THE PRISON YEARS

DAY/NIGHT OF REBELLION
FIRST NIGHT IN THE TOWER

Sonnet 27
A Jewel Hung in Ghastly Night
8 February 1601

Now it is long past midnight, after the Essex Rebellion has failed, and Southampton is imprisoned in the Tower of London. No more is he “the world’s fresh ornament” but, rather, “a jewel hung in ghastly night.” A great darkness has descended over the private verses of the Sonnets; Oxford will write the next sixty sonnets to correspond with the day-by-day circumstances as they unfold. His royal son has committed high treason; as a ranking earl, Oxford knows he must sit on the jury and must find him guilty; as his father, he must also do all he can to save him from execution. Already he has begun to “toil” or argue on his son’s behalf. Henry Wriothesley has lost his claim to the throne; and in the darkness at his Hackney home, Oxford’s “thoughts” begin a “journey” or “zealous pilgrimage” to his royal son in the prison.

Sonnet 27

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travail tired,
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind, when body’s work’s expired.
For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eye-lids open wide,
Looking on darkness, which the blind do see.
Save that my soul’s imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which like a jewel (hung in ghastly night)
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.
Lo thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for my self; no quiet find.

Translation

Weary from these events, I haste to my bed,
The dear rest for limbs tired from their work,
But then begins a journey inside my head
To work my mind when other work is over.
For then my thoughts (traveling far from here)
Make an intense journey to you [in the Tower],
And I keep my eyes open wide,
Looking at the tragic crime that most others see.
Except that the eyes of my soul, in imagination,
Reveal to my unseeing eyes the shadow of you,
Who, a royal prince hung in ghastly disgrace,
Transforms the shame into royal blood again.
Behold, by day I use my limbs, by night my mind,
For you – my son, my self – I find no rest.

Note: Sonnet 27 is chronologically aligned with Sonnet 127 of the Dark Lady series.
Sonnet 27

1 WEARY WITH TOIL, I HASTE ME TO MY BED,
WEARY, etc. = Oxford attempts to sleep tonight; “For to tell truth I am weary of an unsettled life” – Oxford to Burghley, May 18, 1591; “Whereupon I may upon reason quiet myself, and not upon weariness” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, May 22, 1602; “How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world!” – Hamlet, 1.2.139-140

TOIL = work, labor; but OED defines “toil” first as a verb “to contend in a lawsuit or an argument; to dispute, argue; to contend in battle; to fight, struggle”; this legal sense may be the primary meaning, referring to his arguing on Southampton’s behalf, indicated by the use of “toil” in the first line and twice more in the next sonnet; “Your faithful service, and your toil in war” – 1 Henry VI, 3.4.21; “Princes have but titles for their glories, an outward honor for an inward toil” – Richard III, 1.4.78-79; “When I was dry with rage, with extreme toil, breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword” – 1 Henry IV, 1.3.30-31

So service shall with steeled sinews toil,
And labour shall refresh itself with hope
To do your grace in incessant services.

Henry V, 2.2.36-38

Winding up days with toil and nights with sleep,
Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king.

Henry V, 4.1.275-276

WEARY/TOIL:

I still do toil and never am at rest,
Enjoying least when I do covet most;
With weary thoughts are my green years oppress’d,
To danger drawn from my desired coast.

Harleian MS 7392, ff. 52-53, signed “Lo. Ox” (Chiljan, 188, 200)

2 THE DEAR REPOSE FOR LIMBS WITH TRAVAIL TIRED:
DEAR = royal, related to his feelings for Southampton; “one dear son shall I twice lose” – The Tempest, 5.1.176; "Those lines that I before have write do lie, / Even those that said I could not love you dearer” - Sonnet 115, lines 1-2; "If my dear love were but the child of state./ It might for fortune's bastard be unfathered" - Sonnet 124, lines 1-2; DEAR REPOSE: place of repose; a suggestion that his preferred place of rest is in the grave; Milton in Paradise Lost will write of “my harbour and my ultimate repose” – 3.210; Oxford is speaking of the resting place he so dearly needs to find, but he also reflects his “dear son’s” repose in the Tower; “Your Highness shall repose you at the Tower” – Richard III, 3.1.65; TRAVAIL = often glossed as “travel” but in this sonnet meaning “work” or “painful labor” during this day of turmoil; “Yet I am one that hath long besieged a fort and not able to compass the end or reap the fruit of his travail” – Oxford to Burghley, June 25, 1585; “But now, having received this comfortable message of furtherance and favor from your Lordship, although Her Majesty be forgetful of herself, yet by such a good mean I do not doubt that, if you list, but that I may receive some fruit of all my travail” – Oxford to Burghley, March 20, 1595; “I do well perceive how your Lordship doth travail for me in this cause of an especial grace and favor” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, June 19, 1603
“What they travail for” – Timon of Athens, 5.1.15-16; “I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument/Deserves the travail of a worthier pen” – Sonnet 79, lines 5-6; of course, Oxford's 'travail' also included “travel” by horse between his home in Hackney and the Court at Whitehall

3 BUT THEN BEGINS A JOURNEY IN MY HEAD
JOURNEY IN MY HEAD = a mental journey to the Tower; this is the “travel” aspect of the verse, i.e., the traveling of Oxford’s thoughts, at night, to his son in the Tower

4 TO WORK MY MIND, WHEN BODY’S WORK’S EXPIRED.
WORK MY MIND = labor to form a mental vision of Southampton in prison; “work” is related to “travail” in the above line, confirming the meaning of “travail” as labor; i.e., first there was the physical work, and now the mental work begins.

5 FOR THEN MY THOUGHTS, FROM FAR WHERE I ABIDE,
His thoughts are at the Tower, not where he is; “Think on the Tower and me” – Richard III, 5.3.127; Oxford’s home in Hackney in about three miles northeast of Whitechapel and the Tower of London, which is on the River Thames

MY THOUGHTS = “Was it the proud full sail of his (“Shakespeare’s”) great verse,/ Bound for the prize of all too precious (royal) you./ That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,/ Making their tomb the womb in which they grew?” – Sonnet 86, lines 1-4

6 INTEND A ZEALOUS PILGRIMAGE TO THEE,
INTEND = “set out upon … have in mind a fixed purpose” – Booth

ZEALOUS PILGRIMAGE TO THEE = his thoughts go on a royal (and holy) progress to Southampton in the Tower; also, a religious pilgrimage to Southampton as a king or god on earth; in this line Oxford echoes the theme of Sonnet 7, in which he compares Southampton with “his sacred majesty,” a prince or king: "Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,/ Attending on his golden pilgrimage" - Sonnet 7, lines 7-8

ZEALOUS = related to religious fervor, i.e., his thoughts (expressed in these sonnets) are akin to hymns or prayers to a god on earth; "Nothing, sweet boy, but yet like prayers divine./ I must each day say o'er the very same./ Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine./ Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name" - Sonnet 108, lines 5-8: “When holy and devout religious men are at their beads, 'tis much to draw them thence, so sweet is zealous contemplation … thy devotion and right Christian zeal” – Richard III, 3.7.91-93,102, i.e., Oxford is contemplating his royal son as a king or “god on earth” as in “the little Love-God” of Sonnet 154, line 1, and a “God in love” in Sonnet 110, line 12; "With hearts create of duty and of zeal" - Henry V, 2.2.31

PILGRIMAGE = “In prison hast thou spent a pilgrimage and like a hermit overpass'd thy days” – 1 Henry VI, 2.5.116

7 AND KEEP MY DROOPING EYELIDS OPEN WIDE,
Keeping his eyes open in the dark, while forming a mental vision

8 LOOKING ON DARKNESS, WHICH THE BLIND DO SEE.
LOOKING ON = “Looking on the lines of my boy’s face” – The Winter’s Tale, 1.2.153-154; “What might I have been, might I a son and daughter now have look’d on:” - The Winter’s Tale, 5.1.175-176; “The sun look’d on the world with glorious eye,/ Yet not so wistly as this Queen on him” – The Passionate Pilgrim, No. 6, 1599; “Were it not pity that this goodly boy should lose his birthright by his father’s fault … Ah, what a shame were this! Look on the boy” – 3 Henry VI, 2.2.34-39; “A son who is the theme of honour’s tongue, amongst a grove the very straightest plant, who is sweet Fortune’s minion and her pride; whilst I by looking on the praise of him see riot and dishonour stain the brow of my young Harry” – 1 Henry IV, 1.1.80-85
DARKNESS = literally the darkness of his room; also the darkness of this tragedy; also the
darkness that Elizabeth sees in her imperial, negative view, casting her cloud, as in “The region
cloud hath masked him from me now” – Sonnet 33, line 12 (“region” = Regina)

But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed
Sonnet 43, lines 3-4

What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
Sonnet 97, line 3

- Both examples above are to Southampton during these prison years

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art black as hell, as dark as night

- Sonnet 147, lines 13-14, Oxford to Elizabeth in the Dark Lady Series
(Accusing the Queen of casting her dark royal frown upon their son)

Where now his son's like a glow-worm in the night,
The which hath fire in darkness, none in light
Pericles, 3.2.43-44

Witness my son, now in the shade of death,
Whose bright out-shining beams thy cloudy wrath
Hath in eternal darkness folded up
Richard III, 1.3.267-269

Dark cloudy death o'ershakes his beams of life
3 Henry VI, 2.6.62

To dark dishonour's use thou shalt not have.
I am disgrace'd, impeach'd, and baffled here,
Pierced to the soul with slander's venom'd spear
Richard II, 1.1.169-171

THE BLIND: Those who can only see the surface appearance of things and not the substance;
those who have no idea that Southampton is a prince. Those who are “blind” also (even primarily)
include Elizabeth, who refuses to acknowledge the truth of her son. In the final verse of the Dark
Lady series, Oxford will remind the Queen that “to enlighten thee,” he “gave eyes to blindness” –
Sonnet 152, line 11

WHICH THE BLIND DO SEE = others can see, but they see only the treason of the events,
while remaining blind to the greater royal tragedy; Oxford sees the truth and therefore,
paradoxically, he cannot see with his eyes, i.e., he is blind; “O me! What eyes hath love put in my
head./ Which have no correspondence with true sight!/ … O cunning love, with tears thou keep'st
me blind,/ Lest eyes, well seeing, thy foul faults should find” – Sonnet 148, lines 1-2, 13-14; “But,
love, hate on, for now I know thy (Elizabeth's) mind;/ Those that can see thou lov'st, and I am
blind” – Sonnet 149, lines 13-14

9 SAVE THAT MY SOUL'S IMAGINARY SIGHT
MY SOUL'S IMAGINARY SIGHT = my spiritual vision of Southampton, without use of eyes;
“Now my soul's palace is become a prison” – 3 Henry VI, 2.1.74; and in Oxford’s view, his own
heart or soul is becoming Southampton’s own prison, a better one than the Tower; he will write to
Elizabeth: “Let my heart be his guard; thou canst not then use rigor in my jail” – Sonnet 133, lines
11-12; a theme is that Oxford and his son are imprisoned in each other’s souls or hearts.

10 PRESENTS THY SHADOW TO MY SIGHTLESS VIEW,
THY SHADOW = This is the introduction of shadow in the Sonnets; Southampton, under the
darkened cloud or shadow, appears ghostlike; “And so he vanished: then came wand'ring by a
shadow like an angel, with bright hair dabbled in blood” – Richard III, 1.4.52-54
“But the world is so cunning, as of a shadow they can make a substance, and of a likelihood a truth” – Oxford to Burghley, July 1581

“A dream itself is but a shadow” – Hamlet, 2.2.261; “The shadow of myself formed in her eye; which, being but the shadow of your son, becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow” – King John, 2.1.498-500; “But Henry now shall wear the English crown and be true King indeed; thou but the shadow” – 3 Henry VI, 4.3.49-50; “He hath no more worthy interest to the state than thou the shadow of succession” – 1 Henry IV, 3.2.98-99

Must he be then as shadow of himself?
Adorn his temples with a coronet,
And yet, in substance and authority,
Retain but privilege of a private man? 1 Henry VI, 5.4.133-136

No, no, I am but shadow of myself:
You are deceived; my substance is not here 1 Henry VI, 2.3.49-50

I am the shadow of poor Buckingham,
Whose figure even this instant cloud puts on
By darkening my clear sun Henry VIII, 1.1.224-226

SIGHTLESS = “Poor grooms are sightless night, kings glorious day” – Lucrece, 1013

11 WHICH LIKE A JEWEL (HUNG IN GHASTLY NIGHT)
WHICH = the shadow of Southampton, presenting his image; A JEWEL = Southampton now appears like a jewel or ornament (royal prince) as he was “the world’s fresh ornament” in Sonnet 1, line 9; “As on the finger of a throned Queen/ The basest Jewel will be well esteemed” – Sonnet 96, lines 5-6, Oxford referring to Southampton; “As for my sons, say I account of them as jewels” – Titus Andronicus, 3.1.198-199; “Had our prince (Jewel of children) seen this hour” – The Winter’s Tale, 5.1.115-116

No son of mine succeeding…
And mine eternal jewel
Given to the common Enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! Macbeth, 3.1.63, 67-69

(In the above passage, eternal jewel = immortal soul, according to the Riverside edition of the Shakespeare works; and this soul is carried or passed on by his seed; meanwhile, Oxford will say to Southampton: “What can mine own praise to mine own self bring,/ And what is’t but mine own when I praise thee” – Sonnet 39, lines 2-4; and “My spirit is thine, the better part of me” – Sonnet 74, line 8); so the “jewel” of this sonnet is Southampton and his immoral soul as both the son or “better part” of Oxford and as the immortal royal prince of England)

For princes are
A model which heaven makes like to itself:
As jewels lose their glory if neglected,
So princes their renouns if not respected Pericles, 2.2.10-13

HUNG = image of a hanging, i.e., Southampton’s impending execution; also as trophies are “hung” over memorials for the dead; “Thou art the grave where buried love doth live, /Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone” – Sonnet 31, lines 9-10; as on a tomb: “And hang more praise upon deceased I” – Sonnet 72, line 7; to be “hung” or “hanged” or executed by the halter; “To confess and be hanged for his labour! First to be hanged, and then to confess” – Othello, 4.1.38-39; “Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive” – Macbeth, 5.5.39; suspended in the air, like a hovering apparition
GHASTLY NIGHT = the terrible (and terrifying) darkness of his son’s disgrace, yet his shadow glitters in the sight of Oxford’s soul; “Where now his son’s like a glow-worm in the night” – Pericles, 3.2.43; “O, I have passed a miserable night, so full of fearful dreams” – Richard III, 1.4.2-3, i.e., Clarence, speaking of his night in the Tower; suggesting ghostlike, as Hamlet’s dead father appears as a ghost in the night; “I am thy father’s spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night” – Hamlet, 1.5.9-10

"Unto the kingdom of perpetual night" Richard III, 1.4.47

12 MAKES BLACK NIGHT BEAUTEOUS, AND HER OLD FACE NEW.

MAKES BLACK NIGHT BEAUTEOUS = introduction of black in the Sonnets, the opposite of his “Summer’s Day” of the Golden Time in Sonnet 18, the previous series of the "old" time; also, Elizabeth, the “dark” lady, is “old” at age sixty-seven; in Oxford’s view, however, Southampton turns this blackness into the sight of his son’s royal blood inherited from “beauty” or Elizabeth. Southampton, because of the Rebellion, is suddenly changed from the “fairest” of Sonnet 1, line 1, to the opposite; i.e., he has been changed from fair to black as reflected by the parallel verse of Sonnet 127, opening the Dark Lady series: “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 slandered with a bastard shame” – Sonnet 127, lines 1-4; and at the end of that sonnet, the Queen is pictured as in mourning for her royal son, whom she may execute very soon:

Therefore my Mistress’ eyes are Raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem… Yet so they mourning becoming of their woe Sonnet 127, lines 9-10, 13

A few verses later in the Dark Lady series, Oxford further insists:

Thine eyes I love, and they as pitying me…
Have put on black, and loving mourners be…
And truly not the morning Sun of Heaven
Better becomes the gray cheeks of the East,
Nor that full star that ushers in the ev’n
Doth half that glory to the sober West
As those two mourning eyes become thy face.
O let it then as well be seen thy heart
To mourning for me, since mourning doth thee grace Sonnet 132, lines 1, 3, 5-11

Shall we go throw away our coats of steel,
And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns? 3 Henry VI, 2.1.160-161

“...I arrest thee of high treason, in the name of our most sovereign King ... It will help me nothing to plead mine innocence; for that dye is on me which makes my whitest part black” - Henry VIII, 1.1.200-202; 208-209; “And took his voice who should be prick’d to die in our black sentence and proscription” - Julius Caesar, 4.1.16-17; “And from his bosom purge this black despair!” - 2 Henry VI, 3.3.23; “I’ll join with black despair against my soul, and to myself become an enemy” - Richard III, 2.2.36-37; “Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it” - Henry V, 4.1.141-143; “For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres, acts of black night, abominable deeds, complots of mischief, treasons, villainies” - Titus Andronicus, 5.1.63-65; “Black is the badge of hell, the hue of dungeons and the school of night” - Love’s Labour’s Lost, 4.3.250-251

13 LO THUS BY DAY MY LIMBS, BY NIGHT MY MIND,
LO = Lord Oxford; BY DAY ... BY NIGHT = Oxford will now write day-by-day or night-by-night until there is some resolution. “Day” is the “Summer’s day” or time of royal hope in Sonnet 18, line 1, while “night” is this entire time of utter despair
After Southampton’s release, Oxford will recall “how once I suffered in your crime,” adding, “O that our night of woe might have remembr’ed” – Sonnet 120, lines 8-9; “No; dark shall be my light, and night my day” – 2 Henry VI, 2.4.40; Southampton will be called soon to trial

Call him to present trial; if he may
Find mercy in the law, ’tis his; if none,
Let him not seek’t of us. By day and night,
He’s traitor to th ‘height!

Black night o’ershade the day, and death thy life

Winding up days with toil and nights with sleep,
Had the fore-hand and vantage of a king.

Henry VIII, 1.2.211-214
Richard III, 1.2.135
Henry V, 4.1.275-276

FOR THEE, AND FOR MY SELF, NO QUIET FIND.
FOR THEE, AND FOR MY SELF = Oxford equates his son with himself; he is attempting to transfer all the pain and grief and guilt from Southampton to himself; (I can find no peace – not for you, and, therefore, not for me); “Not for myself, Lord Warwick, but my son” – 3 Henry VI, 1.1.198; “O how thy worth with manners may I sing,/ When thou art all the better part of me?/ What can mine own praise to mine own self bring,/ And what is’t but mine own when I praise thee?” – Sonnet 39, lines 1-4

NO QUIET FIND = “I shall not sleep in quiet at the Tower” – Richard III, 3.1.142; “‘Tis thee, my self; that for my self I praise” – Sonnet 62, line 13; “My spirit is thine, the better part of me” – Sonnet 74, line 8. “Whereupon I may upon reason quiet myself, and not upon weariness” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, May 22, 1602

Sonnet 27 begins the 100-Sonnet Center of the Monument that Oxford is constructing for Southampton, as a memorial to preserve him and his "love" or royal blood (“And you and love are still my argument” – Sonnet 76, line 10) for future generations. Although Southampton and Essex claim they were attempting only to remove Robert Cecil from his control over the Queen, they are accused of having committed high treason against the Crown itself. Essex will die for his sins; Elizabeth will spare the life of her royal son, but his claim of succession has been lost.