains the relationship between Elizabeth and Edward de Vere—explains how in his youth he had been so fascinated by her brilliant and cultivated mind, her peculiar eloquence, as well as her glamorous personality and authority, that he had given her his ardent love, in spite of the difference in their ages. It also explains why, although Elizabeth agreed to his anonymity, she never withheld from him her support, allowing him unlimited freedom to write what he was moved to write, even in the case of *Venus and Adonis,* when she well knew its allusions would be widely understood. In a letter which we shall presently quote, Oxford speaks of how she had "often comforted" him (the most) "of all her followers."

Property was thus appall'd,
That the *selfe* was not the *same,*
Single nature's double name
Neither *two nor one* was call'd.

Reason, in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together;
To themselves yet either neither,
Simple were so well compounded.

This is the crux of the matter, that neither, when sole and "simple," without the other, was really complete. They complemented each other. The following stanza says that though they parted, they remained a "concordant one."

That it cried, *'How true a twaine*
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts can so remaine.'

Whereupon it made this threne
To the *Phoenix* and the *Dove,*
Co-supremes and stars of love,
As chorus to *their tragic scene.*

Beauty, Truth, and *Raritie,*
Grace in all simplicitie,
Here enclosed in cinders lie.

Death is now the Phoenix' nest,
And the Turtle's loyal breast
To eternitie doth rest.

Leaving *no posterity,*
'Twas not their infirmitie,
It was *married chastity.*

Truth may seem, but cannot be,
Beauty bragge, but 'tis not she,
Truth and *Beauty* buried be.

To this urne let those repaire
That are either *true* or *faire,*
For these dead birds sigh a prayer.

WIILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE

In his loyalty, which "to eternitie doth rest," he had made the final and complete renunciation. His "truth" will be "buried" with her "beauty," even the truth about their "posterity": his ultimate sacrifice to her obstinate obsession concerning chastity. That statement is refuted in Sonnet 14. But he lets it all go. "Truth" and "Beauty" may "seem" but cannot really exist any more.

"Property was thus appall'd," he has said: its laws were in this case ineffectual; "reason in itself confounded," that they seemed so "true a twain."

Truth and Beauty are eternal poetic entities, as they are in the Sonnets. There the poet had hoped that the dynastic succession of Truth and Beauty might be carried on by the Fair Youth,

That thereby Beauty's Rose might never die.

In the sixth stanza above, the second line reads: *"Love and Constancie* is dead," while in Sonnet 14, we find "constant stars" used to describe the Fair Youth's eyes and in connection with "Truth" and "Beauty." This produces a striking effect when compared (1) with Sonnet 105 *line* 7, and (2) with a speech by *Constance* regarding *her son,* Arthur, who stands, momentarily and allegorically in a revision, for the Fair Youth (*King John:* III.1.51-5):

But thou art *fair;* and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great:
Of *Nature's* gifts thou mayst with *lilies* boast
And with the half-blown *rose.* But *Fortune, O!*
She is corrupted, chang'd, and won from thee.

Sonnet 67 says, "His rose is true." But "Fortune" had forsaken the Earl of Oxford. Like Romeo and Lear, he was "Fortune's fool." She was "the guilty goddess" of his "harmful deeds," which made his name receive "a brand," and thus the cause that he could say, with Cassio,

O! I have lost my reputation. I have lost the immortal part of myself.

In the last stanza before the Threnos the poet speaks of "co-supremes and stars of love." Sonnet 14 reads:

But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And *constant stars,* in them I read such art
As *'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.'

Before leaving the subject of the dirge written by England's greatest poet to celebrate his eternal union with his Queen, we must take note again of his consistent truth and idealistic loyalty. Thirty years before, at Bath, when the ardent young Earl had been shocked and all but crushed by Elizabeth's faithlessness to him after her honorable pledges of love, he had believed himself dying and, as Dan Bartholmew, had written her *His Farewell:*

Farewell deere love whome I have loved and shall,
Both in this world, and in the world to come,
. . . . . .
Farewell my lyfe, farewell for and my death,
For thee I lyv'd, for thee nowe must I dye,
Farewell from *Bathe,* whereas I feele my breath
Forsake my breast in great perplexitie,
Alas how welcome were this death of mine,
If I had dyde betweene those armes of thine.

This verse was accompanied by *His Last Will and Testament.* And here we find in the young poet-lover the same attitude which was to inspire the more mature and beautiful *Phoenix and the Turtle.* In order to "trie my truth," he wills that

My bodie be embalmde and cloazed up in chest
With oyntments and with spiceries of every sweete the best:
And so preserved still untill the day doe come
That death devorce my love from life, & trusse hir up in tombe.
Then I bequeath my corps to couche beneath hir bones,
And there to feede the greedie woorms that linger for the nones.
. . . . . .
And when the deskant sings, in treble tunes above,
Then let fa burden say (by lowe) *I liv'd and dyde for love.*
. . . . . .

Thus when the *Dirge* is done, let every man depart,
And learne by me what harme it is to have a faithfull hart.

. . . . . .

And let them wryte these words upon my carefull chest,
Lo here he lyes, that was as true (in love) as is the best.

. . . . . .

Let sorrow at the last my Supravisor be,
And steadfastnesse my surest stead, I give him for his fee:

. . . . . .

And you which reade my wordes although they be in rime,
Yet reason may persuade you eke, *Thus lovers dote sometime.*

(Original italics.)

They were to be buried together here, as the Phoenix' and the Turtle's ashes were buried in one "urne."

So obvious is it that, from the beginning, everything the Earl of Oxford wrote concerned the Queen (even the Sonnets to the Fair Youth were often aimed indirectly at her) that one cannot question her familiarity with his state of mind throughout their lives. She would have known in 1601–03 how grief-stricken he was about the tragic turn the already sorrowful situation had taken, with "Beauty's Rose" in the "confin'd doom" of the Tower. Deletion from the record of Lord Oxford's name in all intimate connection with Queen Elizabeth has distorted history almost as seriously as it has distorted literature.

If the revelation of the indissoluble bond uniting the Queen with her Poet tarnishes the legend of her virginity, it more than compensates by glorifying her womanhood. For to have been the Phoenix to so noble a lover was to have achieved sublimity.

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The general consensus is that *Henry VIII* was written after 1603. We find internal evidence relating the play to the latter months of Elizabeth's life. For one thing, it is most unlikely that Lord Oxford would have had sufficient vitality, after the death of the Queen, to write a full-length drama—and much of it is demonstrably his, although when he wrote it he was weak and profoundly weary. Most of it would have been dictated, since by then his eyesight was failing, and it was never meticulously revised and revised again, filed and polished, as his best work was.

We believe that he wrote *Henry VIII* for a purpose—a last desperate purpose—failing which he would never have reminded the Queen of her own questionable legitimacy of birth: what could normally have been a less appropriate subject? He had made what was intended to be a final tribute and renunciation, in 1601–02, with the epic of their romance, *Antony and Cleopatra,* and with the lovely defunctive music of *The Phoenix and the Turtle.* Then his anguished

spirit flared up in an anti-climactic spurt of rebellion, and he wrote *Henry VIII* to remind the Queen that her own birth had been no more regular than that of their son, in the hope that she might even yet pronounce him her successor. Not only to remind her of this, but also, for a last time, to play Hamlet to her Gertrude, saying to her once more, in effect:

You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

In *Measure for Measure,* more than twenty years before, Elizabeth's "chiefest courtier" had rebuked her for shameless tyranny: now he tells her that she has become as cruel a tyrant as her wicked father. The dominant theme of *Henry VIII* is abrupt decline from eminence at court to ignominy, despair, and death—this in the persons of a great Duke, a lonely defenseless Queen, and an ambitious favorite and mentor: Buckingham, Queen Katharine, Wolsey. During Elizabeth's reign Lord Oxford had witnessed, had indeed participated in, three such tragedies: that of the Duke of Norfolk, of Mary Queen of Scots, and his own. He does not speak, in the play, of one of Henry's final acts, as heinous as any he ever committed, but Elizabeth would have known that it loomed above them all. This was the tyrant's order for the execution of the brilliant, gentle, noble young poet-Earl of Surrey. Just before his death, the gross, repulsive, decaying organism had its hand lifted by a minion, so that it might append the seal which would ensure the death of an innocent young man and thus make his own end more tolerable. Through all the beastliness of his latter years, Henry had coddled his tender conscience, had rationalized his worst acts. The Earl of Oxford was not the man to fail to draw the clear analogy between him and his daughter, and he was not letting her off anything now in his torment and grief for the fate of their son.

Although he was compelled to dramatize the truth, this drama has nevertheless a strong flavor of the increasingly religious philosophy of the aging poet. It may be loosely constructed, but it has passages of spiritual beauty, Wolsey's great speeches proceeding from Lord Oxford's own ravaged heart. He himself never finished it. But if Elizabeth had read, or heard, what he had written, it must have shaken her, callous though she had become. Yet—even so—she had not, characteristically, been able to make the dreadful, the courageous, decision he so longed to have her make.

The melancholy state which grew upon the Queen after the Essex conspiracy, augmented as time went on, is attributed by historians to everything else but Southampton's fate. Some say she suffered unbearable remorse for having permitted Essex to go to the block;

others believe that regret for not having pardoned the Earl of Tyrone instead of defeating him, preyed on her mind. Not a word is said—or rather, not a word is left in the record—of any distress she may have suffered about Southampton, whom she had for a year or more prior to his mad rebellion treated with outbursts of perverse severity. The *complete absence of any comment whatsoever* upon this subject is in itself highly suspicious, for Southampton had been the most brilliant young courtier of his day and, even in youth, a soldier of distinction, as well as a famous patron of letters. He simply drops out of the record—until James, as one of his first acts upon being proclaimed King, even before leaving Scotland for England, reinstates him, with honors.

It cannot be that Elizabeth entirely consoled herself with the assurance that his sentence was just, since he had sought to overthrow her; for James himself had been a party to the Essex-Southampton conspiracy; and she knew this,[10] yet felt herself too old and spent to cope with it. She was in the state described by Goneril (*K.L.*: IV.2.13-4):

> . . . he'll not feel wrongs
> Which tie him to an answer.

But obstinacy sustained her in her position: that obstinacy which was one of her dominant traits and ruled her actions until the last breath left her body.

Although as early as the closing weeks of 1602, she was reported by her godson, Sir John Harrington, to have been in a state of "great bodily and mental distress," [11] Queen Elizabeth nevertheless continued to ride and hunt even in inclement weather. This, be it noted, was nearly two years after the execution of Essex. At the beginning of the following year she visited her cousin, Lord Admiral Howard, "probably at Chelsea," before moving to her palace at Richmond.

She had steadfastly refused to name her successor—Ward believed (in 1928, at any rate) for fear of precipitating England into another Succession war. However, on leaving London for the last time, she made a provocative declaration to the Lord Admiral: "My throne has always been the throne of Kings, and *none but my next heir of blood and descent* ought to succeed me." [12] Is it possible that she was wavering and might have been induced to acknowledge her son? She could have said, of course, that she had meant James. It is a characteristically inconclusive statement. The Lord Admiral was a close friend of

[10] Aikin states: "The humbled Essex had confessed everything, even giving into the hands of Cecil and the rest of the Council the letter from James revealing his complicity."—*Memoirs of the Court of Q. Eliz.*; vol. II, p. 475. (This was the letter referred to in *King Lear*.)

[11] Op. cit.; vol. II, p. 492; Letter from Harrington to his wife.

[12] F. Chamberlin: *The Sayings of Q. Eliz.*; p. 310.

the Earl of Oxford, and he would have known by now about the parentage of Southampton. But there was always Elizabeth's *idée fixe*, her almost pathological obsession—though there was more to it than a personal fixation by this time. She had remarked to her ladies, in 1602, on the subject of her epitaph:

> I am no lover of pompous titles, but only desire that my name may be recorded in a line or two, which shall briefly express my name, my virginity, the years of my reign, the reformation of religion under it, and my preservation of peace.[13]

She was a contradictory creature and never scrupled to make a statement today which conflicted with an equally positive one of the day before. Perhaps after being an absolute monarch for forty-five years, she was convinced that to make a thing true she had only to affirm it with authority and decision.

During his visit to the Queen late in December of the same year, Harrington wrote his wife:

> Her majesty inquired of some matters which I had written; and as she was pleased to note my fanciful brain: I was not unheedful to feed her humour; and read some verses, whereat she smiled once and was pleased to say, "When thou dost feel *creeping time* at thy gate, these fooleries will please thee less; I am past relish for such matters . . . my bodily meat doth not suit me well; I have eaten but one ill-tasted cake since yesternight.[14]

These first words of hers were the Earl of Oxford's own. He had spoken of "the creeping hours of time" in *As You Like It* (II.7.112), while in *King John*, to which he had added recent touches, he had said (III.3.31), "and creep time ne'er so slow."

At the beginning of March, Elizabeth's melancholy and physical depression noticeably increased. When her kinsman, Robert Cary, visited her, she told him "her heart had been sad and heavy for ten or twelve days; and in her discourse she fetched not so few as forty or fifty great sighs; . . . in all my lifetime I never knew her fetch a sigh but *when the Queen of Scots was beheaded.*" [15] He adds that he found her melancholy "was too deep-rooted in her heart and hardly to be removed." She refused to eat and she slept scarcely at all.

How gratifying it would be if some account had survived of Lord Oxford's visits to the Queen during this period! He was, with the exception of the Lord Admiral, her oldest, and he was certainly her most intimate, friend. Since he was with her at the moment of Essex's execution, he must have been on hand at times during these sad and

[13] Op. cit.; p. 310; tr. from P.R.O. Transcripts, Bashet: M. de Beaumont au Roi. June 10, 1602.

[14] Aikin; vol. II, p. 490.

[15] Op. cit.; p. 493.

trying days, whenever he was able to make the journey from Hackney, for he was failing now too.

A letter written in Latin to Edmund Lambert on the day after the Queen's death, whether by one of her physicians is not known, states,

> It was after laboring for nearly three weeks *under a morbid melancholy,* which brought on stupor, not unmixed with some indication of a disordered fancy, that the queen expired.[16]

It had been on the Sunday before her death that the Lord Admiral was sent for, and it was he who was able, where others had failed (so we are told) to induce her to get into bed: she had refused to do so for four or five days. According to Cary, "On Wednesday the 23rd of March she grew speechless." But he says that by signs she called for her Council and, still by signs, indicated to them that it was her will to have the King of Scots succeed her.

So, on March 24, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died "under a morbid melancholy," leaving Southampton in the Tower facing life imprisonment. A poet might have said she had a serpent in her bosom.

Lord Oxford, in a letter to Robert Cecil, expressed himself feelingly about his sense of loss:

> In this common *shipwreck* mine is above all the rest, who least regarded though [most] often comforted of all her followers, she hath left to try my fortune among the *alterations* of time and chance, either without sail whereby to take advantage of any prosperous gale, or with anchor to ride till the *storm* be overpast.

He uses the word "alteration" that he had applied to the Fair Youth's change of fortune. And he had always thought of his personal disasters as "wrecks" and "storms."

In *England's Mourning Garment,* published after the Queen's death, Henry Chettle took the poets of the day to account for not writing elegies upon their departed "sacred Mistress." As we have previously noted (Chap. Sixty-two), he may well have been referring to the widely known "Shakespeare" of the poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece,* in the passage about "the silver-tongued Melicert," but in the opening stanza he was only too obviously speaking of the great poet and dramatist who was the glory of Elizabeth's reign, the man *behind* the mask, who had "hourly strain'd to sing her praise . . . [for] fortie years," the anonymous Earl of Oxford. (It had been precisely forty years since the publication of *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres,* and thirty-nine since the appearance of *The Famous Victories of King Henry the Fifth.*) His words show that Chettle was well aware of the long intimacy between the Queen and her noble peer:

[16] Op. cit.; p. 493.

Death now hath ceaz'd her in his ycie armes,
That sometimes was the Sun of our delight:
And pitilesse of any after-harmes,
Hath veyld her glory in the cloude of night.
Nor doth one Poet seeke her name to raise,
That living, hourly strain'd to sing her praise.
He that so well could sing the fatall strife
Betweene the royall Roses White and Red,
That prais'd so oft *Eliza* in her life.
His Muse seemes now to dye, as she is dead:
Thou sweetest song-man of all English swaines,
Awake for shame, honour ensues thy paines.
But thou alone deserv'dst not to be blamde:
He that sung fortie years of life and birth,
And is by English Albions so much famde,
For sweete mixte layes of maiestie with mirth,
Doth of her losse take now but little keepe;
Or else I gesse he cannot sing, but weepe.