

**THE SHAKESPEARE
COMMITMENT**

**Sonnet 19
Succeeding Men
1593**

Oxford publishes Venus and Adonis with no name on the title page, but he uses the printed signature "William Shakespeare" (for the first time) to dedicate this long narrative poem to Southampton as "the first heir of my invention," pledging his duty and support – actually announcing his support for Henry Wriothesley's claim as "first heir" or immediate successor to Elizabeth on the throne. Meanwhile he continues this private diary, signifying the Queen as the Phoenix (with which she has identified herself) and promising his royal son that he will "ever live young" in its lines.

Sonnet 19

Translation

Devouring time, blunt thou the Lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood,
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce Tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived Phoenix in her blood,

Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
And do what ere thou wilt swift-footed time
To the wide world and all her fading sweets:
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:

O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen.
Him in thy course untainted do allow,
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.

Yet do thy worst, old Time! Despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

Elizabeth's ever-waning life, devour all things,
And make England consume its own royal princes,
Pluck the keen teeth from the Tiger's jaws,
And destroy the Queen in her own royal blood!

Make us glad and sorry as you rush to her death,
And do what you will, swiftly fading time,
To England and all her withering royal blood:
But I forbid you to commit one worst crime:

O do not take my son's royal life with you,
Nor make him lose his royal blood with your pen!
As you take your course, leave him alone,
So Elizabeth's blood can be passed to successors.

Yet do your worst, old Time! Despite your cruelty,
My royal son in these Sonnets will always be fresh.

Sonnet 19

1 DEVOURING TIME, BLUNT THOU THE LION'S PAWS,

DEVOURING TIME = the tyranny of Elizabeth's ever-waning life in real time; "Thou *tyme the eater up of things*, and age of spyghtfull teene./ Destroy all things" – Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XV, 258-259, translation as by Arthur Golding, Oxford's uncle, published in 1567, but more likely rendered by the young earl himself; there is an echo of "De Vere" in "Devouring"

LION: Elizabeth said of herself, "Do you not know that *we are descended of the Lion...*?" – *Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, p. 303; **LION'S PAWS** = destructive force of this royal beast; Elizabeth is the female counterpart, i.e., lioness, and her own rage is the enemy

He hath more worthy interest to the state
Than thou the shadow of succession.
For of no right, nor colour like to right,
He doth fill fields with harness in the realm,
Turns heads *against the lion's armed jaws...* *1 Henry IV*, 3.2.98-102

Against whose fury and unmatched force
The aweless *lion* could not wage the fight,
Nor keep his princely heart from Richard's hand.
He that perforce robs *lions* of their hearts
May easily win a woman's. *Richard II*, 1.1.264-269

"The *lion* will not touch the true prince" – *1 Henry IV*, 2.4.267-268; "The king is to be feared as the *lion*" – *1 Henry IV*, 3.3.150; "the *kingly lion*" – *3 Henry VI*, 5.7.11; "The *lion* dying thrusteth forth his paw, and wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage ... which art a *lion and a king of beasts*" – *Richard II*, 5.1.29-30, 34

The rage of the lion is the enemy, i.e., rage being the forces against Oxford's royal son, including Elizabeth as royal beast full of rage. Later, when Southampton is in the Tower facing imminent execution: "How with this *rage* shall beauty hold a plea" – Sonnet 65, line 3, with "beauty" = your royal blood from the Queen

"Now, both reason and authority testify to the right of the commonwealth to deliver itself from the government of 'a tyrant, a *Tigar*, a fearse *Lion*, a ravening wolfe, a publique enemy, and a bloody murtherer'" - Robert Parsons, under the pseudonym of "Doleman", 1594, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Inghland*, dedicated to the Earl of Essex, quoted by Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories*, 1947, p. 178

2 AND MAKE THE EARTH DEVOUR HER OWN SWEET BROOD,

THE EARTH = England; **SWEET BROOD** = royal heirs; children, offspring; specifically her son Southampton; "She will ... bring thee forth *brave brood*" – *The Tempest*, 3.2.106

3 PLUCK THE KEEN TEETH FROM THE FIERCE TIGER'S JAWS,

PLUCK = draw down, bring down, snatch, pull sharply; "And *pluck the crown* from feeble Henry's head" – *2 Henry VI*, 5.1.2; "If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack/ As thou goest onwards still will *pluck* thee back" – Sonnet 126, lines 5-6, after the Queen's death, when "nature" becomes the universal "sovereign mistress" or queen; "(Presenting the crown): Lo, here, this long-usurped royalty from the dead temples of this bloody wretch have I pluck'd off to grace thy brows withal. Wear it, enjoy it, and make much of it" – *Richard III*, 5.5.4-7

TIGER = “O *tiger*’s heart wrapt in a woman’s hide! How couldst thou drain the life-blood of the child, to bid the father wipe his eyes withal, and yet be seen to bear a woman’s face?” – *3 Henry VI*, 1.4.137-140; “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. Welcome destruction, blood, and massacre, I see as in a map the end of all” – *Richard III*, 2.4.49-54; “This ravenous *tiger*, this accursed devil” – *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3.5

4 AND BURN THE LONG-LIVED PHOENIX IN HER BLOOD;

PHOENIX = Queen Elizabeth, who is the Phoenix of *The Phoenix’ Nest*, published this year (1593), and she will be the Phoenix of *The Phoenix and Turtle* of 1601; “But, as when the bird of wonder dies, the maiden *Phoenix*, her ashes new create another heir as great in admiration as herself, so shall she leave her blessedness to one” – *Henry VIII*, 5.4.39-43, Archbishop Cranmer, predicting that newly born Princess Elizabeth Tudor will leave an heir to rise from her own ashes after she dies. The legendary bird of Arabia lived for 500 or 600 years; it then built a pile of twigs that was ignited by the sun, and upon that it burned itself; then it rose again, renewed & youthful.

“The chastity, longevity, and uniqueness of the Phoenix were familiar lore in the period, partly because the bird was often used as an emblem of Queen Elizabeth” – Kerrigan; “The Queen adopted the Phoenix as an emblem of herself, as unique as she was chaste” – Strong

IN HER BLOOD = the harsh image of Elizabeth, the unique bird that is supposed to rise from its own ashes, but here instead being burned in her own royal blood.

5 MAKE GLAD AND SORRY SEASONS AS THOU FLEE’ST,

GLAD = “We are *glad*” – *Henry V*, 1.2.260, the King, using the royal “we” in reference to himself; **GLAD AND SORRY** = “Yea, subject to your countenance, *glad or sorry* as I saw it inclined” – *Henry VIII*, 2.4.25-26, Queen Katherine pleading with the King; (*Q* = “fleet’st”)

FLEE’ST = hurry by; “the pleasure of the *fleeting* year” – Sonnet 97, line 2

6 AND DO WHAT ERE THOU WILT, SWIFT-FOOTED TIME,

SWIFT-FOOTED TIME = days rushing toward the unpredictable date with succession

7 TO THE WIDE WORLD AND ALL HER FADING SWEETS;

THE WIDE WORLD = England and the whole world; “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” – Sonnet 107, lines 1-4, upon Southampton’s release from his “confined doom” in the Tower on April 10, 1603; **ALL** = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*

ALL HER FADING SWEETS = all of England’s fading royal princes, i.e., Southampton; “*Sweet princes*, what I did, I did in honor” – *2 Henry VI*, 5.2.35

8 BUT I FORBID THEE ONE MOST HEINOUS CRIME:

ONE = Southampton, *One for All, All for One*; Oxford is speaking to Time, forbidding it “one” most heinous crime, i.e., the crime of treason against Southampton, a prince or king; in effect, accusing Elizabeth (Time) of committing treason against her son

9 O CARVE NOT WITH THY HOURS MY LOVE’S FAIR BROW,

CARVE = “She carved thee for her seal” – Sonnet 11, line 13; **MY LOVE’S FAIR BROW** = my royal son’s royal stature

10 NOR DRAW NO LINES THERE WITH THINE ANTIQUE PEN;

LINES = wrinkles, signs of age; Oxford is again playing on “lines” for the lines of the Sonnets, which are working against time to keep restoring his youth or time of hope; yet he is recreating his

son's life in this diary in relation to Time, or Elizabeth's waning life: "So should the *lines of life* that life repair/ Which *this (Time's pencil) or my pupil pen*" – Sonnet 16, lines 9-10; "And your true rights be termed a Poet's rage/ And stretched meter of *an Antique song*" – Sonnet 17, lines 11-12; and of Southampton again: "In him those holy *antique hours* are seen" – Sonnet 68, line 9; by then, his royal hope has been lost and become part of the "old age" as: "In *the old age* black was not counted fair/ Or if it were it bore not beauty's name" – Sonnet 127, lines 1-2, upon the imprisonment of Southampton on February 8, 1601, when he has lost his right to the throne and has been turned from "fair" to "black" in the Queen's imperial view

11 HIM IN THY COURSE UNTAINTED DO ALLOW

HIM = Southampton; **UNTAINTED** = not deprived of his legitimate right to the throne; ("Sweet prince, the untainted virtue of your years" – *Richard III*, 3.1.7; "And blood untainted still doth red abide" – *Lucrece*, stanza 250); **ALLOW**: "thou shalt be met with thanks, *allowed* with absolute power, and thy good name live with authority" – *Timon of Athens*, 5.1.161-163; "Without *the king's will or the state's allowance*" – *Henry VIII*, 3.2.322

12 FOR BEAUTY'S PATTERN TO SUCCEEDING MEN!

BEAUTY'S PATTERN = Elizabeth's lineage of blood; "She shall be ... a *pattern* to all princes living with her, and all that shall *succeed*" – *Henry VIII*, 5.4.20-22, Archbishop Cranmer, predicting the future of newly born Elizabeth Tudor; **SUCCEEDING MEN** = those who should succeed to the throne, i.e., Southampton and/or his own heirs; "Long after this, when Henry the Fifth, *succeeding* his father Bolingbroke, did reign" – *1 Henry VI*, 2.5.82-83; "Both to defend my loyalty and truth to God, my king and my *succeeding* issue" – *Richard II*, 1.3.19-20; "Henry the Seventh *succeeding*, truly pitying my father's loss, like a most royal prince" – *Henry VIII*, 2.1.112-113; "Yet hope, *succeeding* from so fair a tree as your fair self" – to the prince in *Pericles*, 1.1.115-116; "No son of mine *succeeding*" – *Macbeth*, 3.1.63; "to the *succeeding* royalty he leaves the healing benediction" – *Macbeth*, 4.3.155-156; "*Succeeding* by right of blood and inheritance" – Oxford to Robert Cecil, referring to the newly acclaimed King James I of England, April 1603

13 YET DO THY WORST, OLD TIME: DESPITE THY WRONG,

OLD TIME = the ever-waning life of Elizabeth; also, universal time; "Ever belov'd 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

14 MY LOVE SHALL IN MY VERSE EVER LIVE YOUNG.

MY LOVE = my royal son; **IN MY VERSE** = in these verses; **EVER** = E. Ver, Edward de Vere, *Ever or Never*; "Why write I still all one, *ever* the same" – Sonnet 76, line 5; "Since all alike my songs and praises be/ To one, of one, still such, and *ever* so" – Sonnet 105, lines 3-4; **EVER LIVE YOUNG** = another promise to give him eternal life in these verses; "And *that eternity promised* by our *ever*-living poet" – Dedication of the Sonnets; (by its position, "ever" gains accentual stress); **YOUNG** = fresh, green, in the golden time of hope