

THE PRISON YEARS

OXFORD SUMMONED TO THE TRIAL DAY FOUR IN THE TOWER

Sonnet 30
To The Sessions
11 February 1601

Edward de Vere is "summoned" to be a judge at the "Sessions" or treason trial of Essex and Southampton, to be held in Westminster Hall eight days from now. Oxford is filled with grief over the "losses" suffered by his royal son – loss of honor, loss of liberty, loss of the crown, and likely even the loss of his life by execution. Oxford's expression of overwhelming sorrow demonstrates that, in life itself, he suffered every bit as greatly as do the characters of his plays. When his son by the Queen was born, Oxford had been forced to "pay" by being unable to acknowledge him. Now he must "new pay" for his son by making a crucial bargain with Robert Cecil and King James of Scotland, who, barring civil war around the throne, will become James I of England.

Sonnet 30

Translation

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 (unused to flow)
For precious friends hid in death's dateless
night,
And weep afresh love's long-since cancelled
woe,
And moan th' expense of many a vanished sight.

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee (dear friend)
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

When to the Trial with royal secret thoughts
I am summoned to remember past things,
I sigh the lack of your rights that I sought,
And cry anew over my son's wasted royal time:

Then I can weep tears (like never before)
For my royal son imprisoned, facing death and
disgraced forever,
And weep again over his royalty's cancellation,
And moan over his many losses of recognition.

Then I can grieve over past grievances,
And sorrowfully, from woe to woe, give
The sad account of my past moans,
Which now I must pay again as if never before.

But if, during that time, I think of you (royal son),
All these losses are restored, and sorrows end.

Sonnet 30

“The Privy Council dispatched letters to the peers whom it had chosen to hear the charges against the Earls of Essex and Southampton. These letters promised their lordships that they ‘shall be further acquainted with all the particularities not only of their secret practices of treason against this kingdom but of their actual rebellion within the city of London, where they assembled great forces on Sunday last and killed divers of her Majesty’s subjects’ (modernized English). The government was obviously not risking any verdict of ‘Not Guilty’.”

Akrigg, “Shakespeare & the Earl of Southampton,” 120

The official letters of the Privy Council were sent on 13 February 1601, yet Oxford in this daily record is two days ahead of time. The reason is that he was an insider who made it his business to know information in advance, especially in this case. He was Lord Great Chamberlain and brother-in-law of Secretary Robert Cecil, as well as the highest-ranking earl on the tribunal of nine earls and sixteen barons.

*“Oxford was **summoned** from his retirement to act as the senior of the twenty-five noblemen who unanimously declared Essex and Southampton guilty, after the veriest travesty of a trial on February 19th.”* – B. M. Ward, 336; *“Shakespeare exquisitely incorporates the legal world as a framework with reference to the judicial quarter sessions”* – W. N. Knight, 77

1 WHEN TO THE SESSIONS OF SWEET SILENT THOUGHT

TO THE SESSIONS = to the upcoming trial of Essex and Southampton (“The periodic sitting of judges, a court of law” – Stephen Booth; “Treason was properly tried in the King’s Bench or locally at *sessions*, though noblemen enjoyed the right to be tried by their peers in the court of the Lord Steward” – Elton, p. 80); presiding at the Essex-Southampton trial will be Lord Steward Buckhurst; (“Others but *stewards* of their excellence” – Sonnet 94, line 8); “From this *session* interdict [prohibit] Every fowl of tyrant wing” – *The Phoenix and Turtle*, 1601, by “William Shake-speare,” referring to the treason trial and to Elizabeth as a tyrant; the setting in *The Winter’s Tale* opening Act 3, Scene 2 is that of a Court of Justice, and King Leontes of Sicilia refers to the treason trial as a “*sessions*” as he begins the proceedings, using the royal “we” of the monarch:

This *sessions* (to our great grief we pronounce)
Even pushes ‘gainst our heart: the party tried
The daughter of a king, our wife, and one
Of us too much below’d.

The Winter’s Tale, 3.2.1-8

Then, good prince,
No longer *session* hold upon my shame,
But let my *trial* be mine own confession.
Immediate sentence, then, and sequent death
Is all the grace I beg.

Measure for Measure, 5.1.367-371

“A *treason trial* away from London could also draw the crowds, and on occasion the crush might be so great that it threatened the efficiency of *the sessions*.” – (Bellamy, 134)

SWEET = royal; **SILENT THOUGHT** = Oxford will keep his thoughts (of Southampton as his royal son) secret while on the tribunal.

2 I SUMMON UP REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST,

SUMMON = (“Cite by authority to appear at a specified place, require an appearance before a court, either to answer a charge or to give evidence = summon *to* the sessions” – Booth); in this case, Oxford and other peers are being summoned to the trial; (“The Lord Steward’s court, though in theory composed of all peers, was in practice appointed by selective *summons*” – Elton, p. 80);

“**Summon** a *session*, that we may arraign our most disloyal lady; for, as she hath been publicly accused, so shall she have a just and open trial” – King Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*, 2.3.200-03

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST = the golden time of royalty covered by Sonnets 1 to 26, numerically recording Southampton’s first twenty-six years to 1600; **REMEMBRANCE** = memory, bringing to mind, recollection; (“When Julius Caesar, whose *remembrance* yet lives in men’s eyes” – *Cymbeline*, 3.1.2-3; “Nor it nor no *remembrance* what it was” – Sonnet 5, line 12; “as fits a King’s *remembrance*” – *Hamlet*, 2.2.26; “Praising what is lost makes the *remembrance dear*” – *All’s Well That Ends Well*, 5.3.20

The setting sun, and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last,
Write in remembrance more than things long past *Richard II*, 2.1.12-14

“I thought it good to know the *truth* and to put *Her Majesty in remembrance* of what was *past*; hereupon I understand from Her Majesty that it is *true* she hath signed the same, but now upon this *remembrance* from me she hath stayed the writing. - Oxford memo (undated & unaddressed) Huntinton MS EL 2337; Chiljan, 133-134

3 I SIGH THE LACK OF MANY A THING I SOUGHT,
SIGH THE LACK = moan over the loss of his son; **LACK OF MANY A THING I SOUGHT** = referring to the lack of having been able to claim paternity of Southampton in the first place; the lack of Elizabeth’s acknowledgment of their royal son; the lack of his succession to the throne

4 AND WITH OLD WOES NEW WAIL MY DEAR TIME’S WASTE:
WOES = sufferings over Southampton prior to this one, which is the worst of all; “our night of woe” – Sonnet 120, line 9; **NEW WAIL** = weep over anew, all over again; Long mayst thou live to *wail thy children’s death*” - *Richard III*, 1.3.192-204; **DEAR** = royal; (as Hamlet speaks of his father the king “upon whose property and most *dear* life a damned defeat was made” – *Hamlet*, 2.2.577-578; “My *dear dear* lord ... *dear* my liege ... that *dear blood*” – *Richard II*, 1.1.176, 184; 1.3.126); “dear” often refers to a royal son or father; Oxford uses it in Sonnets 30, 31, 37, 39, 42, 48, 87, 102, 108, 110, 117, 124, 131, 139, 142

Thou wouldst have left thy *dearest* heart-blood there,
Rather than made that savage duke thine heir,
And disinherited thine only son. *3 Henry VI*, 230-232

How now, *dear* sovereign and our gracious mother *Titus Andronicus*, 2.2.89

MY DEAR TIME’S WASTE = the waste of my son’s life and royal blood according to *time*, the ever-dwindling time left in Elizabeth’s reign and dynasty; (“When in *the Chronicle of wasted time*” – line 1 of Sonnet 106, which will become the dedicatory epistle for these Prison Sonnets; Oxford has already developed this special vocabulary involving “time” and “waste”; for example: “For never-resting *time* leads Summer on” – Sonnet 5, line 5; “But beauty’s *waste* hath in the world an end” – Sonnet 9, line 11; “That thou among the *wastes of time* must go” – Sonnet 12, line 10); and such words are consciously reflective of the profoundly sad way King Richard II takes responsibility for his demise:

But for the concord of *my state and time*,
Had not an ear to hear *my true time broke*:
I wasted time, and now time doth waste me *Richard II*, 5.5.47-49

5 THEN CAN I DROWN AN EYE (UN-USED TO FLOW)
DROWN AN EYE = weep, down his eye with tears; a play on Southampton’s royal eye, the sun, i.e., his royal eye hidden; also a play on “I” indicating the drowning of himself in sorrow; “Ten days ago I *drown’d* these news [of the death of Warwick] *in tears*” – *3 Henry VI*, 2.1.104

6 FOR PRECIOUS FRIENDS HID IN DEATH'S DATELESS NIGHT,

PRECIOUS FRIENDS = my royal son; **PRECIOUS** = royal; dear; "Tendering the *precious* safety of my prince" – *Richard II*, 1.1.32; godlike; "The *precious* image of our dear Redeemer" – *Richard III*, 2.1.124; **PRECIOUS FRIENDS HID IN DEATH'S DATELESS NIGHT** = image of Southampton in his prison room, facing trial and a sentence of execution; facing eternal lack of royal succession as an immortal king; **FRIENDS** = the plural used here in the same way that Oxford, with his insert in *Palladis Tamia*, 1598, referred to Southampton as the "*private friends*" to whom the twenty-six sonnets of the 1590s were addressed; also, to cite another example: the plural "fairest creatures" of Sonnet 1, line 1, signifying Southampton;

Prince Hal: I am good *friends* with my *father*
And may do anything *1 Henry IV*, 3.3.182-183

Thou art no *father* nor no *friend* of mine *1 Henry VI*, 5.4.9

HID = covered by the cloud of disgrace; ("The region cloud hath masked him from me now" – Sonnet 33, line 12; not acknowledged as Elizabeth's son and heir; **DATELESS** = eternal; never meeting his date with succession as the new king; timeless, as in "the *timeless deaths* of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward" – *Richard III*, 1.2.121-122; **DEATH'S** = alluding to the very possible execution of Southampton; ("The *dateless limit of thy dear exile*, the hopeless word of 'never to return' breathe I against thee, upon pain of life"- King Richard to Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, *Richard II*, 1.3.151-153); **DATELESS NIGHT** = eternal disgrace; the eternal lack of immortal kingship; "Thy end is Truth's and Beauty's *doom and date*" – Sonnet 14, line 14; "And Summer's lease hath all too short a date" – Sonnet 18, line 4; "So long as youth and thou are of one date" – Sonnet 22, line 2; "A *dateless lively heat, still to endure*" – Sonnet 153, line 6; **NIGHT** = opposite of the "Summer's day" (Sonnet 18, line 1) of kingship in "thy golden time" (Sonnet 3, line 12); the blackness of disgrace; the end of royal hope

7 AND WEEP AFRESH LOVE'S LONG-SINCE CANCELLED WOE,

LOVE'S = royal blood's; ("Near to the king in blood, and near in love" – *Richard II*, 3.1.17); **LOVE'S LONG-SINCE CANCELLED WOE** = the woe he already suffered when Elizabeth "cancelled" her son's blood from her, i.e., refused to acknowledge him

Accursed Tower! Accursed fatal hand
That hath contrived this *woeful* tragedy! *1 Henry VI*, 1.4.75-76

Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops
Are every one a *woe* *Henry V*, 1.2.25-26

CANCELLED = a legal term, denoting the breaking of bonds, indicating also that Oxford previously gave up hope of claiming paternity of Southampton; "Henry, your sovereign, is prisoner to the foe; his state usurp'd, his realm a slaughter-house, his subjects slain, *his statutes cancell'd and his treasure spent*" - *3 Henry VI*, 5.4.76-79

An expired date, *cancell'd* ere well begun *Lucrece*, Stanza 4
Cancell'd my fortunes, and enchained me
To endless date of never-ending woes *Lucrece*, Stanza 134
And through her wounds doth fly
Live's lasting date from *cancell'd* destiny *Lucrece*, Stanza 247

Cancel his bond of life *Richard III*, 4.4.77

Young Prince of Tyre...
We might proceed to *cancel* of your days;
Yet hope, succeeding from so fair a tree

As your fair self, doth tune us otherwise

Pericles, 1.1.112-116

8 AND MOAN TH'EXPENSE OF MANY A VANISHED SIGHT.

MOAN = the moan or groan of those at a funeral

Laughst thou, wretch?

Thy mirth shall turn to *moan*

I Henry VI, 2.3.43

No, when my father York and Edward wept,
To hear *the piteous moan that Rutland made*

When black-faced Clifford shook his sword at him *Richard III*, 1.2.160-162

Let us pay betimes

A moiety of that mass of *moan* to come.

Cry, Trojans, cry! Practice your eyes with tears! *Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.107-109

EXPENSE = the paying out of suffering; **MANY A VANISHED SIGHT** = all the past sight of his son he has had to give up; referring to "precious friends hid in death's dateless night," line 6; ("And all those *beauties whereof now he's King/ Are vanishing, or vanished out of sight*" – Sonnet 63, lines 6-7, i.e., the vanishing of his royal claim.)

9 THEN CAN I GRIEVE AT GRIEVANCES FOREGONE,

GRIEVANCES FOREGONE = sorrows already suffered (or rendered or given up), but now being suffered (and paid out) anew

10 AND HEAVILY FROM WOE TO WOE TELL O'ER

HEAVILY = sadly, in sorrow; ("Help us to *sigh and groan, heavily, heavily*: Graves, yawn and yield your dead, till death be uttered, *heavily, heavily*" – *Much Ado About Nothing*, 5.3.17-21);

WOE TO WOE = "pitiable creature, mournful sight ... sorry, sorrowful, sad" – Crystal & Crystal; ("Accursed tower! Accursed fatal hand that hath contrived this *woeful* tragedy!" – *I Henry VI*, 1.4.75-76; "Measure his *woe* the length and breadth of mine" – *Much Ado About Nothing*, 5.1.11; "We see the ground whereon these *woes* do lie" – *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3.179, of dead Romeo and Juliet; "If thinking on me then should make you *woe*" – Sonnet 71, line 8

11 THE SAD ACCOUNT OF FORE-BEMOANED MOAN,

SAD = heavy, painful; **ACCOUNT** = audit of royal blood; ("What acceptable *Audit* canst thou leave" – Sonnet 4, line 12; "Her *Audit*, though delayed, answered must be" – Sonnet 126, line 11; "No reckoning made, but *sent to my account* with all my imperfections on my head" – *Hamlet*, 1.5.78-79; "But I have a son, sir, by order of law, some year elder than this, who yet is *no dearer in my account*" – *King Lear*, 1.1.18-19; "What need we fear who knows it, when none can *call our power to account*?" – *Macbeth*, 5.1.38-39; "Or at your hand *th'account of hours* to crave, / Being your vassal bound to stay your leisure" – Sonnet 58, lines 3-4; "No shape so true, no truth of such account" – Sonnet 62, line 6); **SAD ACCOUNT** = "heavy reckoning (of debts)" – Evans; "When you were in place and *in account*" – *I Henry IV*, 5.1.37, Worcester to the Prince of Wales

12 WHICH I NEW PAY AS IF NOT PAID BEFORE.

NEW PAY = pay out with grief all over again, as though I never paid it before

13 BUT IF THE WHILE I THINK ON THEE (DEAR FRIEND)

DEAR FRIEND = royal and godlike son; relating Southampton back to line 6: "For precious *friends* hid in death's dateless night"; ("O, *my dear lord*, lo, where your son is borne!" – *I Henry VI*, 4.7; "O *dear son* Edgar" – *King Lear*, 4.1; "As for my sons, say I account of them as jewels purchased at an easy price, and yet *dear* too" – *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.198-200); "If *my dear love* were but the child of state" – Sonnet 124, line 1

14 ALL LOSSES ARE RESTORED, AND SORROWS END.

ALL = Southampton; **LOSSES** = the loss of Southampton by execution and the loss of his claim to succeed Elizabeth on the throne; the loss of his liberty and honor; the loss of Oxford's ability to claim paternity of him; the loss of any way for Elizabeth to claim him as her natural issue; the loss by extinction of the Tudor Rose dynasty; the loss of Oxford's ability to claim the Shakespeare works as his, once he makes a bargain for his son's life; "**all** losses" = "the loss of *One for All, All for One*, Southampton"; ("You amount to them all, for they are all reproduced in you" – Tucker)

"The **loss** of a son of so great hope ... we as his prince and sovereign and you as a loving and natural father, for that we both be interested in the **loss** ... Besides, if we do duly look into the matter in true course of Christianity, we shall then see that the **loss** hath wrought so great a gain to the gentleman whom we now lack, as we have rather cause to rejoice than lament" – Queen Elizabeth to George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, trying to comfort him on the death of his son, circa September 5, 1582 (*Collected Works*, 256); "These griefs and **losses**" – *The Merchant of Venice*, 3.3.32; "Even so great men **great losses** should endure" – *Julius Caesar*, 4.3.192

Looking the way her harmless young one went, And can do nought but <i>wail her darling's loss</i>	<i>2 Henry VI</i> , 3.1.215-216
The loss of those three lords torments my heart And so obsequious will <i>thy father</i> be, Even <i>for the loss of thee</i> , having no more, As Priam was for all his valiant sons	<i>3 Henry VI</i> , 1.1.277 <i>3 Henry VI</i> , 2.5.118-120

Though thou repent, yet I have still <i>the loss</i>	Sonnet 34, line 10
To him that bears <i>the strong offence's loss</i>	Sonnet 34, line 12

RESTORED = compensated for; paid back, because he knows Southampton still has "love" or royal blood within him; and in the next sonnet he is "the grave where buried love doth live"

SORROWS = "Continual meditations, tears, and sorrows" – *Henry VIII*, 4.2.28; "And you recount your sorrows to a stone ... Shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome ... His sorrows have so overwhelmed his wits" – *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.29; 4.3.17; 4.4.10; "These griefs, these woes, these sorrows make me old" – *Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.88; "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions; first, her father slain; next, your son gone, and he most violent author of his just remove" – *Hamlet*, 4.5.78-81; "Each new morn, new widows howl, new orphans cry; new sorrows strike heaven on the face" – *Macbeth*, 4.3.4-6

My gracious lord! My father! This sleep is sound indeed; this is a sleep That from this golden rigol hath divorc'd So many English kings. <i>Thy due from me</i> <i>Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood</i>	<i>2 Henry IV</i> , 4.5.33-37 (Prince Hal to his father King Henry IV)
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