

## THE FINAL DAYS

### NINE DAYS TO THE QUEEN'S FUNERAL

#### Sonnet 116 *The Marriage of True Minds* 19 April 1603

*Oxford renews his commitment to the father-son bond between him and Southampton, referring to "the marriage" or indissoluble union of their "true" relationship. The love between them is real, but the "love" of this verse is the royal blood, which is eternal and therefore can never be altered regardless of the "alteration" of succession that has taken place. In this sonnet Oxford insistently includes self-identifiers such as "true" (Nothing Truer than Truth) and "ever" and "never," echoing his early pen name, Ever or Never.*

#### Sonnet 116

#### Translation

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be  
taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

I will never let our union as father and son  
Be destroyed! Royal blood is not royal blood  
That changes with a change of monarchs,  
Or declines when others have usurped it.  
O no, your royal blood is a permanent star  
That suffers royal storms without change!  
Your kingly sun shines for all to serve,  
Its royalty unknown, but I measure its height.  
Your royalty isn't lost by Eliza's death, though  
Your Tudor Rose claim was cut down by it!  
Your royal blood doesn't change with time,  
But lives until the end of time itself.  
If this statement is proved to be my error,  
I never wrote this verse or fathered a royal son.

"Building on the preceding" – Duncan-Jones.

#### 1 LET ME NOT TO THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS

**MARRIAGE** = indissoluble union; possibly harking all the way back to **TRUE** = Oxford, *Nothing Truer than Truth*; "This royal hand and mine are newly knit, and in the conjunction of our inward souls, **married** in league, coupled and linked together" – *King John*, 3.1.152-154, King Philip to Cardinal Pandulph, the Pope's legate; **TRUE MINDS** = our inner minds, where we know the truth; linked as father and son, both with "true" or Vere blood; recalling: "I will say no more, for words in *faithful minds* are tedious" – Oxford to Robert Cecil, March 1601, immediately after professing his friendship both "in kindness, which I find beyond mine expectation in you," and "in kindred, whereby none is nearer allied than myself" (because Oxford's daughters are Cecil's only nieces).

#### 2 ADMIT IMPEDIMENTS! LOVE IS NOT LOVE

**ADMIT IMPEDIMENTS** = allow barriers (to this father-son union); **LOVE IS NOT LOVE** = royal blood is not royal blood

#### 3 WHICH ALTERS WHEN IT ALTERATION FINDS

That changes in the face of altered circumstances such as these; ("Divert strong minds to th'course of *alt'ring* things" – Sonnet 115, line 8); "O God, that one might read the book of fate, and see the

revolution of the times make mountains level, and the continent, weary of solid firmness, melt itself into the sea, and other times to see the beachy girdle of the ocean too wide for Neptune's hips; how *chance's* mocks and *changes fill the cup of alteration* with divers liquors!" - The King in *2 Henry IV*, 3.1.45-53; "The *alterations* of time and chance" - Oxford to Robert Cecil, April 25/27, 1603; "Why, Warwick, when we parted, thou call'dst me King. Ay, but *the case is altered.*" - *3 Henry VI*, 4.3.30-32; "My Lord, I am tied with a chain of iron around my neck. I am tied, I am tied, and *the case is altered* with me" - Queen Elizabeth, one of her last recorded statements, about succession

"The *alteration of the succession* of the crown" - *Treatise of Treasons*, (anon.) 1572

#### 4 OR BENDS WITH THE REMOVER TO REMOVE.

**BENDS** = changes; an image of the bent-over figure of hunchbacked Robert Cecil; **BENDS WITH THE REMOVER** = bends with Cecil, the hunchback, who removed your claim to the throne; **TO REMOVE** = to change, i.e., your royal blood cannot be altered or changed or removed; (recalling father to son in Sonnet 25, lines 13-14 of Sonnet 25: "Then happy I, that love and am beloved/ Where I may not *remove*, nor be *removed*")

#### 5 O, NO! IT IS AN EVER-FIXED MARK

**O** = Oxford; **EVER** = E. Ver, Edward de Vere; **EVER-FIXED MARK** = i.e., royal blood is a constant and eternal beacon (as for ships to follow, again suggesting that Oxford may leave England)

#### 6 THAT LOOKS ON TEMPESTS AND IS NEVER SHAKEN;

**TEMPESTS** = the storm of the succession that wrecked Southampton's claim; also, introducing a link to *The Tempest*; "In this common *shipwreck*, mine is above all the rest" - Oxford to Robert Cecil, April 25/27, 1603, written during the same period as this verse, and referring to his own life/situation as a result of Queen Elizabeth's death; **NEVER** = Oxford, *Ever or Never*

#### 7 IT IS THE STAR TO EVERY WAND'RING BARK,

**STAR** = the sun, Southampton's royal eye; "But from *thine eyes ... constant stars*" - Sonnet 14, lines 9-10; "*that sun thine eye*" - Sonnet 49, line 6; "Till whatsoever *star* that guides my moving" - Sonnet 26, line 9; "Lord Hamlet is a *prince out of thy star*" - *Hamlet*, 2.2.141; "Small time, but in that small most greatly lived *this star of England*" - *Henry V*, Epilogue/Chorus, 5-6, referring to the former Prince Hal who, in this play, is King Henry Fifth; "*Bright star of Venus*, fall'n down on the earth, how may I reverent worship thee enough?" - *1 Henry VI*, 1.2.144-145; **EVERY** = Ever = E. Ver, Edward de Vere; **EVERY WANDERING BARK** = my wandering boat; **BARK** = "In few, they hurried us aboard a *bark*, bore us some leagues to the sea; where they prepared a rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged, nor tackle, sail, nor mast" - *The Tempest*, 1.2.145-148

#### 8 WHOSE WORTH'S UNKNOWN, ALTHOUGH HIS HEIGHT BE TAKEN.

**WHOSE WORTH'S UNKNOWN** = the star (sun) is that of Southampton, whose royalty is unknown to the masses; ("*Worthy prince*" - *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 3.1.10); whose worth is inexpressible, incalculable, immense, a suggestion cited by Dowden; **HEIGHT** = value; royalty, as in Your Highness; ("And Richard fall in *height* of all his pride" - *Richard III*, 5.3.177)

#### 9 LOVE'S NOT TIME'S FOOL, THOUGH ROSY LIPS AND CHEEKS

**LOVE** = royal blood; **TIME** = until her death, "time" referred to the time left in Elizabeth's life; now it's the time left until she is "officially" dead and the Tudor dynasty is "officially" no more; **LOVE'S NOT TIME'S FOOL** = royal blood is not mocked by universal time (because it defies time and is immortal); and Southampton's royal blood is not Elizabeth's fool, because it outlives her mortal time; **TIME'S FOOL** = Oxford was Elizabeth's "allowed fool" or Court Jester who was given unique freedom to write scathing satires for performance at Court; "There is no slander in an *allowed fool*" - Olivia, speaking of her jester, Feste the Clown, who says, "Thou hast spoke for us, madonna, as if thy eldest son should be a fool" - *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.90-110; "But thought's the slave of life, and life *time's fool*, and *time*, that takes survey of all the world, must have a stop"

– Hotspur, mortally wounded by Prince Hal, in *1 Henry IV*, 5.4.80-82; but, Oxford declares in this line of the sonnet, royal blood continues to live even though the time of life comes to an end;  
**ROSY LIPS AND CHEEKS** = Southampton's reflection of Tudor Rose blood from his mother Elizabeth, who was *Ever the Same* and *Rose Without a Thorn*; "Thus is his *cheek* the map of days outworn,/ When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,/ Before these bastard signs of fair were borne" – Sonnet 68, lines 1-3

**10 WITHIN HIS BENDING SICKLE'S COMPASS COME;**

**BENDING** = image of the bending hunchback Robert Cecil; i.e., the Tudor Rose was, in fact, cut off by the bending sickle of time in terms of Elizabeth's life, when it ended without Southampton's succession

**11 LOVE ALTERS NOT WITH HIS BRIEF HOURS AND WEEKS,**

Royal blood never changes in relation to earthly time; ("And you and *love* are *still* my argument" – Sonnet 76, line 10, i.e., always and forever)

**12 BUT BEARS IT OUT EVEN TO THE EDGE OF DOOM.**

But instead survives or endures even to Doomsday and the Last Judgment, "when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed" – The Book of Common Prayer, 291; **BEARS** = endures, with echo of child-bearing; "Which, laboring for invention, *bear* amiss/ The second burthen of a former child!" – Sonnet 59, lines 3-4; "That for thy right myself will *bear* all wrong" – Sonnet 88, line 14;  
**DOOM** = "Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom" – Sonnet 107, line 4

**13 IF THIS BE ERROR AND UPON ME PROVED,**

**ERROR** = wrong; echoing the "fault" or "error" or plot or crime of the Rebellion; "lest more *plots and errors* happen" – *Hamlet*, 5.2.402; **UPON ME PROVED** = demonstrated; echoing the trial; but Oxford utters this in defiance, using the language of a legal challenge: "If any man will *maintain upon* Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester, that he is a manifold *traitor*" – *King Lear*, 5.3.110-113; cited by Duncan-Jones; "Let four captains bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, for he was likely, had he been put on, to have *prov'd* most royal" – *Hamlet*, 5.2.403-405; "Till then not show my head *where thou mayst prove me*" – Sonnet 26, line 14; "For you in me can *nothing worthy prove*" – Sonnet 72, line 4; "And worst essays *proved thee* my best of love" – Sonnet 110, line 11; "Since *my appeal* says I did strive *to prove*/ The constancy and virtue of your love" – Sonnet 117, lines 13-14

**14 I NEVER WRIT, NOR NO MAN EVER LOVED.**

**NEVER** = Oxford, *Ever or Never*; **WRIT** = legal writ; **EVER** = "E. Ver," Edward de Vere, i.e., he issues a cry on behalf of Love, or royal blood, in defiance of Time; having been destroyed by earthly time, upon Elizabeth's death, the Sonnets now transcend mortality