

THE FINAL DAYS

SOUTHAMPTON LIBERATED

Sonnet 107 *My Love Looks Fresh* 10 April 1603

Southampton, having been “supposed as forfeit to a confined doom” in the Tower of London, is released after spending twenty-six months in prison. Perhaps Southampton’s release has also released Oxford’s creative spirit; in any case, he now returns to composing one sonnet each day for the next nineteen days until the Queen’s funeral. (Her funeral on April 28 will mark the formal end of the Tudor dynasty.) He refers to the death of Elizabeth (“the mortal Moon”) and to the accession of James (now on his way to London) amid “Olives” of peace as opposed to civil war around the throne. “My love looks fresh,” he writes of Southampton, meaning that his royal son has retained his status as a prince even though he has forfeited the crown. Henry Wriothesley is still “the world’s fresh ornament” as he had been in the very opening verse; and Oxford records this truth in his “monument” of the Sonnets so it may exist for the eyes of posterity.

Sonnet 107

Translation

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.

Not my fears for you, nor the predictions
Of others in England and beyond about the future
Can have power over the life of my royal son,
Assumed to be sentenced and confined until death.

The mortal Moone hath her eclipse endured,
And the sad Augurs mock their own presage,
Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
And peace proclaims Olives of endless age.

Elizabeth the Moon has suffered her mortal death,
And the prophets of civil war were wrong.
Worries are gone and James is being crowned,
And we look forward to lasting peace with Spain.

Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since spite of him I’ll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o’er dull and speechless tribes.

Now with the April showers of royal succession,
My son remains royal; and death submits to me,
Since I’ll live in these sonnets in spite of death,
While death obliterates the many who can’t speak.

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants’ crests and tombs of brass are spent.

And you will find your eternity in this monument,
When our late tyrannical Queen’s tomb is gone.

1 NOT MINE OWN FEARS NOR THE PROPHETIC SOUL

Neither my own apprehensions (about my royal son’s fate in the Tower or about the succession of James) nor the anxious prophecies of others; **MINE OWN** = characteristically used in relation to a son or daughter; “Tell me, *mine own*, where hast thou been preserved?” – *The Winter’s Tale*, 5.3.123-124, Hermoine to her daughter; **MINE** = *OED*: 1467 – “I wyll that *John myn son*”

... a son of *mine own*

Oxford to Burghley, March 17, 1575

What can *mine own* praise to *mine own* self bring,
And what is’t but *mine own* when I praise thee?

Sonnet 39, lines 3-4

For term of life thou art assured *mine*

Sonnet 92, line 2

FEARS = dreads, doubts; things to be dreaded, objects of fear; “I was not sick of any *fear* from thence” – Sonnet 86, line 12, referring to those who claim victory over him and over the truth; “Then need I not to *fear* the worst of wrongs” – Sonnet 92, line 5, referring to his father-son bond with Southampton being stronger than his own mortal life; **PROPHETIC SOUL** = divining spirit; playing upon the “prophecies” of the previous verse (106) in which Oxford forecast Southampton’s liberation: “So all their praises are but *prophecies*/ Of this our time, all you *prefiguring*,/ And for the looked but with *divining* eyes,/ They had not skill enough your worth to sing” – Sonnet 106, lines 9-12; “O my *prophetic soul*! My uncle!” – *Hamlet*, 1.5.41; “Cry, Trojans, cry! Lend me ten thousand eyes, and I will fill them with *prophetic tears*” – *Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.102-103

“‘Tis thought the King is dead ... The pale-faced *moon* looks bloody on the earth, and *lean-look’d prophets* whisper fearful change. Rich men look sad, and ruffians dance and leap – the one in fear to lose what they enjoy, the other to enjoy by rage and war. *These signs foretell the death or fall of kings.*” – *Richard II*, 2.4.7-15

2 OF THE WIDE WORLD DREAMING ON THINGS TO COME

THE WIDE WORLD = England and beyond; the vast universe; “For nothing *this wide Universe* I call/ Save thou, my Rose, in it thou art my all” – Sonnet 109, lines 13-14; “Thou that art now *the world’s* fresh ornament” – Sonnet 1, line 9; **DREAMING ON** = predicting the future, both for England and for Southampton, as a result of the death of Elizabeth followed by the succession of James to the throne; “thinking about” or “speculating on” the possibility of civil war over the interchange of monarchs and dynasties; “the *dreamer* Merlin and his *prophecies*” – *1 Henry IV*, 3.1.144; having thoughts, visions, ideas, images in sleep; “O, Ratcliffe, I have *dream’d a fearful dream!* ... O Ratcliffe, *I fear, I fear!*” – *Richard III*, 5.3.213, 215

Why should my heart think that a several plot,
Which my heart knows *the wide world’s common place*? Sonnet 137, lines 9-10

(Referring to the Tower as England’s “place” for traitors or common criminals)

O God, I could be *bounded* in a nutshell and count myself a King of infinite space, were it not that I have *bad dreams* – *Hamlet*, 2.2.255-256, immediately following Hamlet’s characterization of Denmark/England as a prison

“Save that *my soul’s imaginary sight*/ Presents thy shadow to my sightless view” – Sonnet 27, lines 9-10; “But when I sleep, in *dreams* they (my eyes) look on thee” – Sonnet 42, line 3; “Thus have I had thee as a *dream* doth flatter:/ In sleep a King, but waking no such matter” – Sonnet 87, lines 13-14; “Before, a joy proposed, behind, a *dream*” – Sonnet 129, line 12, to Queen Elizabeth, referring to the former hope that their son would wear the crown

THINGS TO COME = England’s inevitable date with royal succession; the diary of the Sonnets has been a “dream” of that succession, i.e., the dream of Southampton becoming king; “Against *this coming end* you should prepare” – Sonnet 13, line 3; “Let this sad *Interim* like the Ocean (royal blood) be/ Which parts the shore, where two contracted new/ *Come* daily to the banks” – Sonnet 56, lines 9-11; “That Time (the mortal decay of Elizabeth) will *come* and take my love away” – Sonnet 64, line 12; “That you your self, being extant, well might show/ How far a modern quill doth *come too short*” – Sonnet 83, lines 6-7

My hour is *almost come* Ghost of Hamlet’s father in *Hamlet*, 1.5.4

3 CAN YET THE LEASE OF MY TRUE LOVE CONTROL,

LEASE = the loan of royal blood to Southampton; the lease of Tudor Rose blood held by Queen Elizabeth, who has passed it on to Southampton by nature but not by will; “Nature’s bequest gives nothing but doth *lend*” – Sonnet 4, line 3; “So should *that beauty* (royal blood from Elizabeth)

which you hold in lease” – Sonnet 13, line 5; and in the Dark Lady series, near the end of the reign, to the Queen: “Why so large cost, having so short a *lease*./ Dost thou upon *thy fading mansion* spend?” – Sonnet 146, lines 5-6, referring to the rapidly expiring “lease” on her House of Tudor, which is now fading because of her refusal to release Southampton from the Tower and name him as her successor.

OED: “A contract between parties, by which the one conveys lands or tenements to the other for life, for years, at will ... the period of time for which the contract is made ... with reference to the permanence of occupation guaranteed by a lease; esp. in the phrase “a (new) lease of life”; also, the term during which possession or occupation is guaranteed”; 1586: “Of my graunt they had enjoy’d / *A lease of blisse* with endlesse date” (Countess of Pembroke); 1628: “Remember of what age your daughter was, and that just so long was *your lease of her*.”

“And our high-placed Macbeth shall live the *lease* of Nature, pay his breath to time, and mortal custom” – *Macbeth*, 4.1.98-99

MY TRUE LOVE = Southampton, my royal son; my true Prince; related to Oxford, *Nothing Truer than Truth*; “And your *true rights* be termed a Poet’s rage” – Sonnet 17, line 11; “O let me *true in love but truly write*” – Sonnet 21, line 9; “Take all *my loves, my love*, yea take them all:/ What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?/ *No love, my love*, that thou mayst *true love* call./ All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more” – Sonnet 40, lines 1-4; “So *true a fool is love* that in your Will/ (Thou you do any thing) he thinks no ill” – Sonnet 57, lines 13-14; “Thou *truly* fair wert *truly* sympathized/ In *true* plain words by thy *true*-telling friend” – Sonnet 82, lines 11-12; “Fair, kind, and *true*, is all my argument,/ Fair, kind, and *true*, varying to other words/ ... Fair, kind, and *true*, have often lived alone,/ Which three, till now, never kept seat in one” – Sonnet 105, lines 9-10, 13-14; “Let me not to the marriage of *true* minds/ Admit impediments. *Love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds*” – Sonnet 116, lines 1-3, referring to their father-son bond but also to the truth of Southampton’s “love” or royal blood, which does not change even if it fails to gain the throne; “This I do vow, and this shall *ever* be,/ I will be *true*, despite thy scythe and thee” – Sonnet 123, lines 13-14, to Time

Bolinbroke: Go, some of you, convey him to the Tower.

Richard: O, good! Convey! Conveyers are you all,

That rise thus nimbly by a *true king’s* fall. *Richard II*, 4.1.316-318

CONTROL = have power over; a play on Southampton’s own “controlling” as a prince, as in Sonnet 20, line 7: “A man in hew all *Hews* in his *controlling*”; “Never did captive with a freer heart cast off his chains of bondage, and embrace *his golden uncontrolled enfranchisement*” – *Richard II*, 1.3.88-90; “Yet looks he like a king: behold, his eye, as bright as is the eagle’s, lightens forth *controlling majesty*” – *Richard II*, 3.3.68-70; “And Folly (Doctor-like) *controlling skill*” – Sonnet 66, line 10, referring to those in power who have controlled Southampton by leaving him in the Tower as a convicted traitor; (related to “controlment” or “controlling” of accounts; Oxford uses the state “treasure” as a metaphor for his son’s “account” of royal blood; in this context “control” extends the metaphor to its regulation by officialdom)

OED: 1577: “In thy fayth I maye ... repose the *controlement* of my life”; 1604: “Otherwise the course of destinie were subject to our *controlment*”

Here is a hand to hold a scepter up,

And with the same to act *controlling laws*

2 Henry VI, 5.1.102-103

OED: “To check or verify, and hence to regulate ... to take to task, call to account, rebuke, reprove (a person) ... to challenge, find fault with, censure, reprehend ... to exercise restraint or direction upon the free action of; to hold sway over, exercise power or authority over; to dominate, command ... to hold in check, curb, restrain from action; to hinder, prevent ... (Law) To overrule

(a judgment or sentence”; 1623: “I put not out anything rashly in print ... especially in this age so ready to control”

4 SUPPOSED AS FORFEIT TO A CONFINED DOOM.

Presumed to be the victim of a life sentence in the Tower and also subject to execution at any time

SUPPOSED AS = imagined or thought (erroneously) to be; held as a belief or opinion to be; apprehended, guessed, suspected, intended to be; assumed to be true as; entertained as an idea to be; expected, obliged, taken for granted to be (or to have been); *OED* = stated or alleged to be, as “formally in an indictment”; 1544: “supposing by his writ”

OED also lists the verb “suppose” as “to feign, pretend,” and it may well be that Oxford intended the phrase *supposed as forfeit to a confined doom* to mean that Southampton was *pretended* to be doomed to confinement in the Tower for the rest of his life. (This possibility occurs only when it becomes certain that James will succeed Elizabeth. Earlier, when Henry Wriothesley’s life was spared, his fate remained uncertain and “supposed” would have correctly meant “generally believed.”) Having made the bargain for Henry Wriothesley to be liberated, few persons other than Oxford, Robert Cecil and King James would have known that the new sovereign would liberate Southampton; and so the earl was *pretended* to be confined for life; “The maid ... was the daughter of his own bondswoman, who afterwards being stolen away, was carried to the house of Virginius, and *supposed* to be his child” – *Painter’s Palace of Pleasure*, 1566, when Oxford was sixteen years old and very possibly involved in Painter’s collection; ppl. adjective = believed to be; put on or feigned:

Let the *supposed* Fairies pinch him sound *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 4.4.61

FORFEIT = “subject to” and “legally owed to” – Kerrigan; “an act under whose heavy sense *your brother’s life falls into forfeit*: he arrests him on it, and follows close the rigor of the statute to make him an example” – *Measure for Measure*, 1.4.64-68; *OED* 1594: “*Forfeit* and confiscate *unto the crown*”; and from 1495: “*forfeitable ... to the Kyng*”

Claudio, whom here you have *warrant to execute*, is no greater *forfeit to the law* than Angelo, who hath *sentenced* him – *Measure for Measure*, 4.2.156-159

OED: (noun) “A misdeed, crime, offence, transgression; hence, willful injury; breach or violation of; ‘in forfeit’ = under charge of wrong doing, guilty of breaking the law”; something to which the right is lost by the commission of a crime or fault; hence, a penal fine, a penalty for breach of contract or neglect of duty; the losing of something by way of penalty; ‘to set to forfeit’ = to attain, outlaw”; (verb) “To do amiss, sin, transgress; to violate (one’s faith or oath); to lose, lose the right to; to render oneself liable to be deprived of (something); also to have to pay in consequence of a crime, offence, breach of duty; to lose by misconduct; to lose or give up, as a necessary consequence; to incur the penalty of forfeiture; to subject a person to forfeiture or confiscation (of estates, etc); to cause the forfeiture, loss, or ruin of”; (adjective) “That has been lost or has to be given up as the penalty of a crime or fault or breach of engagement.”

(Upon the verdict at his trial, Southampton was condemned to have his life *forfeited* by execution; all his titles and lands were *forfeited* to – and confiscated by – the Crown. This was also the penalty to be paid by “misprision” of treason, which left him a perpetual prisoner without a royal pardon and, therefore, still subject to execution. King James will grant him the necessary royal pardon on May 16 this year.)

In the Dark Lady series Oxford pleads with Elizabeth on behalf of their son, offering his own life and honor as ransom for Southampton’s liberation:

So now I have confessed that he is thine,
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will.

Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still. Sonnet 134, lines 1-4

“The King’s further pleasure is ... to *forfeit all your goods*, lands, tenements, chattels and whatsoever” – *Henry VIII*, 3.2.337-344; liable to penal seizure, lost by breach of laws or conditions; given up for lost, forsaken: “And yet thy wealth being *forfeit to the state*, thou ... must be hanged at the state’s charge” – *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.363-365

Shall our coffers then
Be emptied to *redeem a traitor home*?
Shall we buy *treason*, and indent with fears
When *they have lost and forfeited* themselves? 1 *Henry IV*, 1.3.84-86

There *without ransom to lie forfeited* 1 *Henry IV*, 4.3.96

Why, all the souls that were, were *forfeit* once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be
If He, which is the top of *judgment*, should
But *judge* you as you are? O, think on that,
And *mercy* then will breathe within your lips *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.73-78

CONFINED = confined, imprisoned, in the Tower of London; “So have we thought it good from our free person she should be *confined*, lest that the treachery of the two fled hence be left her to perform” – the King in *The Winter’s Tale*, 2.1.193-196; possibly alluding to the “confinement” of his mother the Queen when she was about to give birth to him in May/June 1574

In whose *confine immured* is the store Sonnet 84, line 3 (walled prison)
A God in love, to whom I am *confined* Sonnet 110, line 12

Princes have less *confines* to their wills *OED*: 1548

Denmark’s a *prison* ... A goodly one, in which there are many *confines*, *wards*, and *dungeons*, Denmark being one o’th’worst – *Hamlet*, 2.2.243-248

Th’*imprisoned* absence of your liberty Sonnet 58, line 6

OED: (confined) “Bounded, limited, restricted, restrained, shut up, enclosed, *imprisoned*”; (confine, verb) “3. To relegate to certain limits; to banish; 4a. To shut up, *imprison*, *immure*, put or keep in detention; 4 b. To enclose or retain within limits ... keep in place”

I am thy father’s spirit,
Doom’d for certain *term* to walk the night,
And for the day *confin’d* to fast in fires,
Till the foul *crimes* done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purg’d away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my *prison-house*... *Hamlet*, 1.5.9-14

So we have thought it good
From our free person she should be *confined* *The Winter’s Tale*, 2.1.193-194

DOOM = judgment; prison sentence; Southampton’s imprisonment and his possible execution; judgment of the trial and the Final Judgment; the end or doom of the Tudor dynasty; “Norfolk, for thee remains a *heavier doom*, which I with some unwillingness pronounce. The sly slow hours shall not determinate *the dateless limit of thy dear exile*; the hopeless word of ‘never to return’ breathe I against thee, upon pain of life” – *Richard II*, 1.3.148-153, recalling Southampton as

“*precious friends hid in death’s dateless night*” – Sonnet 30, line 6; “Proud Bolinbroke, I come to change blows with thee for *our day of doom*” – *Richard II*, 3.2.188-189; “Thy *kingly doom and sentence of his pride*” – *Richard II*, 5.6.23

Thy end is *Truth’s and Beauty’s doom and date* Sonnet 14, line 14

In the Dark Lady series, Oxford writes of Elizabeth sparing their royal son from execution:

Straight in her heart did *mercy* come,
Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle *doom* Sonnet 145, lines 5-7

OED: “A statute, law, enactment; generally an ordinance, decree; a judgment or decision, esp. one formally pronounced; a sentence; mostly in adverse sense, condemnation, sentence of punishment; fate, lot, irrevocable destiny (usually of adverse fate); final fate, destruction, ruin, death; the action or process of judging (as in a court of law); judgment, trial; the last or great Judgment at the end of the world; ‘day of doom’: the day of judgment; justice; power or authority to judge; ‘doom-house’ = judgment hall; ‘doom-stead’ = place of judgment; ‘doom-tree’ = a tree on which the condemned were hanged.”

Your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to *the ending doom*.
So, till *the judgment* that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes. Sonnet 55, lines 10-14

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out *even to the edge of doom*. Sonnet 116, lines 11-12

This way the king will come; this is the way
To Julius Caesar’s *ill-erected Tower*,
To whose *flint bosom* my condemned lord
Is *doom’d a prisoner* *Richard II*, 5.1.1-4

5 THE MORTAL MOON HATH HER ECLIPSE ENDURED,

MORTAL = “Such waste in brief mortality” – *Henry V*, 1.2.28; “How many years a mortal man may live” – 3 *Henry VI*, 2.5.29; “Thou hadst but power over his mortal body; his soul thou canst not have” – *Richard III*, 1.2.47-48; “O momentary grace of mortal men” – *Richard III*, 3.4.96; also the sense of evil and/or deadly: “Who ‘scapes the lurking serpent’s mortal sting?’” – 3 *Henry VI*, 2.2.15; “But I return his mortal foe” – 3 *Henry VI*, 3.3.257; **THE MORTAL MOONE** = The mortal self of Queen Elizabeth, known as Cynthia or Diana, Goddess of the Moon, i.e., her *mortal* body or physical self is dead, as opposed to her immortal soul or spiritual self; “Making a complement of proud compare/ With *Sunne and Moone*” – Sonnet 21, lines 5-6, i.e., Southampton and Elizabeth, son and mother; “Clouds and *eclipses* stain both *Moone and Sunne*” – Sonnet 35, line 3, referring to the stain of disgrace that the Rebellion has cast upon both Elizabeth and Southampton, her royal son; “Let us be *Diana’s foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon*; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and *chaste Mistress the Moon*, under whose countenance we steal” – 1 *Henry IV*, 1.2.25-29, an obvious allusion to Queen Elizabeth for the contemporary audience; Elizabeth, also known as Venus, goddess of Love and Beauty: “the *mortal Venus*, the heart-blood of beauty, love’s invisible soul” – *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.1.32-33; **HER ECLIPSE** = the Queen’s “deprivation of light” (*OED*); her death, which has deprived England of her royal light, i.e., the same “light” possessed by her son, Southampton: “When thou thy self doth give invention *light*” – Sonnet 38, line 8; “Nativity, once in the main of *light*,/ Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned/ Crooked *eclipses* ‘gainst his glory fight” – Sonnet 60, lines 5-7; so that this much-discussed line refers to Elizabeth as “the mortal Moon” who is already dead (as marked by Sonnet 105) and as the

sovereign mistress who, simultaneously, has “endured” the “eclipse” of her light and glory on earth, as witnessed by mere mortals, by passing into the immortal, spiritual, eternal state of kings or queens; and in fact these are Oxford’s sentiments as he expressed them to Cecil during this time:

“I cannot but find a great grief in myself to remember the Mistress which we have lost, under whom both you and myself from our greenest years have been in a manner brought up; 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) to give us a prince [James] wise, learned, and enriched with all virtues, yet the long time which we spent in her service, we cannot look for so much left of our days as to bestow upon another.” - Oxford to Robert Cecil, April 25/27, 1603

Alack, our *terrene Moon*
Is now *eclipsed*, and it portends alone
The fall of Antony” *Antony and Cleopatra*, 3.13.153-155

Terrene = earthly, mortal
Moon = Queen Cleopatra, modeled upon Queen Elizabeth

Then here I take my leave of thee, fair son,
Born to *eclipse thy life* this afternoon.
Come, side by side together live and die... *1 Henry VI*, 4.5.52-54

ENDURED = sustained or submitted to; i.e., Elizabeth, being mortal, has died; but also being immortal, she is now in heaven; “to endure” also means to die, as in “Men must *endure their going hence, even as their coming hither*” – *King Lear*, 5.2.9-10, i.e., they must experience their deaths in the same way they had experienced their births; “Thou hast but power over his *mortal body*:/ His *soul* thou canst not have” – *Richard III*, 1.2.47-48

(NOTE: Virtually all commentators agree that this line refers specifically and unambiguously to the Queen; and though debate continues over the dating, most also agree that the sonnet was written shortly after her death. See further discussion below, following the notes for line 14.)

6 AND THE SAD AUGURS MOCK THEIR OWN PRESAGE,

And the gloomy prophets of civil war mock their own forecasts; **AUGURS** = those who practice the art of forecasting the future; “But thou shrieking harbinger,/ Foul precurer of the fiend,/ *Augur of the fever’s end*,/ To this troop come thou not near” – *The Phoenix and Turtle*, 1601; “We defy *augury*. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow” – *Hamlet*, 5.2.228-229, referring to the death of Elizabeth, who used the sparrow to identify herself; **PRESAGE** = foreboding, presentiment; “If heart’s *presage* be not vain, we three here part that ne’er shall meet again” – *Richard II*, 2.2.141-142

O let my books be then the eloquence
And *dumb presagers* of my speaking breast *Sonnet 23*, lines 9-10

So, hence! Be thou the trumpet of our wrath
And *sullen presage* of your own decay! *King John*, 1.1.27-28

7 UNCERTAINTIES NOW CROWN THEMSELVES ASSURED,

UNCERTAINTIES, etc. = the previous insecurities are now securities, i.e., “*assured*” of harmony and peace; **CROWN THEMSELVES ASSURED** = anticipating the crowning of James VI of Scotland as James I of England; “And in that chair where *kings and queens are crown’d*” – *2 Henry VI*, 1.2.38; “Anointed, *crowned*” – *Richard II*, 4.1.127; and Oxford in these verses will twist this monumental event into the crowning of his own royal son, Southampton: “Or whether doth my mind, being *crowned with you*,/ Drink up the *monarch’s plague*, this flattery?” – Sonnet

114, lines 1-2; and “But reckoning time, whose millioned accidents/ Creep in ‘twixt vows, and change decrees of Kings/ ... *Crowning the present*” – Sonnet 115, lines 6, 12

8 AND PEACE PROCLAIMS OLIVES OF ENDLESS AGE.

James offers a new era of peaceful prosperity; **OLIVES** = King James used olives as a symbol of peace, both at home and abroad; “*Olives*” = “O. lives,” or Oxford still lives; “Olive leaves or branches were an ancient emblem of ‘peace’ or security” – Evans; “And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an *olive leaf* pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from the earth” – Genesis, 8.11; **PROCLAIMS** = echoing the Proclamation of the Accession of James, which Oxford signed; “*And once again proclaim us King of England*” – 3 *Henry VI*, 4.8.53; “I’ll to the Tower with all the haste I can ... And then I will proclaim young Henry king” – 1 *Henry VI*, 1.1.167-169; Evans observes this “may be taken to suggest regal authority; right now the new king is taking his time on the triumphant approach to London and the throne (waiting until after the Queen’s funeral procession (to be held on April 28, 1603); but Oxford is well aware of the royal theme of the James progress: the king will enter “*not with an Olive Branch in his hand, but with a whole Forest of Olives round about him*” – Gervase Markham, Honour in His Perfection, 1624

9 NOW WITH THE DROPS OF THIS MOST BALMY TIME

NOW = at this very time of my royal son’s release; **BALMY** = this balmy spring; this healing quality (of medicinal ointment); the balm of kings, served to anoint the monarch; referring to the royal stature of Southampton while anticipating the coronation of James; “Not all the water in the rough rude sea can *wash the balm off from an anointed king*” – *Richard II*, 3.2.54-55

With mine own tears I wash away my *balm*,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths;
All pomp and majesty I do forswear - The King in *Richard II*, 4.1.206-211

“‘Tis not the *balm, the scepter and the ball, the sword, the mace the crown imperial*” – *Henry V*, 4.1.256-257, i.e., aspects of kings; “The *balm* washed off wherewith thou wast anointed” – 3 *Henry VI*, 3.1.17; “*Balm* was used in the coronation ceremony, and it was a familiar symbol of regal authority” – Kerrigan;

10 MY LOVE LOOKS FRESH; AND DEATH TO ME SUBSCRIBES,

MY LOVE = my royal son; “If *my dear love* were but the child of state” – Sonnet 124, line 1; “In the devotion of a subject’s *love*, tend’ring the precious safety of my prince, and free from other misbegotten hate, come I appellat to this princely presence” – *Richard II*, 1.1.31-34; **LOOKS FRESH** = appears royal, as before he was imprisoned in the Tower; perhaps also suggesting that Oxford may actually have seen Henry Wriothesley upon his release, for the first time in many months (see previous sonnets, after the bargain is announced in Sonnet 87 – i.e., Sonnet 89 – alluding to a cessation of visits at the Tower.) “Yet *looks* he like a king” – *Richard II*, 3.3.68; “Thou that art now the world’s *fresh* ornament” – Sonnet 1, line 9; “since first I saw you *fresh*” – Sonnet 104, line 8; **AND DEATH TO ME SUBSCRIBES** – and my son’s expected death in prison now submits to me; Booth notes the legal echoes suggesting “to subscribe” as “to sign one’s name”; Oxford has saved his royal son’s life, behind the scenes, triumphing over death; in the process his son has given his word or “subscribed” to the bargain, by abandoning all claim to the throne; death also submits to Oxford by virtue of the fact that this monument of the Sonnets will defeat death: “‘Gainst *death* and all-oblivious enmity/ Shall you pace forth!” – Sonnet 55, lines 9-10; “From hence your memory *death* cannot take,/ Although in me each part will be forgotten./ Your name from hence immortal life shall have,/ Though I (once gone) to all the world must die” – Sonnet 81, lines 3-6; “And thou in this shalt find thy monument,/ When tyrants’ crests and tombs of brass are spent” – lines 13-14 below.

11 SINCE SPITE OF HIM I’LL LIVE IN THIS POOR RHYME,

Because, despite my own death, I'll live in these eternal sonnets; but they are "poor" because Southampton has not been able to claim the throne and the Tudor dynasty is ending; **P'LL** = an echo of the "Isle" of Wight, where Southampton will become captain, and the "Isle" of Man, which James will return to the ownership and rule of Oxford's son-in-law William Stanley, Earl of Derby, husband of Elizabeth Vere; "I'll Live" suggesting that perhaps Oxford is planning to "live" on one of these islands in the near future.

12 WHILE HE INSULTS O'ER DULL AND SPEECHLESS TRIBES.

HE = death; **INSULTS O'ER** = triumphs over those who cannot (or will not) speak the truth; insult = exult, as a victorious enemy; "Ay me! I see the ruin of my House: the tiger now hath seized the gentle hind; *insulting tyranny* begins to jut upon the innocent and aweless throne" – Queen Elizabeth, wife of King Edward IV, in *Richard III*, 2.4.49-52; **SPEECHLESS** = silent, dumb; without means of speaking out, while Oxford, by contrast, is speaking here to future generations; **TRIBES** = races, bodies of people having particular descents; echoing the "tribunal" upon which Oxford sat as highest-ranking earl at the trial; while proclaiming his own triumph over death, Oxford is also forecasting the victory of death over the current "speechless tribes" of men under the new reign, i.e., Secretary Robert Cecil, who will become Earl of Salisbury and run the Government until his death in 1612. These men have determined that death will bury Oxford in history, but he now defiantly retorts that "I'll live in this poor rhyme" – in the same way he has declared of the pen name "Shakespeare" that: "He, nor that affable familiar ghost/ Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,/ *As victors of my silence cannot boast!*" – Sonnet 86, lines 9-11

13 AND THOU IN THIS SHALT FIND THY MONUMENT,

IN THIS = here in this Book of Sonnets; **THY MONUMENT** = eternal memorial; ("Your monument shall be my gentle verse" – Sonnet 81, line 9; "Not marble nor the gilded *monument*/ Of Princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme" – Sonnet 55, lines 1-2); "Again we see if our friends be dead, we cannot show or declare our affection more than by erecting them of *tombs*: whereby when they be dead indeed, yet make we them live, as it were, again through their *monument*. But with me behold it happeneth far better, for in your lifetime *I shall erect you such a monument* that, as I say, in your lifetime you shall see how noble a shadow of your virtuous life shall hereafter remain *when you are dead and gone*" – Oxford's Prefatory Letter to *Cardanus' Comfort*, 1573

14 WHEN TYRANTS' CRESTS AND TOMBS OF BRASS ARE SPENT.

TYRANTS' = Elizabeth's = the tyranny of her "wasted time"; "But wherefore do not you a mightier way/ Make war upon this bloody *tyrant time*?" – Sonnet 16, lines 1-2; "When in the Chronicle of *wasted time*" – Sonnet 106, line 1; the Queen's tyranny over her royal son; "But to prevent the *tyrant's* violence – for trust not him that hath once broken faith" – *3 Henry VI*, 4.4.29-30; "In act thy bed-vow broke and *new faith torn*/ In vowing new hate after new love bearing/ ... *And all my honest faith in thee is lost*" – Sonnet 152, lines 3-4,8, Oxford to Elizabeth, at the end of the Dark Lady series, bitterly accusing her of breaking her promises to him and Southampton; **CRESTS** = coats of arms on tombs of kings and queens; Elizabeth's crest carried her motto *Semper Eadem* or *Ever the Same*, as in "Why write I still all one, *ever the same*" – Sonnet 76, line 5; **TOMBS OF BRASS** = Elizabeth's temporary tomb in Westminster Abbey will rest "in the very shadow of the great tomb of Henry VII and his wife ... the most notable '*tomb of brass*' in England" – Mattingly, *PLMA* 1933, p. 721; tombs of brass as opposed to the "*tomb*" of this "*monument*" of sonnets, which will outlive such earthly tombs; "Though yet heaven knows it is but as a *tomb*/ Which hides your life and shows not half your parts" – Sonnet 17, lines 3-4, in reference to the verse of the Sonnets; "Making their *tomb the womb* wherein they grew" – Sonnet 86, line 4; "Ever beloved and loving may his rule be;/ And when old time shall lead him to his end./ Goodness and he fill up one *monument*" – *Henry VIII*, 2.1.92-94; but, like a message in a bottle, these private verses of the Sonnets will be set adrift on the sea of time to the distant shores of future generations.

1848: Unidentified researcher "J. R." first assigns Sonnet 107 to 1603.

Gerald Massey, 1866: “We may rest assured that (the Poet of the Sonnets) was one of the first to greet his ‘dear boy,’ over whose errors he had grieved ... He had loved him as a father loves a son; he had warned him, and prayed for him, and fought in soul against ‘Fortune’ on his behalf, and he now welcomed him from the gloom of a prison on his way to a palace and the smile of a monarch.”

“Sonnet 107 will show us that, in spite of the dramatic method adopted by Shakespeare in writing of the Earl, he did find a call for secure congratulation when James had restored the Earl to his liberty. *There can be no mistake, doubt, or misgiving here! This sonnet contains evidence beyond question – proof positive and unimpeachable* – that the man addressed by Shakespeare in his *personal* sonnets has been condemned in the first instance to death, and afterwards to imprisonment for life, and escaped his doom through the death of the Queen.

“It tells us that the Poet had been filled with fears for the fate of his friend, and that his instinct, as well as the presentiment of the world in general, had foreshadowed the worst for the Earl, as it dreamed on things to come. He sadly feared the life of his friend – the Poet’s lease of his true love – was forfeited, if not to immediate death, to a ‘confined doom,’ or a definite, a life-long imprisonment. The painful uncertainty is over now. The Queen is dead – the ‘*Mortal Moon* hath her eclipse endured.’ Cynthia was one of Elizabeth’s most popular poetical names...

“Those who had prophesied the worst can now laugh at their own fears and mock their unfulfilled predictions. The new King calls the Earl from a prison to a seat of honor ... Our Poet evidently hopes that the Earl’s life will share in this new dawn of gladness and promised peace of the nation. He can exult over death this time. It is his turn to triumph now. And his friend shall find a monument in his verse which shall exist when the crests of tyrants have crumbled and their brass-mounted tombs have passed from sight ... The sonnet carries double. It blends the Poet’s private feeling for his friend with the public fear for the death of the Queen. The ‘Augurs’ had contemplated that event with mournful forebodings, and prophesied changes and disasters ... But it has passed over happily for the nation as joyfully for the Poet.”

- *Shakespeare’s Sonnets Never Before Interpreted*, pp 79 and 311-313

Sidney Lee, 1898: “Sonnet 107 ... makes references that cannot be mistaken to three events that took place in 1603 – to Queen Elizabeth’s death, to the accession of James I, and to the release of the Earl of Southampton, who had been in prison since he was convicted in 1601 of complicity in the rebellion of the Earl of Essex ... Elizabeth’s crown had been passed, without civil war, to the Scottish King, and thus the revolution that had been foretold as the inevitable consequence of Elizabeth’s demise was happily averted ...

“There was hardly a verse-writer who mourned her loss that did not typify it, moreover, as the eclipse of a heavenly body ... At the same time James was constantly said to have entered on his inheritance ‘not with an olive branch in his hand, but with a whole forest of olives round about him, for he brought not peace to this kingdom alone’ but to all Europe ...

“‘The drops of this most balmy time,’ in this same sonnet, 107, is an echo of another current strain of fancy. James came to England in a springtide of rarely rivaled clemency, which was reckoned of the happiest augury ... One source of grief alone was acknowledged: Southampton was still a prisoner in the Tower, ‘supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.’ All men, wrote Manningham, the diarist, on the day following the Queen’s death, wished him liberty. The wish was fulfilled quickly. On April 10, 1603, his prison gates were opened by ‘a warrant from the king’ ... It is improbable that Shakespeare remained silent. ‘My love looks fresh,’ he wrote, in the concluding lines of Sonnet 107, and he repeated the conventional promise that he had so often made before, that his friend should live in his ‘poor rhyme,’ ‘when tyrants’ crests and tombs of brass are spent.’”

- *A Life of William Shakespeare*, pp. 147-150

Garrett Mattingly, 1933: “Critics have generally agreed that, of all of Shakespeare’s sonnets, 107 offers the most hope for dating by internal evidence. Since Massey first argued the point in 1866 a number of distinguished scholars ... have supported the view that this sonnet refers to the death of Queen Elizabeth and the accession of James I... That Elizabeth is meant by ‘the mortal moon’ there can be no reasonable doubt. All her life she had been Cynthia ... In a general way it has always been clear that the events of the spring of 1603 do satisfy the conditions ... The further such an inquiry is pushed, the more striking becomes the evidence that the second quatrain of the sonnet expresses exactly the state of mind of most of Shakespeare’s contemporaries ... and the stronger becomes the conviction that, of all the public events of Shakespeare’s lifetime, these are the most likely to find an echo in the sonnets.

“To the average Elizabethan Englishman, at least, the greatest crisis of Elizabeth’s reign was that which marked its close. To him, the certainty and security of the succession to the throne came first ... No one had forgotten the Wars of the Roses, and the corollary of a disputed succession was civil war ... A dread of civil war explains more than half of England’s loyalty to the Tudors. And, as the century drew to a close, men perceived that the last of the Tudors would die without issue, and nothing settled ... But James was a foreigner, and lawyers were found to argue that if birth in a foreign kingdom and status as the subject of a foreign crown could bar claimants from the inheritance of land in England (as under the law it did), then surely such birth barred succession to the throne...

“(The) real danger of a disputed succession ... was widely appreciated and formed the basis of the gloomiest prophecies. Shakespeare could not have been ignorant of it or indifferent to it. His plays ... do show a keen interest in dynastic questions ... Indeed, few people either in England or in Scotland expected James to accede peaceably ... It is rather to the peaceable union with the enemy, Scotland, and to the apparently permanent relief from danger of civil war that the phrase ‘olives of endless age’ is to be applied; but James’s accession extinguished the last sparks of trouble in Ireland, and peace with Spain, too, was seen in the offing. Hostilities with Spain were suspended on James I’s accession, for he held that, as in his capacity of King of Scotland he was not at war with that power, he could not be at war with her as King of England...

“The more one closely examines the events of the spring of 1603, as they were seen by Shakespeare’s contemporaries, the more consistent do they appear with the language of Sonnet 107, even in its slightest details, and the more likely does it seem that these events would have impressed the poet deeply enough to find a record in the sonnets. *Nor do the allusions in the sonnet seem appropriate to any other sequence of public events during Shakespeare’s lifetime.*”

- PLMA, XLVIII, 1933, pp. 705-721

Alfred Harbage, 1950: “All that we know certainly of Sonnets 107, 123 and 124 is that they were published in 1609 ... Their style – by which is meant here their music and the condensation and integration of their language – suggests to me that they were written late rather than early in Shakespeare’s career ... The early months of 1603 were among the blackest in English history: there was fear of Tyrone in Ireland, and of masterless men and malcontents in England: the Queen was dying and her successor unnamed; forty thousand Catholics were said to be ready to rise in arms if the successor should be James ... Then, as if by miracle, the crisis passed, and James ascended the English throne in an almost hysterical outburst of national joy ... the astrological and historical background of 1603 was appropriate for the allusions in Sonnet 107 ... If we can speak of such a thing as a season of imagery, this was the season of heavenly bodies, setting, rising, eclipsed, etc., and the season of olives of endless age.

“The moon had always been Elizabeth’s symbol. She had been Cynthia herself, or, as in Shakespeare, Cynthia’s ‘imperial vot’ress.’ In the elegiac chorus of 1603, she is Luna, Delia, Cynthia, Phoebe, Belphoebe (all the moon), or else the setting sun ... In the presence of Death, Elizabeth qualified *poetically* as a tyrant ... (Shakespeare’s) voice is missing among the poetic eulogists of Elizabeth and James in the ‘Wonderful Year’ (1603). The tone (of Sonnets 107, 123

and 124) ... suggests to me a man quite willing to 'sit out' the public excitements over a change in administration."

- *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.1, no. 2, April 1950, 57-63

G. P. V. Akrigg, 1968: "H. C. Beeching ... declared 'the only sonnet that can be dated with absolute certainty from internal evidence (107) belongs to 1603.' Dover Wilson ... has continued to recognize that Sonnet 107 dates from 1603 ... Re-reading Sonnet 107 in another connection ... I had a sudden complete conviction that the sonnet belonged to 1603, almost as if it had the date visibly branded upon it ... This is what Shakespeare had to say to Southampton upon his release from imprisonment:

"I myself in my fears had thought, like everybody else, that the future held nothing for you beyond continued confinement in the Tower. But now Queen Elizabeth, so often likened to Cynthia, the virgin goddess of the moon, has finally been eclipsed by death. Since she had no acknowledged heir, pessimists had feared that her passing would bring a disastrous civil war, but now even they mock their earlier dismal prophecy. With the peaceful accession of King James, feelings of uncertainty give way to feelings of security. Our new King, dedicated to peace, brings us an unending era of peace and prosperity. The refreshing showers of this pleasant spring give new vigor to my love for you. Poor though my verse may be, it forces death to submit to me. I shall attain a literary immortality denied to the inarticulate masses. And this poetry of mine will provide you with a monument which will keep you remembered when elaborate tombs, like that to be raised for our late tyrannic Queen, have disappeared."

- *Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton*, pp 254-255

Robert Giroux, 1982: "This sonnet (107) could not have been written before 24 March 1603, the date of Queen Elizabeth's death, for a good reason: the word 'tyrant' was risky to put on paper at any time during her reign, and mortally dangerous if coupled with a reference to her. It is generally agreed that 'mortal Moon' refers to Elizabeth ... ('Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither. Ripeness is all' – *King Lear*, 5.2.9-11) Men must endure their deaths, even as their births; ripeness is all there is. 'Endure' can of course mean survive, but the O. E. D. also defines it as 'to suffer without resistance, to submit to, to undergo,' and that is how Shakespeare uses the word in both places. By 'the mortal Moon hath her eclipse endured,' Shakespeare means that, as a mortal, the Queen has undergone death. 'Her eclipse' instead of 'an eclipse ... further emphasizes a permanent rather than a temporary state...

"There is nothing anywhere else in the sonnets like the mastery and freedom of the first quatrain (of 107) ... This single sentence, one marvelous breath, could only have been written by a poet in the fullness of his powers ... Other historical allusions in this sonnet place the poem solidly in 1603 ... At Southampton's trial, it had been remarked how youthful he still looked. On his release from the Tower in April 1603, he was in his twenty-ninth year ('my love looks fresh' – line 9)"

- *The Story of Q*, pp. 191-198

John Kerrigan, 1986: "[In Sonnet 107] the present events are realized so vividly that they can be read as topical allusions ... (Any) dating of the poet's change of heart can be linked to the public events described in lines 5-9, as either written at the time or, less likely, retrospectively set in that context. And this means that, if the allusions are unlocked, they probably date the poem, and certainly set a *terminus a quo* for its composition...

"A considerable outburst of anxious astrology and prediction ... preceded the Queen's death. As her health worsened and the political picture remained obscure, foreboding grew. Much was at stake. Elizabeth had announced no successor, and both Catholics and Puritans feared the accession of a ruler less sympathetic to their religious liberty than the moderate Protestant Queen had been. More than a dozen claimants maintained their right to the throne ... and the people anticipated either invasion from abroad or civil strife of the kind which laid the country waste during the Wars of the Roses, before Tudor settlement...

“In the light of the secondary sense of *My love looks fresh* it is remarkable that one of the first acts of the newly-crowned King [well before the coronation] was to release the Earl of Southampton, often thought the addressee of Sonnets 1-126, from the prison in which he had languished ever since his participation in the ill-fated Essex Rebellion of 1601. If Wriothesley was indeed, to some emotional extent, the *you* and *thou* and *love* of 1-126, both he and the poet’s affection for him would have been refreshed and renewed by the events of 1603... *On the basis of allusions, in short, 1603 seems the obvious date – with all which that implies for the dating of the sequence ...*”

- *The Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint*, Penguin, pp. 313-320

G. Blakemore Evans, 1996: “The majority of recent critics strongly favours 1603 as the most likely date. Indeed, the case for 1603 (or a little later) is so brilliantly presented by Kerrigan that one is dangerously tempted to cry ‘Q. E. D.’” - *The Sonnets*, pp. 216-217