

## THE PRISON YEARS

### OXFORD RECALLS HIS SON'S BIRTH DAY SEVEN IN THE TOWER

#### Sonnet 33 *My Sunne* 14 February 1601

*In the midst of the current crisis, with Southampton imprisoned and facing death, Edward de Vere recalls the "birth" of his son described in the previous sonnet. He recalls how, in the summer of 1574, Queen Elizabeth went "stealing to west with this disgrace" (leaving on her progress to Bristol and Bath in the west, with her negative view of her newly born royal son). Writing as a proud father, Oxford recalls how "my Sunne" appeared "with all triumphant splendor on my brow," but that the boy "was but one hour mine" because "the region cloud" (Elizabeth Regina's imperial frown) quickly covered him. This is the same "boy" Oxford wrote about in the early verses (later to become Sonnets 153-154) following the visit to Bath in August 1574. All along Southampton has privately carried the "stain" of royal bastardy; now he also carries the public stain of treason and dishonor. But by inserting this sonnet as No. 33 (the age of Christ when He died and rose from the dead), Oxford implies he will bring about a resurrection for his royal-sacred son. .*

#### Sonnet 33

#### Translation

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy:

Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
With ugly rack on his celestial face,  
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace.

Even so my Sunne one early morn did shine  
With all triumphant splendor on my brow,  
But out, alack, he was but one hour mine,  
The region cloud hath masked him from me  
now.

Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;  
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's  
sun staineth.

On many mornings I have seen my son's full royalty  
Gracing the world with his sovereign eye,  
Shining his royal light on everything,  
Gracing all with his blood inherited from Elizabeth.

Soon after his birth the Queen's dark view appeared  
With ugly rage obscuring his royal identity,  
And from poor England she hid his royal blood,  
Riding toward Bath with her disgrace of him.

In this way my royal son was born one early morn,  
With all triumphant splendor on my brow,  
But out, alas, my son was just one hour mine –  
Regina's bastard shame covers him even more now.

Yet for this I have no disdain for my royal son!  
Any common son can have this stigma of disgrace,  
when Elizabeth's royal son carries it.

### Sonnet 33

#### 1 FULL MANY A GLORIOUS MORNING HAVE I SEEN

**GLORIOUS** = “Poor grooms are sightless night, kings *glorious day*” – *Lucrece*, 1013; “But I will rise there with so *full a glory*” – *Henry V*, 1.2.278; echoing Southampton’s relationship to the Queen as “Glorianna”

#### 2 FLATTER THE MOUNTAIN TOPS WITH SOVEREIGN EYE,

**SOVEREIGN EYE** = the royal eye of the sun-king (“See us rising in our throne, the East” – *Richard II*, 3.2.50; “My *sovereign*, I confess your royal graces” – *Henry VIII*, 3.2; “Whilst I, my *sovereign*, watch the clock for you” – Sonnet 57, line 6, to Southampton as king; “gracious in those princely *eyes* of thine” – *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.434; “And scarcely greet me with *that sun, thine eye*” – Sonnet 49, line 6, with sun spelled “sunne” in the 1609 quarto; “Lo in the Orient when the gracious light/ Lifts up his burning head” – Sonnet 7, lines 1-2; “*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

#### 3 KISSING WITH GOLDEN FACE THE MEADOWS GREEN,

**KISSING** = “As monarchs bestowed kisses on favored persons” – Tucker; “Three *glorious suns*, each one a perfect *sun*, not separated with the *racking clouds*, but sever’d in a pale clear-shining sky; See, see! They join, embrace, and seem to *kiss*... 3 *Henry VI*, 2.1.20-29; “But that necessity so bowed the state that I and greatness were compelled to *kiss*” – Bolingbroke, now King Henry IV, about his gaining of the throne, in 2 *Henry IV*, 3.1.73-74; “And *kiss him* with a *glorious victory*” – *King John*, 2.1.394; **GOLDEN FACE** = kingly face; “this thy *golden time*” – Sonnet 3, line 12; “Attending on his *golden pilgrimage*” – Sonnet 7, line 8; **GREEN** = related to *fresh*, i.e., royal expectation and hope; “Since first I saw you *fresh, which yet are green*” – Sonnet 104, line 8

#### 4 GILDING PALE STREAMS WITH HEAVENLY ALCHEMY:

**GILDING** = making royal; “An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,/ *Gilding* the object whereupon it gazeth” – Sonnet 20, lines 5-6, referring to Southampton’s royal eye, a sun or star; **HEAVENLY** = related to his mother Elizabeth; **ALCHEMY** = rhymes with “eye”; Oxford studied alchemy with Dr. Dee, the Queen’s astrologer; “The *glorious sun* stays in his course and plays the *alchemist*, turning with splendor of his *precious eye* the meager cloddy earth to *glittering gold*” – *King John*, 3.1.77-80; “And that *your love* taught it this *alchemy*” – Sonnet 114, line 4, referring in part to the “alchemy” of these verses: “Why with the time do I not glance aside/ To new-found methods, and to *compounds* strange” – Sonnet 76, lines 3-4, analogizing mixtures of words to chemicals that are mixed in alchemy, but in this case the primary agent is “your love” or Southampton’s royal blood; related to distillation

#### 5 ANON PERMIT THE BASEST CLOUDS TO RIDE

**ANON** = (“Almost immediately” – Booth); **BASEST CLOUDS** = imperial frown of Elizabeth, casting its shadow of disgrace upon her son; (“cloud” as verb to defame, blacken, sully, as in “My sovereign Mistress *clouded* so” – *The Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.280); making her son **BASE**; “I quickly shed some of his bastard blood; and in disgrace bespoke him thus: ‘Contaminated, *base*, and misbegotten blood’” – 1 *Henry VI*, 4.6.19-22

Yet herein will I imitate the sun,  
Who doth permit the *base contagious clouds*  
To smother up his beauty from the world,

That when he pleases again to be himself,  
Being wanted, he may be more wondered at,  
By breaking through the foul and *ugly* mists  
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him

– Prince Henry or Hal, the future King, in *1 Henry IV*, 1.2.190-192

“See, see, King Richard doth himself appear, as doth the blushing discontented *sun* from out of the fiery portal of the east, when he perceives the envious *clouds* are bent to *dim his glory* and to *stain* the track of his bright passage to the occident” – *Richard II*, 3.3.62-67

#### 6 WITH UGLY RACK ON HIS CELESTIAL FACE,

**UGLY RACK** = ugly mass of vapory clouds; “But, as we often see, against some storm a silence in the heaven, the *rack* stand still” – *Hamlet*, 2.2.505-506; echoing “the rack” used for torturing prisoners in the Tower; **CELESTIAL** = godlike; heavenly, related to his mother Elizabeth, his “face” reflecting hers; “Such heavenly touches ne’er touched earthly faces” – Sonnet 17, line 8

“For indeed what more effective action could he have taken to make his work fruitful of good results than to dedicate his *Courtier* to our most illustrious and noble Queen, in whom all courtly qualities are personified, together with those diviner and truly *celestial* virtues?”

- Oxford’s Letter to the Reader, *The Courtier*, 1572

#### 7 AND FROM THE FORLORN WORLD HIS VISAGE HIDE,

**THE FORLORN WORLD** = poor deprived England; “Thou that art now *the world’s* fresh ornament/ ... Pity *the world*, or else this glutton be,/ To eat *the world’s due*, by the grave and thee” – Sonnet 1, lines 9, 13-14; **HIS VISAGE HIDE** = did conceal his identity; “Which *hides your life* and shows not half your parts” – Sonnet 17, line 4; “But *things removed that hidden in thee lie*” – Sonnet 31, line 8

#### 8 STEALING UNSEEN TO WEST WITH THIS DISGRACE:

Elizabeth went on progress in the summer of 1574 to Bristol and Bath in western England, the setting of the Bath Visit Epilogue, Sonnets 153-154; **STEALING** = sneaking; moving ahead with concealment; she had “stolen” Oxford’s son; **WITH THIS DISGRACE** = not with her royal son, but with her *shame* as in “And Beauty slandered with a bastard shame” – Sonnet 127, line 4; **DISGRACE** = loss of royal grace from the monarch; “The disfavor of a powerful person” – Booth; “*Our empress’ shame*, and stately Rome’s *disgrace*” – *Titus Andronicus*, 4.2.61

#### 9 EVEN SO MY SUNNE ONE EARLY MORN DID SHINE,

**EVEN SO** = in the same way as above, i.e., I now announce that my own royal son was born and covered with disgrace in exactly the way I have just described

**MY SUNNE** = My Royal Son (the only use of the phrase “my sun” or “my sunne” in all of Shakespeare); “My’ is stressed. The beloved is both his sun and his sovereign” – Tucker; **MY** = the personal now emphasized; (“*my fair son*” – *Richard II*, 5.2.92); Southampton is the royal “Sunne” and Elizabeth is the “Moon” as in: “Making a couplement of proud compare/ With Sunne and Moone” - Sonnet 21, lines 5-6; “And truly not the morning Sun of Heaven” - Sonnet 132, line 5; **ONE** = Southampton; **DID SHINE** = was born; the royal son rose like the sun and shined his beams

#### 10 WITH ALL TRIUMPHANT SPLENDOR ON MY BROW,

**ALL** = Southampton; **TRIUMPHANT SPLENDOR** = reflected glory; (“Lo thus I *triumph like a king*” – poem entitled *My Mind To Me A Kingdom Is*, listed by Steven May as possibly by Oxford – Chiljan, 173-174); **MY BROW** = Oxford’s brow; appearance or countenance; “our whole kingdom contracted in one *brow* of woe” – the King in *Hamlet*, 1.2.4; “Lo, here, this long-usurped royalty from the dead temples of this bloody wretch have I plucked off *to grace thy brows* withal”

– *Richard III*, 5.5.4-7, spoken to the Earl of Richmond, afterwards Henry VII, who will begin the Tudor Rose Dynasty, speaking of the crown and adding, “Wear it, enjoy it, and make much of it.”

#### 11 BUT OUT, ALACK, HE WAS BUT ONE HOUR MINE,

**ONE** = emphasizing and pointing to Southampton, his motto; “Since all alike my songs and praises be/ To *one*, of *one*, still such, and ever so.../ *One* thing expressing leaves out difference.../never kept seat in *one*” - Sonnet 105, lines 3-4, 8, 14; “Among a number *one* is reckoned *none*” - Sonnet 136, line 8

Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his *eye*,  
As bright as is the eagle’s, lightens forth  
Controlling majesty; *alack, alack* for woe  
That any harm should stain so fair a show!

*Richard II*, 3.3.68-71

**HE WAS BUT ONE HOUR MINE** = the newborn boy was quickly removed; (“You *had* a father” – Sonnet 13, line 14; “Now, by the burning tapers of the sky that *shone so brightly when this boy was got*, he dies upon my scimitar’s sharp point that touches this, *my first-born son and heir*” – *Titus Andronicus*, 4.2.91-94); “And his love-kindling fire did *quickly steep*/ In a cold valley-fountain of that ground” – Sonnet 153, lines 3-4

**MINE** = “it hath pleased God to give me *a son of mine own*” – Oxford to Burghley, March 17, 1575, after the birth of his royal son, whom he could *not* claim as his own, referring to news that Anne Cecil was carrying his child, who turned out to be a girl, i.e., Elizabeth Vere (who may not have been his biological daughter); in his letter to Burghley he appears to refer to a hoped-for son of “mine own” as opposed to the royal son who had been taken from him after having been “but one hour mine” (Burghley was well aware of the existence of the infant boy who had been given to a wet nurse prior to being transferred to the Southampton household)

#### 12 THE REGION CLOUD HATH MASKED HIM FROM ME NOW.

**REGION** = upper air; (“Here there might be a play on ‘regent’ meaning ‘kinglike,’ ‘sovereign’” – Booth); **THE REGION CLOUD** = Elizabeth *Regina*’s negative view; “Clear up, fair Queen, that *cloudy* countenance” – *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.267; “When *heaven* shall call her from this *cloud of darkness*” – Cranmer, speaking of the infant Princess Elizabeth, in *Henry VIII*, 5.5.44; “*de bene esse, quantum in Regina est*” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, November 22, 1601; “In Shakespeare’s time ‘to be under a cloud’ already meant ‘to be in disgrace’” – Booth; “I am the *shadow* of poor Buckingham, whose figure even *this instant cloud puts on by dark’ning my clear sun*” – *Henry VIII*, 1.1.224-226; “But now *time and truth* have *unmasked* all difficulties” – Oxford to Robert Cecil, January 1602; “*Dark cloudy death o’ershades his beams of life*” – *3 Henry VI*, 2.6.62;

**MASKED HIM** = covered his glory; “*Masking* the business from the common eye, for sundry weighty reasons” - *Macbeth*, 3.1.123-124; “Was sleeping by a *Virgin hand disarmed*” – Sonnet 154, line 8; “When summer’s breath their *masked buds* discloses” – Sonnet 54, line 8, i.e., his bud of the Tudor Rose being hidden from view

#### 13 YET HIM FOR THIS MY LOVE NO WHIT DISDAINETH:

Oxford renews his commitment to Southampton at the present time (February 1601), as his son faces trial for high treason and execution

#### 14 SUNS OF THE WORLD MAY STAIN, WHEN HEAVEN’S SUN STAINETH.

**SUNS OF THE WORLD** = royal princes of England; “Thou that art now *the world’s* fresh ornament” - Sonnet 1, line 9; **HEAVEN’S SUN** = Elizabeth’s royal son; “Shall the blessed *sun of heaven* prove a micher ... Shall the *son of England* prove a thief, and take purses?” – Falstaff, speaking of Prince Hal in *1 Henry IV*, 2.4.403-405; “And truly not the morning *Sun of Heaven*” - Sonnet 132, line 5

Methinks ‘tis prize enough to be his *son*.

See how the *morning* opes her golden gates,  
And takes farewell of the *glorious sun*;  
How well resembles it the prime of youth...

Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three *suns*?

Three *glorious suns*, each one a perfect *sun*;  
Not separated with the *racking clouds*,  
But sever'd in a pale clear-shining sky.  
See, see! They join, embrace, and seem to *kiss*...      3 *Henry VI*, 2.1.20-29

**STAIN ... STAINETH** = corrupt, spoil, taint, carry the stigma of bastardy; more immediately, the dishonor brought upon Southampton by his revolt against the Crown; to make full of disgrace or dishonoring; "And that high royalty was ne'er plucked off, the faiths of men ne'er *stained with revolt*" – *King John*, 4.2.5-6; "*Stain* to thy countrymen, thou hear'st thy doom! ... Henceforth we banish thee on pain of death" – *1 Henry VI*, 4.1.45, 47; "too base to *stain* the temper of my knightly sword" – *Richard II*, 4.1.28-29; "with the *king's blood stained the king's own land*" – *Richard II*, 5.5.110; "Who seek to *stain the ocean of thy blood*" – *Lucrece*, line 655, with "ocean" referring to royal blood of a king

See, see, King Richard doth himself appear,  
As doth the blushing discontented sun  
From out the fiery portal of the East,  
When he perceives *the envious clouds are bent*  
**To dim his glory and to stain** the track  
Of his bright passage to the occident.

Yet looks he like a king. Behold, his *eye*,  
As bright as is the eagle's, lightens forth  
Controlling majesty; alack, alack for woe  
That any harm *should stain so fair a show!*      *Richard II*, 3.3.62-71

Yea, there thou makest me sad and makest me sin  
In envy that my Lord Northumberland  
Should be the father to so blest a son;  
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*, 1.1.77-85

"I say we must not so *stain* our judgment or corrupt our hope" – the King in *All's Well That Ends Well*, 2.1.118-119); "So that myself bring water for my *stain* ... /All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,/ That it could so preposterously be *stained*" – Sonnet 109, lines 8, 10-11, after Southampton has been released and Oxford has sacrificed his name by taking his son's guilt of treason upon himself; "Thy father's charge shall **clear thee from that stain**" – *1 Henry VI*, 4.5.42

