

END OF THE MARRIAGE ALLIANCE

Sonnet 17 *Your True Rights* 1591

Oxford predicts future generations will fail to recognize Henry Wriothesley's "true rights" by blood to succeed Queen Elizabeth as King Henry IX. Instead, he forecasts, readers will see only the "Poet's rage" of these "numbers" rather than their true contents. Yet he vows nevertheless to incorporate his son's life within the verses, i.e., to preserve him within the "tomb" of the Sonnets, which is also a womb giving new life to him. Southampton's "official" date of birth is October 6, 1573, as opposed to his real birth date in late May or early June 1574. This sonnet, numbered to signify the actual seventeenth birthday of Southampton's life in 1591, marks the end of Oxford's attempt to pressure him into a Cecil family alliance. Technically, the proposal will continue until Southampton's "official" twenty-first birthday on October 6, 1594, but otherwise Oxford (as well as Burghley and the Queen) now cease to pressure him.

Sonnet 17

Translation

Who will believe my verse in time to come
If it were filled with your most high deserts?
Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life, and shows not half your
parts:

If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say, 'This Poet lies!
Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces!'

So should my papers (yellowed with their age)
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be termed a Poet's rage,
And stretched meter of an Antique song.

But were some child of yours alive that time
You should live twice: in it, and in my rhyme.

Who will believe these sonnets in the future
If they were filled with your most royal qualities?
Though Elizabeth knows, this verse is but a tomb
Which hides your royalty and fails to reveal even
half your royal aspects.

If I could express the Tudor blood you reflect,
And in new verses express all your kingly qualities,
Future generations would say, "This Poet is lying –
Such inheritors of Elizabeth's blood never existed!"

So should my verses (yellowed with their age)
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than talk,
And your royal rights be termed an exaggeration
And the extreme boasting of an old poem.

But if some child of yours exists in the future,
You would live twice: in the child, and in my verse.

1 WHO WILL BELIEVE MY VERSE IN TIME TO COME

MY VERSE = these private verses; **TIME TO COME** = future generations of readers; the time of Elizabeth's death and England's date with royal succession, after which the Sonnets will conclude either with Henry Wriothesley becoming King Henry IX or with the death of the Tudor Rose Dynasty; "Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul/ Of the wide world dreaming on *things to come*" – Sonnet 107, lines 1-2

WHO WILL BELIEVE MY VERSE = Oxford's prediction has turned out to be uncannily accurate, i.e., few have recognized that the Sonnets testify to Southampton's "true rights" to the throne, as expressed in line 11 of this verse; "By direct address, by varied metaphor, and by multifarious allusion, the description of the Friend communicated is always one: *monarch*,

sovereign, prince, king ... The poet's harping on the same string is so insistent as to make one ask why it has not arrested attention. No doubt everyone has regarded this 'king' sense as formal hyperbole and nothing more. Any literal meaning looks quite incredible, a rank impossibility" – Leslie Hotson, in *Mr. W. H.*, 1965, pp 35-36, referring to the general view of the Sonnets as "a Poet's rage" and arguing to the contrary that the verses of the Fair Youth series (1-126) were indeed written to a younger man who was a royal prince.

2 IF IT WERE FILLED WITH YOUR MOST HIGH DESERTS?

FILLED WITH = contain the truth of; **YOUR MOST HIGH DESERTS** = your most kingly qualities; "Either accept the title thou usurp'st, of benefit proceeding from our king and not of any challenge of desert" – *1 Henry VI*, 5.5.151-153; "And lay those honors on *your high desert*" – *Richard III*, 1.3.97; **DESERTS** = "deserving,, due recompense, right ... worth, merit" – Crystal & Crystal; "my desert is honour" – *3 Henry VI*, 3.3.192; "for these good deserts, we here create you Earl of Shrewsbury" – *1 Henry VI*, 3.4.25; "Within the knowledge of mine own desert" – Sonnet 49, line 10, Oxford speaking as father of Southampton and what he deserves; **HIGH** = as in "Your Highness" or "High and Mighty"; "Ha, majesty! How *high* thy glory towers" – *King John*, 2.1.350; "And that *high* royalty" – *King John*, 4.2.5; "My *high* blood's royalty" – *Richard II*, 1.1.58; "Please your *highness* note ... your *high* person" – *Henry VIII*, 1.2.138-140

3 THOUGH YET HEAVEN KNOWS IT IS BUT AS A TOMB

HEAVEN KNOWS = Elizabeth knows; God knows; "*Heaven* pictured in her face/ Doth promise joy and grace" – Oxford poem about Elizabeth, signed E. O. in *The Phoenix Nest*, 1593 but likely written two decades earlier; **TOMB** = the Monument or Pyramid of the Sonnets that Oxford is now constructing to preserve his son's identity for eternity. The tomb will also function as a "womb" in which Southampton and his royal blood will grow according to time; "That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,/ Making *their tomb the womb* wherein they grew" – Sonnet 86, lines 3-4, referring to the Shakespeare pen name that has forced Oxford's thoughts into deeper obscurity, except for the record of these thoughts being preserved in the Sonnets; "He rests not in this tomb. This monument five hundred years hath stood" – *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.354-355; "And thou in this shalt find thy monument,/ When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent" – Sonnet 107, lines 13-14

4 WHICH HIDES YOUR LIFE, AND SHOWS NOT HALF YOUR PARTS.

HIDES YOUR LIFE = conceals your identity as prince; **SHOWS NOT HALF YOUR PARTS** = reveals not half of all your kingly aspects; qualities, attributes, gifts of mind or body; "For the young gentleman, as I understand, hath been well brought up, fair conditioned, and hath many good *parts* in him" – Oxford to Burghley, September 8, 1597; "Mine eye hath well examined his *parts* and finds them perfect Richard" – the King in *King John*, 1.1.89-90; "Remembers me of all his gracious *parts*" – *King John*, 3.3.96; "Your sum of *parts*" – *Hamlet*, 4.7.73; "Entitled in thy *parts* do crowned sit" – Sonnet 37, line 7; "So full of majesty and royal *parts*" – Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, 1.2.17, of Queen Elizabeth

5 IF I COULD WRITE THE BEAUTY OF YOUR EYES

THE BEAUTY OF YOUR EYES = the reflection of Elizabeth's "beauty" or royal blood in your kingly eyes, which are suns; "My worthy lord, if ever Tamora were gracious in those *princely eyes* of thine" – *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.433-434; i.e., if I could write directly about your Tudor blood from the Queen

Save her alone, who yet on th'earth doth reign,
Whose *beauties* string no god can well distract

Oxford poem about Elizabeth, *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, 1576

6 AND IN FRESH NUMBERS NUMBER ALL YOUR GRACES,

FRESH = newly royal, as in "the world's *fresh* ornament" of Sonnet 1, line 9; **FRESH NUMBERS** = newly royal sonnets, which are the "numbers" Oxford is compiling to build this

Monument; “Yet, after all comparisons of truth, as truth’s authentic author to be cited, ‘as true as Troilus’ shall crown up the verse and sanctify the *numbers*” – *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.3.177-179; “Eternal *numbers* to outlive long date” – Sonnet 38, line 12; “But now my gracious *numbers* are decayed” – Sonnet 79, line 3; “In gentle *numbers* time so idly spent” – Sonnet 100, line 6; “To *number* Ave-Maries on his beads” – *2 Henry VI*, 1.3.56; the individual verses are referred to as numbers (eternal, gracious numbers, akin to sacred Rosary beads), which are part of the means by which the Monument is being built; and in fact each sonnet in *Q* is itself numbered. The numbers are ordered sequentially and chronologically within each sequence, serving to date them in relation to real events. Oxford represents the year of his son’s birth, 1574, in the Bath verses to become Sonnets 153 and 154; now, with the seventeenth verse of Sonnets 1-17, the numbers have caught up to his current age and represent each of his seventeen birthdays from 1575 to 1591:

YEARS: ‘75 ’76 ’77 ’78 ’79 ’80 ’81 ’82 ’83 ’84 ’85 ’86 ’87 ’88 ’89 ’90 ’91
SONNETS: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11 - 12 - 13 - 14 - 15 - 16 - 17

“For now hath *time made me his numb’ring clock*” – *Richard II*, 5.5.50, the King saying that he himself embodies Time

ALL = Southampton; **ALL YOUR GRACES** = all your kingly blood and godlike qualities; “*The king is full of grace and fair regard*” – *Henry V*, 1.1.22; “My sovereign, I confess *your royal graces* showered on me daily ... *your great graces*” – *Henry VIII*, 3.2.166-167,174; these “graces” or royal attributes come from Elizabeth, of whom Oxford had written: “Above the rest in Court who gave thee *grace*?” – Oxford sonnet, circa early 1570s

7 THE AGE TO COME WOULD SAY: “THIS POET LIES,

Future readers will say I’m exaggerating, i.e., lying; they will not believe that the Sonnets tell the true story of my son’s royal blood and rights to the throne

8 SUCH HEAVENLY TOUCHES NE’ER TOUCHED EARTHLY FACES!”

HEAVENLY TOUCHES = blood and qualities inherited from Elizabeth, who is Heaven; (“Truth shall nurse her, holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her” – Cranmer, predicting the future infant Elizabeth Tudor, *Henry VIII*, 5.4.28-29); **EARTHLY** = mortal; also, non-royal
HEAVENLY ... EARTHLY: “and although it hath pleased God after an earthly kingdom to take her up into a more permanent and *heavenly* state, wherein I do not doubt she is crowned with glory” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, writing of Queen Elizabeth on the eve of her funeral procession on April 28, 1603

9 SO SHOULD MY PAPERS (YELLOWED WITH THEIR AGE)

MY PAPERS = my manuscript pages for this Book of private sonnets

10 BE SCORNED, LIKE OLD MEN OF LESS TRUTH THAN TONGUE,

TRUTH = Oxford, *Nothing Truer than Truth*; **LESS TRUTH** = falsity; i.e., not anything like Oxford, who is Truth; not recognizing Southampton’s “true rights” of line 11 to follow;
TONGUE = gossip, recorded history, which is a lie

11 AND YOUR TRUE RIGHTS BE TERMED A POET’S RAGE

YOUR TRUE RIGHTS = Your legitimate rights of kingship; your right to succeed to the throne as King Henry IX of England; “I have some *rights* of memory in this kingdom” – *Hamlet*, 5.2.396; “his purple *blood right*” – *3 Henry VI*, 2.5.99; “The *royalties and rights* of banished Hereford” – *Richard II*, 2.1.190; “*my rights and royalties*” – *Richard II*, 2.3.119; “a *rightful king*” – *Richard II*, 5.1.50; “Thou and thine usurp the dominations, royalties and *rights* of this oppressed boy” – *King John*, 2.1.175-177; “But as successively from blood to blood, your *right of birth*, your emery, your own” – *Richard III*, 3.7.134-135; “for thee and for the *right* of English Henry” – *1 Henry VI*, 2.1.35-36; Suppose by *right* and equity thou be king” – *3 Henry VI*, 1.1.127; “Did I put Henry from his native *right*?” – *3 Henry VI*, 3.3.190; “For he that steeps his safety in *true blood*” – King

John, 3.3.147; **RIGHTS** = “just claim, rights, title” – Crystal & Crystal; “Your right depends not on his life or death, *3 Henry VI*, 1.2.11, about the right to wear the crown

“They labored to plant the *rightful heir*” – *1 Henry VI*, 2.5.80

If *Her Majesty's right* and interest be not cunningly suppressed

- Oxford to Robert Cecil, January 1602

There is nothing therefore left to my comfort but the excellent virtues and deep wisdom wherewith God hath endued our new Master and Sovereign Lord, who doth not come amongst us as a stranger but as a natural prince, *succeeding by right of blood and inheritance*”

- Oxford to Robert Cecil, April 25/27, 1603, writing of King James, now on his way from Scotland to occupy the English throne

And *right* perfection wrongfully disgraced Sonnet 66, line 7

TRUE = Related to Oxford, *Nothing Truer than Truth*; “That *if his rule were true*, he should be gracious” – *Richard III*, 2.4.20; “in justice and *true right*” – *2 Henry VI*, 5.2.25; “genuine, real ... conformable to law and justice, rightful, legitimate ... conformable to nature, due, natural” - Schmidt; “legitimate, rightful, honourable ... true to father’s likeness, authentic, genuine” – Crystal & Crystal; “my shape as *true* as honest madam’s *issue*” – *King Lear*, 1.2.8; “His father never was so *true begot*” – *King John*, 2.1.130; “Thou *truly* fair wert *truly* sympathized/ In *true* plain words by thy *true*-telling friend” – Sonnet 82, lines 11-12, Oxford to Southampton as father to son; “My most *true* mind thus maketh mine untrue” – Sonnet 113, line 14; “I will be *true* despite thy scythe and thee” – Oxford, defying Time on his son’s behalf

“But I hope *truth* is subject to no prescription, for *truth is truth* though never so old, and *time* cannot make that false which was once *true*” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, May 7, 1603

So long as out of limit and *true* rule
You stand against anointed majesty *1 Henry IV*, 4.3.39-40

The quarrel of a *true* inheritor *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.168

Since that the *truest* issue of thy throne *Macbeth*, 4.3.106

Oh, *true-bred!* *Coriolanus*, 1.1.243

POET’S RAGE = poet’s exaggeration; i.e., the poet of the Sonnets, writing conventional poetry with its familiar, exaggerated language; **RAGE** = “violent outburst, furious passion ... madness, insanity, derangement” – Crystal & Crystal; “When rage and hot blood are his counselors” – *2 Henry IV*, 4.4.63, the King, speaking of Prince Henry

12 AND STRETCHED METER OF AN ANTIQUE SONG.

STRETCHED METER = contorted poetical style; overstrained poetry; **ANTIQUÉ SONG** = old-style sonnet; fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameter; a “sonnet” itself was known as a “little song”; evolving from medieval Italian verse (*sonetto*); among varying rhyme schemes, the Italian is *abba abba cdecde*; the oldest variety is from Petrarch (1304-1374); the Shakespearean sonnet is *abab cdcd efef gg*, used by Oxford’s relative Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547), by Oxford himself and notably by Spenser (c. 1552-1599), whose monumental epic poem *The Faire Queene* (1590, 1598) has been regarded as inspiring Shakespeare; but some Oxford students suspect Oxford’s hand in some (or even all!) of Spenser’s work; Oxford in *Shake-Speares Sonnets*

through the public pen name “William Shakespeare,” to be launched two years later, and through this private diary of sonnets in which he records the fate of his son’s royal hope. The seeds of the Essex Rebellion of 1601 are planted here and now