

THE PRISON YEARS
OXFORD VOWS MONUMENT
FOR SOUTHAMPTON
DAY TWENTY-NINE IN THE TOWER

Sonnet 55
The Living Record
8 March 1601

With his son still facing execution, Oxford vows to create "the living record" of Southampton to be preserved "in the eyes of all posterity." Along with Sonnet 81, this verse is a declaration of his utter commitment to making sure the truth about Henry Wriothesley will be known by future generations. The "living record" of him (the story of his royal life until the fate of the Tudor dynasty is sealed) will be preserved for future readers within the tomb of the monument. The tomb contains a womb of verse in which he is still "living" and growing in real time with this diary, the outcome of which remains uncertain.

| Sonnet 55 | Translation |
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| Not marble nor the gilded monument Of Princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme, But you shall shine more bright in these contents Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time. | Neither marble nor the gilded monuments Of royal princes shall outlive these sonnets! Instead you shall reign more royal in them Than any stone statue that decays in time. |
| When wasteful war shall <i>Statues</i> over-turn, And broils root out the work of masonry, Nor <i>Mars</i> his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn The living record of your memory. | When war lays waste to statues, And cities come tumbling down, Neither Mars' sword nor war will destroy This living record of your royal blood! |
| 'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room Even in the eyes of all posterity That wear this world out to the ending doom. | Against death and terrible oblivion Shall you live! Praise of you as king will be Sung by all who live in the future, Who wear out England to its own end! |
| So till the judgement that yourself arise, You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes. | So, until you are recognized for who you are, You live in this verse and in subjects' eyes. |

"No. 55 is clearly addressed to a prince" - Ogburn & Ogburn, *This Star of England*, 1952, p. 908;
"A continuation of Sonnet 54" - Dowden, *The Sonnets of William Shakespeare*, 1881

1 NOT MARBLE, NOR THE GILDED MONUMENT

GILDED MONUMENT = gilded tombs of English monarchs, many made of marble; most modern editors emend "monument" to the plural, but in fact Oxford used the singular on other occasions:

NOR/NOR = neither/nor; “Now have I brought a work to end which neither Jove’s fierce wrath/ Nor sword, nor fire, nor fretting age with all the force it hath/ Are able to abolish quite” – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, 984-986, as translated (1567) by Arthur Golding, uncle of Edward de Vere, who may have produced the translation himself

8 THE LIVING RECORD OF YOUR MEMORY

The Sonnets are to become *the living record* of Southampton, for posterity; the verses are the womb in which he is reborn and grows; this diary, which is recording his life in real time and preserving it for future generations; **LIVING** = the dynamic nature of these verses, which are being written in relation to the calendar of the reign, i.e., the diary is aimed at the royal succession upon the death of the Queen, but exactly when she will die is unknown; (in fact she will die when Southampton is still in the Tower and James of Scotland will succeed to the throne, so the diary will continue until Elizabeth’s funeral, marking the official end of her Tudor dynasty); “Save men’s opinions and my *living blood*” – *Richard II*, 3.1.26

9 ‘GAINST DEATH AND ALL OBLIVIOUS ENMITY

ALL = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*; **ALL OBLIVIOUS** = forgetful of you; “So you being sick of too much doubt in your own proceedings, through which infirmity you are desirous to bury and ensevel your works in the *grave of oblivion*” – Oxford’s Prefatory Letter to *Cardanus Comfort*, 1573, addressed to translator Thomas Bedingfield; **ENMITY** = contempt for you and your royal blood

10 SHALL YOU PACE FORTH! YOUR PRAISE SHALL STILL FIND ROOM

SHALL = echoing “all” for Southampton; **PACE** = step, march, walk; echoing the stately, formal pace of a king, in majesty; **SHALL YOU PACE FORTH** = shall you emerge in glory as king; **FORTH** = as in “setting forth” in the 1609 dedication of the Sonnets; **FORTH** = “out from confinement or indistinction into open view” – Schmidt; “Caesar shall *forth*” – *Julius Caesar*, 2.2.10; “an hour before the worshipped sun peered *forth* the golden window of the east” – *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.1.118-119; also, to bring forth is to beget, procreate; **YOUR PRAISE** = recognition and praise of you as king; “The pain be mine, but *thine shall be the praise*” – Sonnet 38, line 14, upon the trial when Southampton was convicted of high treason and condemned to death; **STILL** = always, eternally; **FIND ROOM** = find the place where your throne is; **ROOM** = room to be who he is; freedom from imprisonment and freedom from censorship or obliteration of his identity as prince; “Grief fills the *room* up of my absent child” – *King John*, 3.3.93; “To take their rooms ere I can plant myself” – *3 Henry VI*, 3.2.132

11 EVEN IN THE EYES OF ALL POSTERITY

EVEN IN THE EYES = in the very eyes of subjects; **ALL** = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*; **ALL POSTERITY** = the entire world in generations to come; descendants; succeeding generations, future times; “Now that Henry’s dead, *posterity*, await for wretched years” – *1 Henry VI*, 1.1.47-48; “Methinks *the truth* should live from age to age, as ‘twere retailed to *all posterity*” – *Richard III*, 3.1.76-77; “Beauty, Truth and Rarity,/ Grace in all simplicity,/ Here in cinders lie./ Death is now the Phoenix nest,/ And the Turtle’s loyal breast/ To eternity doth rest./ *Leaving no posterity*,/ ‘Twas not their infirmity,/ It was married chastity” – *The Phoenix and Turtle*, 1601, as by “William Shake-Speare”, lines 53-61

The *father*, all whose joy is nothing else
But *fair posterity*

The Winter’s Tale, 4.4.410-411

12 THAT WEAR THIS WORLD OUT TO THE ENDING DOOM.

That continue to the end of the world; “And we’ll *wear out in a walled prison* packs and sects of great ones that ebb and flow by the moon” – *King Lear*, 5.3.17-19, glancing at Elizabeth, the Moon goddess; also Southampton is “the world” itself, as Gloucester depicts the King: “O ruined piece of nature, *this great world* shall so wear out to naught” – *King Lear*, 4.6.130-31; **ENDING DOOM** = the Last Judgment; end of the Tudor Rose dynasty; “Thy end is Truth’s and Beauty’s

doom and date” – Sonnet 14, line 14; echoing the possibility that Southampton will be executed and/or left in prison for life; “Supposed as forfeit to a confined *doom*” – Sonnet 107, line 1

“And all the world shall never/ Be able for to quench my name” – Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book XV, 990-991, translated by Oxford’s uncle Arthur Golding (1567) or by the young earl himself

13 SO TILL THE JUDGMENT THAT YOUR SELF ARISE,

TILL THE JUDGMENT = the rendering of you (the *Audit* of Southampton’s royal blood, in the future, to be forecast in the envoy, when nature’s final accounting “though delayed, answered must be, and her *Quietus* is to *render thee*” – Sonnet 126, lines 11-12); as opposed to the judgment of the tribunal at the trial; “So thy great gift, upon *misprision* growing,/ Comes home again, on *better judgment* making” – Sonnet 87, lines 11-12, when the judgment has been changed for the better from treason to *misprision* of treason; “His royal self in *judgment* comes to hear the cause betwixt her and this great offender” – *Henry VIII*, 5.2.154-155; **THAT YOURSELF ARISE** = that you ascend to the throne, rising like the sun, in the eyes of people in the future, i.e., in posterity; (“Till the decree of the judgment-day that you arise from the dead” – Dowden); a Christ-like Resurrection of the royal son or Sunne: “Even so my Sunne one early morn did shine” – Sonnet 33, line 9; “For as the Sun is daily new and old” – Sonnet 76, line 14

14 YOU LIVE IN THIS, AND DWELL IN LOVERS’ EYES.

YOU LIVE IN THIS = you continue to live in this monument of verse, growing in the womb of its tomb, by time recorded in this diary; you and your life and your blood are preserved; **THIS** = this verse; “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives *this*, and *this* gives life to *thee*” – Sonnet 18, lines 13-14; **AND DWELL IN LOVERS’ EYES** = and live in the eyes of your parents and all others who will appear, as subjects and friends, to adore you as king; “I tell thee, fellow, thy general is *my lover*” – Menenius Agrippa in *Coriolanus*, 5.2.14; **IN LOVERS’ EYES** = “You will be read by persons who will love you, though dead, as men love you in life” – Tucker.